

Inside Out: An Inquiry Into An Engagement With The Artworks: An Independent Art School In Halifax

“The Journey Of An Artist/Educator/Researcher In
the Making...”

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Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to the Buddha who resides within us all. It is dedicated to my beautiful mother who gave me life and continued giving for evermore. I dedicate it to all of the lives and the teachers who are ever shaping my journey, to the books and poems and words I have and have not yet read, to The Beatles, John Lennon and Dolly Parton – who created the music of my childhood that has kept me going when all else seemed meaningless. I dedicate it to dreams, hope and aspirations. I also dedicate it to Art Education for helping me to make sense of the world. I dedicate it to spirituality, happiness, joy and wonder and last but not least to The Beautiful Man for finally bringing the other half of my soul back to me.

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Abstract

During the period of 2010 to 2012 I became a student at The Artworks: An independent art school in Halifax, UK. This thesis is a narrative I have created based upon that experience using autoethnography as method. The literature review was conducted part way through the research and shows how I found autoethnography when looking into reflexive research. This and the rest of the narrative shows my understanding of a methodology that is just over twenty years old. Left Coast Press will publish the handbook for autoethnography in 2013 and I eagerly await its inauguration into the canon of research literature. I initially approached The Artworks so that I could learn how to draw. As a qualified teacher of Art I was utterly ashamed of myself and convinced that the reason I was unsuccessful at getting any teaching posts was because I could not draw. Throughout the journey I discovered many underlying reasons for my felt inability to draw and found many answers to questions I had not even dared to ask. My initial aims were to map the impact and effect that this experience could have upon my artistic practice, my teaching abilities and my understandings of the philosophies of art and art education. What I discovered is that through the guidance of John (Ross) and Stan (Peter Stanyer) (The main tutors at and founders of The Artworks) I defined my own philosophy of art education, I fell in love with autoethnography as a method of qualitative research *through my self* and I concentrated not upon learning the basics of drawing but instead developing a series of poems, performances and pictograms. I re-authored my past, revised my practice and reinstated myself in my mind as an artist/educator/researcher. This narrative hopefully translates a part of that experience across to the reader, however I include a cautionary note from Dr Carolyn Ellis about capturing experiences:

“I know experience cannot be fully captured; once it happens, it can only be interpreted from limited and partial perspectives” (2009, p15).

The thesis title begins with the phrase ‘Inside Out’. I have used these words to represent my role as both researcher and researched. I recognised early on that there would probably always be a part of me not fully emerged in the ‘moment’, but continually looking within and without at the experience as it took place.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

The Artworks – An independent Art School located in Shaw Lodge Mills in Halifax, UK and the focus of my research. The Artworks was set up in 2009 by John Ross and Peter Stanyer. The central premise behind The Artworks mission is to bring traditional arts and crafts teaching to Calderdale alongside innovation in Art and Design. The student body is made up of a diverse mix of people as inclusivity is also a very strong focus for the studio. For further information please visit The Artworks website:

<http://www.theartworks.org.uk/>

The Beautiful Man – this is my partner a Mr Yuk-heen Ho. He is discussed frequently throughout the text.

CARN (Collaborative Action Research Network) is a network of practitioners and scholars from fields as diverse as education, health, social and community. The CARN network has been an invaluable resource for disseminating my research. I have attended several of their events including study days and the international conference in 2012. My poem 'Plant a Seed, not a Flower' has also been published in their conference presentation literature. For further information please visit the CARN website:

<http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/carnnew/>

John – John Ross is one of the directors at The Artworks. He also teaches many of the classes and taught the illustration class that I took part in. He also acted as my mentor – overseeing all aspects of my work and educational experience over the time of the study.

Stan – Peter Stanyer is also a director at The Artworks and the teacher of many of the classes I attended at The Artworks including life drawing, drawing from nature and drawing for beginners.

N.E.E.T - Not in Employment, Education or Training.

Toc and The Cabbage Shirted Teacher – My art foundation teacher at Liverpool Community College in 2002-03 and more recently an extremely good friend.

MIRIAD – The Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design at Manchester Metropolitan University and the research institute within which I undertook my Master of Arts (by research).

Introduction To the Thesis: Narratives, Nuances and a Neophyte Researcher

As I sit here, at my newly painted desk in my yellow living room. I feel the tension in my back start to ease thanks to the little fan heater whirring loudly behind me.

I begin to wonder how on earth I will be able to encapsulate the changes that have occurred within myself because of this research study. To create a narrative about my experiences over these past two years seems simple enough, but being able to pinpoint which of those experiences was more defining and shaping than the others upon my practice is where the question lies. I wonder whether I could ever say if one experience has influenced me more than another at all.

Within these pages lies a narrative, *my* narrative about my engagement with *The Artworks: An Independent Art School* in Halifax, UK. It is a story that will attempt to encapsulate the impact that this engagement has had upon my continuing journey of being an Artist/Educator/Researcher in the making. It will highlight some of the breakthroughs I have made within my practice as an artist. As will it draw attention to some of the experiences that will no doubt have a big impact upon how I see my role as educator. And it will hopefully demonstrate my newfound interest in academic research and in autoethnography: a mode of research and writing that describes and analyses personal experience as a way of understanding cultural phenomena (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010). This thesis is titled *Inside Out*, this title has been used to remind the reader of my dual role as both researcher and researched and the richness that this duality has brought to the experience of conducting my research.

Dr Carolyn Ellis (a forerunner in the field of autoethnography) has been a great influence on how this thesis has been shaped and I hope to mirror within these pages what she set out to do with *Revision: Autoethnographic Reflections on Life and Work* (2009): that is, I too wish to inspire my readers to conjure up 'similar ways of accessing their own lives' (Ellis, 2009 p13). This thesis is a reconstruction, a revisiting and a revising not only of my experiences over the past two years at *The Artworks* but also long held memories, beliefs and notions about what art education is, what it does and where I fit into it all.

I am attempting to use Ellis's model of 'reflectively making sense of experience' (Ellis, 2009, p13) – and I hope to create threads of hindsight that enable my readers to follow me into the labyrinth of experience and back out into the open once again (Ellis, 2009, p13). Through being the researcher and the researched I hope to reveal to educators (myself included) what their 'learners' lives might be like on the inside and vice versa. I seek to enable understanding across and through the divides. Alongside being a thesis about experiences in art education it is also about *being* human, about developing self-awareness and about learning to see things from a different and more multidimensional perspective.

There are many invaluable experiences that have occurred during my research that have not made the final cut. I hope the elements I have chosen to focus upon demonstrate what it is I am trying to portray. I have chosen to focus upon experiences that I think have 'sociological and human interest for readers' (Ellis, 2009 p15) and I am hoping to lay credence to John Ross's favoured adage that 'if you can learn to write you can learn to draw'.

If there is one thing I hope my readers come away with regarding my research journey, it is that the process has

been a wonderful tool for self-analysis, self-learning and self-awareness. I have learnt above all else this year to see myself as human. To acknowledge, rise above and overcome my foibles and more importantly to make others aware of their existence and my gracious (if at times tempestuous) acceptance of them.

The most important thing I have gleaned from this research is the knowledge that who I am is someone who will always be on a journey to becoming the best that they can be. I am ever learning, ever changing, ever evolving and I am finally happy with who I am (well, most of the time anyway ☺).

“There is no fixed truth of the past to which we can gain access; everything we say and mean and make of the past is a form of revision” (Bochner 2007 cited in Ellis 2009 p354).

Chapter Divisions: Explaining *what* lies where

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the original aims and first tentative steps in my learning journey. It then focuses on how those aims changed when I conducted the literature review and consequently plucked up the courage to place my ‘self’ at the heart of the research. This chapter also provides information about The Artworks: An independent Art School in Halifax and why it was chosen as the focus of my research.

Chapter 2 explains the methodologies being used and shows my understanding of them through a literature

review. The literature review was conducted as a *Lectio Divina* – A meditative listening to. Instead of being laid out as a traditional literature review, I have created several pieces of writing using the differing types of text used in autoethnography such as poetry, vignettes and conversational pieces. An Introduction To the Collection is the beginning of the literature review and my newfound knowledge is summarised in ‘Concluding the collection’.

Chapter 3 is my narrative and for me, the main crux of the thesis. It is fragmented, distorted and at times uncertain. I hope it comes across as one story – intertwined, interlaced and interwoven, but disjointed to show that this is how my story goes. Life is not linear and perfect, it is never the story of one person's experience but many. For we are all interconnected and this narrative demonstrates how, through the use of autoethnography, all of my stories include ‘other's’ stories and lives as well. All of these narratives were created during my time at The Artworks. Many of them became the focus of my study, during the time when the direction of my work shifted. Initially I was taking part in many of the beginners sessions: ‘Learn how to draw’, and ‘Drawing from natural forms’. However as I got more involved with the research it became apparent that discovering my story through my practice had once again taken over. I started taking part in the illustration classes and had many discussions with John about finding my Charlie Chaplin character.

Chapter 4 is a meta-autoethnography. It is a text that wraps around the texts and finally draws the thesis to a close. It responds to the critics of autoethnography as autoethnography is seen as quite contentious to some researchers. This chapter also provides the limitations that I duly acknowledge that there are of the methodology. Within my meta-autoethnography I also reflect upon the

changes that have occurred within my Artist/Researcher/Teacher self and conclude with a discussion of possible next steps to be taken in my journey.

Chapter 1

Aims and Objectives

The Artworks:

What is it and why is it in this thesis at all?

The *Herstory*

Sometime in the academic year of 2009/10 I was sitting in a classroom at the University of Huddersfield and my heart was filled with dread. Most of the sessions I went to as a PGCE Art and Design student, I looked forward to; but not this one. As I stared at the dark blue ribbed carpet that my right foot was slowly making *very* bobbled I realised that today's session was not going to be a good one. Yet I listened melancholically as the man who had come to show us how to teach our own students '*how*' to draw, explained to us about how he ended up sitting in that chair.

As Sarah my PGCE tutor, regaled us with the man's accomplishments, telling us how he had taught at the Royal College of Art, The Chelsea College of Art and the City Literature Institute in London, he showed us several books on drawing that he had written and told us they were all available for purchase on Amazon. As my fellow students scribbled down the titles I started to notice the ball of dread in my heart was heading further south. With a wince of pain I realised that my left index finger was bleeding because I had bitten the nail too short. I reached down to the floor hoping to find a tissue and as I was fumbling around in my bag I noticed that the tone in the man's voice had changed. As I was no longer listening it took me a moment to realise that the anger I could hear in his voice was directed at the education system that had failed him. I

sat up and popped the bleeding index finger into my mouth and looked curiously at the longhaired and bespectacled man, who was now leaning against the whiteboard, supported only by the back two legs of his chair with his hands clasped tightly across his belly.

As the man told his story he explained that he had been a *school refuser*. He went on to tell us that he had been kicked out of nearly all of his classes for causing trouble or '*mucking about*'. I felt myself warming to him, *I've always liked the underdog*, I thought as the tension in my stomach started to ease. Stan then told us how he had Dyslexia before it was recognised and explained how he managed to get into art school at the age of only 14 by turning up every day and asking for them to allow him to take part. Art was the *only* thing he had been interested in doing, he had said.

He started the lesson by putting a ram's skull in the centre of each table and, after giving us all a 4B pencil he instructed us to draw it. After staring at the ram's skull in bemusement for a few moments, I hunched over my paper and started to draw. I knew it looked awful but I tried not to care. I did care however, when he then instructed us all to '*get up now and go around the room and take a look at each others drawings*'. I could see how ridiculous my drawing was compared to everyone else's. The ram's skull in the middle of the table did not resemble the shaded funny looking blob with an ice cream cone attached to it crudely drawn in the centre of my huge piece of paper. Stan walked around the room and made comments about several of the drawings. '*Nice use of expression there Kali – well done. I see you have used contour lines Hayley – marvellous...*' No comment however was made about my attempt, which he paused in front of for a few moments before continuing to move around the room.

He then went on to give us a series of instructions. Telling us about how to use line as *metaphor*. We drew the skull with our opposite hand, with the tips of our fingers and even with our mouths. By the time we got to the drawing where we had to 'clutch the pencil like a dagger' I had started enjoying myself and my drawings were looser, freer, more expressive and without a shadow of a doubt - *a million times better than my first attempt!* We came to walk around the room again. Stan praised my drawing over and over, holding it up to show the other students .

'Look at this! Jennyanne it seems is a Picasso! Look how brilliant this drawing is compared with your first! Can you see how easy it is with some guidance?'

At the end of the session he asked us what was the lesson he was trying to teach us as future Teachers of Art. My hand shot up and I told him what lesson I had learnt:

"Our students need to be supported, there will be students who feel that they cannot draw and if you give them no instruction they will flounder and feel awful, as I had done with the first drawing exercise."

He nodded in agreement and highlighted the importance of helping students break down their preconceptions about what a *good* drawing was. He went on to tell us about how, when left to their own devices people try to reproduce what they see in front of them. However he said *'you will never be able to draw what is in front of you because it would be impossible*

to capture the actual 3D form on a 2D sheet of paper.' He continued by explaining that *'You can render the illusion of the 3D through the language.'* As teachers of Art he said we *"needed to show our learners that there are literally hundreds of different ways to draw. Behind all of these ideas"* he said, *"there was a different concept, about capturing the illusion of form."*

I had started drawing lessons several times before throughout my education, but never with such striking results as that one hour during my PGCE. At the end of the session, Sarah explained where Stan could be found. At The Artworks, *"It's an Art School in Halifax, and you would all do well to go there and take up the life drawing lessons on a Tuesday evening"* she had said.

I never took up those life drawing lessons. Some of the other PGCE students did and they tried to encourage me often but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Not only because there would be nakedness involved, *which I felt incredibly uncomfortable with*, but also because I had an intense and crippling fear of other people seeing and judging my attempts at *'drawing'*. It was only after my PGCE had come to an end and my teaching interviews all went *pear shaped* that I realised I had to tackle the fear head on. I *had* to learn how to draw and I knew that Stan *had* to be the one to teach me.

I found The Artworks via Google and sent the following email to their info@ address:

Hello there!

My name is Jennyanne and I've just completed my Art & Design PGCE at Huddersfield University. Peter Stanyer came to teach us how to teach life drawing and hence - how I know about the Artworks.

I'm basically writing to ask if there are any volunteering opportunities for me to come along and help out, and gain some wonderful knowledge/experience from real experts in the profession. I'm happy to help out with anything (from simply being the cup of tea girl to helping move things about or getting materials ready for classes) and I am extremely hard working and dedicated to arts education. I do however feel that 'formal' arts education is currently leaving something to be desired and want to spend time around people who are dedicated, motivated and inspired by art (in order to keep my enthusiasm and motivation high!) I also feel that my own education has given me a solid grounding in conceptualising art but has left me with low levels and confidence in traditional techniques and skills (such as drawing and painting) and would like to improve these at Artworks in order to maximise my own and others learning opportunities.

Feel free to give me a call or invite me over for a cup of tea and a chat about how I could best serve you (if you can use my services!), I have many strings to my bow and am more than happy to help out with anything!!... (Smith, 2010, email archive)

I received a reply from John Ross, Director of The Artworks asking me to come over for a cup of tea so we could '*have a look at all of those bowstrings*' (Ross, 2010) I had mentioned.

Throughout September 2010 I spent a lot of my time at The Artworks. When I wasn't folding leaflets or making cups of tea I was drawing and observing the teaching that was taking place. My trusty notebook was always at hand as I frantically wrote down all of the things John and Stan were saying, doing, showing – *not wanting to miss a moment of it*. I was amazed by how different the teaching here was compared to both how I had been taught to teach and how I

had previously been taught myself. It seemed to me there was nothing that John or Stan could not do, no question that they could not answer. I was in awe. I was also shocked - *the language being bandied about here was positively scandalous* – but I loved it. I felt at home in a place where teacher and student were truly being themselves. I had never been in a learning environment like this before.

One day over a cup of tea and a digestive biscuit I was ranting to John about how I desperately wanted to teach but I knew that through observing the teaching here I was simply not yet good enough. And besides I said glumly “everyone getting the jobs has got masters degrees anyway”

“Bring in your portfolio”, he said “Let’s have a look at it, then”

It was John Ross who planted the seed of my researching into The Artworks. ‘*Is this all your work?*’ he had asked when viewing my teaching portfolio, which was admittedly far more text heavy than an artist teacher’s portfolio probably should have been.

“Yes, yes it is. I haven’t really got that much art work in there because, well I haven’t really made that much art! All I’ve got really is some photos of my sculptures and installations and a list of my exhibitions. I don’t think I’m getting any Art Teacher jobs John because I can’t draw and I can’t paint.”

“No, I mean, all this writing. Did you do it yourself? Is it your own words?”

“Oh yes, yes it is! Just my ideas and thoughts you see, about what education should be about, my philosophy and

that” I said.

“Well I think my dear, what you need is probably another qualification. One that will help you to stand out from the crowd. Have you ever thought about doing a research degree? “

“Erm, no?” was my reply.

“Well, how would you feel about doing an analysis of The Artworks? How would you feel about studying our teaching methods and finding out about why we are so different for yourself?”

‘Oh yes’ I said, ‘That sounds *right* up my street!’

The History

The Artworks is an Independent Art School, located in Shaw Lodge Mills in Halifax, UK and was founded by artist educators John Ross and Peter Stanyer (who is known as Stan for short). John Ross is a painter, graphic artist, cartoonist, scriptwriter and commentator who retired from his role as Head of Graphic Arts and Design at Leeds Metropolitan University in 2002. John had always held a keen interest in the restoration of historic places of beauty and in giving something back to the community. At the time he was approached about the Shaw Lodge Mills venture in 2007 he was also Chairman of the Friends of Beaumont Park – a group of volunteers who were working together to restore Beaumont Park, a 21 acre landscape filled with ornate Victorian features, cascades, grottos and beautiful woodland walks on the outskirts of Huddersfield.

John was intrigued by the restoration of Shaw Lodge Mills and believed in the scope of the project. When asked to '*put some Art*' into the abandoned mills he thought about a dream he had long wished to bring to fruition. Instead of simply exhibiting his and other artists' work as suggested, he envisioned creating a 'Proper' British Art School, reminiscent of his own experience of Art School in the 1950's and 1960's. He envisioned an Art School built upon the foundations that his own education had given to him. Focused on allowing learners to discover their own individual creativity while also providing those who needed them with fundamental skills and the vocabulary of drawing and painting. A place that was not lost in bureaucracy or paperwork. A place accessible to all - not just for people aged 18-25, a place where people of all ability levels would work side by side and a place where there were no right or wrong *ways* to do things. The idea for The Artworks had been born and John quickly got in touch with Stan, a fellow Artist Educator he had studied with at the Royal College of Art and also one of '*the most foremost teachers of drawing in Britain today*'. The formation of The Artworks started to crystallise.

Shaw Lodge Mills, where The Artworks is housed is a cluster of historic textile manufacturing buildings that are all grade 2 listed and is located along Shaw Lane in Halifax, UK. The mill complex was originally part of Holdsworth Mills (John Holdsworth & Co Ltd) and housed the design and manufacture of an extensive range of passenger transport fabrics for buses, coaches, rail and ferries (Holdsworth, 2013) from the 1820's up until 2008 when the final looms stopped. In 2008 a proposal was put forward to Yorkshire Forward by the then developers of the site, St James Securities, to turn Shaw Lodge Mills into an '*urban village*' not too dissimilar to their recent and highly successful urban village development, the Round Foundry

in Holbeck, Leeds, UK. The vision was to create an *'attractive new, mixed use quarter of the town with a unique character'* (Quarmby, 2008) that comprised of living quarters, a business innovation centre, business accommodation including restaurants and bars, a health club, a hotel and conference facilities. As part of the vision for the urban village development, The Artworks project started small. John Ross and Peter Stanyer along with one other member of staff Patricia Astwood as their administration assistant delivered a project to twelve local NEET young people. The graffiti art project was so successful that one of the young people went on to study at university and now exhibits widely in London. Because of the success of the project The Artworks was promised seven years of full funding from the owners of the mill. The Artworks continued on a part time basis delivering beginners courses in drawing and painting to the local community for a nominal fee.

However, on November 11th 2008 just one year after inception, the mill was sold and therefore all funding was cut to The Artworks. John, Stan and Patricia decided that the project was far too good to abandon and so they continued alone and mostly on a voluntary basis.

In 2009 The Artworks received Heritage Lottery Funding and was able to continue expanding. Their project now included drawing programmes for local schools and the benefits of these sessions were evidenced in the first class examination results of the learners.

By the time I approached The Artworks late in 2010 there were part time courses in drawing, painting and illustration. Classes for beginners and improvers were now being delivered by John and Stan. They also had a

very strong volunteer base that was the backbone of the establishment. Since 2010 The Artworks has gone from strength to strength. No longer does it rely so heavily on volunteers. The board of directors has expanded to include Simon Smith, once a volunteer and now the champion of business development. The teaching staff has expanded to include 4 new tutors and the projects now include a well established youth arts class, printmaking, millinery and photography. There is even an Arts & Wellbeing programme in partnership with The South West Yorkshire NHS Foundation Trust. They now have Artists Studios for hire and in 2013 they opened their own art gallery: The 1830 gallery in the recently renovated upstairs space. The name of which is a *nod* to the year the mill was built. What started as a shared vision over a pint of the black stuff while sitting next to a smoking fire in a dimly lit pub in the backstreets of Halifax has finally become a well established Art School for All.

Original Aims:

Initial Steps In the Process of Becoming

Application Form to study for a Postgraduate Research Degree

1. Brief title for your proposed programme of research

An analysis of The Artworks: An arts based inquiry into an independent Art School

The quest for knowledge and truth started out rather higgledy piggledy, as the focus of the research was still being determined, I began sourcing information on different research methods and ways to investigate the impact and effect of engaging with an independent art school. *This I found out later is just one of many ways I*

emanated a pattern that many reflexive researcher's follow. Etherington (2004), Ellis (2004) and Muncey (2010) all propose that many reflexive researchers/autoethnographers start out by researching into topics that hold personal significance for them without actually placing themselves at the heart of the research.

Many however, such as Ellis, Etherington and Muncey did not embark upon creating autoethnography or publishing *truly* reflexive research until the post-doctoral stages. They talk of how although this way of working and knowing was *intuitive* and *natural* to them; they held back on creating it (*whether intentionally or not*) until they no longer felt the need to prove themselves or justify their research capabilities quite so much to academia and its traditions (Ellis, 2004, Etherington, 2004, Muncey 2010).

I would argue that coming from a traditional *and male dominated* research background before discovering autoethnography/reflexive research has impacted greatly upon and helped to determine this outcome for these scholars. There are now many people who do autoethnography at the Masters stage (Chileshe, 2009, Moyo, 2009 Rosko, 2010, Hummul, 2010ⁱ). I feel that this shift is primarily because of the growing prominence of the methodology and the fact that as a newcomer to research in 2011 there is less *fighting against the tide* and undoing previously '*known*' knowledge of how research '*should*' be conducted because others have already paved the way with new and experimental ways of working.

It was my first dip into Etherington's *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher* (2004) that gave me the confidence to do what it was that I secretly wanted to do the whole time - Focus the research on my own interactions with art education at The

Artworks and focus upon the impact it would have upon my 'self' *whatever that self may be*. I wasn't 100% sure that this was allowed so originally I had proposed to:

"Conduct an ethnographic study that focuse[d] largely on people's involvement with The Artworks and attempt[ed] to investigate the impact and effect it ha[d] on their lives and personal development...Through this method I would be able to see how The Artworks and the people involved would change over time, how people develop[ed] through their interactions with The Artworks and determine what the actual benefits are of an art school for all ages." (Smith, JA. 2010 Pre-proposal form)

However, after discovering 'reflexive research' and how I was able to use the self as both researcher and participant I decided that I wanted to do what I felt I *needed* to do. I have often felt a deep *connection* to creating work and I more often than not feel a strong pull toward doing something meaningful for myself (*This feeling has also been reflected through Ellis's discussions of her own engagement with autoethnographyⁱⁱ*). My pre-proposal talks of wanting to:

"understand how interactions with alternative forms of arts education can develop people and have an impact upon their self esteem, understanding of the world and creation of meaning." (Smith, JA. 2010 Pre-proposal form)

Boldly making changes

As is documented in my *letter to John and Stan* (See appendix A) written in January 2011 (*just before submitting my RD1*) what I actually wanted to do was create meaning and understanding of the world for myself. I wanted to look at the impact of engaging with The Artworks and Art Education as a learner myself.

I wanted to develop my own self-awareness and impact

upon my own personal development. Etherington acknowledges that these two things alone are sometimes the motivating forces behind choosing reflexive research as method (Etherington, 2004, p39).

The reasons stated for not only including myself but having *me* as the focus for the entire research project included a need to be completely involved and submerged in the subject, and a feeling that:

“Everything ought to be intertwined, and woven into the very fabric of my being, [as] it is the only way I have ever been able to do things really.”
(Excerpt from letter to John, January 2011)

This phrase talks about a need for a holistic or ‘whole person’ connection to the research, which I later discovered is an issue or concept explored by many who engage in autoethnography or reflexive research (Etherington, 2004, Ellis, 2004, Ellis, 2009).

“It [Autoethnography] provides a method that permits the mind, the body, the heart, and the soul to exist simultaneously.” (Smith-Sullivan, 2008, p71)

I decided to change my research proposal. I wanted to embrace the ‘me’. I had decided that I could not analyse The Artworks and the Art Education provided there and its relationships with *other* students. I was going to become the centre of the research my self. I was going to ‘*sit in that chair*’ and tell my own story from both the learners' and the researchers' perspectives.

Changing the Original Aims: Engaging the Whole Self

1. Title:

Inside Out: An inquiry into an engagement with The Artworks: an independent art school in Halifax
"The journey of an artist/educator/researcher in the making..."

2. Aims:

- To map the impact and effect that an engagement with The Artworks can have upon a person
- To create a narrative about my engagement with The Artworks. This narrative will map the changes that occur in my own artistic process/ teaching abilities/ understanding of the philosophies and histories of art/ art education and reflexive research

I sit and scan the scrutineer's report on my accepted application for MA by Research. Looking for things I need to add into my research, things I have to look out for, things I need to change...

2 Academic aims

Comments/recommendation:

The aims should focus on the effect of an engagement with The Artworks on the researchers artistic process (as stated) rather than the broader and less answerable 'how being part of The Artworks can impact upon a persons life'.

Yes, I guess they're right? (*a large sigh escaping my lips*). I am researching in the department of Art and Design, rather than personal development I guess! But that's the part that interests me! I'm interested in the bits that live *around* the artistic process. Like will I finally become a teacher at the end of it and therefore feel more secure with a few less minus marks in the bank! Will I have brushed off the insecurities that tell me I am useless because I cannot draw? And most importantly how different will I *feel* this time next year because of this experience? Will my self-awareness have evolved at all?

4 Methodology

Comments/recommendation:

The problems associated with the dual role of participant and researcher are considered in the methodology. Further thought on the processes of measuring and articulating the impact of this education experience (before, during and after) should be encouraged.

Right, OK so I need to define the processes I'm going to use to measure the impact that being involved in The Artworks has had upon me... Since I'm going to be logging everything in a reflexive researcher's diary, perhaps I should put some of my PGCE training into good use and use a 'particular' format for storing my reflections...

So from the beginning that is what I did. I experimented with a range of different reflection frameworks. I tried Gibb's reflective model where I recorded the details of the sessions, noted down my thoughts and feelings, followed by evaluation, analysis and synthesis. I looked through Brookfield's lenses, I did 'analysis of critical events' and I re-read Schön's reflective practitioner. I eventually stopped using all of these frameworks and started recording my reflections through 'both' voices. I would write down my initial thoughts and feelings on the sessions and then come back to them later with my 'researcher' head on and re-interpret them.

I changed from conducting an ethnographic study to an autoethnographic study. However at the time of writing my RD1, I did not know what an autoethnographic study was so I went with 'creating a narrative' instead. In creating this narrative I have read about, dabbled within and experimented with a myriad of interconnecting methodologies: Arts based autoethnography,

A/r/tography, participatory research methods in the form of workshops and action research. I have even created and had poetry published as part of my research. However it must be stated that the predominant method is reflexive research with the main crux being autoethnography – this is the research method I have researched in-depth and was the basis for my literature review. I am a neophyte researcher and this research was conducted during my first tentative steps in becoming an artist/educator/researcher. It is research into the experience of engaging with Art education, self awareness and the spaces in between being a learner in art and research and being the researched subject.

The main reason for using autoethnography as method was that for me the main interest lay in discovering changes that would occur within my 'self' through engaging with art education at The Artworks. This is highlighted in the amended aims when I wrote that I wanted to investigate how 'being a part of The Artworks can impact upon a person's life' I was writing what I ended up doing as part of this research. I was interested in exploring changes that would occur within my own perspective and I wanted to create a piece of research that came fully from the learner's perspective. What transpired was not only an insight into a learner's experience in Art Education but was also an exploration of the development of my own self-awareness. It was a glance into 'sitting in that chair' and an exploration of how much more in-depth a piece of research can be when the researcher is the researched.

META NARRATIVE - MODE OF ADDRESS

As I write the revisions for this thesis I see that I have to explain the 'mode of address' that is used. I have written this thesis as an evocative narrative, a story, using my own 'inner voice' throughout. This has been done intentionally –

so that the reader will hopefully 'sit with me' – in the chair of experience within my own private world. I wished for my readers to experience the research from the inside through my eyes and experiences as both researcher and researched hence using evocative autoethnography throughout. Autoethnography is a methodology that is synonymous with emotion and has been used by researchers (such as teachers and health professionals) as a tool to discover how their emotional experiences shape and effect their own self-concepts and motivations (Mendez, 2012, Mendez & Pena, 2013, Macalister, 2012, Masako, 2013, Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013 in Mendez, 2013). It is because of this emotional bias that autoethnography has many of its critics (which I will discuss later and in further detail) but it is also this emotionality that makes it so appealing to others – to people like me.

Autoethnography does have its limitations however and I was introduced to one of these limitations only after my Viva had taken place. Since every reader comes to a text with their own set of connections and life experiences (Bochner and Ellis, 1996 in Mendez, 2013) – it is unpredictable how an evocative narrative will be 'read'. The feelings evoked by autoethnography may be negative and unpleasant for the reader (Bochner & Ellis, 1996 in Mendez, 2013). In that respect it is more akin to an art work than a research methodology. Once an artwork enters into the public domain the artist has no control over how it will be perceived and for each viewer it may evoke a different feeling, reading, reaction and/or interpretation.

I also have to point out that autoethnography can be seen to be limited because of it's lack of analysis. However for me (and Ellis & Bochner, 2000 in Mendez, 2013) analysis is not the main point of this type of research. The main point of

this type of research is to 'allow another person's world of experience to inspire critical reflection on your own' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 in Mendez, 2013 p284) – it is a method that inspires reflection and empathy (Mendez, 2013). With my thesis I hope to enable teachers to think about what life might be like for their students and to enable students to see that their teachers may also have once had experiences not too dissimilar to their own.

i Just googling 'autoethnography masters' comes up with a large range of masters level autoethnographic texts such as:

- Chileshe, W. 2009. *Experience of a foreign educated nurse: An autoethnography* Masters thesis [online] Available at: <http://researcharchive.wintec.ac.nz/544/> [Accessed 21 June 2011]
- Hummel, G.S 2010 *dancing in/out/around/about the closet: Marring autoethnographic agency from [a] marginalized voice*. Masters thesis, Colorado State University [online] available at:< [http://www.scribd.com/doc/52977700/Master%E2%80%99s-Thesis-Performing-Impressionistic-Autoethnographic-Narrative-in-Text-and-Pixels-to-Explore-Fear-of-Death-in-End-of-Life-Care-Giving-Contexts](http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CDQQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdigitool.library.colostate.edu%2Fwebclient%2FDeliveryManager%3Fpid%3D87868&rct=j&q=autoethnography%20masters%20level&ei=XXUITtCSO8inhAfAppXVDQ&usq=AFQjCNF88PbnbRUixur15Zsomlxu0S1RmA> [Accessed 27 June 2011]
• Moyo, Awelani Lena. 2009. <i>Between self and author: an autoethnographic approach towards the crafting of reflexive compositions in post graduate drama studies</i>. Masters thesis, Rhodes University.
• Rosko, 2010 <i>Performing Impressionistic Autoethnographic Narrative in Text and Pixels to Explore Fear of Death in End of Life Care Giving Contexts</i> [online] Available at: < [Accessed 27 June 2011]

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Methods

Literature Review:

Lectio Divinaⁱ

When I first started writing my literature review it looked very *very* different. However as I started to do what Neumann (cited in Ellis 2004, p19) calls *finding your voice*, it started to take a very different shape as I continued to read and to write. I began to realise that I was powerless to stop the damn thing from writing itself in the end. And besides (*I reflect*) I didn't really have to find my voice (*it was always there if I'm honest*) I just had to find the courage to open my mouth and allow the initially timid words to come slowly spilling out.

