Co-creating Bodily, Interactive, and Reflexive Knowledge through Art-Based Research

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Abstract

In the past few decades, there has been a growing amount of interest toward alternative research methods within consumer culture research. The goal of such approaches is to engage understanding in a more multisensory, bodily, and experiential manner. While aiming to transgress traditions of research, alternative approaches often end up inadvertently repeating existing structures of knowledge. To provide a perspective on how alternative methods could utilise the full power of the tools they propose to use in research, this paper introduces art-based research (ABR), a process-oriented methodology that involves taking on artistic practice as part of research. ABR is bodily, interactive, and contextualised, employing a different approach to what knowledge is, how and when knowledge is created, and who is a part of knowledge-creation. The paper suggests that ABR can become an important political tool for critiquing traditions of and discussing power structures within academia.

Keywords: alternative research method, art-based research, artistic research, co-created knowledge, art

In 2012, I started exploring experiences of fantasy as part of a consumer culture research project. I was interested in understanding what the concept of fantasy means as an experience on a bodily and interactional level, exploring the phenomenon via ethnography of live action role-playing games (LARP). While engaging the culture and lived meaning of fantasy through these methods, I was faced with a conundrum: I was exploring experiences and expressions that are, at their core, bodily, sensory, and emotional, and thus not something that my informants or I could fully verbalise. Such a situation is not unique to me. Valtonen, Markuksela, and Moisander (2010) have expressed frustration with having to translate sensory knowledge into text in the context of fishing. Wood (2015) similarly described his dismay over the lack of interactive, affective understanding in research.

Researchers in these situations have been asking the following questions. How can we approach experiences that are tacit and not directly verbally communicable? How can we express and help others express something bodily? Interactive? Sensual? Emotional? Describing such aspects using the standard form of academic text does not seem to get at the core of ideas, senses, and interactions, almost disrespecting the experiences to an extent. Reflecting this, various researchers, such as Scott (1994), Bode (2010), Moisander, Valtonen and Hirsto (2009), have discussed a need for research that is participative, interactional, and collaborative, thus going beyond the structures of academic tradition.

On a practical level, a variety of so-called ‘alternative’ research methods have been developed in consumer culture research to aid the engagement of knowledge in a more emotional, bodily, and sensory manner. These aim to conduct research, represent findings, and engage audiences in ways different from traditional academic text through the use of such approaches, as video, poetry, creative writing, and photography. Yet alternative methods face many issues that deter their users from utilising the full power of their research tools. As I explain below, alternative methods tend to be constrained by the norms of academia they

aim to flee from, thus recreating traditional structures of knowledge. Moreover, while taking on a variety of artistic tools as part of alternative methods, cultural consumer research has not fully explored artistic processes in themselves as part of research practice (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Canniford 2012; Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten 2014).

In order to address the above issues and develop the use of expressive, interactive, artistic processes as part of research, this paper introduces art-based research (ABR). ABR is an approach that utilises artistic practice in order to explore phenomena and engage with audiences. The methodology shifts focus from the product of research to the process of research, giving room for experience-based, interpersonal, and dialogical engagement. To accomplish this, ABR requires a different attitude toward knowledge-creation from both researcher and audience, pointing to an epistemology that is interaction- and experience-oriented. The approach further necessitates continuous reflexivity, breaking one's assumptions and making one question existing meaning. All in all, ABR is a methodology that focuses on knowledge as an interactive process through the use of artistic practice.

The paper presents the methodology of ABR through the above-mentioned example of my work on fantasy experiences. Before turning to the practice and theory of ABR, I provide a literature review of alternative research methods, pointing to aspects that require development and can be addressed via ABR.

Alternative research methods in consumer culture research

Consumer culture research has a long-standing history of using alternative research methods. In using a variety of tools and approaches, these do not form a single methodology, but their emergence arises from a similar need to overcome limiting structures of research tradition.

Consumer culture research is an interpretive research field born out of criticism toward positivist and post-positivist logics that are heavily emphasised in consumer research. Instead of adhering to a strict research protocol that accurately answers research questions that correspond with a 'true' reality, interpretive approaches seek to describe contextual, perceived realities through a continuously evolving research design (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Yet the interpretive approach has its setbacks as well. As Sherry and Schouten (2002) write, interpretive work tends to be dominated by the "authoritative voice of realist ethnography" (220) via thick description of social worlds. They believe that such work fails to tap into emotional, co-created, lived meaning. Wood (2015) adds that such research often fails to engage affect, subjectivity, discursiveness, and aesthetics of lived experience.

Getting more specific, Moisander, Valtonen and Hirsto (2009) argue that the focus on existential phenomenology in interpretive consumer research tends to be too individualistic, failing to take into consideration cultural complexity. They suggest developing a discursive research approach that incorporates cultural dynamics and structuring. In practice, they propose the use interactional interviews, in which knowledge is created collaboratively among researcher(s) and participants. Building on this, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) suggest researchers need to "bring consumers alive as real people" (399) through detailed contextualisation that takes into consideration intersubjective dynamics of cultural, societal, and historical structures. In parallel, researchers have explored such issues through the proposition of various theoretical frameworks. Bajde (2013) argues for the use of actor network theory to address contextual co-creation of knowledge, while Hill, Canniford, and Mol (2014) propose the use of non-representational theory to gain sensitivity to contexts.

As a methodological response to above issues, consumer researchers have taken up various alternative research methods, moving toward knowledge that is created through

interactive means of exploring research phenomena. Researchers have engaged new ways of understanding by using tools outside of the traditional academic text and language.