Before composing this review I read several *how to* guides on producing academic literature reviews and on reading critically for research purposes. I took a class on *How to write a literature review*; I planned the structure, layout and had even decided how I would organise the content. I had decided that I would complete this project as strategically and coherently as humanly possible! Having finished reading *The Research Student's Guide to Success* cover to cover (Cryer, 2006) I felt I was nearly ready to embark upon my new journey into becoming an efficient and dedicated research student. My critical faculties were on red alert and my trusty critical note taking printouts were on the ready! I was poised to systematically *and speedily* locate, access and evaluate all of the information I was about to receive...

However, fortunately (*or unfortunately I guess depending*

upon who you are) all of that stuff went straight out of my broken bathroom window before too long (*perhaps the peeling black Gaffer tape holding it together does serve a higher purpose after all?*). It appears that autoethnography did to me what Ellis (2004) suggests that it sets out to do to all of its readers. It gripped me by the heartstrings and compelled me to continue turning the page it 'evoked emotional experience' and enabled me to not only *think* about the words but also feel 'through my body the complexities of concrete moments of lived experience' (Ellis 2004 p30).

Autoethnography is a highly personal and deeply reflective methodology used by some qualitative researchers. There are a myriad of reasons that research is undertaken and some of these are discussed in Appendix D: Quantitative and Qualitative Conversing. According to Merriam (2009) qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings that people make, giving us insight into how people make sense of their world and the experiences that they have in that world. Autoethnography is therefore an extremely useful tool in this research paradigm. It is useful because it a way of researching into phenomena through the researchers own self. It is highly subjective, and its content comes entirely from the perspective of the individual researcher at the time of writing. As it is a subjective account of experiences it can enable researchers to grant their readers insight into the possible reasons for peoples motivations and actions and can 'cut through the clutter of taken for granted assumptions and conventional wisdom' (Lester, 1999).

When researching into methodologies to use for my master of arts I was searching for something that would be accessible to all – not just to academics. I wanted my words

to have meaning and I wanted my research to evoke a response; I wanted my research to act like my art practice – to tell my story and hope it would encourage others to tell their own too. Autoethnography allowed me to do this through using my own voice, my own story and my own unique perspective to illicit a response in my audience.

That said, it is here that I shall mention the only limitation to autoethnography that I have found throughout this study; reader interpretation. Due to its subjective nature the author must be aware from the outset that it will be read subjectively too. Every reader will bring their own set of connections, life experiences and backgrounds to a reading of an autoethnographic work. As one of the main goals of autoethnography is to evoke emotions – it may evoke different emotions to the ones that the researcher initially aimed to stir. It may not be seen as ‘truth’ because it is not backed up with other data. It may be read as inauthentic or even perhaps naive. Instead of empathy you may occasionally be met with hostility or even indifference. I cannot control how you read my words, I cannot control what you - my reader brings with you to the table. I can only offer my story and hope that the resonance you feel brings something additional to your life, that it gives you some insight into how other people may make sense of their world.

The goals of autoethnography can therefore be quite different to other qualitative research methodologies. Although qualitative research seeks to ‘link research to social change,’ critique the dominant worldview of science based quantitative methods while also experimenting with the ‘boundaries of interpretation’ and attempting to ‘understand more fully the relationship of the researcher to

the research' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 pix). Other qualitative methodologies (*as far as I am aware*) do not set out to 'blend the practices' of the research with the 'expressive forms' and 'aesthetic sensibilities' of art while also using the researcher's own storied lives to create a dialogue around complex human-centred issues in a wider social context (Ellis, 2004, p30).

Ellis asserts that good ethnography grips the reader; it pulls you inside the lived experience and envelops your own experiences within its. By enlarging social awareness and eliciting empathic understandings, *autoethnography* can improve not just the readers or 'participants' lives but also the life of the author (Ellis, 2004 p30).

And this is what discovering autoethnography has certainly done for me, and I hope in turn to do the same thing with you today my dear reader. Though I admit I am panic stricken over whether this is the *right* way to do it. I hear the voice in my head start once again to pour forth its decidedly un-stoic justifications...

"How can you possibly be critical about something you have fallen head over heels in love with anyway Jen?"

"Duh' – being critical doesn't mean 'critical' in the usual sense (like Annie is always saying about my hair... *"Have you seen the state of your hair, it looks like a bleedin birds nest... That's disgusting..."*) "

'Annie' is my wonderful Nan who I look after.

She is quite intertwined with my story and as such will probably be a large character in *these here* accounts.

"To be critical in your reading means:

- Not just to *describe* what has been written but offer your opinion and make a *personal response*.
- To relate different *writings* to each other, seek out their *differences* and *contradictions* and highlight what they are lacking.
- You can't just take everything at *face value* you know!
- You need to be *explicit* about the *values* and *theories* that colour both your own *reading* and the writers – *writing*.
- You need to notice and point out the *alternative views* and *positions* of the writers and show your *awareness* of the 'power relations' that are involved in research.
- Oh and you also need to use a 'particular language' and Hughes (2006) asserts that it may use an *impersonal voice*."

(Adapted from Hughes, 2006)

"But this *isn't* using an 'impersonal voice' it's using my voice"

"Well you would have to be different wouldn't you" (A frequent observation by Annie)

Whenever I start worrying these days about whether I am doing something *right* or *properly* in regard to my research I unconsciously (or is it really consciously? – *I can never make up my mind on this one*) find myself transported back to my first day as a student at MIRIAD. Sitting in the Righton Building Foyer, my hand is raised, face reddening, throat tight as I ask the question that has been niggling in the back of my mind for a few days '*...conflict of interest...*' I hear myself say as I am aware that one of my supervisors is the Director of the organisation I am researching and am desperately hoping this will not become a problem. I hear a

loud authorial voice appear from the other side of the room, my ears prick up as I crane my neck around in order to locate the speaker. Through the multitude of new faces I see the Research Degrees Co-ordinator leaning forward, his arms crossed against his chest. His left hand begins to outstretch as the index finger points firmly toward me.

“...IT IS **YOUR** RESEARCH,
YOU ARE **PAYING** FOR IT,
SO YOU **DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO!**”

For me authenticity is THE most important aspect of being a human. Being true to oneself and to others is the only way we can truly relate to one another. For some this much truth is dangerous – it leaves you vulnerable to criticism, judgement and misinterpretation. I am happy to take that risk – I know that this piece of work has benefited others. I know that it has enabled at least a few other people to understand the world around them a little more – that it has enabled some to see that they are not alone in their experiences.

For some it may ‘scream’ of having a secret ‘power hungry’ agenda – written words may always be misconstrued – however for the proponents of autoethnography it is a methodology of authenticity. It is a way of ‘being’ in the world. A way of being that ‘requires living consciously, emotionally and reflexively’ (Ellis in Holman Jones et al, 2013, p10). What I have learned throughout this experience is that some people will never ‘get’ what you are saying – no matter how many different ways it is said. And that is ok – because for the ones who do ‘get’ you and what your words are saying – life is understood that little bit more.

And this is the point of research after all – to elicit more understanding of the world that we reside within. It is a method that Ellis et al proclaim will enable us to not only make a little bit more sense of the world but also increase our understanding of and empathy for *other* people (Ellis & Bochner, as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2010, p2).

Evocation

My literature review provides you with a glimpse into the literature that has so far impacted upon my own thought processes, and in turn shaped and *improved* my life and work on this incredibly short part of my master's journey toward making a little bit more meaning. I will look at some of the work I have produced *through the gaze* of the autoethnographic literature. In order to both understand it myself and to show how my work fits inside it. I will also hopefully demonstrate my knowledge of research methods and methodologies through using examples of my own newly produced work to produce a varied and exciting literature review. Toward the end of my research degree I created a 'meta-autoethnography' around these earlier writings as by this point I have gained new knowledge and was able to *re-present, re-examine and re-vision* my journey. Ellis defines meta-autoethnography as the work produced when the researcher 'wraps a larger story of the stories' around the original work (Ellis, 2009).

So here is my literature review – autoethnographic style. I do hope it is an *evocative* read. Please get in a comfy seat and make yourself a nice steaming cup of whatever hot beverage you prefer to get you through the reading. Included are reflections, conversations, a vignette and a poem or two. A forewarning comes with this body of work

- It can help to read all of the following with a bit of a *Scouse* accent – in order to catch the intended *turn of phrase*.

As I acknowledge that I am a *neophyte* researcher I apologise in advance for any glaring omissions and direct you toward an insight from Cole “every reader’s response to a writer’s call can have its own startling suggestive power” (1989, cited in Smith-Sullivan, 2008 p20). Therefore I urge you to give me any advice and input you think I would benefit from. Thank you for reading and enjoy!

Literature Review: An Introduction To the Collection

CONTENTS:

- An ode to reflexivity
- An ode to autoethnography
- A Comparison between texts
- Selected reflections on the literature:
 - *Mini A-Ha’s!*
 - *Meta-reflection: re-cognising re-authoring*
 - *re-thinking re-authoring*
 - *re-visiting the readings*
- An autoethnographic vignette on a reading of *The autoethnographic call*
- Concluding the collection

My literature review also contains one more sections, which is located in the Appendices. Please see Appendix D: Literature Review: Quantitative and Qualitative conversing

of *lectio divina* (A meditative listening to) instead of performing a straight 'critical analysis' of the texts. I find that personally – I learn better this way. That being said I have also completed critical analysis that will hopefully be apparent during your reading.

For me – learning is about 'transformation' it is not about 'demonstrating the validity of a theory'. I am deeply influenced by Buddhist/Taoist philosophy and therefore find that through having performed personal introspection for years it has provided the most profound personal learning, which has in turn enabled me to help others to also learn. This is what I believe Ellis is getting at with 'evocative personal narratives' and autoethnography.

An Ode to Reflexivity

At the beginning I had so very *very* much to say,
But since far more recently that urge hath gone away!

Reflexivity,

It appears is much *bigger* than I thought!

And to think,
Once upon
a time
Why,
my mind-

It was fraught

With worry and angst about finding the *words*
To describe in such detail the concept,

The '**blurbs**'

Of this *thing*
That I thought
only a *few* researchers did do

And now I find - they're all at it!
Erm - *excuse me, but who?*

Why those qualitative researchers!
They pretty much all do '**re-flex**'!
But why...

What do you mean?

I am feeling quite vexed!!

To be reflexive,
My dear,

Well it just means just to '*be*'-
To acknowledge your story!

Allow in the '**me**'

When completing the research - just think of
Your impact,
Why you're doing it,
Where you've been
Otherwise *you'll be sacked!*

It is oh so **important** to
Acknowledge the '*self*'!
The histories, the philosophies
Everything else on that shelf!

On the shelf of your life
And *you're story* through the years
Why it makes such a difference in relinquishing
their fears!

This research, is being done - *by you*

YES DEAR **YOU!!!**

So make sure it's 'your' work

And let your *self*
Shine
right *through!*

An Ode to Autoethnography

The world is interrelated,
Every *thing* from the tip to the toe
Your story, why it *can* be debated,
But you've to allow it to ebb and to flow,

Auto ethnography - it is but *evocative*,
And *that* is the *way* it should *be*!
I will interpret my story,
I hope you will listen to me.

Once you have heard of my story,
You can relate it into your own life!
You may start to see connections and differences
And similar things that have also caused strife!

Sometimes I am a storyteller who is *wounded*,
But aren't we all at some point?
If nothing has ever 'affected' you
Well I wouldn't say that was a *life*!

Through listening to the words of my *story*
You can take them to impact upon your own
Use my meanings to make several *re-visions*
Perhaps, be pushed to go pick up the phone!

Auto-ethnographies talk of *bigger pictures*
They enable you to see a new world
Our own narratives *they* are our stories
And we really should let them uncurl.

Literature Review: A Comparison Between Texts

What exactly *is* autoethnography?

Smith-Sullivan's thesis begins with a lengthy discussion about what autoethnography *is* and where it first *began*. She concludes this section by giving us Carolyn Ellis's (2004) definition:

"It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness...Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations." (cited in Smith-Sullivan, 2008, p7)

She goes on to state that the reason she suspects this to be the most cited definition is because it is used in Denzin and Lincoln's seminal text *the handbook of qualitative research* (2004).

What I found most interesting however was how Smith-Sullivan did not discuss the differences between or even *acknowledge* the fact that some scholars say there are two very different forms of autoethnography (Muncey, 2010 & Anderson, 2006). I first discovered the two terms in Muncey's *Creating Autoethnographies* (2010). And without even looking at my notes I can remember thinking 'I'm definitely interested in the *evocative* one!'

Allow me to explain:

Muncey puts forth the argument that there are *two* forms of autoethnography; *Analytical* autoethnography and *evocative* autoethnography. She goes on to suggest that the '*current discourse*' refers '*almost exclusively to evocative*

autoethnography' (Muncey, 2010, p36) and gives short examples and synopsis of the two variants.

Through continuing to devour more and more autoethnographic texts I started to notice that most autoethnographers like Smith-Sullivan (2008) did not acknowledge that there was a divide or two alternative autoethnographic foci. Some of the writers would discuss variants of their approaches such as Duncan writing in 2004 who considered her account as taking a '*conservative autoethnographic approach*'. She did this she stated so that her work would have an '*analytic scholarship*' instead of relying too heavily upon '*personal writing style to evoke direct emotional responses in readers*' (Duncan, 2004 p11).

Muncey (2010) labels Wall as an *analytical autoethnographer* because she is '*not trying to evoke a response to her personal story*' (Muncey, 2010, p36). However upon reading Wall's article *Easier said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography* (2008) I noted that nowhere in the text does Wall proclaim herself to be creating an *analytical autoethnography*. She simply states that:

'Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on' the self and the 'application of the research process'. She goes on to suggest that some autoethnographers namely Ellis and Bochner (2000) 'consider personal narrative to be the same thing as autoethnography' (cited in Wall, 2008). Wall then explains that other autoethnographers use the term to explicitly link 'concepts from the literature to the narrated personal experience' such as Holt and Sparkes (2001 & 1996 in Wall, 2008). While occasionally researchers use it to 'support an approach as rigorous and justifiable as any other form of inquiry' such as Duncan writing in 2004.

Wall says that this *emerging method* may be more of a

'philosophy than a well-defined method' and goes on to provide her readers with illustrations of different uses of 'autoethnography' for example:

- Frank used autoethnography as a *'way of telling a story that invites personal connections rather than analysis'* (2000 cited in Wall, 2008)
- Holt and Sparkes *'explored issues of personal importance within an **explicitly acknowledged** social context'* (2001 & 1996 cited in Wall, 2008)
- Duncan used autoethnography to *'evaluate her own actions'* (2004 cited in Wall, 2008)
- Muncey used autoethnography to *critique existent literature on a topic of personal significance* (2005 cited in Wall, 2008)

In fact through all of the readings I have done, the only place I found information about the variance between 'analytical' and 'evocative' autoethnographies was in Anderson and Muncey (2006 & 2010 respectively).

It appeared to me *at first glance* that there were not two defined oppositional standpoints on autoethnography as *generally speaking* most writers who use autoethnography merge the two together. Using personal narrative to both evoke response while also embedding their stories within the literature and/or social context. In fact most of the papers I have read that explore autoethnography illustrate the varied and multiple approaches and nuances to this emerging field of research (See Etherington, 2004 p137 – 159, Holt, 2003, Mkhonza, 2008, Spry, 2001, Wall, 2008,)

However a further exploration found an **interesting occurrence**:

Anderson is cited by Muncey as being the leading protagonist in analytical autoethnography (Muncey, 2010

p36). In 2006 he had a paper published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography entitled '*Analytical Autoethnography*'. Five years later in January 2011 Ellis, Adams and Bochner published '*Autoethnography: An Overview*' (2010). Anderson's '*Analytical Autoethnography*' paper appears in the reference list. But nowhere in the text does the term '*analytical autoethnography*' appear. The only reference to Anderson is a single sentence in the '*Critiques and responses section*' on page 11.

"Furthermore, in using personal experience, autoethnographers are thought to not only use supposedly biased data... (ANDERSON, 2006; ATKINSON, 1997; GANS, 1999)," (Ellis et al, 2011 p11). Now if we go to Anderson's original text what he actually says is that he:

'applauds the energy, creativity and enthusiasm' of 'scholars' (note how he puts this word in indentations) such as 'Ellis and Bochner', 'Laurel Richardson' and 'Norman Denzin' (Anderson, 2006, p373/374).

"for articulating a theoretical paradigm for the form of autoethnography that they promote and for producing and encouraging texts (and performances) that exemplify ethnography within this paradigm." (Anderson, 2006 p374)

He goes on to say he is '*concerned*' however that the '*impressive success*' of the evocative autoethnographers work:

"may have the unintended consequence of eclipsing other visions of what autoethnography can be and of obscuring the ways in which it may fit productively in other traditions of social inquiry." (Anderson, 2006 p374).

After having read the Overview and how '*analytical autoethnography*' had been completely ignored, my initial reaction was to say that I felt almost as though the '*evocative*' ethnographers were trying to ignore the existence of analytical autoethnography and as such remove

it from the canon.

I would have gone so far as to say that this was a *very* intended ‘*eclipsing*’ of other visions of what autoethnography can be. I was also left confused by the fact that I re-read Andersons text and no where in it does he say through using personal experience autoethnographers are using ‘supposedly biased data’. If anything he advocates the use of personal experience and offers up examples of several *analytical* autoethnographers who use personal experience. Such as Murphy in *the Body Silent* (1987). What Anderson says analytical autoethnography does is to place the personal experience:

‘within a social analytic context. Unlike Ellis and Bochner’s (2000, 744) call for a ‘narrative text [that] refuses to abstract and explain’. (Anderson, 2006 p378)

But the thing is – Ellis and Bochner are not *defining* autoethnography as a ‘*narrative text [that] refuses to abstract and explain*’ what they are discussing in *Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject* (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2004) is ‘*evocative personal narratives*’ which it *appears to me* that in this chapter they are saying can be used *within* the realm of autoethnography.

And the reason they advocate a text that ‘*refuses to abstract and explain*’ is because they feel that when reading an evocative personal story the reader needs to stay focused *in* the story as the next line suggests they are ‘*stressing the journey over the destination*’. Ellis and Bochner (2000) are saying that in *some* texts the reader should not be dragged out of the story by having to move into readings with a theoretical impetus and then placed disheveled back inside the text once again. What they are calling for is to be

allowed an occasion to produce a text that people can be ‘enveloped’ within. But both Ellis and Bochner do also produce analytical autoethnography that links to the literature and include links to social theory (see Ellis 2009, Bochner 1997) it is just that they use evocative personal stories to get their message across too! It is a different *kind* of analysis!

Anyway, my overall thoughts on this little conundrum are that *as a rule* autoethnography as a methodology is barely 20 years old (Sullivan-Smith 2008) – so for me – it obviously has gone through several changes and re-definitions. People, *as is human nature* have different takes on the *meaning* of the word and concept and it will continue to be this way until [*at the very least*] it has been defined in the Oxford English Dictionary. *It is still not there I’ve checked (And I’ve rechecked in September 2012 for my final hand in and it still is not there)* – *but then neither is Meff and that being my favourite word which also has a million and two people fighting over its definition is also something I am looking forward to/hesitant about being ‘officially defined’.* Nevertheless I think with both of these *words* even once they have been *officially* defined their meanings will still be a little transient. People will still want to use a *different* terminology.

And in my book that is ok!

Because *as Annie is always saying:*

“It would be no fun if
we were all the same now would it!”

**Meta-autoethnography:
further reading, hindsight and changes in belief**

This comparison was written *before* I had read Carolyn Ellis's book REVISION, written in 2009. After reading this book - which is a series of her autoethnographic papers that have been re-visioned and re-vised from her current perspective and include other peoples comments upon the papers (such as reflections and critiques) I can see that the *truth* I didn't want to believe (*that Ellis et al were purposely trying to remove 'analytic autoethnography' from the canon*) was in fact rather true. However I can now see that the reason for this is because Ellis et al believe their form of autoethnography *is* analytical (as do I) Therefore to acknowledge that *other* people claim there are two separate kinds of autoethnography would be them admitting that *evocative* autoethnography is not as such analytical. And therefore by Anderson suggesting that evocative autoethnography is not analytical autoethnography he is *in fact* suggesting that it is based on biased data. Whereas Ellis asserts that the analysis comes in the multiple layers of consciousness and the focus on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience (Ellis, 2004).

Ellis believes her version of *heartfelt* autoethnography will 'change the world' and therefore Ellis is not interested in fitting into 'realist' paradigms like Anderson or making her work fit the stereotypes of how research *should* be done. She wants autoethnography to signify a new genre of research, one that *can* change peoples lives by allowing them to make connections through personal story instead of through links to abstract concepts or thought (Ellis, 2009).

Selected Reflections On the Literature:

Mini A-Ha's

"There's something spiritual about mountains, I think as I contemplate the souls of the dead family members in the mountain peaks and the low cumulus clouds. Is this why I am always pulled back to the mountains? Do I hope to reconnect with my family and with my roots here?" (Ellis, 2009 p319)

This passage made me smile and a small laugh of recognition surprised me as it popped out of my lips. I feel the same way but about flowing water. Whenever I am near a large body of water I feel a connection. I feel freed of all worry, thought, preoccupation. I feel a great stillness. I often say this feels like 'home'. I had no idea why – until The Beautiful Man pointed out that I came from the city upon the river. I felt foolish for not realising before now that I was, on some level reminded of the trips I used to take back and forth on the ferries. The water was dirty and dank and the rain was ever dripping – but it didn't matter. It was home.

Reading Reading Reading - *whatever have you done to me?*
 You have opened up my eyes - *So that now I can finally see.*
 You have also quite hurt my head - *it is banging both too and to fro.*

I cannot get rid of the words now - *I really just can't let them go.*

Spinning around in my head – *they are constantly asking me why.*

When a person *critiques* just one text - *It's aimed at the whole genre- they imply!*

And that for me just isn't the case! - *The critique needs to be seen in context.*

It is aimed at just your **one** telling – *the writer was just trying to bisect!*

“While traditional scholarship was meant to educate, inform, and perhaps eventually lead to positive change, autoethnography has as a basic tenet —to help. This aid comes from someone who is not only a qualified researcher, but someone who ‘has been there’. This first-hand experience of the researcher is the backbone of autoethnographic scholarship.” (Smith-Sullivan, 2008 p28)

I love this idea! Not only the idea that it's about 'helping' but that the reason for helping is not a hidden agenda. It reminded me of the time when I was studying for my PGCE I came across the notion of education for emancipation and I promptly went to interview the cabbage shirted teacher and asked him truly WHY he taught. When he told me that it was to 'use his time in this life to help others on their path out of Samsara' I realised that he was teaching to help – same as what I wanted to do. And if autoethnography is a research method that embraces that – I am all for it!

Selected Reflections On the Literature:

Re-cognising Re-authoring

When reading for my Literature Review I came across an autoethnographical text written by Dr Carolyn Ellis entitled *‘Goin’ to the Store, Sittin’ on the street, and Runnin’ the Roads: Growing up in a Rural Southern Neighbourhood* (2009). In this text Ellis is describing her childhood and using it as the opening chapter to a book. She tells the story of a child growing up in the 1950's in rural Virginia. This story explains to us that Ellis grew up in a small town and led a fairly simple existence. She describes the foods that she loved to eat (Wonderbread, Miracle Whip and Macaroni), talks about how she would read Nancy Drew mysteries for hours on end, informs the reader that ‘she had little notion

of the classics or good literature' (Ellis, 2009 p26) and that the TV was at the heart of the household.

The story describes the pastimes of the people that lived in her community: chatting and drinking mostly for the adults/ devouring sweets and playing on bicycles for the children. Overall the story is light-hearted, evoking feelings of a tranquil yet naive childhood. There are hints of a mother who may be having an affair and the text mentions however briefly that her parents (along with the parents of several of her friends) had a dysfunctional relationship due mainly to hardworking fathers and their overconsumption of whiskey on a weekend.

The story ends with a final paragraph about how life changed when Ellis turned 15 and was gifted her first car. The car represented freedom and she used it to drive to school – outside of her small town. She started to meet people from 'other' places and began to see that there was a big and glorious world outside of the small town she had so far grown slowly within.

This story is followed by a 'Meta-Autoethnography' entitled 'Conveying the Feeling World' (Ellis, 2009 p32). The meta-autoethnography goes on to explain how this story had been 're-authored' and had many different revisions created over a period of several years before it became the version that is now published within Ellis' 2009 book entitled: *Revision*. She tells us how the first version of this story focussed on several traumatic events that the author had experienced as a child (infidelity, deceit, alcoholism and betrayal). Ellis explains to her readers that *'this is an approach often used by autoethnographers and memoirists in portraying their childhoods'* (Ellis, 2009, p32). Ellis explains in the endnotes that her original version was

a 'traumatic memoir' while the new version is a 'lyric memoir' (Ellis, 2009, p355). The former being written as a reflection on and compensation for the 'destruction' and 'rupture' experienced as a child while the latter is written as a contemplative piece designed to 'recover the felt core of early experience' (Ellis, 2009, p355).

Ellis tells us that in transforming her traumatic memoir into a lyric memoir she was able to examine difficult events in her childhood. This then gave her a greater understanding of her own past, which consequently enabled her to 'identify more closely with the difficulties her own students experience when telling their childhood stories.' (Ellis, 2009, p33).

The I AM story that is located in Chapter 3: Selected Works is my own lyric memoir of growing up. Like Ellis and many other autoethnographers and memoirists (Rambo Ronai, 1995 and Karr, 1995 as cited in Ellis, 2009 p355) I had also written several different versions of my own traumatic memoir – however these were kept within my own journals and were never made for public consumption. Like Ellis, I did not want to 'reduce and freeze' the whole of my childhood into those 'few traumatic moments' – however I did want to tell the story of the confusion and frustration I experienced throughout my own engagement with art education. And I wanted to explain some of the underlying reasons for the confusion and frustration that I was experiencing at the time.

Selected Reflections On the Literature: Re-thinking Re-authoring

When I read how Ellis had re-authored the story of her childhoodⁱ my mind wondered fleetingly if I also should 're-present' my own story (the I AM story). I wondered about whether my readers or I also *really* needed to be 'lost' in those '*moments*' of '*chaos and trauma*'. And then I regained my senses and recomposed myself.

For the time being,

YES.

I still feel that this story *needs* to be told as it is. As I glance over the text I am adamant that every part of this story is crucial to the whole. For example: the start of the narrative is needed to set the scene and highlight that our students have '*pasts*'. These '*pasts*' need, not only to be considered by educationalists but also the fact that our students themselves have probably not yet been able to 're-author' those *pasts* also needs to be taken into consideration.

I remember a time when I was training to be a teacher and a 19-year-old student confided in me how upset, worried and scared she was about the upcoming exams. Through her tears she told me how she had no where at home to do her art work because of various family '*problems*' and how she just simply couldn't cope at the moment. Fighting the urge to cradle her in my arms and tell her she was going to be alright. I advised the student to '*try not to worry about the exams*', explained how *if things were really bad at home and she did fail then she could always sit the exams again next year*. I told her that if she *really* needed to focus on other things, I was sure that *she could always come back to the course when her*

head was fresher and that I would talk to her tutor for her and see if there was anything we could do!

Imagine my surprise when upon my speaking to the tutor and mentioning that the student was feeling overwhelmed and under pressure. I was greeted with a long ‘roll of the eyes’ and the drawn out announcement *in front of several students and teachers* that **“Oh her...”** Accompanied by a set of rather demeaning hand gestured speech marks

“She’s got DE PRE SHUN!”

My gut reaction was a strong urge to punch her in the face, *I will admit this to you now*. However I collected myself and reflected that although I had empathised with the student it was probably due to the fact that on some level I had related to her. And therefore I did not share what I perceived as this educator’s cold and dispassionate stance toward her *own* learner.

I therefore still maintain that some readers of my story need to experience a wake up call. To be reminded of the need to empathise with their students. Whether my opinion on this will change in the future I’ve no idea – but for the moment it shall stay as it is. As long as I can enable at least one more person to ‘re-think the use of their red pen’ (*as one of the audience members at the CARN preparation day stated that she would*) then I will believe I am still making a difference. And that is good enough for me.

For now.

Selected Reflections On the Literature: Re-visiting the Readings

Muncey discusses how her most 'influential ideas' were invoked not by 'studies' but from real people's perspectives and from teachers, friends, family, key authors and 'chance acquaintances' (Muncey, 2010 p3&4) and up to this point I *felt* exactly the same way. However, reading autoethnography has changed that. Many autoethnographies show lived experience from real peoples lives and that resonated deeply with me (see Ellis, 2009). As I look back across my notes from reading the literature I see that the I AM story was created over a long period of time and that all of the literature I read around autoethnography did in fact influence it greatly. Though at the time of writing it felt as though it just popped out of my head in a matter of a few days.

Autoethnography embraces subjective and feminine ways of knowing; it goes against the grain of the 'grand narratives' and 'subverts the dominant discourses' (See Spry, 2001). I think this understanding has infiltrated my work and process but it has not been a subject for scrutiny in this literature review. I have chosen instead to focus on how learning about reflexivity/autoethnography has really impacted upon me. Autoethnography and reflexive research has enabled me to *re-vision* my own art practice. Through reading about other people's stories I have helped to re-define my own. Now I look back at my *canon* and do not see the lack of drawing as the dominant feature – I see the exploration of the human condition from an autoethnographic perspective.

I realised that I enjoy learning about topics such as ethics through Ellis's discussions of her interactions with the Fisher Folk (Ellis, 2004) or the people on the mountain

(Ellis, 2009) and that I like learning about *abstract concepts through the context of people's lived lives*.

I felt that Muncey's *story* was in some respects quite similar to my own. But then I also recognised parts of myself (*and my various life situations*) in Etherington (2004) and Ellis's (Ellis, 2004 & 2009) texts respectively. I related to ALL of them on some level. At one point I wondered if there were connections or if I was simply connecting the dots and reading what I want to read rather than necessarily what was placed on the page. However, I then had the thought that perhaps people with a certain mindset/way of thinking/background moved into a similar field of researching and this was the reason I was so enchanted by the reading I'd been doing.

Most of the literature focuses on how the authors started to question the conventional approaches to what knowledge production was. And this was also true for me – when I was doing my PGCE, I often wondered why none of the readings were coming from the student's perspective, or discussed the lived experience of the 'non self starter' students (which I have always been – this is not something I am proud of and keep trying to overcome). One of my bugbears during the PGCE was that I started to ask questions such as "*Why do 'policy makers' get to make decisions about what I should study, how I should learn? When they are so far removed from my life and my situation!*" (Smith, 2009 reflections on learning)

Through engaging with the literature I found that I started to choose 'favourites' with the authors. For example: When I first read *Creating Autoethnographies* (Muncey, 2010) I thought it was amazing and my notes talk of how the book was 'resonating' with my own experiences, how we had done/gone through many similar experiences, been

interested in the same concepts, and how I was so pleased I had read this book.

However, after reading *The Ethnographic I* (Ellis, 2004) I started to think that Muncey's book paled in comparison. Then when I compared my notes, I realised once again that *Creating Autoethnographies* is a great starter book. It covers a lot of issues and topics that Ellis's does and shows an opposing viewpoint on occasion (*such as with the evocative/analytical autoethnography debate*). Nonetheless I did note that her use of language and narrative style were just not as 'poetic' or 'evocative' as Ellis's and hence why I had preferred one over the other. The only real grievance I have/had with Muncey's text is that she makes some generalizations about *people* and she doesn't back them up with *fact* or concrete evidence. But then another part of me says that not backing things up with *outside* evidence is one of the beauties of autoethnography – if it speaks to you then surely that's enough? Because what Muncey *generalizes* for *all* people does in fact include me. An example:

"People are inherently creative beings...on a daily basis we struggle to make sense of other's actions...we have a tendency to label our creative endeavours as hobbies and struggle to keep the serious world of work/research in an objective style" (Muncey, 2010 p55)

My notes on this reading are:

"Is this true of everyone? It is for me but I thought that was 'abnormal'...I don't believe I agree with her on this point about 'everyone'... I think I am centrally hardwired this way but I think there are other people who are possibly more 'logical thinkers' or something and do things differently! She also doesn't back this statement up with any references – sweeping generalisation? And I know already how much of a 'faux par' it is to make these" (Smith, notes on Muncey 2010)

On the one hand I agree with Muncey - these descriptions *do* include me however I don't think she should make such generalisations about *people*. You cannot simply state that this is true of everyone surely? But my feelings on this could be down to the fact that when I did make a generalization about 'all' in my artist statement for 'Mirror Mirror' (2004 – *this artist statement is discussed in the I AM story – the incident with the red pen*). I was bitterly reprimanded for it and since then have never been able to generalise again – maybe *on reflection* this was in fact incidentally a good thing – because it means I do now honour the individual fully.

Throughout reading the literature I was 'reflexing' on it and my notes are also full of things like this:

"Perhaps I am telling my story to get 'my' reality about previous engagement with art education into the mainstream because I know that art ed can actually be like this!!" (Smith, notes on Muncey 2010).