Text and language are often put above all other forms of representation of knowledge, both within and outside of academia. Their power in contemporary culture, Blumenfeld-Jones (2016) explains, is heavily linked to the preferred type of knowledge in Western society overall, which is rational and regulatory, clearly recorded and presented, focused on answers and truth-value (Finley 2003; Scotti and Aicher 2016). Bleiker (2001) suggests that the prioritisation of text in research is connected to social science being largely positivist and realist, elevating writing as a neutral, objective faculty. Knowledge based in claims, assertions, and propositions *requires* language for its formation, Eisner (1997) explains. Yet, as Meyer et al. (2013) show, experience cannot always be placed into syntactical units of language. In line with this, Warren (2002) stresses that language is a limited medium, as it involves no experiential aspects: no body, no emotion, no sensation. Meyer et al. (2013) agree and stress that language is just one way we communicate and engage with knowledge; just one medium of understanding and one mode of research.

Next, I describe some of the central forms of alternative research methods taken on in consumer culture research. After that, I discuss the issues that the use of such methods faces.

Visual media

Visual media is probably the most popular form alternative research methods. The use of photographs and illustrations is by no means alternative in itself, as visual evidence is common to ethnography and other interpretive methods. Meamber (2013) even suggests that use of visuals should be *mandatory* in researching contemporary culture, which is ocular in its nature. However, engaging visuals as a form of knowledge in its own right allows for new

perspectives in research. As Meyer et al. (2013) explain, visuals can provide knowledge that is not linear or sequential, but holistic and immediate. Following such notions, consumer researchers have taken up visual media as a focal point of research in a variety of ways.

Visuals are often approached as a point of analysis. For instance, Scott (1994) explored how individuals read, understand, and respond to imagery in advertising. Schroeder has studied visuals with a focus on photography, investigating how individuals view, appreciate, and critique imagery (2010), how they build meaning via imagery (2002), and how they create photographic representations of their selves (1998).

The creation of visuals has also been taken on as part of research. Heisley and Levy (1991) were among the first to use 'autodriving': they photographed informants and then used these images in interviews as a form of photo elicitation, asking individuals to comment on and negotiate their own behaviour. Taking on photography as an active representation of the researcher's point of view, Holbrook (1998) and O'Guinn (2015) conducted research in the form of photo essays, presenting readers with visualisations of their own experiences. Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel (2013) engaged a more active approach from the point of view of informants. They have used the method of 'photo voice,' which gives informants quite a lot of freedom in taking photographs that represent their lives in a specific subject matter.

Going beyond photography, researchers have taken on creation of collages and drawings in their work (Williams-Burnett and Skinner 2017), using visuals to evoke emotions and meanings in interview settings (Christensen and Olson 2002). For instance, the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (Zaltman 1997) asks informants to gather a collection of images before an interview. The images are used for a number of narrative elicitation exercises, aiding the discussion of meanings, emotions, and sensory experiences. Engaging visual arts, the Consumer Culture Theory conference has hosted an Art Gallery since 2014,

showcasing projects using various visual media for research. These have included paintings, drawings, sculptures, and installations.

It is worthwhile to note that, within alternative research methods, overwhelming primacy is given to visual form. This reflects contemporary culture in general, which, in Jay's (1994) description, is ocularcentric and imbued with social practices that are visual. Bell, Warren and Schroeder (2014) have discussed the issue as visualisation of the linguistic turn. However, as I discuss next, there are many other ways of knowing besides seeing. Stressing the visual solely may run the risk of re-creating limiting structures that alternative methods aim to go beyond, especially if used merely as props for analysis. Visuals may easily become a version of text, with the created knowledge taking on traditional academic structure, just represented through a different medium. Additionally, visuals are rarely presented without accompanying text, placing the work directly into accepted form.

Moving image

The use of moving image is another popular alternative form of conducting research. Wood (2015) explains that moving image allows for both researchers and their audiences to have more affective and lived experiences of research. The medium is multisensory in that it engages not just sight, but also hearing and possibly other senses.

Following Belk and Kozinets' (2005) work, videography has become widely used in consumer research to collect data (Smith, Fischer, and Cole 2007) and as a methodology in itself (Seregina et al. 2013). Videography has become a prevalent form of research practice, especially visible at conferences (e.g., Association of Consumer Research, Consumer Culture Theory conference). Some videographies have also been published in journals (Belk and Kozinets 2005), yet these have generally been supplemented with traditional academic text.

There are varied perspectives on how moving image should be used and what its function is as part of research. Schembri and Boyle (2013), for instance, describe the medium of video to be the closest a researcher can come to seeing the world through someone else's eyes, thus allowing for more authentic and rigorous interpretation. In contrast to such 'representational' work, Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) offer an alternative 'expressive' approach to videography that "emphasizes the evocative power of moving images" (2019) and aims to explicitly create other worlds for audiences to engage with.

Performance-based, interactive, and multisensory approaches

A variety of interactive approaches have been used as part of research, which engage knowing through an assortment of senses, such as sight, hearing, smell, touch, balance, movement, and temporality. One popular approach is sensory ethnography, the aim of which is to widen perceptions and address the multisensory human experience delicately (Pink 2015). Nakamura (2013) stresses that an important benefit of sensory ethnography is that it takes into consideration perceptions beyond sight and engages media other than text. To provide an example, Valtonen, Markuksela, and Moisander (2010) explored smells, sounds, temperatures, touches, and aches as part of researching the practice of fishing.

Other approaches have similarly allowed researching behaviour as a holistic, multisensory entity. Ethnoconsumerism "studies actions, thoughts, language, institutions, and their interconnections between the categories" (Venkatesh 1995, 27-8), allowing researchers to go beyond an emic perspective to develop deeper engagement. Pitts and Gross (2017) used the 'audience exchange' approach to create interactional understanding via dialogue. On a more bodily level, Bode and Chauvin (2015) have used music, Bode (2010) proposed a performance-oriented research, and Vincs (2007) engaged in dance. Modrak (2015), an artist

who has published her work alongside consumer research, has created multimedia artistic interventions that explore tools as symbolic objects via critical design.

Alternative use of text

Consumer researchers have promoted the alternative use of text in research. While not necessarily multisensory, alternative use of text does allow for more emotional engagement of research topics. Most notably, poetry has gained traction as an approach, having a strong presence in academic conferences and in research outlets, both as part of more traditional texts (Canniford 2012) and as publications in their own right (Schouten 2009). Sherry and Schouten (2002) describe poetry as grasping presence, emotion, and unmediated experience that resists reduction of knowledge to the confines of clinical, scientific language. Poetry emerges as a more affective way of *writing* research for researchers and a more affective way of *engaging* with research for audiences (Canniford 2012).

Consumer researchers have also engaged in other forms of creative writing with the aim to use text in a less scientific manner. For example, Brown (2011) and Schouten (2014) have written prose as part of research. Stern (1998), while focusing on traditional academic text, has advocated reconfiguring *how* we write such text. She specifically addresses narrative structure, suggesting that interpretive research can become akin to writing fiction.

Resolving issues faced by alternative research methods

While a wide array of alternative approaches has been taken on in consumer culture research to develop knowledge-creation, such work may not be fully utilising the potential of the methods. The approaches face many constraining issues, which I explore next.

First, alternative methods are rarely used in pure form, that is, they usually emerge as an aid to or with the help of traditional work. For instance, videography and poetry are usually created alongside ethnography, with the alternative method becoming a technique for getting at what scientific inquiry had difficulties with. Resultantly, researchers often end up using alternative methods to 'furnish' evidence for traditional research, says Wood (2015). Even when taking on alternative methodologies more holistically, research retains strong ties to traditional academic work, as researchers often opt to or are pressured to publish their work with written explanations. De Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) have noted that they always accompany video with explanations. They imply that this is due to the fact that a lack of guidance may feel threatening or uncomfortable to researchers and viewers. Yet, such explanation transforms the knowledge into safe, familiar forms, thus losing much of the interactional, lived characteristics gained through the use of alternative methods.

Second, alternative research methods often take form in data or its collection. For example, Schroeder's work, while seminal for the development of visual methods in consumer research, mainly focuses on language-based analysis of pre-existing or informant-created visuals. In his 2010 paper, Schroeder explores consumers using snapshot photographs to construct their identities, analysing the visuals through language. Similarly, Heisley and Levy (1991) use autodriving to create experiential data via use of visuals, but analyse this via description. In such endeavours, images *do* allow for gaining new understanding, but become likened to textual data, with analysis and expression of findings taking on linguistic form.

Third, research making use of alternative media also ends up taking the *form* of academic writing. To provide an example, videographies tend to take the structure of journal articles, transferring the form familiar from text onto moving image (Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten 2014). In a similar manner, poetry becomes an expressive and insightful way of approaching academic writing (Canniford 2012). Hence, in trying to attain new forms of

knowledge, projects engaging alternative research methods may be inadvertently repeating the exact patterns they are trying to flee from.

Fourth, the power that alternative research methods purport to give informants is very limited. Researchers have suggested that one of the main aims of alternative methods is the development of interactive ways of engaging informants, to give them voice and power (Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel 2013). Yet, most of the time, informants gain only trivial power, as researchers either employ the alternative methods themselves or clearly control their use among informants. When informants *are* engaged, the knowledge gained is often translated into the form of academic text. For instance, Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) asked their informants to take photographs that "'tell who you are' or 'reflect things of importance in your everyday life'" (235), but these photos were then verbally deconstructed during interviews. Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel (2013) asked their informants to take photos, yet, once again, these photos were discussed, explained, and analysed using quite traditional verbal approaches. Hence, informant voices become constructed and constrained by researchers, with alternative approaches potentially losing their interactional benefits.

Fifth, alternative research methods rarely actively engage their audiences. Researchers using alternative research methods have suggested the possibility of transferring emotional and sensory experiences, thus creating reflexivity and resonance in audiences (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Petr, Belk, and Decrop 2015). Yet, audiences are rarely acknowledged, and, when considered, are often approached as passive entities to be guided. For instance, researchers talk about making video viewable for audiences, forming audience response, and shaping audiences' understanding (Kozinets and Belk 2005; De Valck, Rokka and Hietanen 2009). As a result, audiences are dictated how to interpret and understand research. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility of audience members actively engaging in research. However, the central issue is that audiences are *approached* as passive by

researchers and are not expected to influence the work beyond emotional response or commentary. Yet, it is very reductive to think of one's audience as unresponsive receivers of knowledge. If we want to explore interactive, discursive, culturally embedded knowledge, we would need to consider the audience as interacting with and influencing knowledge-creation.