So through engaging with other people's autethnographies I was 're-visiting and re-interpreting' my own reasons and meanings – therefore doing exactly what autoethnography should set out to do! It provided me with 'new perspectives' on my 'personal experience' and helped me to 'fill a gap' in my 'existing, related storylines (Couser, 1997, Goodall, 2001 cited in Ellis et al 2010).

"There is value in re-storying/revising ourselves rather than uncritically accepting for ourselves the stories we have constructed in the past". (Ellis, 2009 p348)

**An Autoethnographic Vignette On a Reading of
*The autoethnographic call: Current considerations
and possible futures* By Kendall Smith-Sullivan,
2008**

I can't help but be jolted **suddenly** from the thesisⁱⁱ I am reading.

The bloody rude boys round ere!

I violently drag the blue material cleverly disguised as a curtain across my single paned bedroom window.

*I've got a headache! And that bleeding sun is **not** making it any better!*

My mood lifts as I gaze out of the half covered window at the steady stream of passing traffic. The *stupid* rude boy in his luminous orange Subaru with *added noise box* has finally moved on and the sun is dancing daintily on the tarmac where the rain has left its twinkling mark.

God, I do love this house.

I sigh and rub my left hand over my eyes and forehead that is aching from concentrating on the computer screen for so long. *Perhaps I should go and make the tea and allow what I've read so far to mull over in my head a while.*

I realise that not only is the front of my brain hurting but my left shoulder has started to ache – *how long have I been sitting here anyway?*

I slowly *and ache-ily* pad down the 4 sets of creaking stairs.

I really need to make those carpets and decorate this bloody hallway!

Entering my homely orange kitchen puts a smile on my face and I stretch up to hit the button on the little black DAB radio that my mum got me several Christmases ago. Lowering down Absolute 80's to a quiet lull I go about getting out the pasta and collecting together the vegetables...

As I start to prepare the tea, my mind starts wandering over the text I'm partway through reading...

It started off quite prosaic, the first two chapters were *dare I say* a little *boring*, talking about 'how she had collected data' and used 'grounded theory and coded analysis and all manner of things, I didn't have the slightest inkling toward. I wasn't sure if I was going to be that interested, but I couldn't help but think that this bit might be important reference material for when I eventually start writing up my thesis.

I pull out the chopping board and search through the archaic tub of cutlery for my favourite knife.

But when she moved onto the people's stories though! *Oh I was in heaven!*

All these names I keep seeing in my books and papers and Internet searches started to emerge as *real* people, with *real* voices. When she talked about that panel at the *Third International Qualitative Inquiry. Conference in 2007*, with Ellis, Bochner, Denzin and Richardson why *for a moment I felt like I was actually there!*

One of the dudes even said how reading Carolyn Ellis's work was like '*falling in love*' and finding his '*soul sister*'ⁱⁱⁱ Well, my heart just *swelled* – that is what it felt like for me too when I read *The Ethnographic I*. I'd even wrote most of my notes in CAPITALS I was *that* excited!!

♪♪ *So long,*

I've been looking too hard,

I've been waiting

tooooo long...♪♪

Yes! TUNE!!

I dart around the big oak table and crank the radio up. Singing my head off as I continue frying the onions and garlic that are sizzling away in the pan and enveloping me in their intense aromas.

ⁱ Ellis, C. 2009, *Chapter 1: Goin' to the Store, Sittin' on the street, and Runnin' the Roads: Growing up in a Rural Southern Neighbourhood*

ⁱⁱ Smith-Sullivan, Kendall, 2008. The autoethnographic call: Current considerations and possible futures.

ⁱⁱⁱ Russell cited in Smith-Sullivan, 2008, p63

Literature Review: Concluding the Collection

So there it is - my literature review on reflexive research and autoethnography. I would like to tell you that this literature review was designed as an experiment, a tester space for my newfound knowledge of autoethnography. However it wasn't *designed* at all. Not in the beginning. The design was for something completely different however something *intuitive* took over.

I discovered through completing this review that there are still gaps in my researcher knowledge. Such as arts based autoethnography, performative autoethnography, a/r/tography and further insights into personal narrative as method. I feel I have addressed some of these gaps toward the end of my research journey. Notably that of arts based autoethnography; through my poems and performances and a/r/tography, through my published piece: The A/r/tographer which is located in appendix E and discussed in further detail in chapter 3. I also used participatory research methods in the form of workshops and action research when I took The I AM story on tour to the CARN conference and the University of Cambridge. Yet I still feel I have much to learn about autoethnography since this is such a new field of research (roughly 20 years since inception). If I were to continue this research onto doctoral level then more time would be spent on learning about my chosen methodologies in further depth.

I see this literature review more as a body of work *informed* by the literature rather than just a broad study of what has came before.

In the beginning I introduced Hughes' (2006) fundamentals of critical reading for a literature review:

- Not just to describe what has been written but offer your opinion and make a personal response.
- To be explicit about the values and theories that colour both your own reading and the writers – writing.

I like to think that this entire account is a unique and personal response to the literature including my own opinions and developing voice that is explicit about the values and theories that colour both my reading and others writing.

- To relate different writings to each other, seek out their differences and contradictions, highlight what they are lacking while also 'not taking' things at 'face value'
- To notice and point out the alternative views and positions of the writers and show your awareness of the 'power relations' that are involved in research.

The 'reflections on readings' section demonstrates my understandings of these fundamentals as does 'comparisons between texts'.

I hope that I have used the 'particular' language needed and have used my newly acquainted terminology correctly. I have chosen to use a personal voice for this work, as that's the one I enjoy using the most and it works rather well with autoethnography.

What I have learnt from this review should be evident on the preceding and following bricolage of pages, however I have also discovered a deep love for *research*. I probably don't need to tell you how passionate I am about my discovery of autoethnography. *I hope that my work has done what autoethnography is supposed to do: to have evoked emotions, experimented with the boundaries of interpretation (Ellis, 2004 & Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and blended the practices of research and art simultaneously*

together (Ellis, 2004).

Ellis suggests that autoethnographies and meta-autoethnographies can take the form of: 'short stories, poems, current/past reflections, narrative vignettes, story interludes, and analyses in numerous forms: dialogue with friends and family; reactions from critics, reconsiderations of the writers positions and talking back to critics; responses from participants and dialogues with them about the stories; scenic short stories; portrayals of classrooms, where students react to stories and tell stories of their own; internal dialogues; email exchanges; plays and scripts; artistic works; narrative essays and analytic essays.' (Ellis, 2009 p303)

What I have tried to do with this literature review and my thesis in general is experiment with the forms and possibilities within autoethnography. *This is Another Place: An autoethnographic tale about Annie and the Artworks* is a 'standalone narrative' that does not include any social theoretical or meta analysis. *An ode to reflexivity* and *An ode to autoethnography* are poems that do not link directly to any one reading, but came about from pondering the subject. *Quantitative and qualitative conversing* (See appendix E) is a dialogue informed by my own internal monologue while reading. The *selected reflections* include links to theory and traditional analysis though they 'differ to the degree and depth' of that analysis (Ellis, 2009 p303). These are all styles of autoethnography employed by Carolyn Ellis. Some of the work produced is very short and some of it is very long. Autoethnographies are like that.

What I have enjoyed most in learning about autoethnography/reflexivity is the idea that I do not *have* to 'rewrite' my words. To revise can mean to leave them as original and analyse my own misconceptions! I have experimented with this in *A comparison between texts*. I often marvel at how one reading can change my whole outlook

on life – and I like that!

Through completing this review I have internally re-authored my previous education and knowledge, I have started to re-assess, re-think, re-configure, re-interpret and re-imagine my previous arts practices (Smith-Sullivan, 2008). I have also discovered a strong desire to re-visit my previous artworks and re-write them as the early *unconscious* autoethnographies that they are. I would like to *meta-autoethnographize* my practice. And I have discovered a million and two new questions I am seeking the answers to.

“That’s why I have to tell these stories – to keep memory alive and make sure I don’t forget.” (Ellis, 2009 p285)

Chapter 3

Selected Works

“For as long as I can remember I had been trying to make sense of my world through my artwork. It was only when I officially became a researcher however that my world finally started to make sense...”
Excerpt from A Life Lived Through Lilies

The I AM Story:

The histories and philosophies of Art Education

The original plan for my thesis had included a chapter on the history and philosophies of art education within the United Kingdom. Research into the history of art education had been deemed a necessity very early on in my studies. When talking with John and Stan about what I had observed to be their strange and ‘unconventional’ teaching methods – it became apparent that my knowledge on the subject was extremely limited and shaped only by what I had experienced myself.

In order for me to fully understand The Artworks and how John and Stan taught therein I needed to gain an understanding of how different their own educational experiences studying in the 1950’s and 1960’s had been in comparison to mine studying in 2003.

I understood what it was that made The Artworks so unique – the marriage between John and Stan’s opposing instruction – which John had informed me had developed organically from their own very different art educational experiences – neither of them had been ‘formally’ trained as

‘teachers’ of art – they had learned by ‘Osmosis’ from their own teachers before them. Stan taught the techniques and laid the ‘foundations’ – this was the part that I had always felt had been lacking in my own education and was the reason I had sought out The Artworks in the first place. John on the other hand nurtured the students creativity and sought to discover what it was that made each different learner ‘tick’. Stan would tell us that we needed to ‘learn the rules of art before breaking them.’ Whereas John clearly encouraged defiance and innovation – he wanted his students to be free thinkers and always told us he was most fond of the ones who would paint blue when he had specifically asked for red.

*“You mean to tell me that you studied at Leeds
and have never actually heard of the
Leeds Experiment, Jen?”*

John Ross, 2010 in conversation

While I was reading about The Bauhaus, The transformations of the Leeds College and the Coldstream Reforms I gained an understanding of how dramatic the changes to art education had been and my eyes were opened to how much all of these changes had impacted upon my own story. I saw myself as a product of my time and my own education and I grew able to acknowledge how my own philosophy of art education had been formed. As I listened to John and Stan regale me with tales of their own educational experiences – I started thinking more and more about what had been lacking in my own. I felt cheated

and robbed by the changes that had come about and, as I was also reading about reflexivity and what the researcher's own story could bring to the research – I started making notes on my own experiences in art education – these notes would later become *The I AM Story* – a performance monologue that I would take on tour and use as a way of discussing issues in art and design education, the perspective of the learner in education and notions of being both researcher and research.

I had always understood that the art school Stan had gone to as a 14-year-old boy in the 1950's was very different to the conceptual Fine Art Bachelor of Arts degree course that I had enrolled upon in 2003 but now I was learning why and how.

As I read, my mind was overcome with questions and ponderings on alternative realities. What would my life be like if Grandad's parents had said 'Yes' and allowed that gentleman in the black suit and smart bowler hat to take him to London to study at his Art School, when he was just a boy, sitting on the docks and painting ships in the 1920's? I wondered what would have happened if my ancestors had stayed in Austria – perhaps Nannie would have enrolled in the Bauhaus and been taught by Paul Klee and Johannes Itten themselves! It then occurred to me that had these alternative realities existed then 'I' would cease to exist myself and I found this to be a curious but intriguing notion.

I started my re-education with Stuart Macdonald's seminal text *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (2004). I learned about the medieval guilds, apprenticeships and the academies of the eighteen hundreds. I read about how British art education had constantly chopped and changed and how one regime had been replaced by another time

and time again as history moved forward. I started to grasp how politics and different schools of thought were making art education transform from one generation to the next. I understood the many different 'reasons' and necessities for art education throughout history: mechanical arts for tradesmen and workmen as opposed to the liberal arts for freemen and gentry (Macdonald, 2004).

Herbert Read was now revisioned within my mind as a previous student of the very university I had studied at - as opposed to being just a name at the end of several interesting quotes on Powerpoint presentations I witnessed on my PGCE. In turn, as with Read, Michael Sadler and Jacob Kramer transformed from buildings I had once sat confused and bewildered within into visionaries who had transformed art education by introducing contemporary artists and innovative art works to the city of Leeds (Miller, 2003).

I moved on to Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (1953) and started trying to take imaginary lines for a walk. I read *Elements of Colour* by Johann Ittens (1961) and tried my best to feel the mystical and spiritual aspects of colours. I then poured over Bauhaus books, taking in the images and learning about the context within which it was born. I started to understand how world wars had shaped man and his ideas about life, about society, about education and about art. I discovered how phenomenal the Bauhaus was and saw how its influence was still felt in art education courses of today (Fiedler & Feierabend, 2013) and I became engrossed in stories about the convoluted and complicated lives of the artist/teachers and what seemed to me, their strange ways of viewing the world (Weber, 2011). I finally grasped the 'bigger picture' that had shaped what art education was to become.

Each evening after I had made sure that Nannie was sleeping, I crept upstairs to her old bedroom and devoured my art education books. I was particularly interested in all things Leeds based, as this was where I had studied and spent the last decade of my life before the recent move back to Liverpool to care for my Nan. I'd wanted to go to Leeds since my Art Foundation course when Barbara (my contextual studies teacher) had told me it was where she had studied and that it was 'wonderful', 'life changing' and 'magnificent'. I was reminded of the days when I opened my acceptance/rejection letters after my interviews. As a newly defined 'Mixed media fine artist' I was dismayed to find that I had been accepted to LMU (Leeds Metropolitan University) for Graphic Design but rejected for Fine Art. Yet enthralled to discover that I'd been accepted to the University of Leeds for Fine Art but rejected for Graphic Design.

I enrolled upon the Fine Art course at the University of Leeds and Barbara was so thrilled she crushed me with a bear hug and gave me a beautiful artists sketchbook with brightly coloured pages. That very same sketchbook I have finally gotten around to using now I am studying at The Artworks.

As I read accounts of previous students at Leeds College of Art (Miller, 2003) – I noticed parallels between the curriculum in 1926 and Stan's beginners' courses at The Artworks. Katherine Fryer explains that she spent her first term 'drawing plants and painting groups of objects in tones', she then went on to drawing from the cast, learning about anatomy and perspective and drawing from life – 'a man holding a pole' (Miller, 2003 p55) – these are all exercises that Stan has given to me as part of the beginners courses at The Artworks and I had never come across any

of them before.

I finally discovered what the Leeds Experiment was and was shocked to see that it was part of the 'Basic Design Movement' that was the basis for a nationalised Art Foundation course in 1961 (Miller, 2003, p77). I learned that The Bauhaus had laid the foundation stones for what would effectively become the Art Foundation course that had changed my life. I saw that all of my teachers had been affected by their teachers and I discovered that a large part of Thubron's legacy was his unwillingness to put his most inventive teaching methods down on paper (Miller, 2003 p77). He knew that art education should be responsive, 'organic' and without rigid formula, system or prescriptive approaches (Miller, 2003, p77).

I read about Thubron's radical revolution of Leeds College of Art in the 1950's (Miller, 2003 & Lewis, 2000) and I began to see that John Moores University was very different to the polytechnic it was when John completed his degree there in 1969-72. I then gained the realisation that the polytechnic it once was – was yet again different to the art school it was before it became a polytechnic – I began to understand the 'politics' of it all and how time, society and culture changes everything.

As I read about Thubron and his 'ribald language', 'ignorance of hierarchies' and 'routineless' teaching methods (Miller, p13) I start to understand John and Stan and what I had deemed to be their 'unconventional' ways a little bit more – I saw how they fitted into the canon of art education and I finally understood why it was that John was adamant there would never be a 'written' or prearranged syllabus for any of his courses at The Artworks – he, like Thubron before him worked organically and

holistically and I now understood the value of this and why it was so.

When reading about the Leeds Experiment, one of the things I was most struck by was the number of tutors who were present in the studios (ratios of 1 tutor to 8 students) – giving guidance, offering encouragement and individualised instruction, thus enabling each and every student to come to their own conclusions.

“There are no answers other than those offered by the student” (Thubron in Miller, 2003 p63)

Yet it was the ‘teams of roving tutors’ in the studio that would help ‘coax’ those answers out – instilling within their students a confidence in their own work and their abilities (Miller, 2003 p63). As I continue to read – I couldn’t help but reflect upon my own experiences including the ones on my own degree course, where I had felt so terribly alone.

I learnt about how Thubron had given his students individual projects and exercises that would make them think about the ‘dynamic energy’ present in materials, about creating art works that had ‘tension’ between shapes, working without any plans and told to work slowly. How he give one student a block of alabaster to transform without using a preconceived idea to guide him and gave another the instruction to create a composition of shapes using only newsprint and charcoal (Miller, 2003 p63). I read about the courses Thubron introduced in Resin and fiberglass, sheet steel and vaccum-formed plastics (Miller, p11) and how students on the painting course had spent ten whole days mixing with just three tubes of primary coloured paints - while experientially learning about ‘visual presence and the joys of discords’ (Miller, p13). I started to give voice to the feelings of disillusionment I had long since

held toward my own formal arts training – and I also understood where it was that Stan had got his ‘creating squares of grey’ exercise from in the painting for beginners course at The Artworks.

Thubron stated that he was an ‘enabler’ not a ‘teacher’ and he argued that it was his job to ‘set the scene but not direct the play’ (Miller, 2003 p63). He encouraged his students to explore their own innate sensitivities and he trained them in developing their own ideas and their own work ‘unselfconsciously’ and without compromise (Miller, 2003, p63). After conducting my research into the history and philosophy of Art education within the United Kingdom I finally got the courage to throw my ‘plan’ in the bin. I started to paint blue instead of red and I wrote The I AM Story instead.

The I AM Story:

An Autoethnographic Account of An Engagement with Art Education

The piece can either be ‘listened to’ as a voice recording on the enclosed CD or can be read as a script. However it is important to remember that nuances and tones in the characters voices may be missed when simply reading words from a page.

THE SCRIPT:

Characters:

The Participant – a 28 year old female postgraduate student
The Researcher – a female postgraduate researcher

Staging notes:

The various scenes in the performance are all set in educational settings. This is signified by a large desk in the

centre of the stage. Both characters are played by one person. To signify the change of character when the researcher begins to speak she will pick up a clipboard and stand to stage right – her tone of voice is much more confident and authorial. The participant's actions will change fluidly, fitting into the differing roles of her character.

SCENE 1

THE PARTICIPANT: I'm angry, upset and confused. *(Pause)* I've just moved school and discovered I'm not in *top set* for one of me classes. I ask for an explanation, but I get no answer. Convinced it means am *thick*, me *mind* starts to drift. I start doodling *instead of paying attention*. I start drinking and *smoking* most nights after school. I don't see the point in fractions – that's what calculators are for. And besides, when am I ever *really* gonna discuss *rulers* and *rubbers* with a French person anyway?"

THE RESEARCHER: In angry, upset and confused, the participant is talking about the experience of changing schools. A time when her world *spins upside down*. In primary school she was one of the five *clever* children who sat on the Super Mario's table. No longer one of the few *prized* students – now in a *large* school where there are *too* many girls and *too* many fights, she feels uncomfortable in a foreign land. She moves into the phase of being interested in boys, music and being *older*. Gone are the days of playing in imagination land and burning incense, she has become a teenager.

THE PARTICIPANT: I'm going to earn a fortune. *(Pause)* I pick my GCSE's. My mother tells me to rethink my choices. I untick art and tick separate sciences. I'm going to be a petrochemical processing engineer and *earn* a fortune. *(Pause)* I will not depend on anyone for *anything*. *Ever*.

THE RESEARCHER: Here the participant is giving us an insight into her upbringing. Coming from a single parent family she is instilled with the notion that she *can* look after herself! She feels invincible and perhaps a *little* pressurised into making the *right* choices.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am despondent. *(Pause)* Am not allowed to study *Art* coz I didn't choose it at GCSE! Psychology is *borin*! All we do is talk about alcohol abuse for a year and I end up gettin an E. I enjoy Media Studies *though* coz we get to make films an I spend most of me time in DT playing with the tools and chopping things up.

THE RESEARCHER: I am despondent is about a student who has resigned herself to 'whatever is – *is*'. She

does what her teachers tell her to do – because that is what you *do* at school *isn't it*? Many of her *friends* have not stayed on to the 6th form. (Pause) She '*switches off*' to psychology she says, because they are studying alcohol abuse. (Pause) Her father was a *heavy drinker* and this she says is probably the reason she decided not to engage with the topic. She enjoys the more creative subjects and spends a lot of her time making wooden objects and 3D forms.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am getting there. (Pause) My Product Design teacher is friends with the head of the art and design foundation at the local college. He suggests that I apply. Even though I don't have an art qualification he says he will write me a letter to take to my interview! (Pause) I go with my letter and small portfolio of '*art work*'. The interviewer *smiles* as he reads the letter. He asks me why *I* think *I* should be allowed to join.

THE RESEARCHER: I am getting there, was a *new* and *exciting* point in the participants life. (Pause) She had *made her own* decision. She had *chosen* to go to the art college *instead* of the University. She felt positive in a *new* kind of way. Before her first day at the art college she dyed her hair bright pink – she was *going* to make her *own* choices from now on.

SCENE 2

The scene changes to the Art College; this is signified by several easels being added to the stage.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am mesmerised. (Pause) By my new tutor! (Pause) He is likened to a *shining* star of light. He is described over the years as *effervescent*. I *vow* to become him when I am older except *perhaps* not a gay male Buddhist. He wears a shirt with cabbage leaves on it when he is happy. I am given the theme of '*weddings and funerals*' to explore. I make a comment about how marriage is like an *Iron Maiden*, designed to *trap* women inside something *horrific*. My tutor *encourages* me to create it. I feel *anarchic* but like I have something to say and I *like it*. My work singles me out from all of the other students. (Pause) Some of the men who visit get *angry* – but many of the women *laugh*.

THE RESEARCHER: Here is an insight into the first teacher *in a long time* who the participant felt had *seen* her. This tutor had a different outlook on life to everyone else she was surrounded by. She met other people who also wondered '*why are we all alive?*' She got a few different possible *answers* to the question. The participant often remembers this as a time of *metamorphosis*. Not when she was *transformed* into

something else, but when she finally meets other people who are asking the *same* questions, who are *interested* in the *same* things. She likens it to finding her long lost matching glove.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am very sorry. *(Pause)* My father comes over from Ireland. He is the *only* person who climbs a chair to read a piece of *prose* I have put up on the wall. I placed it up high on purpose so that *he* would not see. *(Pause)* He was the only one *interested* enough to pull out the chair. *(Pause)* I can see that I have hurt him and I am very sorry.

THE RESEARCHER: I am very sorry is the *participants* first glance into self awareness. She starts to *see* how her own actions can *impact* upon other people. She wants to work with her *experiences* but feels that she probably should not. She does not want to hurt or damage the ones that she loves – even if she *sometimes* feels that they *may* have hurt or damaged her in the past.

SCENE 3:

Scene changes to a university; signified by a large pile of Art books being added to the table.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am struggling. *(Pause)* I look around at everyone else in the *large* lecture theatre. *(Pause)* Why don't I understand the words? *(Pause)* I can't keep up. I've *no* idea where we're up to in the text – it reminds me of some foreign language. One that has some similar sounding words *but* the rest of them don't make any sense... "*Ainsi, lorsque Barthes décrète la mort de l'Auteur,...Il ne souhaite pas penser la production des œuvres contemporaines mais la lecture des œuvres passées.*" . *(Pause)* The words are foreign to me but everyone else seems to get it. I feel myself starting to think I must be *thick* again. My heart is *pounding*. . *(Pause)* Later in the seminar I shrink into the chair and become a wallflower. I *joke* in order to *deflect* the questions. The tutor gets annoyed but *I don't care*. Coz **You** don't understand me anyway!

THE RESEARCHER: The participant went to university with a *sparkle* in her step. She was *expecting* it to be like the art college. It was not. *(Pause)* She felt like she did not *belong* here and she took a lot to heart. She responded *negatively* when people made comments about her *accent*. She felt judged and uneducated.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am silenced. . *(Pause)* A *scrawl* of **red pen covers** my **artist statement**. **'NO WE ALL DO NOT!!** *(Pause)* All I see is **red pen**. **BRIGHT RED PEN**. **Corrections, comments, scrawls** and **exclamations!** I

feel sick. (Pause) To the pit of my stomach! He doesn't understand! I don't understand! I tear up the paper and throw it forcefully in to the bin. (Pause) I have made some sweeping generalisations about feelings that I have myself! Feelings that friends have! Feelings that other people I know also feel about themselves! My tutor's bright red pen explains to me that not everyone sees themselves as ugly in a mirror. Not everyone picks up their own negatives that others perhaps cannot see. Instead of sensitively explaining to me that this was only one worldview I feel like he is calling me a liar! And I depart!

THE RESEARCHER: I am silenced is the final *straw* for the participant. Her *work* is not going well. She was used to *structure* and *support* at the art college. And a tutor who helped to *open her eyes* to her own *misconceptions*. She was *used* to responding to briefs and getting together in her *small* class of 12. She leaves the course, but her mother (*thankfully she says in hindsight*) steps in and does *not* let her quit the university all together. She changes to the rival art course at the university, the one in the *school of design*.

THE PARTICIPANT: (*speaking excitedly*) I am trusted and euphoric. (*Pause*) Given *access* to the studio 24/7! Shown how to tig weld, use ceramic shell, allowed to use tens of power tools and I *even* get to help pour my own bronze! I play with *steel*, wood, wax and *memories*! I am told that my work is '*thought provoking*, an exploration of the *human* condition'. I decide to investigate these claims; I have a lot of time on my hands here, in these *foreign lands*.

THE RESEARCHER: The participant went to study for a year in Canada. Her accent *here* a plus point. The *education* system *completely* different. She explored, she *enjoyed* and she played. She started to *read* new books. She started to *open her mind* to *new* ideas. She wondered *often* why *this* university was so different to her own.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am beginning to understand...*the words*! And I am interested in *the topic*! The student I am taking notes for *however* does not, and neither it *seems* do the majority of the *rest* of the class! I look around the room and *this* reality hits me. *One* student is interested, nodding enthusiastically and finishing the lecturers' sentences. The rest of them are all slouched in their chairs. Looking out the window, doodling. Or playing with their *mobile phones* and gadgets. How does she *not* see this happening? Could it be that *she* has never *sat* in that *chair*?

THE RESEARCHER: She relates. The *participant* has a job as learning support assistant for a student with severe Dyslexia on an Art course at a *university*. Once again

she begins to *see* the limitations of studying art at a *university*. How it is geared towards a *particular* type of student. But *what* is the alternative? Where *else* can you go to study art? She is reminded of the cabbage shirted teacher's declaration – that he '*failed* foundation three times on purpose because he *never* wanted to leave'.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am the students' voice. (Pause) The class has *ended*. My student is in a rage. She is *screaming* that she *hates* it, that she doesn't understand the words! '*Why do they have to use such big EFFING words?*' (Pause) I explain that it is a language that she just needs to give herself *time* to *learn* it. Then I realise that like myself she may decide not to learn it, *to rebel*. I am *finally* in the position to *be* the students' voice. I *explain* that many of the students are *struggling* and I ask her to use layman's terms, as the academic language is still *foreign* to this *cohort* of students.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am exasperated. (Pause) I am *told* that *this* is the language of the *University*. That the *students* need to *read more* in their spare time! I go home *furious*, ranting about the *elitist* nature of the *university*! How capable young people with an *eagerness to learn* are *barred* from doing so by tutors who are *passing the buck* and *saying* that their earlier education *should* have taught them how to understand! Well, *it didn't!* So now it is *your duty* to *bring them in s l o w l y!* I hear myself shouting while drawing a puff on my cigarette – *why don't you understand normal people you posh so and so* (except far more expletives were used during the actual event). I find myself once again *likening* it to the foreign language that I am learning where some of the words are getting *easier* to decode... "La Machinata photographica... the photographic machine *why that's a camera!* Per favore... for a favour *why that means Please!*

THE PARTICIPANT: I am touched. (Pause) I '*re-write*' the essay questions, making them *easier* to understand. Using *language* that we *both* understand – but with the inherent meaning staying intact. My student writes her *first* essay. I am *struck* by the fact that this *student* has got to the age of 20 without ever having *written* her own essay before. I read essays that I wrote at this age, *so confused and so muddled*. I am further struck by the omission she gives me that "*every other learning support has done my work for me, you are the first person who has ever taught me anything! You have shown me how to work for myself, you have made it so I can understand!*"

THE RESEARCHER: The participant has, by this point cemented in her mind that *art education* is her passion. She *feels* that she must teach in order to *change* the

experience, in order to help the other students who will struggle. In order to make a difference. (Pause) She is reminded of her own struggle with the university. When her student tells her she should 'become a teacher' she decides that she will. She starts to have many discussions with people about their own experiences of art education and she notices that many other people also reference a person similar to the cabbage shirted teacher of her own.

THE PARTICIPANT: *I am intrinsically motivated. (Pause) I am writing one of my essays. It seems crazy that this time there are no tears, no frustrations. I am actually enjoying the process. (Pause) I am writing about Mazlow and his hierarchy of needs. I am enthralled and undergo a great series of realizations. I used to have socio-economic barriers to learning, my preferred style is kinesthetic, I am an activist/reflector and I like to learn from people – With people. I decide that I am a social constructivist who believes in the importance of Metacognition. There are definitely multiple intelligences and I am definitely a tacit learner! I redefine myself all over again - finally having the words to express my thoughts and feelings. (Pause)*

SCENE 4

THE PARTICIPANT: *(Inner thoughts) I am hypothesising. (Pause) I hear my voice saying the phrase that first enamoured me to that one special teacher with the cabbages on his shirt. 'Art is Philosophy with Stuff' (Pause) Except I also hear myself adding an extra layer or two, developing the concept with my own spin on the possible meaning of the words... It can be an investigation of 'given principles' about being, knowing or doing. It can be a search for your own inside 'truths' - wisdom, knowledge and understanding. It can even be the study of being human, of morals, characters or peoples behaviours. It is a way to figure out your own take on the world, your place in the world and what the 'world' means to you! My work encompasses the experience of being human in a social, cultural and personal context! (Pause)*

SCENE 5

In an art classroom, in a secondary school. The books are removed from the desk and one easel is left – with a clean sheet of A2 drawing paper on it.

In this scene the participant will draw a figure while talking.

THE PARTICIPANT: *I am busted. (Pause) The sweat rolls*

down my cheek. The fact that I cannot draw has come back to haunt me. *The artist who cannot draw.* (Pause) At one point this did not matter - You can *argue* the fact when you are an installation artist, you can hide from it at *university* when no one questions the *lack* of drawing in your *entire* portfolio. Gaining a *first class degree* in art without being able to draw seems illogical but it is true, *I am living proof.* I have been very good at hiding it – *until now.* (Pause) I am stood at the front of the class with *pencil and paper.* I embark upon telling the students *how* to do their drawing. I explain form, proportion and *even* where to start. But my drawing looks like a two year old did it and I *rush* to get it over with. I go the toilet to calm down. (Pause) The text I send to my boyfriend at 10.52am reads. “*I want to die! First lesson – demo on drawing figures! The tutors were watching as I struggled just as much as the learners did! I want to go home.*” (Pause) Not for the first time the fact that I have thirty two thousand pounds worth of student debt flashes through my *mind.* Yes I think *I’ve learnt a few big words – but can I draw them?* Sadly no.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am abhorred. (Pause) I go to the SEN office to inquire as to *why* I have no learning support or teaching assistants. I *explain* that I have a class of *thirty-five.* (Pause) *Two* gifted and talented children, *five* with EMBD, *two* on the autistic spectrum, *one* with moderate learning disabilities and *five* with *specific* learning disabilities. *I cannot teach!* I feel like a failure. (Pause) The answer I get – “*The students need to leave school able to read and write, knowing how to draw a picture isn’t really that important. They get support in English, Maths and Science only I’m afraid.*” (Pause) But *why* don’t they get support in the lessons they struggle with, or in the lessons they *enjoy* the most? Is this support chosen in consultation with the learners? Yes. *Right.* She laughs.

THE RESEARCHER: The participant is ‘*busted*’ and reminded once again of her insecurities, of her *failings.* (Pause) However this time she recognises that she is perhaps not to ‘*blame*’. The fact that she cannot draw may not *perhaps* be her ‘*fault*’. *C’est la vie.* (Pause) It is simply a ‘*problem*’ she will have to solve. On later reflection she draws attention to something she has recently read by Gardner “*[T]he single most important contribution education can make to a child’s development is to help him toward a field where his talents best suit him, where he will be satisfied and competent*” (Cited in Goleman, 1996, p37)

SCENE 6

The final scene takes place in a ‘traditional art school’. The table is

much bigger and several easels are added to the stage.

THE PARTICIPANT: I am also laughing. *(Pause)* At the *irony* of her words. *(Pause)* I decide to go and learn *how* to draw a picture. I am sat in a large *studio* surrounded by a *mass* of different people. I feel more than fleetingly ashamed that I am an *artist* who cannot draw. *(Pause)* I take a deep breath and *grasp* the pencil. *(Pause)* I notice that many others in the class are displaying similar signs of feeling flustered. I listen intently as he explains that it is a new language. That we need to give ourselves *time* to learn it. To practice and to listen to the *different* pronunciation. *(Pause)* I smile and my *eyes* well up. I am *home* in the unfamiliar territory once again of *learning* a new language. But at least this time I know I will *actually* be able to learn it eventually.

THE RESEARCHER: The researcher and the participant *discuss* the text. The researcher *suggests* to the participant that perhaps due to her not studying GCSE or A level art that there are *gaps* in her knowledge. That perhaps these *gaps* in her knowledge added to her *anxiety* and less than enjoyable experience at the *university*. The participant agrees and acknowledges that her *emotional intelligence* has also affected her *academic capabilities* at certain times in her life. She reflects that were she *educated* about *emotional intelligence* as well as *academic intelligence* her path *may* have been slightly different.

THE PARTICIPANT & THE RESEARCHER: I am still learning after all. *(Pause)* So now I ask you this, my dear audience:

Have *you*.

Ever *sat*.

In that *chair*?

**Performing the I AM Story As a Tool for
Empowerment:
*In Order to Make a Difference!***

The I AM story is a personal narrative based around various stages in my life and educational experiences. The piece disrupts the linearity of *authorial* voice by opening up the spaces between reading and writing; self and other; researcher and participant. There is a continual interchange between my own *developing voice* and my reflective *researchers voice*. The main interest for me lies in how this text helps to create a space for *other* voices to also open up in response.

This section details how through performing this autoethnographic monologue, I have been able to evoke change in the minds of my audience members in order to pave the way for a better world to emerge.

The sessions within which the I AM story was performed were participatory action research sessions. Participatory Action Research is a methodology that is used as a tool to 'understand and improve the world by changing it' (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006). It is used so that participants can improve upon their own practices and in the case of the I AM story – it was undertaken with artists, teachers/tutors or trainee teachers of art. The reflective process was directly linked to our actions, as teachers and artists and often the discussions would be surrounding how we act as teachers or students ourselves. Participatory Action Research should be 'empowering' and enable people to have increased 'control' over their own lives (Minkler, Wallerstein and Grbich cited in Baum, MacDougall &

Smith, 2006) and this is what I hoped to achieve by taking this story on tour.

Usually lasting an hour to an hour and a half, I would start the session with a brief introduction to what my overall research was about and then a 25-minute performance monologue was given. Before the monologue, I would ask people to listen to my story and then possibly use it to impact upon their own.

After the performance there was a space for an open-ended discussion. The discussions were opened with the last line of the performance when I would ask the audience "Have you ever sat in that chair?"

Background:

Having dabbled in a former life as a participatory performance artist it seemed only too natural a progression to include participatory action research in my methodologies for my larger research project about my engagement with The Artworks as both Art student, researcher and Artist Teacher in training.

The I AM Story was written initially as a single voiced reflection upon my own engagement with Art Education, while I was conducting initial research into using personal narrative as methodology for my Masters by Research and while I was reading around the subject of Art Education. Since completing my PGCE in 2010 I had been interested in how research and writings on issues in Art Education did not come from the student's perspective, yet it is this perspective that will be moulded more than any throughout the experience of art education. In order to write this narrative I went back into my memory and wrote how I remembered feeling at the time of the actual

experiences.

Revisiting memories:

The revisiting of these memories empowered me to write and study my own history and philosophy of art education as well as those found in classic textbooks such as explanations of the Bauhaus School or Stuart MacDonald's infamous text, 'The History and Philosophy of Art Education' (1970), which chart various ways of teaching and the differing concepts taught.

Through the writing of this piece, I was also able to re-author my past and fill in the gaps with a more mature and multidimensional perspective. This is when I went back to the reflective piece and added my reflexive researcher's voice – that is my current (at the time of writing the piece) perspective. The reflexive researcher was added into the piece and interspersed between the various stages of a narrative that starts with *I'm Angry, Upset and Confused*, when I was age 11 and overcoming the first major hurdle in my education – the move from primary education into secondary and ends with *I Am Still Learning After All*. The researcher's perspective juxtaposed against the participant's story enables both myself and the audience to 'fill in the gaps' through additional background information such as in 'I am Despondent', where the researcher's voice tells us that the participant's father was an alcoholic. It also provides an insight into knowledge that I have since gained but did not have when originally experiencing my life as a child moving through the various stages into adulthood. At many points in my educational experiences and life in general, I have had a negative outlook that coloured my view of the world. However I did not see this at the time and have only gained this knowledge through research into depression and how it affects our mindsets. This is notable in several parts of the text that hint at despondency,

existential crisis, feeling misunderstood and the resulting anger that can arise from these moments in a person's life.

At its inception this piece of writing was not intended to be performed. It was written as an investigation into my own history of art education. Initially it was a documentation of feelings. Then it became an investigation, incorporating newer knowledge into my story as a way of sense making and empowering myself to continue fighting for what I believed in. I believe that teachers ought to aim to 'make a difference'. I also believe that we should listen to our students and empathise with their pains and struggle however futile they may appear to be.

The piece for me was initially about acknowledging my struggle and embracing it. But when the opportunity arose to channel its energy into the greater good and perhaps take it to conferences, I leapt at the chance, no matter how scary it seemed at the time.

Performing and disseminating research:

I was invited to perform the I AM story at a CARN preparation day in MMU, in order to highlight various different techniques for presenting at conferences. Being a conference virgin I had no previous knowledge of what conferences were like and had not originally created the piece as a presentation for a conference. It developed much in the same vain as many of my performance art pieces had done in the past. I was using the I AM story as I had with my previous works: 'Tell Me Something About Your First Love' (2010) and 'What is your one Unanswerable Question?' (2007). I started by sharing a part of my experience and seeking resonance with other people. I was asking for others to share their stories in order to empower me to embrace my past. To show myself that there were others with similar backgrounds and shared experiences

and to enable me to feel connected to the rest of humanity.

During the first presentation of the I AM story at the CARN preparation day, the one piece of feedback that really stuck out for me was made by a blonde woman in a very smart and tailored dark suit; “I’m a doctoral supervisor and I’ve never really thought about it before but this will certainly make me re-think my use of the red pen”. People also started to reveal having had similar experiences. One researcher even went on to tell me that her daughter was going through a very similar experience to mine at University and was also grappling over whether to *throw the towel in*. This is a major life changing decision and hopefully my story went back to that daughter over dinner that evening and perhaps gave a small ray of hope.

At the second presentation of the I AM story which was to a mixed audience of Art teachers, Artists/former art students and Art education tutors it was made apparent by Jane – a PGCE tutor that this would be something that PGCE students could really benefit from listening to. As it talks about many of the issues apparent in art education at the moment having an interesting spin upon it because the researcher and the student's voice in question are but one and the same.

This discussion session was the first for me to really get a chance to put into words things that I had only known tacitly both about myself and the project. One of the audience members Ruth, a practising artist and former art student picked up that, although it was a piece about a struggle with academia. It was also about a love of it too, and she was right. I had never formally thought about this before but it wasn't just about me being able to *prove* I could do it. I actually fell in love with learning, with research, with art education, with beautiful big words and with encouraging, enabling and guiding students who needed it.

I had also fell head over heels with learning about myself and my place in the world. I noticed that unconsciously as the participant grew up, her language also developed. This then enabled me, as I continued to perform the piece, to improve how it was performed emphasising aspects I had not seen in the initial performance. The two characters are very different from one another at the start of the dialogue; their accents, their demeanour and their turn of phrase. However by the end of the story they have merged into one being.

Getting responses:

Every audience this piece has been presented to so far has been different and as such each time it has provoked different responses. At all but one of the discussion sessions so far, people have opened up and told me which part they related to in the story and many have shared a similar story of their own. This is the part I am most interested in, seeking out shared experience, enabling me to envision the interconnectedness of us all.

At the CARN international conference in Vienna (2011) the majority of the audience were researchers, some were also teachers and others were policemen and women. The audience this time was more interested in discussing the performative aspects of the piece, asking me to further clarify details or *titbits* of my story, whether I had shared this story with my family and the other characters held within and whether that had caused any uproar or new understandings of one another. *Uproar was expected from one however the sharing just enabled the rest of us to see things from each other's perspectives thankfully.*

One researcher told me that she related to the experience of going to an all girls school. She went on to tell me how as a school girl she had been ostracised for being seemingly

'stupid' but had then gone on to become a researcher and have several books published, of which she took great delight in sharing this information on Friends Reunited. I was also asked whether the narrative was a cathartic piece of work created purely for the self rather than as a research tool for the wider audience. My answer was as I have stated above – *it is both*.

The writing of this piece enabled me to see my past in a different light. Ellis (2009) says many people choose a research topic that is close to their heart because they want to find out more about it for themselves as a mode of healing. This is what I have always done with my art practice, so it seemed only too natural a progression to incorporate this need into my research topic.

The performing of the I AM story sometimes enabled me to gain validation for my struggles as well. There are others out there who struggled too – we have common ground, we are connected as the more personal a story is, the more universal it becomes (Sankey, 2000).

Key findings:

However when presenting the piece to student teachers, I began to see its real impact as a research tool in participatory action research. I found that for many of them, engaging with my story helped to empower those who struggle to keep on pushing, to keep on bettering themselves, to speak up about their areas of weakness. For several of the trainee art teachers there was a *felt* inability to draw and there was also a great deal of shame surrounding this, as we feel that as artists we *should* be able to draw. Talking about this text and shared experience has opened up many areas of discussion about *felt* inability to draw. How many students felt that their art teachers could explain drawing techniques but could not demonstrate

them. How many art teachers would show examples of artists work. But rarely do the work themselves or how some students would feel frustrated because their art teachers could draw but could not break it down into accessible chunks for the students to be able to grasp the concept. Two of the student teachers from one of the groups I presented this piece to, went onto enrol themselves on intensive drawing courses (with my drawing tutor at The Artworks) – so that they would be ready and confident enough to show their students how to get over their fear. They said that I helped them realise that it could be done.

The I AM story was performed to a number of PGCE Art and Design groups within the UK and after one such performance, I was also told that I gave a student courage as she was from a similar background to me and wanted to go into research but was scared to (as was I). I was also told that my story about standing up for my students gave one or two of these trainee teachers the motivation to also speak up when injustice was being served. I was told that it was nice to hear other people say they also believed they were “thick” for not understanding the words and I told them that one day if they were interested enough they would be able to learn them all. Not all of the performances of The I AM story however, went exactly according to plan...

Performing the I AM Story: Insecurities, Ineptitudes and Interpretations

“Oh, Hi there, my name is Jennyanne Smith and I’m supposed to be meeting with the PGCE Art and Design group at 9am, could you pass on a message please. It’s just that I’m running a bit late...”

Trust me!

Trust me to be late when I'm going to present my piece at
the most prestigious university in the UK!

Great!

What a fucking joke!

*"Ok so erm Hi everyone. My name's Jennyanne and **this** is my story."*

" The I AM Story, An autoethnographic account of an engagement with Art Education"

"I'm angry, upset and confused..."

As I start performing the monologue in front of this group of students, I realise that there is a different feeling entering my consciousness this time around. I still, thankfully notice the warm smiles and enthusiastic heads bobbing up and down, yet they do not help settle my nerves as they have done in the past. This time I also have the brown jumpered boy well and truly within my radar. His presence is making the regurgitation of these memories much more painful and confusing than they have been of late.

"I am despondent..."

Perfect.

Just what I need.

He obviously wants me to know he's not interested!

What audacity!

I'd have thought they'd be better educated here to know
how to respect someone when they are giving a
presentation...

He obviously thinks this is just fucking boring.

Stupid woman pouring her guts out...

Great - spinning around on his chair,
shaking his head at the floor and NOW facing in the
opposite direction!!

Oh Jesus, even the others have noticed him now!

Should I say something???

No!

No, if I say something he'll know he's got to me.

Just breathe and continue...

I carried on with the performance, silently begging him to just leave the room. Asking a God I am confused and baffled about to take him out of the equation. But alas I thought, my prayers where not answered and, as he stared up at the beams on the ceiling I projected my own discriminations onto the brown jumpered boy once again. He thinks I'm worthless and thick:

'this isn't research it's just you pouring your heart out about all the things you have got wrong over the years! You're a joke Jennyanne'.

As I wind down to the punchline some 25 minutes later, I can feel my heart throbbing in my chest and my throat tightening. He is judging me I think, and he wants me to know it!

When I finally ask the audience whether they had sat in that *chair* many of them were smiling at me with their eyes, but they glanced across the room to the boy in the brown jumper. It seemed everyone was just as aware of his presence as I had been.

SILENCE.

“Well, that’s it. So, this is the part where there is usually some sort of discussion about the issues or topics that have come up in the story, some people share their own stories or talk about how my story might impact upon theirs or their students in the future...”

NOTHING...

“OK, so for instance the first performance of this piece was to a bunch of post doctoral researchers and many of them were talking about how their own children were going through or had had similar experiences at university when one of them. This woman who was a supervisor for medical Ph.D. students said it just made her realise how powerful her words could be as a supervisor. That she’d never thought anything of being quite critical of their work and that it would definitely make her rethink her use of the red pen”

STILL NOTHING... But nervous glances around the room...

Tough crowd.

That one usually gets a laugh at least.

“Well, basically all you’ve just done there is talk about a load of things we have all been through

really haven't you".

His tone matched the long drawn out sigh that began the sentence: disinterested and uninspired. With arms folded he wasn't even courteous enough to look me in the eye.

My response at the time: *"Well, yea, yea I guess I have..."*

"So how did it go then?"

"Well, there was this one student, put a bit of a dampener on it all really, I think the other students really wanted to open up but I sensed that they just wouldn't speak in front of him"

(This was actually not the full truth as several of the students rushed over to me after the class had been dismissed and told me to 'just ignore him, he's not very nice but we all loved it!!' One of them positively beamed through her blonde hair as she gesticulated and wrote down the names of films I NEEDED to watch while exclaiming, *"Oh my God, you are Me! You are so Me, it's like we're exactly the same person, I literally have never met anyone like you before I love that this is research!"*

"Ah yes him, I was going to warn you about him but I didn't want to make you nervous. He thinks he's a lot 'cleverer' than the other students. There's quite a lot of tension there really."

As I read through the pink and orange torn slips of paper that contained the student's anonymous feedback that I'd thankfully remembered to ask for in my flurried state, I realised, thankfully that what I was doing was beneficial...

"Thank you, thank you so much for reading us both your

stories, it took so much courage, they were beautiful"

"I could really understand the feeling of subjects feeling like a foreign language and feeling lost and stupid. I will never forget sitting in A- level maths lessons (and being an A GCSE student) and just not understanding a single thing.*

No student should ever feel that lost and confused"

"Only about a month ago, I had the feeling I was useless and stupid, I could understand half the words in my lectures and journal reading."

"You have given me hope. I have always been interested in doing research, but never thought I'd be able to. It's really nice to see someone from a similar background to me going this far, good luck"

In an alternate universe where I would have reacted differently to his opening comment the rest of the session would have gone quite differently. Instead of dumbly answering that 'yes, I had just talked about a lot of generic random experiences that happen to everyone' I would have answered with something a bit like this:

'Good observation but actually no, not quite... What I've talked about here is a very specific set of experiences that relate only to me - for they are my personal experiences and these particular experiences have had an impact upon shaping the person who is stood here before you today.'

Followed by:

'It's great that you can see yourself in my experiences though, it must mean you relate to it somehow. Let's hear about where you

made connections... let's find the shared experience in the research and then take that into our teaching...'

And then I'd have gone onto something like this:

'Are there others in the room who have struggled with academic language? (With a pause for sharing of course).

Well as future teachers – if you know that you struggled and quite a few others in the room have struggled, perhaps you could go on to make that language accessible for someone else who will struggle without making them feel inadequate – tell them about your own struggles. Teach, learn and love the little words first... the big ones that capture your interest will look after themselves at a later date...

Perhaps with a bit of this thrown in for good measure:

If you can remember BEING the stroppy student then perhaps when you come across that stroppy student in your classroom you can remember, re-vision or even realise what they feel like, so we can create a different world, a world where every student can and does reach their full potential!'

But of course it never turned out that way in my reality and during my train ride home, through my snuffled tears, I heard my boyfriend on the phone re-iterating what my subconscious had been saying all along:

"Ahh, of course he was pissed off Jen, here he is studying at the number One university in the rankings for the UK and some little Scouser turns up promoting her research which is all about her and her experiences. He was probably pissed off as soon as you walked in the room Jen. Some people are just like that, arrogant, they think they're better than you and they will go out of their

way to prove it. What is it your Nan's always saying 'let it like water off a ducks back' you have to just grow a thicker skin Jen, you know this research is valuable, you have to believe in yourself..."

So instead of giving up all together and throwing the towel in, when my train arrived back in the *friendly* north, I sat in a pub in Piccadilly Gardens and wrote a poem. A gang of loud and Leary rail track workers shared my table and when I'd finished my poem and my pint we got to talking, finding common ground through rough roots...

"No way! My boyfriend's originally from Gorton..."

Turns out one of their kids had recently gone to University; while the other guys ribbed him for having a 'college bowy' he went on to tell me his story...

"When I was at school you were just a dunce you know, a spacker, not all there in the ead... made to sit in the corner. Never got far me but our lad, he's doing well, he's up Northumbria, doing a Bee Ed or somethin, had this screening, turns out he's got the Dyslexia or something, no such thing as learning difficulties in the old days you see. Fantastic what they can do these days, none of that in my day they just made you feel like a waste of space..."

As the kindness of strangers bought me another beer, I had one final musing on the days events...

In the initial hindsight I was angry, I wasn't warned about him, about the Gorilla lurking in the mist. But that's the thing about Gorillas when coated in fog. You never get any warning, they just come up upon you and **BOOM** – you are seemingly lost for words.

You see I knew the Gorilla would come, however I didn't expect to meet him in the circumstance that I did. I believed myself to meet the Gorilla at the big international conference in Vienna. I expected for him to be lying in wait among the highly educated doctors, scholars and Masters of the worlds' universities. Did I ever think that I would have stumbled upon the Gorilla in a class of people training to be teachers?

Never.

Never in a million years.

But then afterwards I laughed heartily to myself as I realised that all of the people who I'd felt had dealt with me using neither empathy nor wisdom throughout my education had in fact sat in that very room once too... metaphorically speaking of course. And I also realised that there would always be people who would try to make me feel like an inadequate fool – if I allowed them to.

An Elegy Aimed At the Arrogant

"Am I boring you?

Oh hostile one

Who's eyes a-roll.

Who's heart absconds..."

"Does my tale of *woe*

Not thrill you *so*?"

"Well, I've heard it ALL before,

So it's a bit of a chore.

You know we've all felt like that,

Or tit for tat.

Why this story is old,

You are not

That bold"

"Oh really,

BOOHOO,

Did the piece not RESONATE with you?

Oh give me a clue

I BEG

Of you!"

"What a great teacher you'll make

With out a shake

Of em-pa-thy

Or time for tea
A shirt filled with *leaves* of the cabbaged variety,

Will not fill your mind.
You're not one of a kind"

"People wanted to talk!
And they wanted to share!
If you were not there,
A few souls would be bare."

*"I can't talk in front of you,
You stuffy bufooh!
No emotion in sight,
Oh Lord what a fright!"*

*"Why get over yourself!
You lowly elf
But everyone struggles,
That's life –
Full of troubles"*

"Indeed that is so,
You clever Joe
But connecting is art
And sharing is heart. "

"You disengaged the connection,
And I was cut off,

Our threads about to *entwine*
Until *you* severed the line!"

"To be human is to suffer
And to Live
Is to Love"

"Yes to all of the above,
And a nod
To a dove."

"To be human is to connect
And connect we will,
But not until
You go through the mill,

And pour fourth your story
As I have poured mine!"

"Oh what a crime
Stepping across the
Line!"

"Put the personal
In the public??"

"Oh what a sin,"

"Said with a dose of your

Gin."

"Though you know the concept
You're too removed from context.

The context of life!
And all of the strife,
That follows it around,
Singing "Oh
How

Y
o
u

Do

Astound"

"Isn't it strange how some can remain

So aloof to life,

So above the knife?"

"I really don't care if you think you're *cleverer* than me!

Coz I know that I'm good,
And I know that I should...

Continue to bare my soul

To you – And-to-you,
Even though I allow you

to hold the powers that
Sometimes make me feel blue."

"With the glimmer of distain
That-I-thought-I-saw-twinkle
In you're eye,
Feel like I-want-to
cry!
Feel like-I-want-to
lie!

To cover it all up,
Not talk about the pain,
And try to regain
A place
in a less *vulnerable* domain"

"But then I remember
That to be insecure within yourself
Can sometimes be a health-
Tonic much better than wealth!

For when two people can relate,
And partake in comfortable debate."

"We can start to heal the wounds,
that we allowed to develop
When we were so enveloped
In trying to do
What one similar to you

Tried to teach us to do."

"But you used the wrong language

Because you didn't know us well

So we shout "Oh go to Hell"

"And we suffer and berate,

Ourselves.

For once again,

Allowing the hostility to enter."

"When in reality you
Probably just don't really get it."

"Because you never did sit in that chair really did you?"

"Liar"

Ouch!

Working with Annie

'Annie Get Your Gun' is an affectionate name for my maternal Nan: Mrs Anne Sharkey, born in 1916, mother to ten, grandmother to at least twenty six and one of the foundational figures of my childhood. David Daniel Sharkey was her husband and also my maternal granddad who died in 1993 – he will be mentioned in a later story within Selected Works.

Works in this section:

- Developing my Drawings: A Pictorial Essay
- Annie Get Your Gun
- This is Another Place

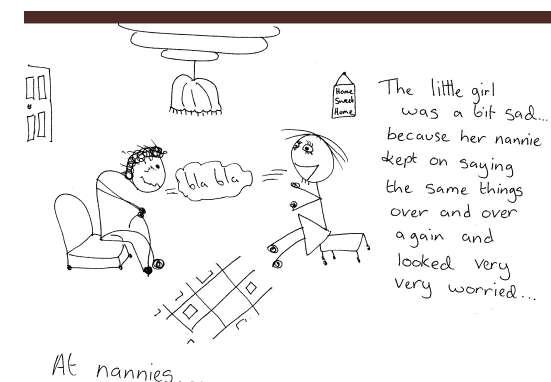
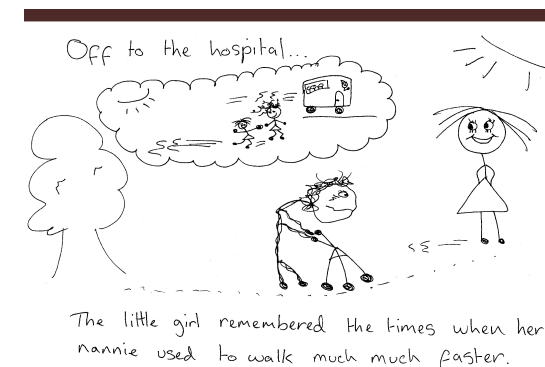


Developing My Drawing
at The Artworks :

A Pictorial Essay



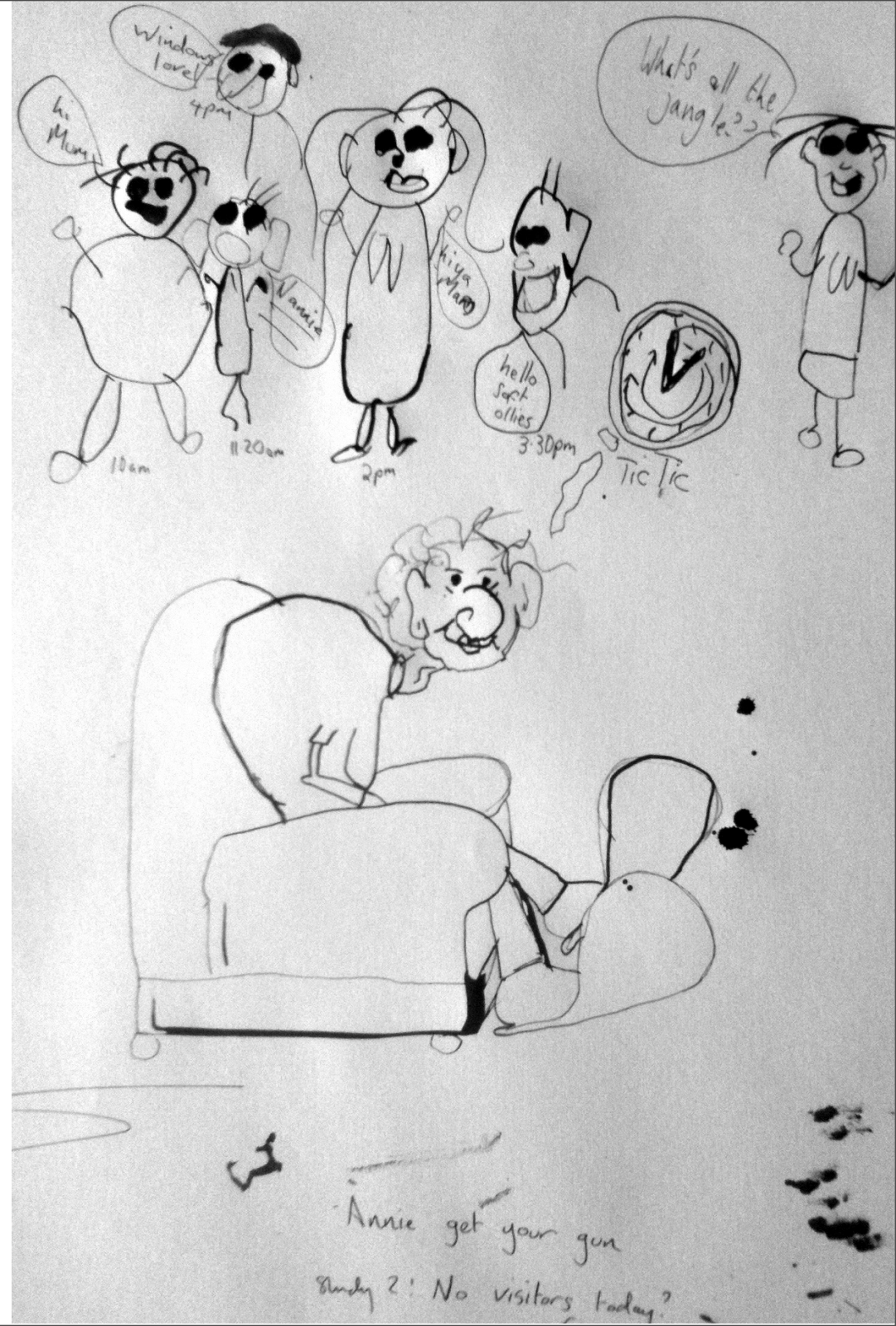
The sketches on this page are all taken from a journal created in 2009/10. My Nan has been a great influence upon my life and this relationship became a predominant feature in my work during my engagement with The Arworks in 2010/12.



sketchbooks Filled with Annie...

When I joined the illustration class John told me to look for the humour, to make a feature of the mundane and the inconsequential.

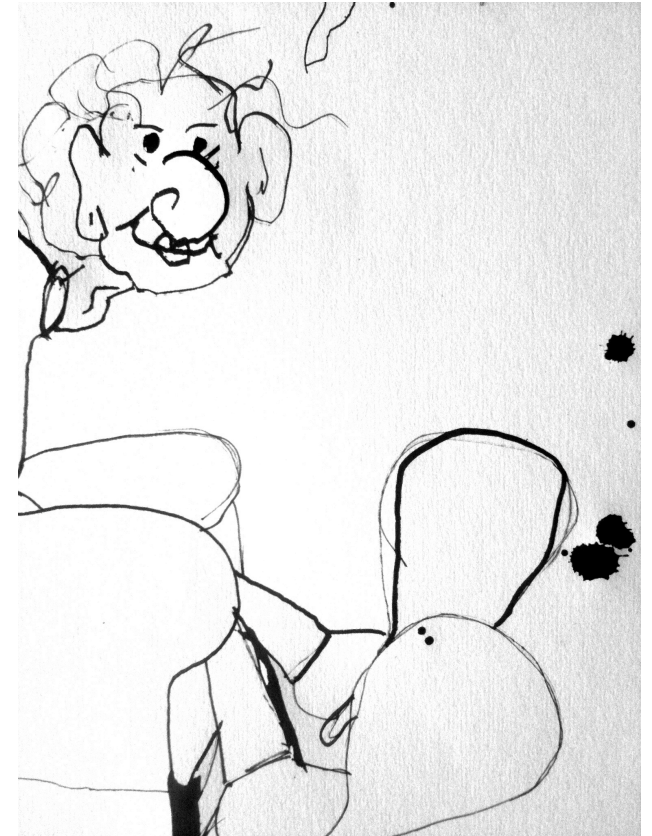
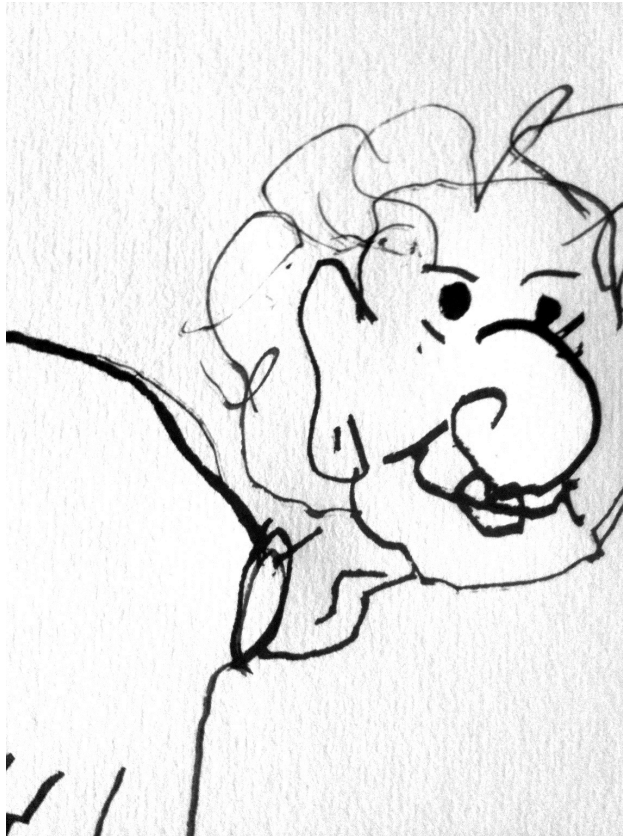
I said Nannie's slippers were huge! He instructed me to draw them.



Nan's Giant Wall Clock

- Soon enough the pages of my sketchbook were brimming with drawings of Nannie Annie and the various ephemera that made up her life.
- Through spending hours and hours on my drawings I began to *really* see her. The huge hump on her back, the ninety five years in her face and how a clock became a feature in almost *all* of my doodles. I was obviously thinking about the passage of her time.