Overall, the use of alternative methods could be described as constrained by the methodological history it aims to flee from. A possible explanation for the above issues could be the dominance of language and text as a way of producing knowledge, an approach that expects very specific one-way communication with a passive audience. Additionally, the issues could be associated with the belief that the responsibility for meaning-making lies with the researcher (Petr, Belk, and Decrop 2015). This restricts interactive capabilities of knowledge-creation, as well as pacifies audiences and informants as actors who have a voice. Another explanation may be the systemic resistance to alternative methods. Wood (2015) suggests that many researchers do not perceive alternative approaches to be sufficient or intellectual enough to demonstrate research. Kozinets and Belk (2007) further add that alternative methods are seen as entertaining and are thus not given the attention that 'real' research is. Faced with such stigma, alternative methods have a hard time gaining legitimacy within a context that has a long tradition of producing specific types of text-based knowledge. This impedes acceptance and spread of approaches, making researchers wary of their use.

It is, of course, ironic, to argue against traditional forms of conducting research by writing a paper. In many ways, this paper will do exactly what it suggests needs to be overcome. Yet, this form is necessary in order to begin a multimedia discussion on above-discussed topics and present practical examples to the academic audience. Next, I provide a perspective on how we can explore more co-created, bodily, and interactive forms of knowledge.

Doing ABR: Art-based research of fantasy experiences

To engage knowledge as interactive and co-created through the use of alternative research methods in a more comprehensive methodological manner, I propose the use of the art-based research (ABR). Leavy (2018a) describes ABR as "a transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that combines the tenets of the creative arts in research contexts" (4). Hervey (2000) adds that the approach has three defining characteristics: using artistic methods to gather, analyse, and/or present data; engaging in an acknowledged artistic process; and being motivated by the aesthetic values of the researcher(s). In short, ABR engages artistic processes in order to conduct and express research.

Leavy (2009, 2018a; see also Scotti and Aicher 2016) explains that the aim of ABR is to create a context of emotional, sensory, and bodily interaction among researcher, audience, and the researched phenomenon. ABR thus focuses on the process rather than the product of research, with the emerging knowledge being of a co-created and interactive nature. Such knowledge is not the result of zeroing in on a claim or a solution, but is rather found in opening up a topic for discussion and criticism. Understanding emerges through continuous, reflexive interaction with the audience that is involved throughout the research process.

Simons and McCormack (2007) stress that ABR is not just a set of methods, but a way of designing, interpreting, and communicating research. Accordingly, doing ABR requires approaching the entire research process as well as the creation and expression of knowledge differently. In practice, the methodology uses various media to explore multisensory and multifaceted knowledge through artistic practice, taking on a processual and relational epistemology. The media used in ABR can involve anything that the research requires for exploring and interacting with the chosen topics and contexts, such as painting, photography, installations, poetry, prose, or performances, to name a few. The media are often combined and used in ways that support the research themes being explored.

It is noteworthy that the field of art-based research is quite fragmented and various definitions of the approach have been suggested. Moreover, many similar terms exist: artistic research, arts based education research (ABER), artistic inquiry, and a/r/tography (artist/researcher/teacher). The term art-based research (ABR) and the above definition are used here, as these have become used generally for the type of research discussed in this paper (see Chilton 2013 and Leavy 2018a for an overview).

Next, I explore how ABR is done in practice. I discuss the aims and creation of ABR, the role of the audience, as well as the epistemology, evaluation, value and legitimacy of ABR. It is important to stress that the example provided is just one way of doing ABR; ABR is a methodology that can emerge in a variety of ways and using a variety of media.

Aims of ABR: Why choose ABR as a research methodology?

I my work, I aimed to understand fantasy (that is, the conscious experiencing of something as not real) as a bodily, interactive, lived experience through the context of LARP. I will not discuss in depth the theoretical or empirical basis of the project here (see Seregina 2019a), rather focusing on the methodological characteristics of ABR taken on as part of it.

My work was initially going to be quite a traditional ethnography. Yet, when engaged in data collection, it became apparent to me that these methods were not going to be enough. Exploring fantasy experiences only by means of linguistic and textual forms felt restrictive: it felt like discussions and observations did not express lived sensations in enough detail and lacked emotional, experiential characteristics in their description, analysis, and representation. It became pertinent to find other ways of approaching knowledge-creation.

Reflecting above notions, Eisner (1997) explains that ABR was born out of discontent with restrictive, traditional conceptions of what research and knowledge are. The goal of

ABR is thus to illuminate human life as it is lived by encountering phenomena directly via non-traditional forms of representation (Simons and McCormack 2007; Leavy 2009). ABR grounds nonverbal thinking and feeling, creating immersive and bodily awareness (Blumenfeld-Jones 2016). In these characteristics, ABR is heavily intertwined with art therapy processes, as Malchiodi (2007, 2018) explains (see also Zaltman 1997).

I turned to art practice as part of research (see Picture 1), creating artwork using acrylic paints and mixed media in order to better understand the theory and the phenomenon I was working with. I mainly engaged in two-dimensional work on paper and canvas, drawing and painting with such materials, as acrylics, pencils, charcoal, ink, and spray paint. The choice of media was based on my familiarity with them and their applicability to the purposes of the ABR project. Collingwood (1938) theorised that creating artwork allows individuals to enhance and become more aware of their understanding of experiences. He suggested that this is due to artistic practice pushing us to step to the very edge of what we know, encouraging us to go further and engaging us in knowledge that would not be possible otherwise. Similarly, artistic practice pushed me to approach the subject of my work in new ways. Novel understanding became possible through breaking conventions and assumptions about the research process, as well as taking on creativity and intuition as part of research.