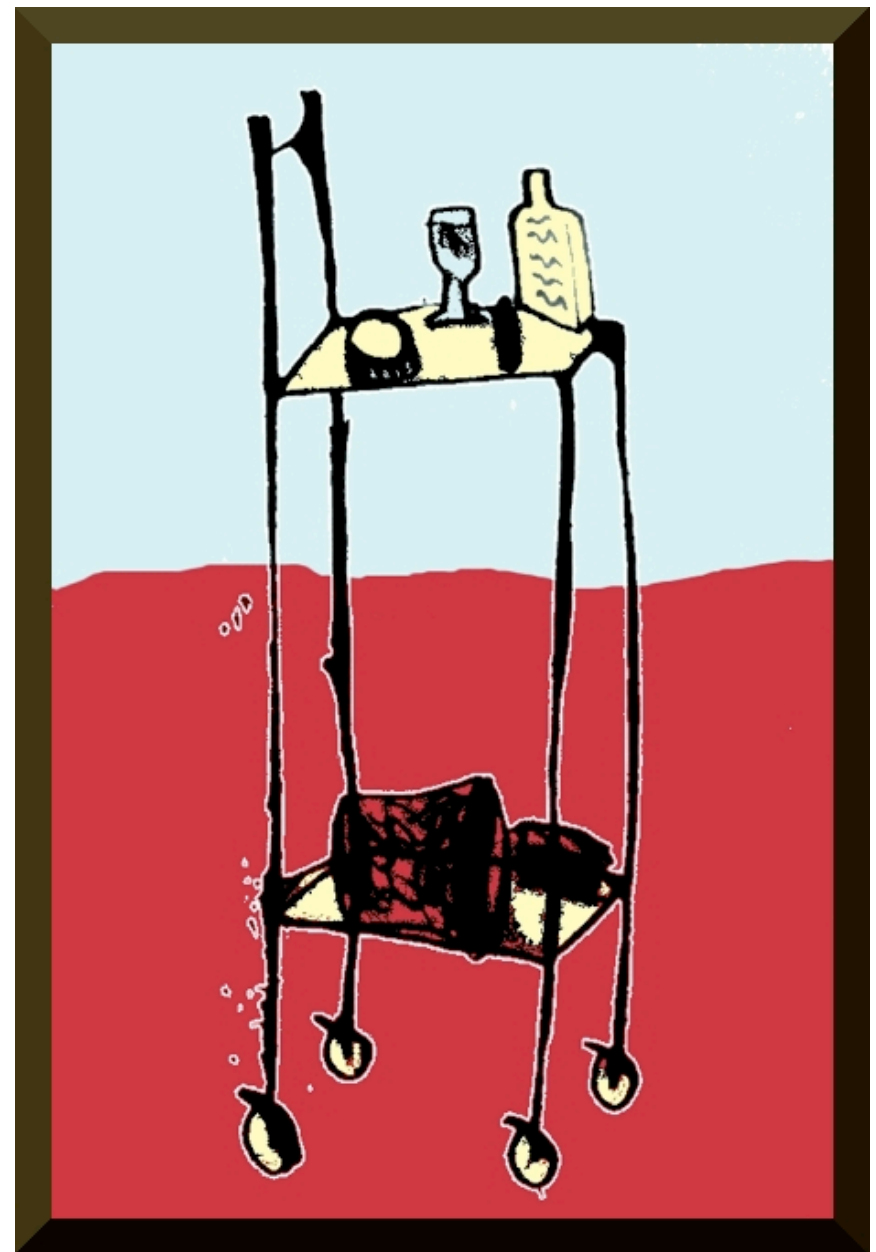
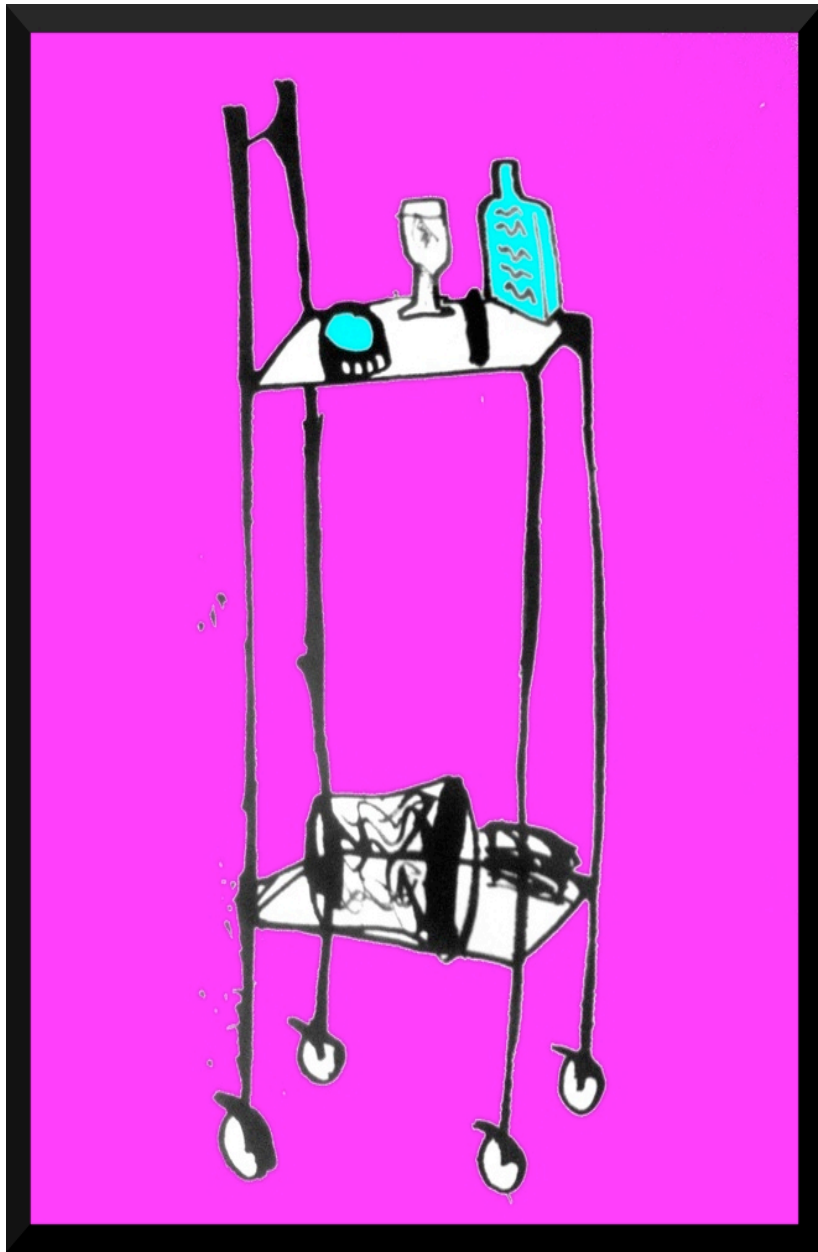
In my illustration classes John taught me how to frame my drawings. "Don't even think about the final product when you are drawing," he would say.



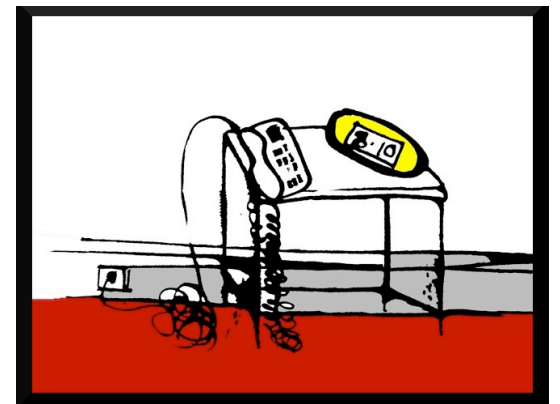
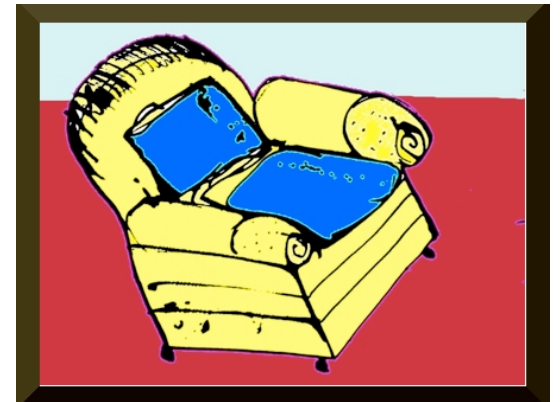
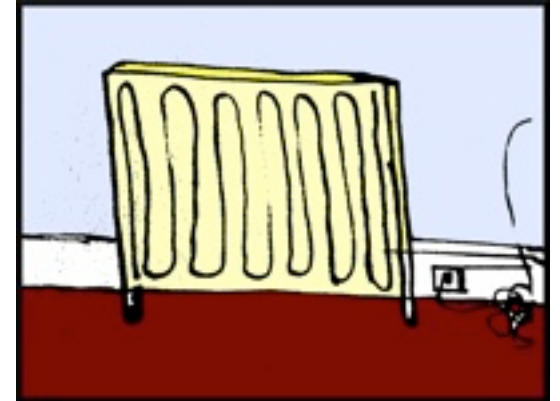
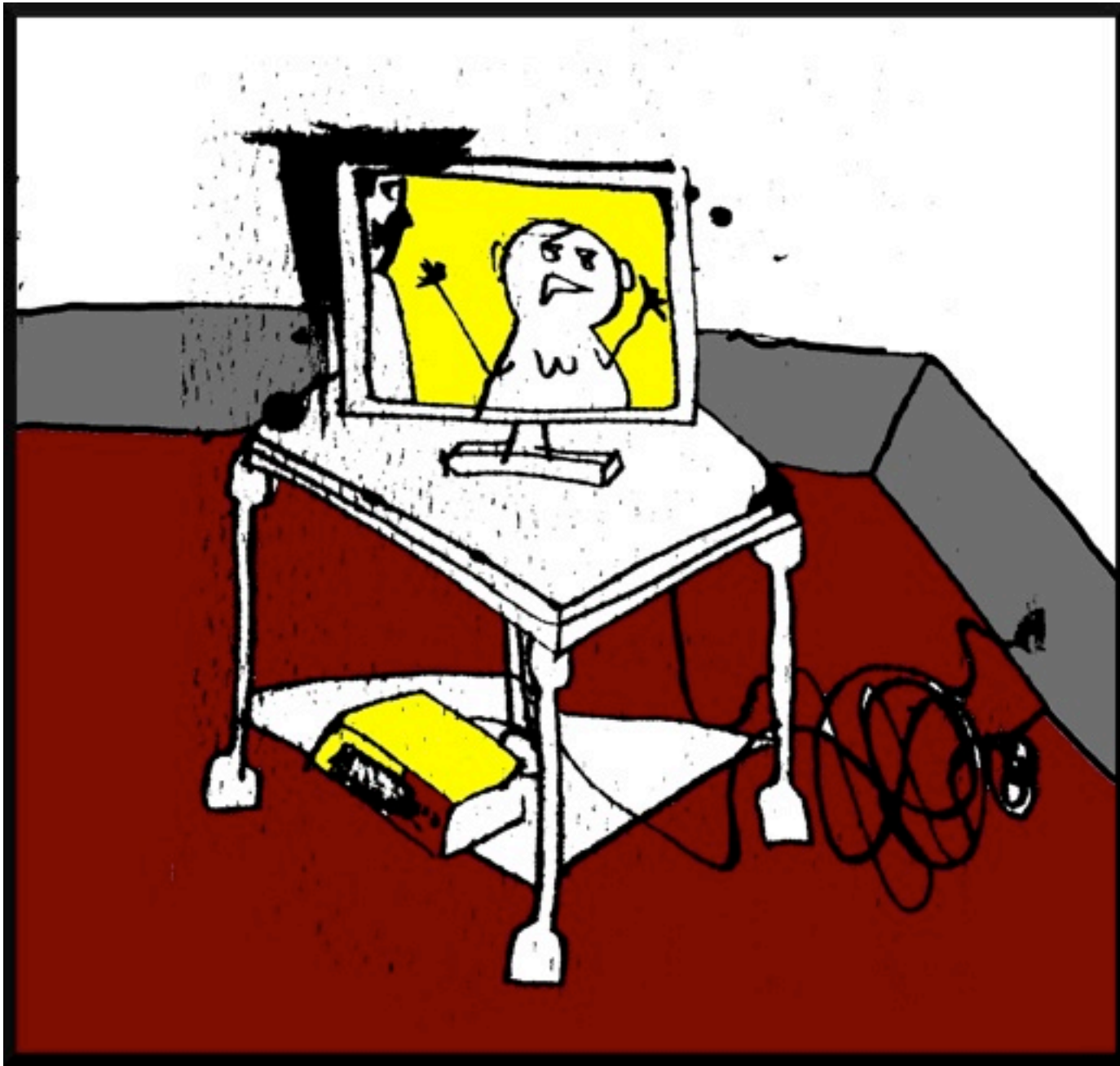
Afterwards he would tell me to print them out and paint on them to experiment with colour on throw away versions of the images. I started to loosen up.



This was when I would start playing about with them in Gimp (GNU Image Manipulation Program - a newly discovered open source image editing tool)



Once I got to grips with using it I started experimenting with colours and John gave me advice and taught me how to use colour in my drawings.



Studies of Nannies.



Off To Drain Me Spuds, 2012



My Nannie Annie, 96 years young and still going strong, 2012

Annie Get Your Gun:

Homage to My Nan

PLEASE NOTE: This piece is also available as an audio track on the enclosed CD.



This is the tale of Annie Get Your Gun, boy how fast did she once run. Now she barely moves at all, all because of that terrible fall. Every night she sits alone, I call her on the telephone. Her voice, it starts to tremble and shake. At the end of the line, I can feel her heart ache. Her words do ring inside my ears, constantly reminding me of all her fears. Her mind is confused now and panic has set in, but as dear Annie used to say; *what can you do when your boots let in?*

This is where she slept for years, the walls are cracked and peeling, with 20 different coloured patches of paint upon the ceiling.

Now Annie sleeps just down the stairs and I definitely get the feeling, that here she is surrounded by joy and love and an insurmountable amount of healing.

Therein she doth lie, in the room that's filled with memories of Christmases and cake! The giant tree *with all them deckies*, that was never ever a fake!

Such joy this woman did bring to me at Christmas when I was little. Like letting me pick a present off the tree and then feeding me cheese and *pittle!*

When it is time to say goodbye, I know my heart will be heavy. I'll cry long tears and miss her much, but be pleased she has joined the bevy,

Of wondrous angels gathered on high, looking out for me and you. And I'll think of Annie get your gun every time I make a brew.

My Nanny was born in the First World War when lots of bombs went *Boom!* She used to tell me stories late at night, when we were sleeping in her room.

Regaling me each and every night with tales of solitude and fear, about how people got their legs blown off who were oh so very near.

They landed on top of lampposts so high up in the air. Annie lived through times of struggle and hardship, I think only she could bear!

Like looking after her brother and sisters when her parents passed away, or telling me how she would count her blessings on each and every *single* day.

Annie married her first true love and got pregnant with his twins, but some nasty person told her he had died and her belly did backspins!

When told he had fallen off his motorcycle Annie did get such a fright! And as such Bobby and Billy disappeared, off to heaven *in the middle of the night.*

Robert's dad though, was still alive Huzzah! Hurray Whoopee! And he and Annie were blissfully happy until he eventually went off to *sea*.

But alas then during the big World War, Roberts's dad did surely die, and Annie was left with 4 young children, a ha'penny and no goodbye.

Annie then married my grandpa whose name we now know was not Dave, but eventually after having another 6 kids he also went off to the grave.

Annie since then lived in her house alone for 17 long years. This is when she would tell me all about her life and numerous careers...



For years I've sat in the living room with Annie Get Your Gun telling me jokes, stories and tales that would oftentimes make her eyes run!

I remember the first time she told me a story of during the Great World War, regarding the young woman who lived alone. With her baby, in the flat next door.

A bomb went off and blew the ceiling in!

She held her baby son so tight - he wouldn't hear the din.

Then when it had settled she glanced down at the child.

His body was lifeless.

Her tears were wild.

That poor woman had suffocated her baby with all her love. When telling the tale Annie *always* looked above.

Blessing the child as his story was told. I heard it on numerous occasions it never did get old.

So there is the story of 'Annie Get Your Gun', boy how *fast* did she once run. Now she barely moves at all. Still think it's because of that silly fall!

Every night she sits alone, I call her on the telephone. Her voice it starts to wobble and shake.

At the end of the line *my heart* persists to ache.

Every morning I pray that perhaps she has left.

To meet Robert's dad, leave me feeling bereft.

My mind is confused now.

And panic has set in.

But as old Annie used to say:

*"What **can** you do when your boot let in?"*

"96 years young and still going strong! I'm only staying to annoy them!", Pen and ink, digital imagery and memories, 2012



*The phone is wedged between my
left ear and shoulder as I fumble
with the shopping bags and my
enormous bunch of keys... Keys for
six houses, only one of them I
supposedly live in.*

"Norman Denzin said he's very
impressed with the piece!"

"Who's Norman Denzin when he's
at home?"

"Never mind"

*I sit back and read over the story
once again. Time has moved on I
think,*

but has the story really changed?

This Is Another Place: An Autoethnographic Tale About Annie and The Artworks

*PLEASE NOTE: there is also an audio version of this piece on the
enclosed CD*

The Story

I snapped at her.

"I can't help it Nan, coz I live in *Leeds*"

Her mouth falls slowly open while she stares at me for
what *feels* like an hour but is *probably only a blip of a moment*

"Alright..." she says, her eyes seemingly penetrating my
very soul

"We know you do your best."

This exchange was at 4.54pm on a Thursday. It's the same
story, different *minute* I'm afraid.

"I'm going to miss you when you go tomorrow"

I sigh and say the same sentence I have said at least 150 times today – the last of which was merely *moments* ago, when we were finishing our sausage casserole. My lip curls tightly as I spit out the words:

"I'm not leaving tomorrow Nan!"

"It's *Saturday* I leave."

"Saturday!"

Her reply

'Well that's just as bad'.

5 months I managed without snapping at her, not once.

God!

Why did I have to let it wear me down!

I know the reason I let it wear me down, and to be honest with you I also know that I really shouldn't be hard on myself for it. Nine hours we have been sat together with no one else around. That - added to the lack of sleep over worrying about what will happen to her when I leave, my anxiety about the anticipated reaction to the 2 page letter I have written to my 9 aunts and uncles, coupled with PMT and the newly introduced fluoxetine coursing through my veins is the answer.

And yet I *still* can't help feel bad that I snapped.

Jesus!

One part of me is desperate to walk out now. Pack my bag and say:

"Fuck you all – I've had enough"

My blood is boiling! I can *feel* the ripples of anger as they

throb underneath the pink skin on my forearms.

Anger with *her*.

Anger with *the family*.

Anger with *the situation*.

And most of all - Anger with myself for *being* angry with her, for being too passive and not *demanding* that something be done, for not *forcing* it to have been done already.

Then I remember my letter and start to feel the guilt. I know she won't survive when I am gone.

I am leaving in a month, I have written the family a letter and in it, I have told them she wishes to live with one of her children. I have *told* them I am leaving so that they will *finally* make a decision. I already feel that I know the outcome of that decision. They will put her in a care home and she will die.

Because she does not want to go into one of '*them places*'.

She *lived* for her family.

She only *ever* associated with her *family*.

She doesn't *understand* or own any friendships with *other* people.

I have decided that I would rather her go into a care home and finally have the care she needs – even if that means that she will die.

I feel like I am playing **God**.

Going there will kill her, but staying here will kill her too. Or at least staying in this situation will. And if it doesn't kill her, it will certainly kill *me*.

This is my current life situation.

Outside of *The Artworks* that is.

Like so many of the other students here, I have a *'complicated back-story'*.

It wasn't that complicated in the beginning. When I first arrived the only thing complicated about my life really was the fact that I was completely broke and up to my eyeballs in debt. Oh and I didn't have a job – but none of that stuff bothered me – not really – I knew it would *'all come out in the wash eventually'* as Annie always says.

I thankfully have a marvellous support network, family and friends who love and value me and who can make me laugh till I'm cackling like a witch – *this I feel is the most important thing to anyone*. I am also blessed with a marvellous partner who is not only my best friend and aficionado but also my highly trusted counsel. All the things one needs in order to successfully barrage their way through this thing called *Life*.

Even at the beginning however, when my back-story was not full of complexities I did, *I think* know how to interact with those *certain* students. How to listen to their stories about things that were *going on* in *their* lives. Stan says in order to be a good teacher you have to have an innate skill. He stabs his fingers furiously at his chest when he talks about it, and the frustration he feels that not all *teachers* have it is shown upon his face.

"I couldn't agree more Stan!" I say while we right the world's educational wrongs over a cup of tea and a ginger nut. I am learning to love and appreciate Stan more and more every time I am in his presence. His character is not one I warmed to instantly unlike with John. It takes time to get to know Stan, time to understand the nuances of his multifaceted character. He is definitely slightly mad, there is no question of that. But then so am I, I think while I type and then

realise my face is hurting from the beaming smile I can't remove from it - no matter how hard I try.

Like the other students with the complicated back stories - I had *been there* before and had used art/art education as an escape.

As catharsis.

As therapy.

And why not?

Is this not the reason we engage with many things – to seek pleasure or understanding of our place in the *world*?

It is the same at the moment. The Artworks is a place where I can *forget* what is going on outside. However, it is also a place where I can get some much-needed support. I can talk about what's going on while sharing Sammy's kindly offered lunch, or choose *not* talk about it. I can focus for hours on my drawing. Discuss innumerable other topics with the fascinating bunch of different people with completely different interests, backgrounds, lives...

In the same day last week, I learnt about Speciation, a witch called Ethel and the sociological standpoint of a certain Mr Goffman.

Or I can just go stand outside and stare into space and drink my tea.

This Is Another Place

"How long did you care for your dad Stan?" - I ask the question that's been burning in my mind for days without taking my eyes off the trumpet I'm drawing, for fear that I will *burst* into tears if our eyes connect.

*"5 years Jen and you know what - It was the most difficult
fucking thing I have ever done in my life!"*

“Yea you’re not wrong Stan. You Are Not
Wrong.”

Time

Here

Can

Stop...

There is another crucial way this place is so different to a University. Time here can stop. There are no marks or qualifications at the end of your time here, no deadlines. No *boxes to tick*, no essays to submit. If you have got a lot on, you don’t have to come in. you don’t get a letter sent home saying you have not been attending and 80% attendance is a *must*.

If you don’t keep in touch though someone will call up:

*“Just tell her I was a little worried and everyone at The Artworks
was asking about her OK?”*

“We have a lot of vulnerable people who access the studio...”

I hear myself telling a volunteer while trying to be discreet about asking her to be a little bit more sensitive when engaging with the learners. When the fact of the matter is that there are a lot of vulnerable people everywhere.

Using everything as an *escape*.

The difference is that the ‘escape’ can *truly* be accommodated here. And the great thing about the staff and mix of people is that there are so many different personalities here, So many different *types* of people to engage with you.

When I go to studio with a lot on my plate - John (bless him) now knows to avoid me. He knows I will go to him if I need him. Not the other way around. I think he knows this from the time we were having a tutorial and I barely managed to keep my tears inside my eyes. I remember this tutorial, when my dad was over from Ireland. Such a trivial thing to have been upset about now, I realise as I look back on the event. Still I'm quite proud of myself for keeping them in. *I didn't used to be able to do that.*

John is the joker, but then again Stan is also the joker too – but of a different kind. Though on occasion they share this beautiful childish cheeky naivety that I can't express through words. You've got to see it to appreciate it. However it can also cause some people annoyance too. Especially when they are being *taught* and they both turn into the rebellious teenagers. It is at this moment that you wonder what on *earth* it must have been like having them two both learning on the MA course at the Royal College. I *shudder* to imagine. But what I wouldn't give to see John or Stan in class when they were lads!

Stan is the most empathic tutor here I think. He seems to identify completely with what you are saying. Maybe this is because of shared experience? Stan is dyslexic and as a dyslexic person he has also done his fair share of struggling with the education system. He is however, the most brilliant teacher of drawing I have ever met. And many other speak very *very* highly of him. It seems I can't go anywhere these days without meeting one of Stan's former students.

Must be the new circles I am moving in. ☺

I understand now. I understand one of the many reasons *why* I had to have this God-awful experience. Why I had to *snap* while being primary caregiver for my 95 year old Nan

who has senile dementia. So I could perfectly articulate *exactly* what it is that The Artworks *does*. What *exactly* it is that the Artworks *is*.

Ellis says there are two kinds of people who tend to write *autoethnographically*; those who 'write themselves through a crisis' and those who consistently journal throughout both good times and bad (Ellis 2004 p76). At the moment I feel as though I needed to be in this place, going through this hellish experience and guilt about *snapping* to fully appreciate what it is that I am researching.

Yes, The Artworks' primary focus is Art Education. To '*bring traditional arts and crafts teaching to Calderdale*' but for me, at the moment like so many of our *other* students it is far more than that.

It is a place to be accepted.

It is a place that is safe and warm -though only metaphorically – the studio is actually (*sorry John but its true*) very VERY cold. Even with those enormous 19th century heaters you have at either end. Or maybe I'm just *nesh* as Annie is always telling me.

It is a support network.

It is a place where people whose daughters are battling cancer can come and immerse themselves in meditative work – to forget. It is a place where people who feel threatened in their own communities, who feel they do not understand the world around them can come and be around people - who will listen to them talking.

Sometimes I can't bring myself to go.

But that's what its like when you have stuff going on in your life. And here I am not being ostracised for it. Whereas at the university you *are*. I remember my student telling me

how she quit the university the year after I left. When I worked as a study skills assistant, I could motivate her to go in. Sometimes she came in and all we did for the whole day was to eat a bacon butty, but at least it got her out the house *right*?

And the university didn't *need* to know we were not doing any work did they? But that's frowned upon at the university. If my boss found out that some days we were not working, I am sure I would have been sacked. But when someone has mental health problems/ real life issues going on, the last thing they need to be thinking about is whether they have labelled the *table* correctly or 'annotated their sketchbook enough'.

"It's your degree, Nic – You're paying for it. Why should *they* choose whether you get to stay?"

"You are *paying* to be here!"

"If they were paying you to be here I'd understand. *But God!*"

She left the year later. The next *lady* was not as sympathetic and didn't understand that some days she just couldn't get out of bed. They called her in for a *meeting* and told her she needed to *try more*. That she wasn't *dedicated enough*. Apparently they didn't care when she showed them the letter from her doctor signing her off for another 3 weeks. The newly introduced tutor stood above her with her arms folded and said with disdain that:

"*This [was] an **unforgivable** First Impression Nicola!*"

I hear Stan over the phone "*Just tell her we were thinking about her – OK*". In the voluntary management committee meetings Stan runs through which students aren't attending at the moment, gives reasons, no one gets particularly agitated about it because numbers are down.

People have lives and lives are messy. That's accepted here. If a student 'can't do mornings' because they are a night person – then they come in for the evening classes. No drama – that's fine. *We will accommodate you best we can.*

"Ey Smith, Where were you last night?!"

I sigh, I've been feeling guilty already so I'm immediately defensive and my back is up. I feel like a cat when I say:

"I just can't do every week at the moment Stan, I've too much on."

"OK, no problem."

He knows not to push it. Yet I know I want to be in them classes. I *want* to learn to draw. But currently my head just isn't here. My motivation has been zapped. Next week I tell myself. *Next week*. I'll be back on my game next week.

I realise I haven't interacted with my Nan for a little while. So I go and sit next to her on the little striped foot stool. Guilt.

God how I hate it.

"You have to tell them Nan, tell them you don't like being here alone on the other nights"

*"It won't bring you back though will it. I'm not interfering with the family. Just don't **You** let me down OK?!"*

"OK" I lie. My eyes close to tears and the anxiety at lying to the woman I hold most dear causes that horrible fluttery feeling in my chest again. "OK"

I am letting her down.

In 4 weeks I will be gone. I can't cope with this anymore. Isn't that horrible? Why is life so shitty? *'Because if it wasn't my dear you would not appreciate the smell of the Lilly's'*. Yes I

answer the other voice in my head.

OK *I hear you!*

John knows not to involve me in too much at the moment. He's stopped asking for tutorials or catch-ups on my work. We usually do this every week. I think he can see the spiky shell orbiting around me at present and I'm really glad to be let off the hook. I don't want to burst into tears in front of him. *Or anyone else for that matter.* I'm sick of the tears.

This is the art school for when *real life* gets in the way. It is also the art school however for when real life doesn't get in the way. I'm mesmerised by the volume of quality work that's getting produced here. Some of the students are really coming along. And both Stan and John are marvellous at pointing out the exemplars in the studio, but without making you feel inadequate, jealous or guilty for not performing.

A rare talent in a teacher I feel.

I feel proud of the students here, like this place is *our baby* and we're all in it together. There is definite camaraderie in the place. That's not to say I do not feel all of the negative emotions I have expressed above. I do of course, *I'm only human*. But like the dreadlocked lady at Buddhafields had meant with her phrase: "*I'm a Buddhist not a shouldist.*" I believe that although I *feel* these emotions I no longer allow them to consume me and gnaw away at me for very long. *Not to say at one time in my life however, I did not.*

My days in the studio are filled with a myriad of things. Sometimes I draw, sometimes I play with a quill and try desperately to undo my *conditioning*. I'm not used to allowing myself to *play*. Neither is Freda. She says this is something to do with a woman's sense of her work ethic. I agree on some level but I can't be bothered to research it, to

find out quite what she means just yet. *In time.*

When I'm not drawing or sketching, I find myself going around the other students. Checking in, making sure they're OK, and asking them about their work or their lives. I recognise how important it is for some people sometimes to just have *someone* to listen.

However, some weeks I can't listen.

Some weeks I feel like I am not strong enough, so I give a smile and say hello and go back to my drawing. Perhaps on these occasions those who *read* people see me being *pensive*.

Perhaps they just know I have things on my plate.

Occasionally, I read intimate parts of peoples lives through their artworks or stories they have written and have never previously shared. I feel there is a certain magic in the air when people allow strangers into their hidden worlds. Are we strangers though? Strangers yet I was the first person to have ever drawn your picture. You were humbled I think, however I was embarrassed.

I go through to check on her. It's 8.21pm and she is sleeping. It is very quiet and still in the parlour. No sound except the loud ticking of the little round wall clock.

*"The clock reminds me I am alive, kept me going right through
the war it did!"*

"Did it Nan, that's good, you did always have a loud clock of a night time I remember..."

I feel lifeless today.

Like I'm looking in on someone else's experience through a window. We had a beautiful morning together though. A memory I believe will *not* be fleeting. I took her out *up the*

swan for the first time her new wheelchair. The coaxing took a lot less time than I had anticipated. I took my beautiful wonderful fragile little Annie outside and we sat in a café drinking tea and people watching. Yet again tonight I know I will pray that she will die.

God forgive me.

Dear God!

Please

Please

Please

Let her *die* in her *sleep*.

Let her *go* so I don't have to *send that letter*,

Let her *go* so I don't have to *leave* her!

Let her go while she can still occasionally be *happy*.

Wednesday she said was the *first time* you had answered her prayer – by bringing me to her.

Today I beg you to answer only this one of mine.

Take her away from me.

"You know Jen,

I think it's horrible that people have to die"

"Me too Nan, me too. But you know, if you believe what the Buddhists believe then when you die you just get recycled and come back again as someone else anyway!"

"Never heard that one before,

the things you come out with ey!"

Said with that knowing look and a smile as my dear Annie
wipes her constantly dripping left eye with her crumpled
handkerchief.

Sweet

Dreams

'Annie get your gun'

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Interlude

Teaching *Those* Students: The Ones Who Carry A Chip!

Many of my drawings lay half finished,
A lot of my projects still *only* half done.

I've come to realise that I am **not** the ideal student,
When the going starts to get tough,
I know I run.

Teaching a student who has depression
must be such a terribly *frustrating* thing!

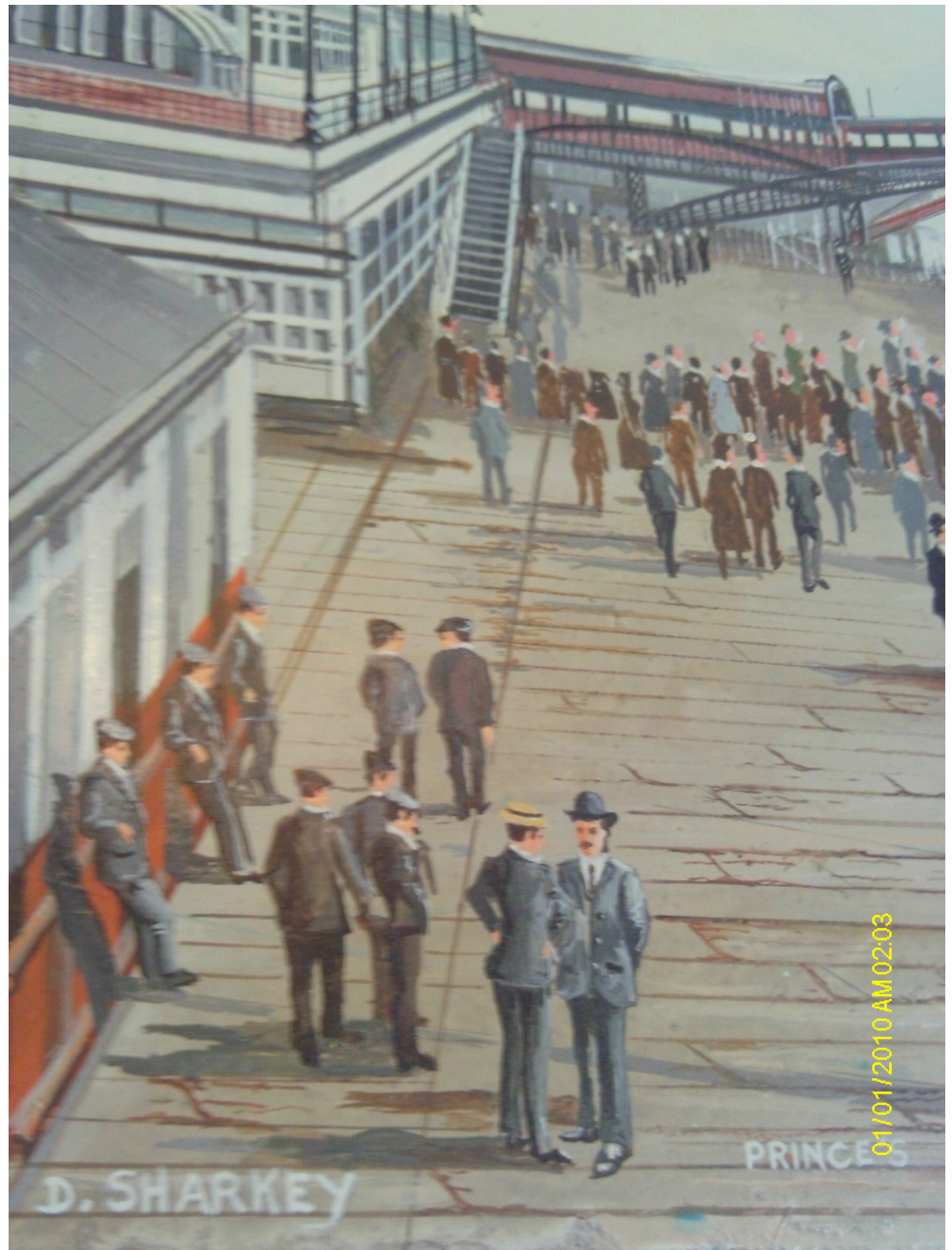
How do you get through to their phone line
When you know to them
that it may not
even ring?

How do you engage with that one student
who seems **locked** within her own private hell?

How do you even get through the doorway,
when you are certain
she can't even
hear the bell?

**A Life Lived through Lilies:
Here It Started. Here It Will End**

*Please note that this piece is also available as an audio track on
the accompanying CD.*



**Detail: Princes landing stage Liverpool, 1925, Daniel David
Sharkey**

“We shall not cease from exploration,
and the end of all our exploring will be
to arrive where we started and know
the place for the first time.” T.S Eliot.

The Beautiful Man is Chinese and he wears very thick-rimmed glasses. He is also prone to chest pains due to his high cholesterol and inherited heart condition, chronic asthma and a range of skin problems and allergies.

*“Well, that’s what you get for only coming from the same gene
pool for centuries!”*

I scoffed while waving the knife around that I’d been using to chop a very large Spanish onion.

“Just like Pie Dog”

(my mums West Highland White Terrier)

“And his million and one problems!”

“You should have more diversified genes my dear like me!” Said
with a flourish and a swish of my long strawberry blonde
ponytail.

Adopting the familiar pseudo *poshy* accent I use when obviously mocking the snobbish I continued with:

“My skin, eyesight and general health are perfect!

*There are noooooooooo genealogical mishaps going on in this
body!”*

Oh the irony of serendipity.

When I finally opened up my eyes to the fact that yes, I do indeed suffer from a severe recurrent version of the dreaded D word I also opened my eyes up to the current research being done around it. For years I had felt inadequate, weak, like it was all in my mind and that it

was something I should just be able to 'fix', to 'get over' to 'ignore'. I had spent years not talking to anyone about it apart from close friends who also suffered similar maladies. I was forever blaming the different bouts of it on current life situations or *other* people and things they had done.

"I feel this way because HE hurt me, I feel this way because SHE said that thing..."

There was a chip on my shoulder and it was large, gray and very very heavy. Yet I believed I shouldered it well, and kept it to myself. Aside when I would have various blowouts and then I would kick and scream and wail and cry because my insides were being torn apart and my mind was turning in upon itself.

For as long as I can remember I had been trying to make sense of my world through my artwork. It was only when I officially became a researcher however that my world finally started to make sense...

Monday, 16th May 2011 at about 6.35pm

*"Look, Look at this Keynerd,
LOOOOOOOOOOOOOOKKKK!!!!!"*

His mum was making dinner; I could smell the fresh turbot and ginger steaming in the large silver pan. The Beautiful Man was scooping the rice into the little white bowls with the plastic spatula that I had once forgotten to use and had been filled with tears and guilt. Because I might have scratched that very same rice cooker. Thankfully it was unharmed. I however was not due to the severe chastisement I had given myself for days afterward.

"I'll look at it later Jen, come on, can you put the computer away - it's time for dinner. And can you put the chopsticks out, please?"

I sullenly closed the lid on my old white Mac and plonked it down on the seat beside me with a large sigh. Almost immediately chastising myself once again:

“Stupid Cow! You know you’re not supposed to sigh at a Chinese dinner table! What will his mum think of you now! Idiot! Can’t do anything right!”

For the rest of the evening I’d forgotten what it was I had just read, too busy feeling guilty and shameful for just being me. But the next morning when I opened the lid and the NHS website popped up I felt a small glimmer of hope run through me. There had been a ‘genetic link to depression found’ (NHS, 2011). Researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry at King’s College, London had found ‘clear evidence’ that ‘a region on chromosome 3 (called 3p25-26) is linked to severe recurrent depression’ (Ibid). *I must get hold of that copy of the American Journal of Psychiatry*, I thought while taking a screen shot – one word for later reference.

After piecing together my family history and seeing that I was more than likely genetically prone to this disgusting mind disease that had enmeshed me in its poisonous vines on more occasions than I would care to remember. My feelings were mixed to say the least. On the one hand I can honestly say it felt terrific.

“Yes” I thought.

“I have finally discovered what the fuck it is that is wrong with me!”

On the other I was terrified to my absolute core.

I suddenly remembered the words a dear friend had once said to me after revealing that her grandfather was a convicted paedophile.

"Well, I'm never having kids! I'm not passing these fucked up genes on to anyone!"

A cold sweat started travelling down my back...

*But what about my unborn (and as yet un-conceived)
children?*

*How can I bring little Lila-Grace and Joseph-Joshua into the
world now?*

*Now that I know what this truly feels like, I wouldn't wish it
upon anyone!*

*And I certainly wouldn't want my children to also be genetically
prone to getting it when stress comes knocking at their door!!*

Thankfully for me I have the Beautiful Man, and with his inbred Chinese genes has come a font of all wisdom and a powerhouse of common sense (something I am decidedly lacking in, I now hastily admit).

"Well, we will deal with that if and when it comes! Plus since you know about it now and you know the triggers. You can still have them, we just need to educate them about it, right. Not everyone will get it Jen, Danielle doesn't, does she?!"

That calmed my nerves just a little but then I realised she had just had Thomas,

"But what if he gets it too!!"

I gasped through my confused tears.

*"Then he will have **you** to notice it and get it treated early won't he?! – Stop bloody worrying".*

Depression, if left untreated helps to give the sufferer a distorted worldview and I'm guessing far more people are afflicted with it then one would care to imagine. Another thing it leaves you with is an enormous amount of guilt

and self-loathing. This guilt and self-loathing also kept me in the perpetual cycle of depression for many years, until I finally started having my realisations.

Allow me to try to explain it for you...

Imagine you are standing in a meadow on one of the first clear crisp days of Spring, overlooking a multitude of rolling hills covered in different shaped and coloured fields. Some are filled with yellow flowers swaying gently in the breeze, others have a few little white fluff balls in them dancing gaily and making their little lamb noises.

A crimson and cream butterfly flits gently in front of you and your gaze follows it to a amber rock placed in the little stream babbling delicately just ahead. The wind is blowing gently in the trees making their leaves create that beautiful contenting rustle that only new leaves often can make and you notice out of the corner of your eye. The sun twinkling delicately on the windows of an old mill on the left side of the horizon.

When all of a sudden a big dripping black figure rises up from the ground about 20 feet ahead and moves menacingly toward you at lightening speed. Blocking out the light of the sun with its gigantic morphing form and a powerful stench of rotting flesh and putrid hell seeping into your flared nostrils. The figure continues approaching only now in slow motion and with the sound of 20 squeaking violins playing furiously, it forces its hand through your body and into your chest. Your heart stops beating and it feels as though liquid nitrogen has been poured into every cell in your body. You freeze from the absolute fear and dread from what may happen next. The black figure pulls its arm quickly out of your chest and with it goes your delicate and swirling yellow soul.

You simply feel empty.

The figure's arm darts violently upwards and throws the form of your soul onto the point of a big black spike. Cracking like an egg on the side of a large mixing bowl, the outer membrane of your soul splits and its contents pour out down the spike and form a glowing pool on the grass below it.

Then the figure is gone and you are left dumbstruck and without words to describe the incident that had just occurred.

How can you even describe the magnitude of something like that to someone who you know just wouldn't get it?

At the time there are no words. So you sit down on the floor and silent tears roll down your colourless cheeks as you watch your soul seep into the ground and wonder how on earth you will ever recover.



**Detail:
Princes
landing
stage
Liverpool,
1925,
Daniel
David
Sharkey**

The first time this misery hit me I was still just a child. My mum always says that as a youngster I was bubbly, full of the joys of Spring. A happy-go-lucky child with a magical glorious imagination and a loving and caring soul.

I also had a fierce temper and could be as stubborn as an ox but that's natural for a child with its own individual temperament mum would later reassure me. She says after the age of 10 however my personality abruptly changed. I became moody and down, sullen and apathetic. She blamed it on the steroids I was taking for my asthma and I remember being carted back and forth to the hospital and the doctors, one physician throwing all of my various medications in the bin and saying:

'She doesn't need any of it'.

The first time I recall, it began with violent migraines and blackouts. I remember one time that Mum was brushing my hair into a ponytail and then everything went grey around the edges and slowed down. When I opened my eyes I was lying on the floor, the carpet was hard against my elbows. The CAT scans came back negative.

'Just one of those things'

The doctors had said.

And then all of a sudden I was sat at the top of the stairs with this feeling of complete and utter numbness that I simply couldn't explain. Bubbling hot tears were rolling down my cheeks as I screamed that I couldn't take it anymore. My mum hid all of the medicines and knives in the microwave

'Just in case'

she said, and

"you were serious".

I just couldn't explain to anyone that I simply couldn't feel anymore.

Just this bit of me,

"from the middle,"

I said had vanished.

What's the point of life when the big black figure has taken your soul away? My 10-year-old self sat wondering with a sigh alone at the top of the stairs.

From that point on, the metaphorical chip had welded itself to my left shoulder. My view of the world had changed. Well it had not even changed it had just gone. Zip.

What EXACTLY was the point any more?

I stopped caring. Why bother to care when nobody else cares? But that was what the disease had done to me. It had taken away my hope and dreams and instead replaced them with a part of it instead. Depression was camping out in my head, clouding my thoughts, having me misinterpret things, get things muddled up and it would unnecessarily hurt me whenever anyone said anything I thought was even remotely insensitive.

It would tell me that I was no good, rotten, a poor excuse for a human being who nobody could ever possibly love. But what was even more frustrating was that it did it in my own bloody voice.

It had turned itself into me and tricked me into thinking that it was, in fact the real me.

For years I was told by a well meaning mother who had studied psychology and social work (*as I believe a way to deal with/make sense of the madness of her own family life and upbringing*) that I was just 'too sensitive' and that I occasionally suffered not from depression but episodes of 'low mood'. Because I loved her and depended on her I

believed her and denied 'it' to myself.

But then as the years went by and she started to encourage me to seek help, I just wouldn't listen.

I didn't want it to be real.

I wanted it to go away on its own and each time it lifted I swore it would be the last time. Forever I had felt, however like there was something terribly wrong with me: that there was something big, dark and scary lurking just around the corner, waiting to catch me off guard.



Detail: Princes landing stage Liverpool, 1925, Daniel David Sharkey

Seeking refuge

"When do you believe you first suffered from depression"?

"When I was 10."

(I sigh, really wanting the counsellor to read the letter I have given to her explaining all of this, and also explaining that talking about it when I'm in the thick of it does me no favours whatsoever and sends me into floods of tears).

"And what do you think brought that episode on"

"Can you please just read the fucking letter, it is too hard for me to talk about it, I've told you that 4 times now, it will take you exactly 5 minutes – I've timed it, Please!"

Grappling with death...

My mum says that it was the steroids the doctor put me on for my asthma. I just realized this morning that it was more than likely triggered by the stress brought on by the death of my granddad, and the subsequent encounter I had grappling with the reality of how final death truly was after staying in Nannie's silent house with his corpse for a week during the Wake.

Understandably my Nan needed her family around her. My mum being the caring sweet soul that she is promptly packed us up and shipped us all over to Nannies for a few weeks. It was strangely a nice and memorable time, I always loved staying at Nannies because I would awake to the smell of hot toast, jump out of bed into the freezing air and run hell bent for leather down the stairs to a glowing living room. My freshly pressed uniform hung over a chair, my knickers and socks warming on the fire and a little plate of jam on toast sitting on top of a freshly made piping hot cup of tea awaiting me on the hearth.

This time however the house had become a lot more

sinister, what with granddad's newly embalmed corpse lying in the still and gloomy darkness of the parlour. There were little blue forget-me-nots lay upon the veil that was covering his strangely altered face.

I remember staring at *him* for what felt like hours and being fascinated by how this tiny little thing just didn't look like my granddad any more.

It appeared that he had no legs for a start!

And I had never ever seen him alive with his teeth in!

Or wearing makeup!

Or even dressed in a silly white satin frock with lace and blue frills on it before!

Granddad had only *ever* worn green woolly jumpers and big brown trousers with braces, collarless shirts and elastic bands around his socks to keep them up!

I still loathe and detest the fakeness of white satin and I can still remember wondering how on earth a man of his size could have ended up in a box no bigger than a '10 bob note'. How on earth had he shrunk so much? I wondered in amazement.

I still love the smell of a room filled with years worth of newspapers, lino instead of carpet and a whiff of oil paints and turpentine filling the stale and musty air - must be the reason I love charity shops so much. And perhaps also the reason I chose to become an artist? *I wonder*. I love how life is always surprising me with things that were right before my nose, though the synchronicity often makes me feel foolish when I finally piece the puzzle parts together, but this is the beauty of life I guess.

I sang to him in the hospital the day that he died.

A song I had learnt that week for choir in school, probably a little inappropriate to some but at the time it made sense to me to recite it and I'm glad mum allowed me to sing it for him.

I recently noticed alongside a million other things that snapped my life into place that I sing 'my grandfathers clock' to myself sometimes when I'm really 'down in the dumps'. I still shed a little tear, as I think about him lying, so thin in the hospital. In his too big and for some reason ripped blue and white striped pyjamas, hooked up to his morphine tank with the bulging cancerous lump, clear as day on the left side of his thin and wrinkly little neck.



Grandad's lilies, Pen and ink, digital imagery and memories,

2011

As far as my Nan is concerned, children should not be allowed at funerals, so instead I watched from the top of the road as the big black Hurst took Granddad away from me forever.

He never had a tombstone, he got cremated and we threw half of his ashes out over the River Mersey. He, just like I and the other Dave coincidentally that I love in my life, had always cherished the sea.

Since then I've never really been phased by the actual act of 'death'. I know it's sad and it hurts a lot but it's a natural part of life really, isn't it?

Still,

it would have been less confusing to a 10 year old I think if I'd got to say goodbye properly, like I did with Granddad Smith some 3 years later.

My argument now is that children also really shouldn't be allowed to go into the parlour to fetch something out of the Welsh dresser when their granddads' lifeless, frozen looking and now strangely childlike body is lying in a coffin. In the dark of the night with liver spots all over his face and his now so tiny little hands and polished nails – *where did all the paint go to anyways?* I wondered.

Still,

who am I to judge an old woman's ways, *she is from a different era and saw many worse things than that during the big world wars!* The term 'Man up Jen' springs to mind.

Granddad used to be a big heavy set man, I won't lie to you – his temper scared me half to death and the way he used to jump about and shout and scream about us '*swinging on the door bell*' or *banging the*

'bleedin' gate' would send shivers down my spine. However I also loved watching him draw and paint. Though he never painted in front of me, I would watch him in his workshop secretly, through the window and when he died I chose a pack of his oil paints and his magnifying glass as my keepsakes.

For a girl who loses everything including her mothers engagement ring, (*I'm so so sorry mum/dad*) it's not bad going that some 18 years later I still have the big convex magnifying glass that he used to paint his delicate images through.

It lives on my shrine next to Toc's Buddha and my Kwan Yin from the Beautiful Man. I polish it every so often and show to it to people as one of my most prized possessions.

I tried to use the oil paints when I went to art college but they had gone all dried up and hard so I cut open their little metal tubes with my yellow scissors and squeezed the hard lumps out. So I could look at all 12 of the different colours and imagine how he would have used them to paint, I was always mesmerized by how real and perfect he could make everything look with his absolutely tiny paint brushes. I would later regret not preserving the paints and can still remember the way the thick, worn out greying rubber band had kept the cream lid on the green and battered old box that they used to lie in before I so *carelessly* destroyed them.

When granddad was alive, I remember how he often did strange things like the time when I asked him to get me a sheep from the market for the nativity and instead he came back with a pretty white unicorn with golden hoofs and long flowing multicoloured hair.



Lilies for mum, Pen and ink, digital imagery and memories,
2011

I loved how every Sunday he would give me a peppermint cream bar wrapped in dark blue shiny paper from his secret stash (*again secured with elastic bands, and this fetish perhaps the reason one of my other prized possessions as a child was a giant elastic band ball we had made together*) after mum brought him home from his weekly pint down Scotty Road with 'the lads'. I still love all things peppermint cream and I'm still awash with grief whenever I see forget-me-nots.

I still also love the peaceful yet melancholic sensations I get whenever I smell, look at or touch a Lily. People are always telling me that 'you can't have the flower of death' as your favourite flower, but I tell them that I don't care, I tell them that Keats called it not the flower of death but the symbol of the souls returning innocence upon exiting the world and I tell them that my mum's favourite flower is the white Lily,

"So there!"

My favourites are the ones with the burst of dark pink down the centre; Orange ones were my granddad's favourite.

The crisp white sheets that covered the parlour windows and all of the mirrors in the house had garlands of orange lilies tied to them all around the top, during the time that the giant wreath of sadness was hung on their big brown front door.

The parlour was newly whitened and cleaned and in the centre stood the coffin containing my granddad's little corpse. The smell of orange lilies lingered in the air and their stamens would occasionally drop off and blend into the orange, yellow and brown swirly carpet that still lines the room some 18 years later.

'A very proud man' you would hear people say.

'A truly creative man' my mother would often tell me.

"he had a 'bloody temper on him!" Annie would also say.

Ah, poor old *'Tut Tut'*.

I'd always laugh hysterically, but be shocked as hell when our Laura would polish his head with a duster or slap his baldy patch while he was watching TV and then run away giggling.

His long bony fingers would make me squeal, as he would move like Frankenstein's Monster across the living room pretending to eat my microchips or mini pizzas after school.

Only recently have I realised that the stress and unusualness of this event *probably* brought on the first bout of the terrible sadness when I was just 10 years old.

Quite fitting I think that the most recent and hopefully last bout came about after spending a large amount of my time in that very same room.

Only this time with my Nan's frail but still living 95-year-old body, the terrible lamentation and anger that comes along with dementia and grappling with the injustice of it all.

If only all deaths were as sudden and quick and as painless as granddad's was perceived to be by my small 10 year old self all those years ago.



Lilies, Pen and ink, digital imagery and memories, 2012

Creating the A/r/tographer: Publishing Self-portraiture and Poetry

Dear Prof. Smith,

Attached are page proofs of your contribution to Visual Arts Research, ready for review. Please check the file carefully for last-minute corrections such as misspellings, incorrect word divisions, and factual errors, but avoid changes that are likely to alter the page composition.

Once you have reviewed the proofs, please list your feedback in a return e-mail message to me, providing the line and page numbers for each change.

Please send along your changes by 9/19/2012. A delay in returning your feedback may mean that your contribution will be published without the benefit of your proofreading, so be sure to contact me if you need more time. Thank you for your considerate attention, Prof. Smith.

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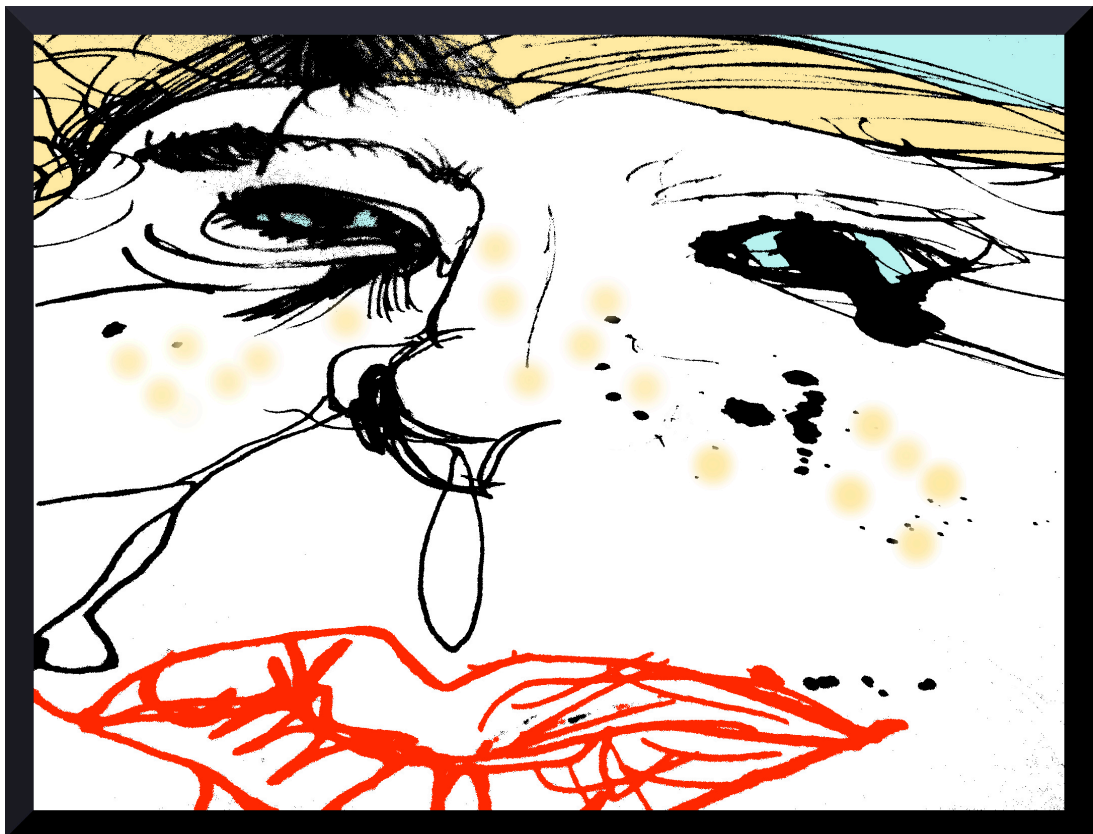


Image 1: J. A. Smith
(2011) *The
A/r/tographer*.

Louise: *Not very nice! (sorry) XX* 19 hours ago

Sarah: *Is it julie goodyear?* 19 hours ago

Me: *Bet Lynch?? Amazing, thanks Richo!* 19 hours ago .

Sarah: *you're welcome! She is a nasty piece of work! Good luck with your writing. Look forward to reading your story when it's finished :)* 19 hours ago

Leanne: *reminds me of the lonely woman who feeds the pigeons in the park!!!! Sorry you asked for honest! x* 19 hours ago

ME: *feeeeeeeed the birds... tuppence a bag... tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bagggggggg* 19 hours ago

Emma: *Grotesque if that's how you spell it lol x* 18 hours ago

Louise: *Was gonna say vile but thought it might be of someone u no drawn in a horrible light :) xx* 18 hours ago

Esther: *It reminds me of a teacher – an elderly teacher who has lost her youth and her way. It's a brilliantly drawn pic! Half of her face looks angry and determined, the other half looks lost and sad. Like a mixture of how everyone feels.* 18 hours ago

I smiled as I read through the responses. The *Honest* and *Initial* responses I had asked for. I was right. I still can't quite believe I had not seen it when I drew the picture. But there it was plain as day, staring at me from the page. How I looked through depression's eyes.

I'd been experimenting with drawing through both hands. My journal entry at the time talked of '*capturing life through both sides of my self*'. I felt like a Jekyll and Hyde. I felt like a split person – severed. Right down the middle.

I said: *"Look Yuk-heen, It's like there's two of me. And there are two voices in my head, I just can't explain it!"*

He said: *"You want to be careful there Jen, coz it's sounding very much like you are telling me you are hearing voices. Think carefully about what you are trying to say because if you go the doctors saying that it could end up a lot worse than it is."*

I said: *"I'm not hearing fucking voices! It's my voice! It's me but it's not the nice part of me. Can't you see – I feel like I'm two fucking people and the one in here (stabs right index finger into temple) is not very fucking nice!"*

Fortunately, it was just after this dialogue that *Depression* became a separate entity and finally started his journey toward his demise. Just before I separated *him* from myself however, I started my drawings for The A/r/tographer.

I had been trying to come up with a logo, a character for my short stories and poems. John had been asking me if I had a clear view of what it was I wanted to be.

"Yes" I said.

*"I'm going to be an A/r/tographer"*¹ I said.

"What's one of them" he asked.

"It's someone who constantly mixes Art, Research and Teaching"
I replied.

"Well then" he said, *"Get it created my dear girl!"*

So I started to use the illustration class to create my character. As I fumbled with the quill and got to grips with the notion that I wasn't wasting reams and reams of paper, John would come along and talk through what it was I was trying to achieve...

"Your drawings are too prescribed, too polished. You need to

¹ Throughout this part of my masters research I became interested in and started reading up on A/r/tography. A/r/tography is an arts based methodology within which artist/teachers use art to inquire into educational happenings (Jevic & Springghay, 2008). Springgay et al are interested in the blurring between the roles we have as artist, researchers and teachers of art. (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008)

make them more childlike, much freer! Use your wrong hand, make it playful"

And he was. When he licked his finger and splodged his spittle onto the page, his face lit up. As he smeared the ink and turned it into a character, his belly shook underneath his paint-spattered apron. Even through the storm clouds forming in my head, I felt a smile coming on. When I was engaged it was easier to forget.

"What is that?"

"It's a self portrait. It's me. Jennyanne - the A/r/tographer?"

"Doesn't look like you"

"Well, it is. I looked in a mirror and I drew the left side with my left hand and the right side with my right hand. Think I should probably get my eyebrows done at some point, eh?" I was attempting a joke but it came out a little too forced *"It's going to be my new thing. Drawing with both hands. You know, using both parts of myself"*.

I couldn't see it at the time. It was just a self-portrait. Nothing out of the ordinary - just me. That was how I looked in the mirror. That evening I wrote the poem and I didn't think too much more about it.

This morning as I clicked *send* on my response to Stephanie Turza's *email*, I was a little disheartened to see that my beautiful colour image *The A/r/tographer* had been turned into a series of shades of gray. *Still* I thought, *at least I got it published!*

I liked the choice of colours though. I liked how I had framed it after John had told me about only using selected parts of my drawings. Now it was black and white it just looked a little *flat*. Like the vibrancy had gone. As I dug out

the original drawing it shocked me to see how *flat* it really was. I smiled to myself as I noticed that today was probably the first time I had ever *really* seen the original drawing.

As I uploaded it onto Facebook I titled it **Research: Honest initial reactions to this drawing please – much obliged.**

And I giggled as the responses of my nearest and dearest flooded in. Yes I thought, *that is what I look like through depressions eyes.*



Image 2: J. A. Smith (2011) *Initial sketch for The A/r/tographer.*

*Guess it's time for a new self-portrait after all 'Professor Smith'.
Professor Smith, now wouldn't that be something?!*

Please see Appendix E for: *The A/r/tographer* (An Image and a Poem) as published in *Visual Arts Research* Volume 38, Number 2 Winter 2012.

Chapter 4

Meta-autoethnography: I AM Responding To the Critics

“Autoethnography is “dangerous” because the ‘self-questioning’ it ‘demands is extremely difficult’. ‘You confront things about yourself that are *less* than flattering’, ‘then there’s the vulnerability of revealing yourself’, of ‘not being able to take back what you have written or having *any* control over how readers interpret your story’. It is ‘hard not to feel like the critics are judging your life as well as your work’. ‘In the last decade autoethnography has been gaining ground and adherents at a fast pace’. However ‘at the same time critics have *pounced*’ on it, and ‘the critiques come from both inside and outside of the community of autoethnographers (Ellis, 2009, p230-231).

The criticisms

Ellis states that the criticisms of autoethnography generally fall into 3 categories. However, she also acknowledges that they do in fact overlap and can usually be found in more than one category at any given time (Ellis, 2009, p231). These categories are:

- 1: Autoethnography isn’t sufficiently realist and it tries to be too aesthetic/literary**
- 2: Autoethnography is too realist**
- 3: Autoethnography isn’t sufficiently aesthetic**

The following criticisms are taken from Dr Carolyn Ellis’s book *Revision*, (2009 p231). The autoethnographer is responding to general criticisms of autoethnography but relating them to **this thesis**.

SCENE 1

Critic: *Oh lord here we go, yet another navel-gazing, self-absorbed narcissistic ‘autoethnographer’...*

Autoethnographer: Navel gazer? Why thank you, yes I would say I often engage in a bit of *omphaloskepsis*: As part of my meditative practice I do undertake intense self-reflection, I think it helps me to be a better person. However I wouldn't say this thesis is too focused on a 'single issue' and it certainly doesn't ignore other important issues. I am *not* the only person this manuscript talks about, therefore do not feel that it is self-absorbed or narcissistic. There are a myriad of other stories entangled in here!

The I AM story talks about a whole host of people. There is:

- The dyslexic student at the university.
- The class of children not being supported enough to be able to learn.
- The role model of the cabbage shirted teacher.
- A mother who struggles to give her child the best things in life.
- A father who is trying to be a part of his grown up daughters life and *rather karmic-ly*) being hurt via her by his own past actions.

Then there are also the other students at The Artworks:

- The people whose daughters are battling cancer.
- The empathic tutor.
- The tutor who tries to bring humour and light into life.
- The life models.
- The vulnerable learners and the volunteers.

This narrative speaks about many *many* issues if you look closely enough at it. It's not just about my 'own' experience of art education this last year.

Critic A: *But you have not fulfilled your scholarly obligation to offer any conclusions! You have not analyzed your 'results'!*

Autoethnographer: Erm, have you even read the I AM story?

There are several conclusions drawn in there, and the space for you to draw your own. Lets take a look at it again together shall we? A striking example is the final section where the participant and researcher discuss the text?

“The researcher *suggests* to the participant that perhaps due to her not studying GCSE or A level art that there are *gaps* in her knowledge. That perhaps these *gaps* in her knowledge added to her *anxiety* and less than enjoyable experience at the *university*. The participant agrees and acknowledges that her *emotional intelligence* has also affected her *academic capabilities* at certain times in her life. She reflects that were she *educated* about *emotional* intelligence as well as *academic* intelligence her path *may* have been slightly different.” (Excerpt from The I AM Story)

Autoethnographer: I would say I’ve spelled out my conclusions rather succinctly! Things are ‘missing’ from the educational experience. There is an acknowledgement of gaps in knowledge and possible different reasons for them. Including barriers to learning and family pressures. This is also reflected in the earlier part with her student at the university. I would say this piece is very much concluding, that it is a personal critique of an educational experience here in the UK, but also showing that ‘real life’ has a major impact upon people’s experiences.

Autoethnographer: In fact, looking more closely at all of the stories provided in the Selected Works section, I would say that the main conclusions drawn here are that real life always has a major impact upon people’s experiences. All of these stories talk about my life outside of The Artworks and how it is always ever present in my work – both my art and my research. I never set out in the beginning to work with my experiences, I never set out to draw endless studies of my Nan but her story has all but consumed me and this

has been evidenced in my work.

Autoethnographer: And erm hello – no analysis? This piece clearly is what Davies and Davies (2007 cited in Ellis, 2009 p303) call a ‘text in motion’ – it jumps back and forth between past and present. And what exactly do you call the researchers interjections? They are clearly ‘meta-autoethnographies’ (Ellis, 2009, p303)ⁱ. Am I not, through my ‘researcher’ voice reinterpreting my original *participant* story and breaking it down for you? Giving you extra meaning? Why even this here conversation is an analysis you buffoon!

Critic A: *Ah yes but – it has not been theorized in regard to social and cultural contexts!*

Autoethnographer: Oh come on! Not been theorized? I feel like I’m repeating myself. The participant in the I AM story says if she were educated about ‘emotional intelligence’ as well as ‘academic intelligence’ her path would have been different! Surely that is a proposal of a ‘theory’ right there? And as for social and cultural contexts, are you having a laugh? The language used, places it in a social and cultural context. It’s about a girl from a working class single parent family in the ‘deprived north’ and her struggle and journey into becoming an academic! It is a story about a love of the academic language. It is a narrative about insecurities and life. It talks about one student’s passions for art education and the multitude of reasons she is still studying it now. This story is defined and shaped by historical and cultural processes and ideas!

It talks about how learners are unique and bring their own pasts, experiences, preferences and learning styles to the learning environment. It talks about how the

artist teachers at The Artworks are unique and help nurture their learners own individual talents and styles. It's basically a case study and can obviously prove useful to help teachers understand the wide range of learners/ possible reasons for learners behaviours, sensitivities and their 'attitudes' and you know it!

SCENE 2

Critic A walks off in a huff muttering about how 'these people' always have an answer and critic B enters the room.

Critic B: *For me this account is too 'realist' and 'linear'. The writer is green!* She thinks through this dialogue she can reveal the 'secret self' when in fact that self is unknowable!

Autoethnographer: Well you clearly haven't read this dissertation, it blatantly states my feelings about how the self is a social construction! The use of the 'I AM' is taken from the Nisargadatta-Maharaja Meditation. The very basis of which is about the concept of 'no self', of the absolute, of the dissolving of all other experience! No one here is claiming that the 'self' can be revealed! And as for being too linear! It is a fragmented narrative! It jumps from present to various points in the past throughout – you sir, have lost your marbles!