<Insert picture 1 about here>

ABR allows researchers to tap into phenomena that are beyond written explanation and scientific classification, without the need of translation into text (Busch 2009). The object of research is interpersonal and contextualised experience with a focus on emotional and embedded understanding. Following this, ABR is beneficial for work that is explorative, critical, and/or engaging vulnerable and marginalised contexts (Barone and Eisner 2012).

ABR can be of great use to consumer culture research, as the focus of study of the latter is a highly aestheticised, visual, and often non-linguistic culture (Warren 2002; Wood 2015).

Creation of ABR: What does ABR require in terms of skill and practice?

As it has become apparent, ABR restructures research by introducing artistic practice as a major element of the process. But how is art-making taken on in practice? In my work on fantasy experiences, artistic practice usually started with a blank canvas and the aim to explore a particular aspect of the project. Such aspects included theoretical concepts, strands of interdisciplinary literature, my own fantasy experiences, my interview data and field notes, and various other interactions I had with the informants and the context. There was no pre-planned representation in mind, with art-making becoming a way of expressing what I could not fully grasp. Driven by a need to explore and build understanding, art would emerge in a bodily manner as a process of trying to figure out feelings and experiences that had no predefined form or logic and resisted easy patterns. Below I present my reflections on the process of figuring out a typology of fantasy experiences via painting (see Picture 2).

> *I strongly felt that fantasy emerged in different forms. This was evident in my own experiences and in the interviews. But I could not logically or rationally explain it. There was experience. There was emotion. All the senses were pointing to it. But I could not yet describe it. Taking a paintbrush to my hand seemed like the only solution. I started painting with my research issues in mind. I did not try to rationally solve the issues, but rather create forms and patterns that I felt and sensed. I was giving into what my body did without rationalised, planned action, but there was no flow experience, as there was still a distinct determination to figure out something*

particular about the research phenomenon. I combined experiential elements on canvas by painting them in the forms, colours, and symbols I had experienced them as. Different colours began to represent different aspects of fantasy experience; different textures were the feelings associated with them. Hands emerged as an important symbolic element. The particular perspective from which the hands were represented was important. It was personal and it pointed to the constructed and deeply self-conscious aspects of the fantasy experience. Moreover, it tied nicely into the context of games, as the visual made reference to first-person video games. Next, I needed to understand how the hands would be used differently in a variety of fantasy experiences. Through the artistic work, the hands began to represent the juggling of parallel frames of interaction (fantasy and reality) during fantasy performance. The visuals thus became tools for showing myself what I was experiencing, allowing new knowledge to arise. Before I was able to rationally verbalise and explain, I was able to express through colour, perspective, and form how frames of interaction were juggled differently. The process required several iterations of paintings: I tried different colours, combinations of elements, arrangement. I knew I could stop working when the composition looked and felt right.

<Insert picture 2 about here>

The process above resulted in the development of understanding of how frames of interaction are juggled within fantasy experiences from the individual's point of view by visualising how these are performed. ABR thus allowed me to explore experiences that I was not capable of verbalising or grasping and building these up into understandable patterns through trial-and-error that makes up artistic practice. As Malchiodi (2018) wrote, artistic

practice is “a few steps ahead of the logical, reasoning mind” (78). The process makes physically concrete and/or external the ideas, thoughts, and relationships one was not aware of or incapable of understanding. The researcher can then view and engage these concrete expressions directly, interpreting them via theory, experience and symbolism. Bennett (2011) explains that artistic practice reconfigures events and experiences, tracing connections and revealing meanings, which allows for generating new perspectives. This is supported by various visual and kinetic processes being helpful in synthesising patterns (Hatcher 1999).

Active, bodily engagement is central to the approach, as it pushes individuals to figure things out through a multitude of senses. Engaging in hands-on activity allows tapping into exteroceptive and interoceptive sensory experiences, making one’s feelings, values, beliefs, and experiences more visible (Malchiodi 2018). The bodily process of ABR further requires engaging with the research topic in an other-oriented manner, that is, through focusing on the context and interaction, rather than the self. Crawford (2009) explains that working manually forces one to confront the world, deal with problems not of one’s own making, let go of oneself, and focus on others. He adds that seeing and doing as iterative processes in manual work allow one to gain more acute vision of and active engagement with the world by responding directly to others and holding oneself responsible to them.

ABR can be produced either by researcher(s), subject(s), or both together (Holm 2008). The work on fantasy experiences provides an example of researcher-created art. Nevertheless, informants were consulted through interviews and discussions, and were thus engaged in the process to an extent. Subject-created forms of ABR could include things like artistic workshops, performances, interactive theatre, or creation of artwork with informants.

The main outlets for ABR are *not* journal articles or books traditional to academia, but elements of the project may nevertheless be published in these media for documentation or as parallel research. However, these should not be providing explanations of the work. While

ABR usually produces some kind of material or expressive outcome, it is the process rather than the output that is the focus of the approach. It may also be possible for ABR to leave no physical or digital evidence whatsoever of its existence.

ABR can involve any medium, emerging, for instance, as collages (Vaughan 2005), art installations (Bröckerhoff and Seregina 2017), artistic workshops (Stoll, Sørmo, and Gårdvik 2018), or poems (Rhoades 2016), to name a few. ABR can also combine various media: Minge (2006) used painting, writing, and performance together. It is important to stress that ABR does not exclude spoken or written word. Linguistic media may be central to an ABR project, but these need to be approached as tools for artistic practice. The chosen medium and the quality of artistic skill have little relevance in themselves in ABR, as the aim is to engage in artistic processes in order to develop knowledge. Consequently, working only with pre-existing artwork (e.g., analysis of film or imagery) would not fall under ABR.

Use of theory and other methods in ABR

Artistic practice in ABR is heavily guided and informed by theory (Andersson 2009). Reflecting this, my project was based on various interdisciplinary literature. In creating art focusing more on theory, my aim was to gain clearer understanding of concepts, their structures and connections to each other through processing the knowledge via visual form. Below, I describe the art process of exploring literature on temporality (see Picture 3):

> *I was having a hard time processing all the literature I was reading on the concepts of time and temporality. I was reading work from a variety of fields, and I felt like it all fit together somehow, but there was no obvious logic to it yet, as different work used a variety of terminology and built on different traditions. But somehow, on a non-rational*

level that I could not verbalise I did feel that it all fits together somehow. Taking on artistic practice really helped me figure out how all that I had read creates a whole. It was like solving a puzzle, but the pieces were my own impressions of knowledge that I had gained, and I had to visualize those pieces before I could fit them together. It took some time to get the forms and colours right; to get them to the point that I was happy that they represent what I had learned about temporality. Once I was happy with the pieces, it was all about finding harmony among them. Through testing out how they could work together on canvas by painting over and over again, I finally reached a version that clicked. And then I was able to understand how it all works together.

<Insert picture 3 about here>

In the image above, I ended up creating a pattern for how implicit and explicit time is experienced and acknowledged by individuals, allowing me to better comprehend the way temporality was approached in the literature I was reading. The pattern emerged through expression of learned material and testing out how elements of it work together.

ABR can also involve the use of empirical methods (Andersson 2009). Interviews, discussion groups, and participant observation are often used with ABR. In my work, ethnography and in-depth interviews with LARPers became a central basis for artistic practice. Based in empirical work, the focus of art-making was to understand my engagement in the context and my interaction with individuals within that context (see Picture 4):

The interviews got really deep into the emotional and experiential aspects of informants' experiences with LARP. Yet really often the interviewees struggled to fully verbalise what they meant. And they said so themselves. They tried to express things in

more bodily manners, such as gesticulating or using different tones of voice. Sometimes, knowing I had a lot of experience in LARP, they would make claim to my experiences and say things like "well, you know how that feels." As the interviews were largely discursive, one central aim was to create a bond with the interviewee. I used the created relationship as part of the artistic process. I aimed to explore and understand what it was they expressed to me; what was left unsaid. And I expressed that through artistic means. By aiming to visualise those unsaid moments that nevertheless both myself and the interviewees had some sort of innate understanding of allowed me structure my thoughts and find the patterns I was looking for.

<Insert picture 4 about here>

Here, the artistic practice became an embodied way of processing my senses, emotions, and interactions as well as those of others by focusing on the connection between researcher and informant. I was able to map out how individuals perceive their self and a fantasy role, as well as what relationship the two have and how they interact with one another during the performance of fantasy. The art-making thus allowed for gaining knowledge that was initially pure feeling or experience, creating a deeper connection to the research phenomenon, informants, and context, and exploring how these work together within their cultural context.

Researcher reflexivity

Taking on ABR allowed me to structure and articulate knowledge in a different way by taking something un-understood, and pushing it into visual form via bodily art practice. This opened an avenue for understanding that connects to feelings, senses, materials, and

movements. Importantly, the approach was not pre-structured, requiring me to be continuously aware and reflexive, as well as oscillating between making, seeing, and understanding. Meaning was further developed by working in several iterations. The iterations allowed for trial-and-error in expressing and exploring meaning.

Leavy (2009, 2018b) stresses that heightened researcher reflexivity is a central aspect of ABR. Graham (2000) proposed three ways in which artistic practice supports understanding through its reflexive nature. Firstly, creating art pushes one to focus on the sensual and bodily experience of the particular medium (e.g. painting), making awareness of said experience more explicit. Secondly, in communicating via artistic practice, individuals become more aware of the expressed emotions and experiences as part of lived existence, as seen in my pattern-creation. Thirdly, artistic practice pushes the limits of understanding by suggesting previously unimaginable possibilities and questioning elements that seem unquestionable. For me, this emerged though gaining understanding of how concepts and experiences work within the research context, what their relationships are, how they are perceived by and are influencing individuals. Artistic practice thus pushes us to think and experience differently by continuously questioning our norms and practices.

Consumer researchers have similarly pointed out that using alternative methods incites introspection and reflexivity in the researcher, pushing for novel ways of expression, interaction, and interpretation (Canniford 2012; Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten 2014). In these goals, ABR is in line with previous methodological work in consumer culture research.

Artistic skill

A central issue that is often discussed in relation to ABR is the associated artistic skill. Does engaging in ABR require a certain level of artistry, thus excluding many potential users?

Artistic skill is highly problematic as a criterion for evaluation: it is increasingly difficult to define, let alone assess, in the contemporary cultural context (Barone and Eisner 2012). It can further deter researchers and informants from engaging in ABR through a pressure to be classically 'good' at art. Following these ideas, Finley (2003) and Barone and Eisner (2012) argue that traditional evaluation of artistic skill is irrelevant to ABR, as the focus is on the doing and not the product. Jones (2006) also suggests that researchers may solve the concern with lack of skill via collaboration. ABR does not need to be used in isolation, but can rather be done as part of cross-disciplinary cooperation (see also Andersson 2011; Busch 2009).