Critic C: Well my only gripe with this 'author' is that she is a 'literary poseur'! She has unashamedly written transparent realism and cares not about the complexities and nuances of the literary imagination!

Autoethnographer: Hmm! Well I disagree with you, I am not a 'social scientist', I am an artist – I can say that now thanks to my engagement with The Artworks. I have never written 'realism' or social science prose before in

my life! And besides I was always being told off for having an overactive imagination at school – I can't win! You my friend are just a SNOB – plain and simple!

The autoethnographer wins this battle! But she knows it is only in her mind and probably only one of many she will have...

The Autoethnographer sits in her sisters cream kitchen, her head hurting a little from her heavy damp hair and finishes gulping down the last dregs of her now *only slightly warm* coffee while she reads the final few chapters:

"At first, because of the critiques I received, I worried about whether my work would be seen as sociology.' I soon came to concentrate on whether what I did was sociologically interesting. Then I questioned whether what I was doing was research. I soon came to care only that what I did was meaningful to me, my students, and my readers. Later, I wondered if what I was doing was just therapy. I soon came to believe that everything I wrote should be therapeutically useful, capable of helping and changing people, providing companionship and healing. I worried that my stories were seen as being only about me. I soon came to understand that the self and other are intertwined and that you can't know one without the other. I worried whether what I wrote was representative; I soon came to care more about whether what I wrote evoked recognition, stories, and responses from others. Did it stimulate us to keep talking? Later, I worried that my work did not address social injustice and social change. I soon came to believe that social change involves emotionality and can occur one person at a time, as one thing leads to another. Finally, I would be concerned that what I wrote would be seen as fixed, as choking out the movement of stories and interpretation; I would soon come to write revised and revisioned stories that called forth other stories and showed the self and stories in motion, refusing to be finalized. "(Ellis, 2009b, p374-5)

I am beginning to understand...

"Is what I do research?" she asks herself. "Sociology? Representative? Apolitical? Egotistical? Just therapy?". "What absolutely meaningless, useless, irrelevant questions," the impatient yet happy woman shouts out from her covered porch and then listens to the echoes reverberating from the wooded hillsides. She cups her ear and thinks she hears the clouds, sun, sky, and mountains

holding a discussion. "The meaning is in the experience, the experience, the experience," the mountain groans. "There's nothing quite like walking through the woods.". No, the meaning is the story," says the cloud, its billowing wisps of white sounding out the words. "Without a story to tell, what is the meaning of hearing a thunder clap, for example?" "No, no, the meaning comes in writing the story about the experience," says the sun, dancing across the horizon. "It's the process, the revision that is important. I should know. I reinvent myself anew every morning." "You're all right," says the big blue sky. "Don't you know, we're all in this together?" (Ellis, 2009b, p376)

Yes, my dear we are! The autoethnographer, the critic, the readers of the text and the *other* people who will then interact with *all* of the above. The new stories that will be written/created about the performance, the reactions *to* and the revelations brought about *by* the story.

"That's why I have to tell these stories – to keep memory alive and make sure I don't forget." (Ellis, 2009 p285)

Reflection

I realize that as I continue to re-play my story, I will notice more and more meanings within it. This happens a lot with my practice. I make things and explore things and don't necessarily know what the connections are in the beginning (*not on a conscious level anyway*), only to have someone else point them out to me through reading/interacting with my work. I look forward to being able to find out more about myself through other peoples analysis of the story. Allow me to give you an example from my past:

During the first year of my bachelor of Arts, I created an artwork called '*To All the Sailors Lost at Sea*'. It was a piece within which I collected many peoples 'unanswerable questions', then placed each one inside its own self-

addressed stamped envelope and placed them into balloons. I set free fifty of these balloons on campus and in Leeds City Centre hoping to present my work at the end of term as the *answers* I had received.

Not one of the envelopes returned.

The piece of work then instead, was an empty box. I had created a metre square transparent box – with the eager intention of placing the answers and anything else they inspired inside of it. When no answers returned, I thought it ironic that these ‘unanswerable questions’ in the end still remained unanswered.

During the critique, the tutor made a comment about how the piece to her ‘*screamed of absent fathers*’. To this day I can still hear her voice saying the phrase, though the context is now slightly blurry. I remember feeling nauseous as this reading had never occurred to me before, and I had never mentioned anything to anyone on the course about any absent fathers I may have had in my past. I felt violated that she had read that *truth* in my work, and went home wondering how on *earth* it had gotten in there in the first place. Because in my reality there was not one but two absent fathers and one of them paradoxically worked at *sea*.

ⁱ “Each meta-autoethnography reflects back on the original representation and updates an interpretation and/or story.” (Ellis, 2009 p303) The original *I AM* story was only the participants version of events. It took a few days of reflection before the researcher appeared. Thus the researcher is a meta-autoethnography.

Meta-narrative: Reflecting on Reflections

What I notice when looking back over my two years worth of reflections is that I have continued to reflect – not just on ways of learning new artistic skill. But I have also consistently been reflecting on how John and Stan teach. Though this has not been a predominant focus in the research, I feel that perhaps this sort of learning has become tacit knowledge that I have found difficult to express. I've been engaged in taking their seemingly informal style of teaching and applying it to my own, engaging with learners outside of the research. Right throughout my reflections, I have recorded many times things that John Ross has said regarding 'learning by osmosis' and this seems to be very much how I have absorbed some of their teaching methods. During my PGCE we were supposedly taught 'how' to become teachers, but I feel it's been my interactions with John and Stan that have really shown me how to 'become' an educator. However I find it really difficult to explain the learning that I have been taught in words.

I am currently employed as a freelance Creative Practitioner at a large and newly opened art gallery in Yorkshire. I gained this employment in the VERY initial stages of the research study – December 2010. I believe it was the fact I was enrolled on a research degree in alternative forms of art education and my previous employment with N.E.E.T young people that gave me an edge to win this highly sought after position. Over the past two years I have delivered non-formal learning activities to families on occasional weekends and school holidays. There are 12 Creative Practitioners in the team. I have watched while all of the other creative practitioners have developed new

sessions and resources. Every one of the Creative Practitioners except for me has worked with schools and/or paying adults taking classes in various art disciplines such as clay, plaster and felt. They have all had their names printed in the publicity materials for the gallery, being called such titles as 'Local Printmaker' or 'Sculptor' or 'Artist'.

In April 2012 I sent an email to the non formal learning co-ordinator at the Gallery. Within it I wrote:

...please take a look at my drawings and if you would ever like to talk about me doing any pen and ink / digital drawings workshops at the gallery - please let me know. It would perhaps work quite well with current collections. I could run a class for creating pen and ink studies...

I've been doing these at The Artworks and it's proving quite a success...

An email pinged back almost instantly telling me how 'cool' my pen and ink studies were and thanking me for sharing them.

While studying for my PGCE, I was actively thinking about teaching and learning. In my observed sessions I was actively trying to gain marks. I made sure that I displayed the objectives for the session and 'revisited them at the end'. I actively made sure I stuck to the allocated timings of my lesson plans. I made sure I was asking the learners 'open questions'. While working at the gallery, I have not actively tried to be anything but myself. However I have obviously been 'learning by osmosis'. As I read through my reflections over the two years, it becomes apparent that John and Stan's teaching style was the thing my reflections focussed upon the most (Please see Appendix B – selected reflections on experience).

In my literature review - revisiting the readings (p49) I said that:

One of my bugbears during PGCE was that I started to ask questions such as “*Why do ‘policy makers’ get to make decisions about what I should study, how I should learn? When they are so far removed from my life and my situation!*” (Smith, 2009 reflections on learning)

And I see now that this study has been so much more beneficial to my ‘educator’ self. I can see the benefits of this study through what Schon called my ‘knowing-in-action’. When studying for my PGCE I came across the notion of tacit knowledge and it was a great realisation for me. I realised that there was lots of ‘stuff’ I knew that I did not know how to verbalise. This ‘stuff’ was unspoken or tacit knowledge. I could quite easily tell someone how my PGCE taught me to teach because I have all of the handouts and the notes I made on how to teach. But even after reading through two years worth of reflections on John and Stan’s teaching, I realise that I still could not verbalise what I have learnt from them about teaching– but it is clearly evident in my ‘teaching’ skills.

And John and Stan have obviously learnt their unique and quirky teaching styles through ‘osmosis’ as well. The fact that they both have many years of teaching and art practice experience impacts upon their teaching style too of course. Early in the research I wrote a reflection within which I mused about their strange style of teaching. I wrote about how it was totally different to anything I’d been taught or seen before. John said I needed to understand the context that they had come from, that I needed to read about the history of British Art Schools. So I did. I studied the Leeds

Art School and where all the knowing originally came from. But it didn't make a difference – at the time. John and Stan's teaching knowledge was tacit knowledge that I could not extract from books – however I could learn a bit of it through osmosis. What I needed was to absorb their knowledge. Their ways of knowing and of seeing.

In October 2012, I have been asked to develop the gallery's Big Draw competition. Based upon the drawings I have been creating at The Artworks and *I believe* the excellent feedback I have received from children and parents on the session evaluation sheets this summer. Since this summer (2012) many of the volunteers *who are mainly recent arts graduates wanting to move into art education* who I have worked with have told me that I 'have a fantastic way with the kids'. One of the other Creative Practitioners told me I would make an 'absolutely perfect art foundation tutor' because I interact so naturally with the young adults who come into the gallery. I've been told that my 'teaching' style seems 'effortless, confident and really natural'. I've been asked how did I learn my style of teaching and 'why do I not find it difficult changing so rapidly between teaching children, adults and teenagers'. At least two of the other creative practitioners have asked me where I did my PGCE. I reply by telling them about The Artworks.

Drawing the Thesis To a Close: Visualising the Human Experience

As my supervisors and fellow students at *The Artworks* will remember, while undertaking my research I fell into a deep depression. It was not the deepest depression I have ever encountered, however it was a remarkably significant one none the least.

As a long-term sufferer of recurrent depression I have always felt that each time the clouds of fog are lifted, I am changed, reborn and sometimes given a new lease of life. The I AM story talks of many of these incidences without using the stigmatic term of 'depression'. I was hinting at it but not wanting to acknowledge it fully in my work, just as I was not wanting to acknowledge it fully in my life. This is something I have done forever - alluded to the misanthropy I was feeling but never actually named it. That is until I came to The Artworks.

The poignancy of this particular episode in my story is that alongside the usual feelings of incompetence, hatred and failure. I also finally reflected upon where these insecurities and inadequacies stemmed from originally.

Each time the fog abated I would swear vehemently that it would never return. However without looking into the condition more deeply, without understanding its causes or starting points or connections to the brain. I had been powerless to stop its cyclic return and would loathe myself for allowing it to overtake my mind once more.

As my practice was given a shape at The Artworks and John and Stan nurtured my forays into stories and poems and ever changing experiments in drawing and illustrating, I stopped feeling so lost in the mire and started concentrating on just exploring my experiences. I finally

started musing in my research journal about the incidences that had brought on the terrible fog.

I realised what my triggers where and I finally opened up to the people around me. I cannot put into words how liberating and instrumental this release was, in order for me being able to finally make sense of my life and my story.

I genuinely believe that it was because I was researching and felt supported both by my supervisory team and at *The Artworks* that I was able to normalise my experience. I was able to find others who had 'been there' before and I was able to talk about it – if only through words and images on paper.

Through my writing and drawing I discovered the reason that Art Education had always been associated with dulling the pain of depression for me and I started to acknowledge it's roots. Throughout the entirety of my experiences in Art Education I had at one time or another been grappling with unacknowledged depression.

My artwork had always been used as a vehicle to explore my experiences of it, however I had been completely unwilling to discuss this, possibly even to comprehend it fully myself.

So when I was told by a tutor at university that '*if I wanted to practice Art Therapy I shouldn't be enrolled on an Art Course*' I immediately shut down and wrapped my experiences in 'other' forms. My work became like a wolf in sheep's clothing and it was only when I joined *The Artworks* that I turned the key using my art practice, and allowed my mind to wander back across the years.

It was here that I saw students openly painting and discussing their obsessions with the bible and here I heard about the strange and mythical creations that came out of

And I was finally able to let go, to talk about what I wanted to talk about, to draw what it was I wanted to draw and to enjoy the process of learning through my mistakes – however still within the closed and safe environment of *The Artworks*.

As *This is Another Place* was shown to people and, as I tentatively began reading people my other poems and stories they started asking me if I knew of this poet or that.

“No” I’d reply in astonishment,

“I’ve never even heard of Brian Patten” I’d say.”

‘Erm, No – I’ve never heard of the Liverpool Poets either, I’ve never really read any poetry – it never really interested me to be fair’

However now, now it interests me. And where this research to continue and become a PhD, this is what I would like to explore. I would like to read the Liverpool poets, research the other poet/performer/artist/educators who went before me and continue carving out my own place in the world.

I would like to see what impact this newfound knowledge could have upon my practice. What I do has always been issue based, however I have struggled to identify or align myself with anyone else who has been creating similar things. I never thought what I did had any value, but as I glance across the websites and the pages. I see there is an entire canon of issue based, experience led poetry, art and performance and I’m desperate to know more and I wonder if any of them have tackled the black dog in their tales...

According to the DSM IV, Depression causes diminished ability to think or concentrate, creates indecisiveness and causes the brain to have a negative bias in thinking. From personal experience I can also tell you that it severs the links to the senses, accesses only the darkest recesses of the mind and hides all of your fond memories within an elaborate filing system that even a Sudoku genius would find hard to fathom.

If I’d have realised before this year that my seeming ‘stupidity’ was more a symptom of malfunctioning

serotonin transporters. Or how my body was metabolizing dopamine in the prefrontal cortex or even due to the amount of calcium flowing through my brain I'd probably have been a little bit more forgiving toward myself before now (McManamy, 2011). But for some reason, before starting to do 'research' at The Artworks I'd never had the incentive to find out. And I'd had therapy before. Twice. It never made a difference.

Perhaps if I'd have continued my education in Liverpool or Manchester or even studied at The Artworks instead of the University I did study at, I'd have made these connections earlier. However as I echo the Charlotte Joko Beck quote, I generally believe that life gives you the lessons you need *when* you need them. If I had known all of this before now I would not have written this thesis and you would not be reading it.

I realise now that life is what you make of it and to be an artist can mean to be someone who looks at their life through their work. Someone who's work other people hopefully can connect to and that this holds no shame, perhaps can even help.

My misperceptions about what 'Art' should be have clouded my judgment and curtailed my artistic development for long enough!

Now I shall walk a new path.

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Appendix A: Letter to John and Stan

A letter to John & Stan,

"If one believes that when one is ready, the right teacher comes along, then our paths crossed at exactly the right moment" Duncan De Kergommeaux on Ricky Atkinson. ☺

Note to reader: it usually helps when reading one of these things to put on a scouse accent in your head, that way grammar and punctuation should be easier to understand. It also helps to grab a cup of tea/earl gray and sit down, because it's probably going to be lengthy...

What I ask of you Mr Stanyer & Mr Ross is this, that you allow my research to be my story. A 're-education', one more meaningful and potent the second time around. Can The Artworks finally teach me how to become both Artist and Educator? And just imagine what a story that would make.

I want you to design a programme for me, like you have for all of your other learners. I want to be taught how to be an artist at The Artworks. I want to be taught how to 'art' so I can then not only go on to teach it to other people but also so I can fulfil my own aspirations of creating 'art' work. I am a storyteller, a gatherer of information and a collator of memories (both my own and other peoples) but I lack the skills to visually polish the pieces at the end. I would like The Artworks to help me figure out how to do this... to take my ideas and possibilities and show me how to use them. As you well know my coming to The Artworks was not to create a portfolio to get into art school, nor to gain a qualification (as I already hold two of those) but was to 're-educate' myself in the visual arts. I still need to be 're-educated' in both Art and Art Education, and I hope for you both to do it. I also would quite like to then be able to carry on the legacy of The

Artworks, to say not that I graduated from university with a first class honours but to say that Peter Stanyer and John Ross and The Artworks were the ones who actually enabled me to be what I am (whatever that may be).

I will be the case study. It will be an analysis of the effect that The Artworks can have upon someone who is eager and willing to learn, someone who is 100% open and committed to their programme. Someone who will do their homework and listen to the guidance of their teachers but also push their own boundaries in order to achieve their own personal best. A person who at first glance has no 'natural talent' but has passion and commitment and desperately wants to learn.

My documentation will most probably take the final form of a book. I like books, I have written several (but none yet for general consumption). I envision it as an annotation of my journey throughout the year:

- What I have learnt (both about art, art education, The Artworks and myself),
- How it has been taught (A large focus on the pedagogies employed, creativity in education and will also contain proper interviews with you both and many others from the Leeds experiment etcetera about how Art Education should be taught, how it was taught for you and why you both teach as you do, how it is different to the mainstream as we now know it.)
- What the impact and effect of engaging with The Artworks has had upon me, and therefore what the impact and effect and benefits could therefore be for other people.
- The difference this one-year will have made to my life compared to the 6 years and thirty two thousand pounds worth of student debt that I got from my BA and PGCE. Because that is what I think it will show. That one-year at The Artworks (at the right time in

your life) is better than several in mainstream education at the tender age of 19, with the wrong mindset, belief system or attitude or even the wrong teachers, or the stifling bureaucracy that stops the right teachers from teaching effectively and innovatively.

- It will delve deeply into what makes this place so different, so magical and at the end of the journey it will answer the one question I hope it will answer positively: will I finally feel justified in calling myself what I am supposedly qualified to be: both an Artist and an Art Educator?

I feel that it will be the story of how The Artworks has given to someone what the norm of the 'mainstream' education experience did not. However I will not know this until the end of the project for certain. I do not want my involvement in sessions to be something separated from the research and I also do not want to be twice removed from it myself either. I feel that everything ought to be intertwined, and woven into the very fabric of my being. It is the only way I have ever been able to do things really.

I wish more than anything to be involved in Art Education forevermore but I also want to be able to produce my own work, I want to guide and mentor students in order for them to follow their own dreams whatever they may be but overall I want to follow my own, to be both an enabler for other people and a practitioner alongside. I came to The Artworks initially in the vain hope that I could accomplish this, and I hope you agree with me that my research should also take this form of investigation.

Design with me a personalised programme, like you have for your other students, teach me all that I do not yet know about drawing, composition, taking my ideas out of my notebook and into reality. Assist me with my books, my stories and artistic capabilities. Have me participate in classes like

everyone else and have my own documentation of this process become the research degree.

It could be the story of a girl who took part in The Artworks and came out the other side transformed. This is what I would be passionate about, this is what I truly long to do and would pour my heart and soul and every fibre of myself into. Anything else would not be real, not what I truly want and therefore would not be as good for either you or me. Please forgive me for being so dramatic, but this is what I feel I honestly need to do.

I know that The Artworks wants a report, a document that can be shown to funders and prospective clients - something tangible that proves the benefit of The Artworks for all. However I want to change my life and to become what I know I can be. And I know this is the place for me to do it. I also feel that the work produced at the end of this programme will speak far more passionately about just what effects The Artworks can truly have upon any person who walks through the doors and takes part in it at the right time in their lives.

That said, if my project does not deliver all that your heart so desires for The Artworks then I wholeheartedly promise and swear to also produce a detailed report to your exact specifications on The Artworks and the benefits of it for all, but I really don't see any need. I think this work will speak loud and clearly for itself.

Attached is my proposal – have a gander and a read. If you think it is ok to go with let me know so I can email it to John and Cathie to have a gander at before I submit – I've had it proofread so hopefully the grammar etc is far more eloquent than this here illegible scribble. Apologies for this being the same length as a novella ☺ I get carried away sometimes and still do not own the vocabulary to say this nice and succinctly ☺.

Appendix B:

Selected Reflections on Experience

Reflection: 15th May 2012,

Session: Life drawing - Or drawing on life

“Stan would walk around and correct a little here and there. I really enjoyed doing this drawing but again felt a show because my skills and techniques were not up to scratch. : S

Everyone walks around the room before break and looks at each other's work. I felt like an incompetent fool. ☹” *Excerpt from reflection, Lifedrawing March 2011*

So in the poem about teaching ‘those’ students you mention that many of your projects were left unfinished, care to elaborate?

Yea, I quit lifedrawing about half way through. I had *issues* with drawing the naked body. But, well I also got quite mad at myself really because I just couldn't seem to be able to *do* it. You know, I couldn't follow the instructions. Everyone else could follow the instructions and I was literally the only one in the classes who just couldn't compute. But you know also it was because the life model made me feel really uncomfortable. He stared right at me while I was drawing him and well, I'd been one of the people asking for a male model too but I guess I didn't realise *how* uncomfortable it would make me feel.

Why did it make you uncomfortable then?

Well ok. It's kind of like. I was used to critiquing a woman's body. I was used to seeing a woman's body as just a 'body' you know? Like when I'd look in the mirror I wouldn't see me as a whole person I'd just see my *body*.
You get me?

So when I was drawing the women it was still a little odd because they were different bodies but then I was used to it.

They were familiar almost.

But well, I guess I wasn't used to seeing a man's body just

as a body. I've never really objectified men's bodies before. I've only ever seen fully naked men's bodies of men that I have loved. So they were never just bodies – they were people. Like whole actual people. So when it came to drawing a random mans body I guess it felt awkward and strange and he would look at me, like in the eyes while I was drawing him and the women models, well they would all stare at the back wall. It was less invasive.

For the model or for you?

For me. Definitely for me.

So then I just thought screw it. I can live without drawing the figure and I quit.

What did Stan say?

Well he just said *sometimes Jen you just got to realise when you're flogging a dead horse. If you really hate it then you really hate it.* And he told me that there are loads of artists who can't really draw the figure anyway. He told me to look at David Hockney paintings and look for the hands and feet.

And you know what – he was right. David Hockney doesn't draw hands or feet! And that was quite refreshing really because usually they just sort of bully you to keep trying.

Reflection: 2nd February 2011,

Session: Drapery Drawing



On weds I went back into Le artworks... to meet with John s son charlie - except he didnt arrive. we were meant to go over the website stuff Coz Im updating it for them... but we didnt get a chance to. Nevermind.

I started my new sketchbook and John gave a demo on Egg tempera. He said it was coz Freda wanted to know how to do it.

What was good about it was that John said it had been YEARS since he had done it and then he was basically just experimenting and enjoying himself and we all got to watch it. What I thought was really interesting with it was how John and Stan interacted throughout the 'demo'. There was about 10 students watching and I remember writing down how it made me wish I were a painter. :) but then afterwards John said something really interesting to the young lad (cant remember his name) saying he could use this in his cartoons. I could use it in ANY of my work... like when I actually start making my books. I could use it then. So I WILL! :) he he.

this computer is pissing me off and keeps deleting all my words!!

Anyway. the 'demo' started with John putting this 'posh dont you know' voice on (which he does sometimes) and then Stan joined in with him. John was saying the 'this is how you do it' stuff like 'Take a scapel and pierce the egg sac to not get any white only yolk' and then Stan was interjecting in his posh dont you know voice 'this is due to the nature of the white and its bla bla'... John explained the 'How to do it' Stan explained the 'Theory and History' of the medium.

It worked really well. Stan started off as a naughty school kid butting in and making jokes though... which I thought was funny coz its something Ive noticed john doing a lot when stan is teaching... then they both got very serious and explained everything. Its a bloody good team effort these two. defo!

just before/after the demo Stans beginners drawing class started. He got the bipolar lady to draw the skull (Ive noticed she is struggling a lot and lacks motivation for the classes - she frequently gives up. I keep trying to encourage her by empathising and saying I too have found it really difficult (which is true) but I think shes not as enthusiastic because she originally wanted to do the illustration course and John suggested she do the beginners drawing course first but I dont think shes interested in it enough. we will see but I dont think its too long till she quits.

numbers arent too good this term. they never managed to advertise. - long story.....so beginners drawing is just me and this woman - and sammy i think - but shes off doing other things. I like sammy. ALOT! shes a DUDE!

So Stan got me drawing the draped figure in this lesson. First off he asked me what I knew about why drapery was done and who did it... I admitted I didnt know. but he

explained that back in the days of the old masters. the apprentices would start out learning to draw drapery, then landscape, than other things etc etc so that the master could find his 'drapery person' or his 'landscape person' then those apprentices would do those parts of the masters paintings and he would concentrate on the figure or important aspect of the painting. once they got good enough then they maybe would go on to become the master themselves. Leonardo da vinci he said started out as a drapery drawer. and he told me to look him up. He also got up on the internet a few different drapery paintings and got me to see how some where really heavy (machiatto or someone) and some did really light floaty drapery. apparently ours were meant to look floaty but mine just seem to me like big heavy wierd ring raith cloaks from harry potter.

I was struggling with getting the outlines down - coz stan was saying 'your not copying it' just getting the idea of it. then he drew a rough outline for me. I asked if I should start it again and he said no - to trace over his lines. I did it - but i didnt feel at ease. This is a bug bear of mine that I had from when i was on teaching placement on PGCE - Do the students actually learn anything if you do the basics for them and then they 'trace over it'? Personally - I dont think you do. So I drew a few more. but I'm still not happy that I have mastered drapery drawing. I will defo still have to do more. And I need to do more observational drawings too. I still havent done the pine cone. Stan seemed to think that the drawings I had done of the dried flowers were good enough for me to move on but I dont think so myself.

He also said I should practice drawing from a manequin so I did that today at nans. I didnt realise how LONG arms are!! and I am struggling with perspective.

finally before I go to bedfordshire. John wanted to sit down and have a talk about the programme. he wants me to give him a presentation on where im up to so far and wants me to keep foccussed on whats going to be the outcome. I kindof feel like screaming that its research and i want to research and focus later like my timeline says. But its john and I know he does actually know better.

Need to get him onside for helping with my first loves book. Then I can concentrate on that! I know it will sell. people are well obsessed with their first loves. (well some are). I was for ages! haha.

Reflection: 5th April 2011,

Session: Life drawing and painting

Reflecting on sessions at Le Artworks using Gibb's Reflective Model

Tutor: Stan

Description: what happened?

Note from last week's session that ties in with this - There's a guy who comes to this session who wears glasses and he had started a new painting and could not quite get the sky to be lifelike. Stan took over and wiped away most of it and started it again. He took over and did the guys painting for him. For the most part he watched intently but after a while his attention drifted.

This week a similar event happened with one of the other students here. A lady who – 2 years ago had to start using her right hand instead of her left because she had had a stroke. She had been telling me how she had to start all over again and retrain herself to use the other hand. Once when using her left her artwork was intuitive – it just worked. Now though she says she really has to think about it – she is not an intuitive right-handed artist. Stan took over once again and painted a glaze on her work –the improvement was vast but – he did it for her HOWEVER she then used it to do her own glaze on a different part of the work.

(Note from later session – I've noticed today that the lady who is re-learning to paint has been creating her own glazes on her work after Stan shown her how to when he did it on her painting.)

Feelings: what were you thinking and feeling?

I started to wonder if the two students would be able to recreate the things Stan had shown them by themselves or if they would have needed Stan to do it once again. He showed them on their own work and I remember thinking – if that was in a college the student would be well pissed off – someone else drawing all over his work. But the guy was enthusiastic about the change when he had finished and has gone on to do a similar painting this week. It worked!!

Evaluation: what was good or bad about the experience?

Good: the students could see 'how' to do things

Bad: it seemed to me the wrong way to teach things – but that is because that's what I have been told and am only seeing it through my own perspective as a recently trained PGCE person. The students themselves seemed to actually be grateful and liked it and I got to thinking that with only a few hours a week how else could you teach these things?

Analysis: what sense can you make of the situation?

Things are not always as they appear!

Sometimes things work for some that would not work for others and perhaps this style of teaching really works for people who are

genuinely here to learn!

Conclusion: what else could you have done.

Nothing – I was merely observing. I suppose Stan could have got them to experiment on different pieces of paper with Glazes or Sky's but then it's only a 3 hour session so perhaps the students may experiment with these things in their own time outside of the studio.

Action Plan: if it arose again, what would you do?

Encourage the students to experiment with their new skills at home in own time.

Reflection: 19th January 2011,

Session: Drawing from nature



Figure 1

"Behaviourism, active listening, intrinsic motivations..."

Researcher's voice is italicised

Stan had shown me previously how to do 'analytical observational drawing' before, first term and I did one of a dried flower of some sort – it was my first drawing at The Artworks (Fig 1).

First time around the class had 4 people in, all starting out together. Me, Sammy and

two others, one quite shy, timid never having drawn before. I remember struggling with it, but giving it a go anyway. Stan – just before showing me how to fix it was tentative towards showing me how I had done it wrong, his voice was soft, head tilted to one side, he asked me if I was happy with it as it was? Then when I said I wasn't but couldn't figure out how to do it he showed me - fixing the initial parts of it for me while running through what I was supposed to be doing (not expressive, analytical, slow, detailed) and then me working over it again, he showed me how to make it appear 3D by

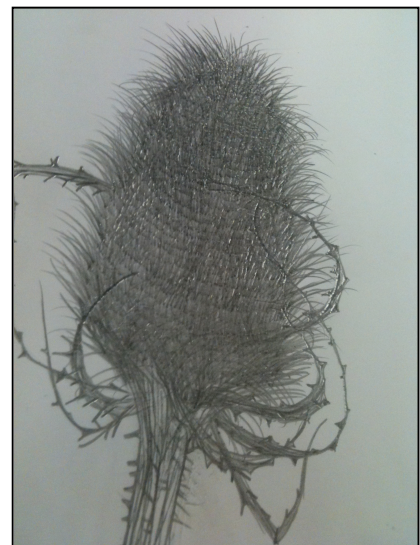


Figure 2

drawing the oval shape and putting a sphere over the top. He made it appear so simple – and eventually I got it. He talked about how I wanted to make a ‘representation of it’ – not an exact copy but show its form through a drawing – all of which he said slowly so I could take it all in. The drawing would never be exactly the same but it was ok not to be. That sometimes it’s better when it’s different. I remember being really pleased with the final outcome because I didn’t think I would be able to do it.

This time around I joined the ‘same’ ‘First’ class of the beginners drawing class again. But with another woman who came here to do illustration. John asked to look through her portfolio before they designed a programme for her. When looking through her portfolio with her he said she needs to ‘up her confidence’ with drawing first. It was great to watch them both. John first, looking at her work and really boosting her confidence with her paintings ‘these are incredible – you painted these from life? You have a real skill with painting, but the drawing side of things – you need to gain more confidence with’. Stan said similar things and then he sat down and we both started on the initial demo for beginners drawing.

What was interesting this time around was that Stan taught us the same class/lesson – but in a completely different way. For a start he used a different natural object (thistle) as his example but the way he explained it was different too. He told us to take a really **really** good look at it. That in an analytical drawing you want to get the basic structure down first and then start adding the form and embellishments. On reflection I wonder if he had explained it similarly but this time I was able to ‘hear’ more of it because I was starting to understand this time around. The other lady didn’t quite get it still, and I couldn’t help but think – if she hears it a few more times then maybe she will start to get it – like I did. I was starting to get what I was supposed to be doing. I took some of the objects home and decided to just keep having a stab at it.

This ability to hear it second time around could be linked to several different theories of learning such as learning through repetition – as behaviourism suggests, or it could be because I was actively listening this time around, really focussing. I had told myself that this time around I would REALLY be learning. That I was going to learn how to draw and made a pact with myself. – Intrinsic motivation was at play and perhaps that was why I could ‘hear’ it better?

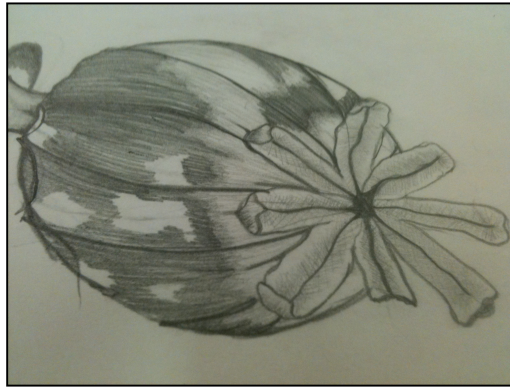


Figure 3

The Thistle (fig 2) I could draw out perfect and I'm quite proud of that one – but the reason it was so easy was that I watched Stan draw it closely in the 'demo'. Well I listened intently while watching him make the first few marks on the

top of the thistle. So I understood what he

meant by having the lines represent the real thing. The other things I drew while I was between classes I didn't quite master – but I knew that and I brought them to Stan for the next session.

I struggled with the poppy head (fig 3) – I couldn't quite get it 3D so I gave up – and decided to ask Stan next time around. And my big flower skeleton (fig 4 and 5) I drew out 3 times, each time learning more about how I should be doing it and realising that each time I was learning more too.