While artistic skill is irrelevant to ABR, researchers using ABR need to understand the intricacies of the media they intend to use. In other words, researchers should learn about the senses and knowledge that the medium taps into, the practice that it involves, and the background that it has. Some media may require a lot of practical training, such as using etching tools, editing video, operating glass-blowing machinery, or planning complex choreography. Hence, skill can and does come into play in ABR, with researchers most likely developing skills as they work. However, what is important to stress that it is the engagement in artistic process that is central to the approach, not the quality of its outcome, making a traditional idea of *artistic* skill irrelevant, even as *practical* skill is still necessary.

Different media allow researchers to tap into different aspects of experience, requiring different skills, approaches, tools, and venues. Furthermore, each mode of expression has its own historical and cultural background, which will influence its use and reception. For example, most Western audiences will approach paintings in an analytical, distanced manner, as they will have learnt this via their socialisation. An installation, on the other hand, may automatically invite more physical interaction. For instance, Bröckerhoff and Seregina's (2016; see also Seregina and Christensson 2017) "Shopping at 'Capitalist Peace'" included a scene from a grocery store, with audience members being invited to interact with the artwork

as they would with a store. In awareness of characteristics of their medium, researchers can connect better to their context, allowing culturally embedded, interactive meaning to emerge.

To reflect on traditional academic work, while writing skill is something that is definitely required, it is not a skill that researchers are questioned in being able to master. Moreover, language barriers and preference for certain cultural contexts are issues that remain largely unaddressed in publishing practice. Meriläinen et al. (2008) argue that academic publishing continuously reinforces the hegemony of an Anglophone core. They stress that English is the standard language used for academic publications, and its comprehension is expected, even as many researchers do not speak English natively. Similarly, Anglo-Saxon cultural contexts retain a privileged and prioritised place in academic work. While recent publications (e.g., Askegaard and Linnet 2011) have ignited discussions on thorough contextualisation of research, in practice, it is still often just the research conducted in 'peripheral' countries that needs to validate the relevance of its cultural context. Using ABR could thus actually *increase* access to both doing and communicating research by breaking down linguistic and cultural barriers. Of course, any knowledge is contextually embedded, but artistic processes allow for more accessible understanding in bodily form, with meaning becoming more relatable across languages and cultural contexts.

Audience of ABR: What is the role of informants and audience in ABR?

A central aspect of ABR is the co-creation of knowledge through engagement among researcher(s), research context, and audience (Pigrum and Stables 2005). As a result, audience members take on an important, active role in ABR. Audience, in this context, refers to quite a wide and fluid group of individuals that interacts with the research in some way. In this sense, the audience can include one's research context or academic peers, but is not

limited to empirical contexts or research fields. In fact, ABR actively promotes making research more accessible to audiences outside of academia (Leavy 2018b). The audience is also not limited to individuals interacting with the 'ready' work (if relevant to the medium), but can involve interaction on any level of progress. As I discuss next, the audience is present in all phases of ABR, thus influencing and co-creating knowledge at all stages of the process.

Audience and artistic (process)

As noted earlier, ABR can involve either researcher- or participant-created art (Holm 2008). In my work on fantasy experiences, participant involvement during the creation of artwork was quite limited, as the artwork was researcher-created. Participation of the audience in creation of ABR can, however, be much more active, emerging in different forms and on different scales. Audiences may be involved in workshops or interactive performances; they may be involved in creating artwork (alone or in groups) or adding to it in some ways by painting, collaging, sculpting, dancing, reciting poetry, photographing, etc.; and they may be asked to respond to artwork somehow. For instance, Stoll, Sørmo, and Gårdvik (2018) used communal art to explore perceptions of marine debris using a variety of workshops that incorporated creation of artwork together. In my more recent ABR work, I have similarly shifted toward involving audiences in art-making. In the project "Consumption Portraits," I co-created and filmed a performance with participants that explored their bodily expressions of consumption patterns (Seregina 2019b).

When taking on audience members as active co-creators, ABR is usually non-directive, that is, it stresses minimal guidance and intervention, with art practice rather being a process of doing, making, and experiencing together. Themes and aims may, nevertheless, be presented for guidance of artistic processes if necessary for the aims of the particular

project. When engaging in ABR, and especially when working with subjects, the containment and safety of the work space as well as the artistic process taking place in it are central. This refers to physical, but also emotional and conceptual elements (Malchiodi 2007).

Active interaction with research participants is in no way a novel approach. Consumer researchers using alternative methods have advocated interacting with research participants and allowing them to voice their experiences. For instance, Canniford (2012) and Sherry and Schouten (2002) discuss how poetry allows communication of cultural and emotional meaning between researcher and researched more directly. Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel (2013) created photography together with research participants, showing that the activity can have transformative social and political influence on the individuals engaged in it. Reflecting Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto's (2009) and Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for research that is discursive and contextualised, alternative research methods allow researchers and informants to become reflexive about the social and cultural structures they are interacting in, thus providing possibilities for new types of knowledge and "making beneficial differences on the lives of consumers" (Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto, 2009, 343). Yet, such approaches seem to only consider the co-creation of meaning between researcher and informants, with knowledge mainly emerging as data to be analysed. I suggest that the consumers whose lives researchers could be impacting are not just the informants, but also a wider research audience. Moreover, the interaction in itself can become an important form of knowledge, without the added need of translation of it into academic text.