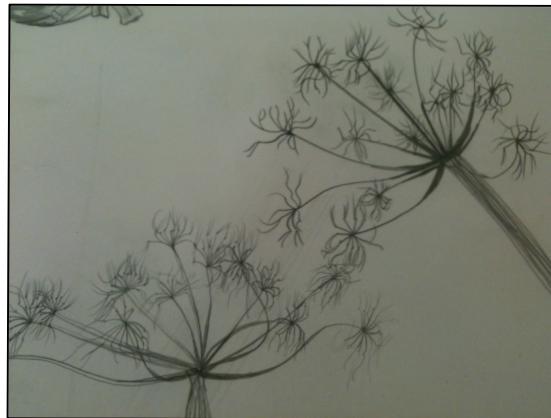


Figure 4

When I got to The Artworks for my 2nd session the week later I had finally mastered how to draw it. In the session I drew out copy number 4 and asked Stan to show me how to draw a pinecone

and to look at the Poppy

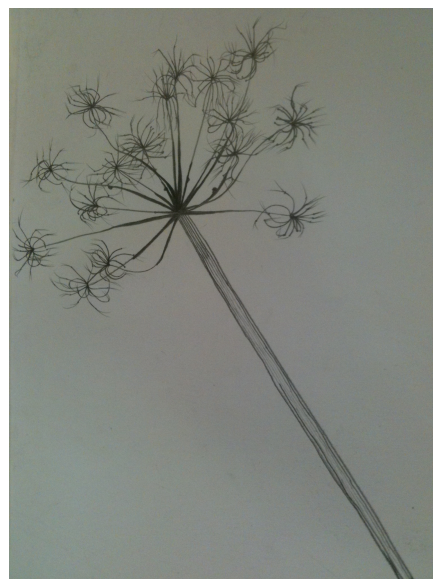


Figure 5

head (fig 3) and tell me where it had gone wrong. I didn't know quite what was wrong with it but knew it wasn't working as well as it could – even on the 2nd attempt. He immediately got a real poppy head and sat me down asking what did I think was wrong with it? (Pointing out first that it was a much better attempt

than the first).

It is interesting here to note how our relationship has changed from when he first taught me the lesson. The first time around I noted that he was more reserved in coming forward to show me where I was going wrong, waiting for me to point it out first. Whereas this time around I just shouted over to him and said 'hey Stan come and show me how to do this' – He came over, sat down and dived in. Carl Rogers [one of the founders of the humanist approach to psychology in the 1950's] suggested that if learners are to gain the self-belief that is needed in self-directed learning, then the key to ensuring affective learning takes place is to focus on the interpersonal relationship between the learner and the facilitator. This relationship should be based on trust, empathetic understanding and genuineness as opposed to giving praise and reward 'encouraging learners' to see their own 'successes' (Petty, 2009, p371)

He showed me it was because I had made it too flat and I explained that was what I had been struggling with – making it round. Time and again I had drew it out. He drew it for me showing me which additional things I needed to add by pointing to them with his pencil on the actual object and then drawing the parts on his 'crude sketch'. I think I got it and knew what I needed to do for next time. I think some people could take Stan as being quite condescending when he is teaching you. I say that only because he REALLY explains thing, and he puts on a posh voice and does this 'I'm a genius don't you know' kind of thing (he says things like that too – like 'I am such a font of knowledge' but the thing is He IS! And I think he really enjoys it when his students look up to him. But for me that's now part of his charm, it's a persona and a 'bravado' thing. However he does genuinely want you to do well – but I think you have to get to know him a bit to understand that. I know there has been at least 1 woman who stopped coming to the beginner's course because she felt Stan wasn't teaching her how she wanted him to – she disagreed with him on certain things. For example no colour in the initial abstract drawings – she argued about wanting to put red in, or about wanting to do different things (but not teasing him with it like Sammy does) and for Stan it was not up for debate. He is a 'things are black and white' teacher. Or at least he is in the beginner's class – because it is about rudimentary skill development – and I can see where he is coming from (don't over complicate things when you are just grappling with the basics). However I can also see where she is coming from – but I know that Stan is a magnificent teacher and if what he says goes is what goes then so be it, I will do EXACTLY as he says in order to develop my skill.

Learning through the repetition of behaviour (Curzon, 1997) can be limiting for some inquisitive students who cannot cope with learning in this way and need to understand and conceptualize things before they can accept them, thus students can become frustrated and avoid the learning environment feeling that there is something missing.

John on the other hand is different. He wants his students to challenge him, he wants them to question what he tells them to do and think about different ways of doing things, but that said I haven't seen John take a complete beginners course – and I haven't seen him teaching basic skills development courses. I do know that at least twice when I have been working on a drawing for Stan's class John has came over and grabbed a pencil and gone 'ooh – just be a bit more expressive here, take this line for a walk, look at how beautiful that bit is there – you can tell you enjoyed doing that side'. And what a wonderful thing to have these two very opposites working together in the same room, always keeping you on your toes!!

"The best teachers work in tandem delivering a solid and inclusive learning environment." – I cant remember exactly where I got this quote from – I will have wrote it in one of my essays but the reason I know it off by heart is because it is one of my favourite things to say (like John has his 'picture tells a thousand stories thing) in job applications! For me teachers working together but as opposites are what makes the learning environment invigorating – and it definitely works here at The Artworks.

Anyway I remember thinking at the time of asking Stan to show me how to draw the pine cone and the poppy head – is this going to be the only way I can draw things? Objects? With Stan actually showing me how to do them first? But then I had drawn the other one out 4 times and got to it through determination and will and figuring it out.

Motivation plays a key role in the learning process, with studies showing that a motivated 'less able' student can 'achieve greater success' than a more intelligent student showing a lack of motivation (Reece & Walker, 2009 p76). This stuck with me from my PGCE. I remember reading it and thinking – yes – if I can make myself motivated then I can actually achieve anything!

When I was putting my drawings in my drawer I got out that first drawing I had done. The one I had been so proud of initially. I looked at it and smiled to myself. It was absolute rubbish! I seen the development I had made over the time and I hadn't even drawn 'that much'. When I was drawing the thistle it took me about 4 hours. And I said to myself – this is how you can learn to draw. You just keep going.

Over a cup of tea Stan and I discussed it. Talked through how in schools today there's an expectation (both by students and teachers – or at least inexperienced teachers ☺) that things should be completed immediately. A 'first go' is the only go. There's no time and space or interest maybe to practice practice practice. There's this thought that you have to get it right first time. Which is easy for someone who's been doing it for years to do. But not for a first time learner. – Unless they are an intuitive drawer/tacit learner. And maybe that's why art in schools is so frustrating because it's about targets and lesson plans and people doing certain things within the curriculum. Whereas here – everyone wants to be here – genuinely (perhaps for different reasons but definitely here through choice)- and no one is learning exactly the same thing at the same time.

*I see what I am referring to here is my own bad 'guilty' experience of teaching art in a school and how as the inexperienced teacher I did believe the school wanted things finished quickly, after listening to another teacher saying 'ooh and they have to have this, this and this completed by Christmas'. My year 7 students were always wanting to move onto the next thing and as someone who had no prior knowledge of the 'right way to do things' I did in fact just rush through the curriculum – however after a few weeks I seen that many of the other year 7 classes were far behind mine because the teachers had made the students work slower. Made them 'refine' their drawings – but because nearly all of the 35 in the class hated what they were doing (partly because of my own limited understanding of it and then probably my not being about to explain things properly, and because I too thought that the curriculum was rather outdated and boring – no 'relevance' for me??) I let them race through it. And this is what was coming up through this conversation with Stan. That will CERTAINLY never be an issue for me again – after now **really** studying how good teachers teach.*

Stan said today - 'Genius is 10% madness and 90% practice. – Or something like that. ☺ I liked it.

Reece, I & Walker, S. 2007. *Teaching, Training and Learning: a practical guide*. 6th Ed. Sunderland: Business Education Publishers

Curzon, L.B, 1997, *Teaching in Further Education: an outline of principles and practice* 5th Ed. London: Continuum International Publishing Group

Petty, 2009. *Teaching Today: a Practical Guide*: 4th Ed. Cheltenham: Thornes

Reflection: 27th November 2011,

"... every one who can learn to write can learn to draw,..."

Reflection on links between Walter Smith & The Artworks, personal strengths and weaknesses, discovered while reading.

Researcher's voice is italicised

Last night (26/1/11) I was reading 'The History & Philosophy of Art Education' (Macdonald, 1970). So far there has been some interesting bits and bobs but certainly not very many! However last night I got up to the chapter on Walter Smith – Chapter 13: America imports Cole's system. It was here I read that Walter Smith taught at the Leeds School of Art, pre 1870 when he went over to coordinate and organise the Massachusetts Art School System in America. Basically Walter Smith took all the good things about Cole's educational system and took them over to America – where he laid the foundations and paved the way for most of America's art educational success and art teacher training facilities. Smith was a utilitarian and had helped make the students at the Leeds School of Art come out with the best examination results in the entire country (Macdonald, 1970, p255). Now what made me smile and sit up in my bed was this. Macdonald when discussing Walter Smith's impact upon America states that Smith's viewpoint was 'echoed' in the Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education of 1871:

“... every one who can learn to write can learn to draw,...”
(As cited in Macdonald, 1970, p255)

Now the reason this tickled me so much is that when at The Artworks, I have heard John Ross say this EXACT phrase verbatim, at least once in every day that I have been there! That alongside – 'Every picture tells a thousand stories'. And it got me to thinking that isn't it amazing that Walter Smith's presence all those years ago at the Leeds School of Art is still having an impact, as it surely trickled down the

Leeds School of Art/Leeds College of Art/ The Artworks route between the times of the 1800's, the 1900's (John studied there in the 1950's, taught there (well at LMU which it became) and the 2000's (John is teaching this philosophy now).

I also realised that I found this chapter more interesting because I felt that it related somewhat to me. I remembered the name Walter Smith from when I used to work at LCAD (Leeds College of Art and Design) after my BA. His name must have been somewhere because as soon as I read it in this book last night I said to myself 'He's got something to do with Leeds' and I sat up more, paying closer attention – I couldn't remember quite what and thought it was the University of Leeds, (perhaps one of the lecture halls or something?) because that is where I studied – but I googled it and it was in fact LCAD. Small bloody world eh!

It is interesting to note that I reflected upon how I paid more attention when something was linked to my own life. This is definitely something that is part of my 'story'. I have said for many years now how if something doesn't seem relevant to me or my life I will 'switch off'. It is the reason I have given for not being particularly interested in my art history lectures during my BA, because they never seemed linked to the practice element. It is the reason that my boyfriend has finally stopped asking me if I want to go clothes shopping and it is the reason I absolutely LOVED studying upon my PGCE. I was learning so much about myself, through the programme.

Extracts taken from my PGCE 'Reflective Report' on planning and designing for learning, 2009

"Early on in my education I have experienced socio-emotional barriers to learning. If I felt a task was too big for me, I would avoid it. This affected my own learning process by creating anxiety and poor self-management,

which consequently gave me a poor self concept, negative attitude towards learning and poor motivation to engage myself within the learning process. I quickly understood that for me semantics and purpose was important and linked to my motivation to learn.

As motivation can be a key barrier to learning I have come to understand that without seeing the 'relevance' of a subject to my life, I lost motivation and have consequently realised that an andragogical holistic approach to my learning in which I am self-directed has been the best strategy for successful learning to take place.

Unless I was 'inspired to learn' only surface learning would take place therefore inappropriate pedagogy has been a major learning barrier for me in that my learning style was not accommodated throughout much of my education. The deep learning that has occurred from my days at school were the projects I could respond to kinaesthetically. Dewar [1996] suggested that when learners are 'actively engaged in the learning process' they are significantly more likely to 'achieve success' (Pritchard, 2009 p95). Only when I have been actively engaged with and in control of the learning process, have I been able to learn successfully."

Another thing I learnt about that I remember being REALLY interested in while researching that essay was the theory of metacognition, which really links in with personal relevance of learning...

"Metacognition [a theory also devised within developmental psychology] was first defined by Flavell in 1976 but is thought to have originated within the previous work of Vygotsky. It is a theory of learning which suggests that once a learner understands 'how they learn' through gaining knowledge of how their own mind works, they will then be able to go on to actively seek new ways of learning, or to undertake learning more effectively by knowing their strengths and weaknesses and as such working upon these to develop them (Pritchard, 2009). Understanding how best you and your students minds work can be seen as key to successfully picking the best strategies for them to learn (Reece & Walker, 2009)."

However when completing this reflective report nowhere did I mention that my weakness was paying attention and focusing on things that at first glance do not seem 'relevant to me'. If I want

to advance as a learner I should be developing my weaker aspects and a major one I can now see is paying more attention to things that do not seem 'relevant' to 'me and my story'. Should I have tried to be as enthused with the previous chapters of the book, would I have got more out of it? This is the challenge I will give myself from now on and see if I can work upon this to develop both myself and how I learn.

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- Macdonald, S. 1970. *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*. London: University of London Press Ltd
- Pritchard, A. 2009. *Ways of Learning: Learning theories and learning styles in the classroom*. 2nd Ed. Abingdon: Routledge
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Appendix C:
Exploring Life in My Artworks: Mirror Mirror



Photograph of Mirror Mirror in progress, 2003

Appendix D: Literature Review: Quantitative and qualitative conversing

The conversation

“So what exactly is the difference between ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ research then?”

“Well at least try to have a guess at it. Come On!!”

“Alright, Alright!

Well my initial thoughts are that quantitative is about ‘quantities’ meaning big numbers and qualitative denotes ‘quality’ so that’s about focussing more on one thing? You know – the old thing about homework with Mr Chu: *“it’s quality not quantity I’m looking for girls!”*

“Not Bad – Punchⁱ defined data in the form of numbers as quantitative, and yes I suppose you could say that the literature agrees with you on the ‘big’ part – quantitative research tends to be used more for ‘large-scale and representative sets of data’”ⁱⁱⁱ

“So when I took part in that ‘Wellbeing for Women’ study last year – that was a quantitative research study wasn’t it?”

“How so?”

“Well, there were 200 participants, all female between the ages of 21-45 all of whom had to have a BMI of over 30. They had two diets (I later found out one was a **control** ‘healthy eating’ diet and my one was a ‘healthy eating’ plus added fibre diet). They measured me at the beginning and took my blood sugar levels. Then sent me off to follow the diet for 3 months then I went back and they re-measured me and checked my blood sugar too. Oh and there was a tick box questionnaire at the beginning and then again at the end.”

"I would say that 'ticks the box' of quantitative research yes... Did you get anything out of it?"

"Erm, I got a recipe book, a set of scales and loads of free high fibre cereal (*Though this is all still admittedly in my kitchen cupboard because – quite frankly its RANK*)."

"Anything else..."

"Actually I did sleep a bit better! But they said that was an '*unexpected result*' that many of the participants had stated in their feedback."

"So it was a bit more than just a 'tick box' questionnaire then?"

"Well yes, I had to fill in a '*Wellbeing Diary*' every night (this was tick boxes too on whether I had my period, what time and type of 'poo' I had, if I had any headaches etc *and there was a little bit of space for a comment on the day overall at the bottom of the page*)."

There was also a nutritionist who I spoke to at the beginning and the end and she asked me for feedback on the diet and why I thought I didn't lose much weight. I asked her about the other people doing it but she said she wasn't allowed to tell me until the whole thing was finished and I'm still waiting because it takes quite a long time to put 200 people through the study apparently." **As of September 2012 I still have not heard anything back about the results of this study. I completed it in November 2010.**

"Did you ever meet the researcher?"

"I did actually. Once. I can't remember her name though– *how bad is that!* But I remember the research assistant. Her name was Caroline - I remember coz she was telling me she was going to Hong Kong for her holidays and I was too so she stuck in my mind. Haha!"

“So you said you never lost much weight? Was it a study about losing weight then – only the title of it doesn’t suggest an emphasis on weight loss?”

“Erm, to be honest I still don’t *really* know what the emphasis was on.

I think it was weight loss because that was the thing they measured the most.

They took loads of physical measurements and put me inside this pod thing to measure my overall body fat, and although the tick boxes were about periods and ‘poos’ and how much I slept each night - when I talked about that bit with the nutritionist she didn’t write any of the stuff I said down – *(unless she wrote it up after when I wasn’t in the room – but I won’t know until they publish the results)*

You know, all the stuff about how I realised through tracking my moods and things every day that I really did have quite severe PMS or about how it seemed to help me sleep better.

They said when they finish the study and publish the results I’ll get to see what it was all about. But until then she only let me know what the two diets were because I literally begged her to tell me!”

“Was it life-changing do you think?”

“You know at first I’d have definitely said no!

Because I didn’t lose any weight.

It didn’t make me any healthier and I didn’t continue it after it had finished so as an all rounder I’d have said *no impact at all*.

But - the plus of it was that it did make me ‘see’ that I had really bad PMS and in turn I went to the doctors about it and now I’m

fixing it so in a way – yes. It did have quite a big impact. But sort of by accident almost, you know?”

“Anything else to add?”

“Well – this is just my opinion like but to be honest it kind of pissed me off. I mean don’t get me wrong – getting free cereal was good and the £150 at the end for taking part was amazing but I didn’t like how it was so ‘formal’. I wasn’t allowed to meet any of the other people on the study. Like I had to sit in a room with the door closed when another participant was walking past so we didn’t meet and stuff! I felt like I’d been turned into a **number**, to be charted on a graph of **averages** or something. And I was expecting it to be exciting, to help me actually start controlling my weight and that but,

It just didn’t work.

Losing weight for me - it’s harder than just being able to ‘*eat healthily and follow a diet*’.

Life gets in the way you know?

Then I start to feel bad about how I’ve no ‘will power’ to just follow a healthy diet, like they make it sound so easy – but I dunno, sometimes when stuff happens – I just can’t help but eat.

Something goes bad – I eat,

I’m worrying about something – I eat.

I need to do my work – I eat... *you get the drift*.

I’m just so mad at myself for not being able to say no and I’m not stupid – I know about the food triangle and what’s good and bad. I just can’t seem to do it sometimes.”

“So, are you still unhappy about your weight?”

“Well to be honest, a few months after it finished and I had *recognised* that I did have really bad PMS I started looking into how that and other things (*you know your emotions and stuff*) can really impact upon your diet and your relationship with food”

“Go onnnnn...”

“Well, I’d realised that when some things happen it triggers my eating. So I started googling emotional eating, stress eating even ‘eating as procrastination’ haha! Then I found a few books about PMS and diets and things – like ‘*the woman’s advantage diet*’ by Dr Henry Mallekⁱⁱⁱ – this guy who did his Ph. D in nutritional biochemistry had done all this mad research into women and their PMS and eating habits (*it’s a bit outdated and the language he uses seems slightly condescending but the theory/Stats are quite fascinating* – and maybe on reflection I only think he is condescending because it feels like he is *generalizing* about women and he’s not one – so I feel like he would never *really* know that stuff you know?).

So after that I started keeping a diary to try and find out what my eating triggers are, and after a few months I collected all the diaries together and then tried to figure out ways to overcome them.”

“Do you have an example?”

“Ok yes, well for instance – Half of the week I’m a live in carer for my Nan who’s in the undiagnosed stage 6 of Alzheimer’s. So for 3 days I’m alone with her and being asked the same question over and over again until she goes to bed – *it’s exhausting and quite depressing* because well – it just makes me so unhappy that she has to live like this you know? Plus – I’m not going to lie – it is *seriously* frustrating for me too!

So anyway after a full day of *say* looking at the same set of photos. I’ll go and raid the mini cheddars, cakes, crisps etc – literally anything I can get my hands on!

So now what I do is – I put them all in a cupboard (*instead of just out on the kitchen table where they are sitting there winking at me!*) and I make sure when I do the shopping that I buy some of those

mixed prepared fruits too! Sometimes I still head for the stodge but more often than not I'll go for the easy fruit option now!"

"Interesting, so do you realize then that quantitative research actually led you into doing some qualitative research yourself"

"Has it?"

"Well would you say that you collected and analyzed information about emotional/stress/procrastination eating and PMS linked diets?"

"Erm, yes I guess I did actually"

"And you say that you researched the causes, effects and strategies for overcoming emotional eating. You also mentioned that you kept a 'reflective' diary to determine what your eating triggers are – and you then used this data to figure out ways to avoid them in the future?"

"Yes, that's all true"

"Well treacle, they are all key characteristics of qualitative research^{iv}. You see they say that the aim of qualitative research is to 'understand experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it'^v.

It's quite a 'natural' process and therefore nothing really can be 'predefined or taken for granted'^{vi}.

Hughes^{vii} also says its really important to see events in 'context' so you have to really 'immerse' yourself in the setting.

"You mean like how I only realized what my emotional eating habits were like after I had been tracking them in the diary and had got a new 'perspective' on things after reading and 'appraising' it?"^{viii}

"Exactly you 'owned' the research for yourself and tailored it to your own needs.

Qualitative research is all about exploring things 'in as much detail as possible'- that are 'interesting' or 'illuminating' and they can be in as many forms as you like, it doesn't have to be about numbers^{ix}

It was also individual to you then."

"It was you know, coz I found the information that '*resonated*' with me! It was definitely a little bit *harder, more stressful* and more *time consuming* than doing the quantitative study but it was worth it because it had such a '*personal*' impact you know?"^x

I found my own answers to my problem; found my own '*meanings*' and '*reasons*' for not being able to lose weight.

"Exactly.

This is what Burns called an idiographic approach^{xi}. The only limitation to this is that other people may not get as much out of your research as you did – because it was purely in a 'single context' – just for you."

"And it took quite a lot of time"^{xii}

"Well, Yes there is that". So you could say that overall the initial study and your own further research both impacted upon your understanding of your weight loss and relationship with food"

"Erm, well now that you mention it yes, I suppose there was a *combined approach* to the research. The '*qualitative*' research *facilitated* the quantitative. It provided the *personal background*."

"Would you say the second study 'plugged the gaps' of the first?"^{xiii}

"Definitely! You know the more I think about it – the more I see them as two parts of the *same* research! One initiated the other they were both part of the same process really"

"Oh Very nice, that's called a longitudinal study – you used them both in different stages of the research process – See you are already a researcher!"

Meta-autoethnography: re-interpreting the conversation

The above conversation is an amalgamation of autoethnographic material and theoretical information taken from Dr Christina

Hughes, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick – Research Process website. This website has given me a wonderful in depth look into the research process. The site includes information on:

- What research is, including methodological paradigms, the distinction between method and methodology and an introduction to the commonly used terms and ‘language’ of research.
- The key principles of research design and how to evaluate your own research.
- Information on how to do a literature review, why we do literature reviews and how to develop skills in critical analysis.
- Contextualization of qualitative and quantitative research, backed up with links to theory, strengths and weaknesses of both approaches and a wonderful introduction to reflexivity.

Within this conversation I hoped to cover some of the key characteristics, strengths and limitations of both research approaches. For example: in the quantitative study the researcher was an anonymous figure whose name I could not *even* remember. This statement is in alignment with one of the eight limitations that Hughes (2006) identifies for quantitative research: that the ‘mechanistic ethos’ can ‘exclude notions of freedom, choice and moral responsibility’.

I also have to admit that as the *participant* myself – there were some days when I just couldn’t be ‘*bothered*’ to fill in the diary so I fudged some of the results (*though I did admit this in my feedback at the end of the study*). I don’t doubt that others would have done the same due to the aspect of ‘human agency’ and the ‘complexity of human experience’. These are two other elements that Hughes states factor into the limitations of Quantitative research (Hughes 2006).

I believe that a *leading brand of cereal manufacturer* sponsored the initial study. *I only found this out at the end of the study too though – as all of the ‘high fibre’ foods I was given came in white boxes or silver wrappers. But when I quizzed the nutritionist at the end of my 3*

months she told me they were all Kellogg's products. I also feel that this could be a limitation to the initial study – due to possible conflict of interest from an outside agency.

I hope to have demonstrated through this conversation both reflection and reflexivity. There were 'reflections in action' running through the conversation (Brookfield, 1986 cited in Hughes, 2006) and I used Reeves 'Awareness in action' (1994, cited in Hughes 2006) since my agenda was to discuss my newfound knowledge of the research process. The use of a research diary denotes reflexivity as does the fact that my own biography was used to produce this knowledge (Hughes 2006). I also think the text highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the subjectivity of using the self. Ideally I would have liked to link this dialogue to 'art education' but felt that my experience of the quantitative study on diet highlighted the issues and debates around research more concisely and hence why I chose to use this as my explanatory topic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Christina Hughes for enabling this work to be produced and for succinctly providing me with a brilliant overview of the research process and providing an extensive list of references on every aspect of the research process for further reading.

"A final question – is this *personal narrative* or *autoethnography*?"

Ron Pelias asserts that the difference between personal narrative and autoethnography is that autoethnography takes on an additional burden: '*to try and use the self to help explicate culture*' (cited in Smith-Sullivan 2008 p77). This account is attempting to explain quantitative and qualitative research through the use of the self – so is that really trying to explain culture?"

"I suppose it is – because it is explaining the 'culture' of research isn't it?"

“Perhaps – but to be honest I think it depends on who you are talking to – because for Ellis^{xiv}, personal narrative *can* be autoethnography, sometimes the boundary just isn’t very clear!”

Response to the conversation

Upon completing this conversation I did not favour it as one of my *stronger* pieces of work in this literature review. However I emailed it to Dr Christina Hughes along with my thanks for providing the website and information. Her response to the conversation was this:

Taken from Dr Christina Hughes, Personal communication, 26 June 2011

*Dear Jennyanne,
how fantastic that you have found these resources useful. I really really enjoyed your paper and to see what innovative material you are producing. It got completely to the heart of things. I think it would make a fantastic resource for other students so I hope you can find ways of sharing it. Perhaps if you talk to your tutors at MMU they will find a way? Thank you, also, for such kind words and acknowledgement. It is so gratifying to hear. I do hope you are continuing your academic career. You certainly seem to have a real gift for it.
best wishes,
christina*

So perhaps it was rather a good look into things after all. How nice 😊

ⁱ Punch, K, 1998 cited in Hughes, 2006

ⁱⁱ Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996 cited in Hughes, 2006

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr Henry Mallek, 1990, The Woman’s advantage diet

^{iv} Hughes, 2006

^v Sherman and Webb, 1988 cited in Hughes, 2006

^{vi} Hughes, 2006

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} Ibid

^{ix} Ibid

^x Delamont, 1992 cited in Hughes, 2006

^{xi} Burns, 2000 cited in Hughes, 2006

^{xii} Hughes, 2006

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} Ellis, 2009

Appendix E: **Other works**

The A/r/tographer

Jennyanne Smith
MIRIAD (Manchester Institute for Research
and Innovation in Art and Design)
Manchester Metropolitan University



Figure 1. Jennifer Anne Smith, 2011. *The A/r/tographer* (a self-portrait) [Pen and ink, digital imagery].

Will the initial outcome of the thought *always*
be the *words*?
Or will I *move*
into the *visual*?
Will the images ever *inform*
the words?
Or will it *always*

be the *reversal*?
How will I *cope*
with the *change*?
From left-handed writer
of Script,
to A/r/tographer whose hand is the
“*right*” one.
What will the outcome enfold?
Tell me, where will *this* research now go?

For more info on The A/r/tographer please visit:
www.jennyanne.co.uk/research.

Planting a seed, not a flower

Grasping the opportunities offered by presenting at a CARN Conference

These notes arose from a 'Conference Preparation Day' held at Manchester Metropolitan University on May 17th 2011. We hope you find them useful in considering how to present not only at a CARN Conference but also at other conferences.

The day was organised by Cathie Pearce and Una Hanley of the CARN Co-ordinating group in response to a question that had been pre-occupying both the Co-ordinating Group and successive CARN Conference Organisers, namely:

Given that CARN Conference is such a supportive event, how can we encourage more participants to take advantage of this by moving away from the traditional '20 minutes power-point presentation followed by 10 minutes discussion' format?

The day was enlivened by 3 'rehearsal' presentations which were delivered very much in non-traditional ways:

1. a performative narrative - Jennyanne Smith
2. using visuals and objects – Christina MacRae
3. 'Passing Shadows': a participatory / facilitator led session – Rebecca Patterson

And we asked ourselves

- what makes a 'good' presentation 'work' ?
- in what ways can the 'space' be used?
- what kinds of experiences are they?

The purpose of this paper is to distil some of the insights we developed from our discussions, prompted by the 3 presentations, in the form of **guidelines**, and these are set out below, not by setting out a sequence of 'bullet points', but instead by elaborating on the points that were agreed at the plenary session under some thematic headings as an attempt to convey what we explored. The plenary 'points' – which might normally be reduced to a list - all appear in **plain bold type** within the text.

During the lunch-break, Jennyanne wrote a poem:

When I first arrived *I was scared*,
My vision became slightly **blurred**.

But there sat, were some new critical friends
You have to try to
make sure
that it blends

You only have half an hour,
So please **plant a seed not a flower**

Open their eyes to your world,
Allow both THEM *and* self to unfurl

Switch your registers around
And speak out the concept - **astound!**

... and Christina offered us a quote that resonated for us all:

"Creativity is making mistakes, art is knowing which ones to keep"

... and here is the overview, derived from our plenary, of some of our insights:

1. We all did acknowledge that ***the traditional format has its uses***.

CARN Conferences offer a particularly good venue for people to test out presentations of this type, because the audience will try to offer honest, supportive critique.

2. We discussed the nature of the conference presentation as ***a situated experience*** – for the ‘presenter’ and ‘audience’ alike.

It’s a great opportunity to **play with the dynamics of group interaction**, and may also offer a chance to **collect some data** in terms of views expressed etc.

We realised that once we had begun to ask the question ‘**what do you want from an audience?**’ and began to see the presentation as **purposeful engagement** then the whole experience became subject to a different way

of thinking. Many think of a presentation as an ordeal and while it does of course provoke nervousness even among the most experienced presenters, this feeling can so dominate that the purpose becomes limited to 'emerging unscathed' – which in fact is almost certain to happen at CARN Conference! So why not grasp **permission to play** ? – to think about connecting with people via different kinds of register. This is a slightly more risky strategy, but for which one can prepare by considering the risks in advance and being **prepared for the unexpected**, and being willing to **read the audience and be flexible**.

3. We felt that the ***focus of the presentation*** may be taken for granted, yet it is worthy of deeper reflection.

Passion enlivens every discussion and so speaking about **something you feel passionate about** helps both the presenter, in terms of motivation, and the audience in terms of engagement. It may also offer new insights into a subject that the presenter does NOT feel particularly passionate about, but needs to present about! So – it's useful to **be selective about what is presented**, and not to attempt to summarise an entire project, just to explore one aspect of it. There is a balance to be struck between **challenging** people and drawing them in to your line/s of argument and thinking, and **bringing them along** with you.

We discussed the difficulties of dealing with **theoretical matters** in the short spaces of time offered by Conferences, and felt that theories need to be brought alive - indeed we need to find ways that an audience can be **invited to play with theories**.

Whatever the initial focus, it's worth **testing out in practice** if at all possible beforehand – even after the abstract has been submitted. A rehearsal is an excellent opportunity to discover new questions that might deserve a slight change in focus.

4. The ***logistics*** of how to use a half-hour time-slot are fundamental.

How many times have you left a session thinking the discussion had only just got going? So consider **how much discussion you want** – and build that in to your presentation. A 10 minute introduction, which could take any form (consider using vignettes, drama, pictures, photos, etc.) – leaves 20 minutes for discussion. If discussion is what you want, then it's essential to **keep to time**. A good operating principle is that we speak at around 100 words a minute, so a 10-minute introduction involves only 1,000 words. Crafting your presentation with brevity then becomes an important matter. Stating **the purpose of the session** is extremely helpful in setting the context, as is giving thought to the way that you will **use the physical space**.

The traditional approach brings almost complete control of the space to the presenter, so once this is relinquished a great deal more flexibility becomes possible, for which **back-up plans** are very useful since there is less certainty about what will happen. It's useful to plan for different numbers of participants, different interests, etc. Greater flexibility also enables the

presenter to pay better attention to **how people are experiencing** the presentation as it progresses, including their levels of comfort, general audibility, the nature of their involvement, and to respond to any difficulties.

5. Treading new ground always feels a bit dangerous, so presenters who do this need to think about their own ***personal needs***.

Risk-taking is brave and requires confidence. Finding the best way to get it is a matter for each individual to experiment with. **Rituals and 'props'** can bring reassurance; **familiarity with the venue** beforehand is useful in many ways, eg. ensuring the best use of the space; **making eye-contact** with audience members fixes our own engagement.

Perhaps the most paradoxical insight of all, however, was that once we had discovered what might be '**realistic**' to achieve in the limitations of an allotted time, then it became possible to imagine how to **expand** the experience for mutual benefit, to re-think what might count as a 'conference presentation' and to enliven and deepen the nature of the encounters we might have as a result.

**Ruth Balogh
Una Hanley
Cathie Pearce**

October 2011

Postscript

This document is to be treated as a work in progress which we hope will stimulate further discussion and contributions from the wider community of action researchers.

Use the CARN blog <http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/carnnew/blog/> to share your responses to this paper.