Audience and artistic (product)

ABR approaches knowledge as emerging interactively among individuals, yet this interaction need not take place during the creation of art. Hence, the amount of audience participation

during art-making does not point to the success or failure of an ABR project, as interaction can also take place with and around the created art. In reverse, interaction can also take place only during art-creation. Consequently, ABR needs to involve interactive knowledge-creation at some (or all) of its stages, but the levels of interaction in each stage are guided by aims and needs of the project at hand. Collingwood (1938) argued that art does not exist in its physical manifestation, but it is rather continuous action, emerging as apprehension of it by and between artist and audience. Similarly, Hatcher (1999) stresses that art is at its core a form of communication, existing only in the interaction that it creates among individuals and the art. Reflecting this, knowledge emerges as interactive processes within ABR.

The line between the process and product of ABR is extremely blurry. This is especially true for projects engaging more ephemeral or interactive media, such as performances or interventions, as these may not leave behind any traces of their existence. In some cases, artistic process and product may be completely indistinguishable, existing only as connections, movements, or interactions. Moreover, in many instances, ABR can take on 'a life of its own' through individuals' interaction with it, and may live on without researcher participation, with meaning being continuously created and recreated (Andersson 2011).

Reflecting these notions, the audience did also play a part in my work on fantasy experiences. The artwork has been presented at a variety of venues, both academic, such as conferences and seminars, and not academic, such as galleries (see Picture 5). At these events, the art became a way of communicating the work that had already been done, but, more importantly, it became a point of departure for discussions, revelations, and experiences, thus further developing and co-creating knowledge. Following such events, I continued artistic practice, developing existing pieces and creating new ones.

<Insert picture 5 about here>

Instances of audience interaction were not merely contexts for getting feedback and comments on the research, but rather emerged as central aspects of the research process. The art pieces opened up the topic of fantasy experiences for exploration among the audience, providing the basis for lively interaction and multisided understanding. The interaction was not only verbal, but emerged through the bodily connection with the art and the ensuing affective expression that took place. Audience members note having sensory and emotional experiences through the art, connecting these to their own past and knowledge, as well as gaining an avenue for novel understanding of both abstract concepts and tactile experiences. Audience members would also engage one another in discussions about the artwork, building on each other's experiences and interpretations. Understanding and meaning thus emerged in the interactions between researcher, audience, and art pieces.

In presentation of my work, audiences had access to the titles of the pieces, but not to any written materials pertinent to the research. Audience members were therefore coming in 'fresh' to the experience of interaction with ABR. This was intentional, as I wanted to see how individuals would connect the interaction with the art to their own experiences of fantasy and imagination. Other ABR researchers may opt to do otherwise, depending on what they want to accomplish with the audience interaction and what their chosen media allow. If a more detailed discussion or a deeply grounded interaction is required, researchers may provide more information on the project via written materials, presentations, tutorials, or performances. This can be done before, during or after interaction with the artwork.

The venues used for ABR vary a lot from project to project, depending on the desired modes of interaction, intended audience, as well as the requirements and limitations of the used media. Venues may include galleries or conferences, but also classrooms, community centres, public spaces, theatres, etc. The choice of venue should depend on the aims and needs of the specific form that the ABR project is taking.

Lastly, ABR does welcome parallel expression via traditional textual means. Andersson (2009) explains that traditional expressions of a project using ABR do not need to be excluded because of artistic output, as long as the two do not restrict one another. In other words, the output of ABR should not be treated as data for or 'furnishing' of research, but rather as a process in its own right. Similarly, text should not emerge as explanation of ABR, but rather as a different version of the project. Reflecting this, my work has found outputs both in more a traditional form of books and journal articles (e.g., Seregina 2019a), yet also in the form of artwork that has been presented at workshops, lectures, and art galleries. The two cast light on one another and share a basis, but are separate and parallel.

"Reading" ABR

ABR allows for interactive, bodily, sensory knowledge-creation. The essence of this approach lies in that it has no preconceived structure, with knowledge developing freely. Yet, having no scripted way of meaning-making can also be a challenge. How can we be sure that the audience will know how to engage 'correctly'? Text has a seemingly straightforward way its audience can understand it, but we have no 'right' way of approaching knowledge provided by ABR, as it is intersubjective and open to multiple interpretations.

ABR is demanding of and thus has an inherently different relationship to its audience in comparison to traditional methods. ABR pushes its audience to form their own meaning and interpretation, not just readily consume one, by opening up questions for discussion and inquiry (Walton 1990; Hatcher 1999). The underlying idea is that by presenting the audience with something they do not fully understand, individuals become engaged.

The approach requires a lot of input, effort, and contemplation both from the researcher and the audience, and may thus become uncomfortable or intimidating. In fact, the

arduousness of the approach is an important reason for why researchers are deterred from using ABR, Becker (2007) suggests. However, by raising questions and pushing individuals to reflect, ABR allows for new viewpoints, deeper analysis, and increased understanding of phenomena to emerge. The approach creates a context for development of ideas interactionally, leading to endless possibilities for interpretation, analysis, and embodied co-creation of knowledge (Hatcher 1999). To connect this back to alternative methods used in consumer culture research, ABR allows researchers to overcome the approach to audiences as passive entities and take them on as active and interactive participants of knowledge-creation.

Using a form of communication that does not require a background in a limited context (such as academic jargon) also opens up the possibility for ABR to gain access to wider audiences both within and outside of academia. ABR provides avenues for working cross-disciplinarily and influencing consumers' everyday lives through inciting criticism and conversation. This does not mean that research lacks a theoretical basis or a basis in a research field; it is still the researcher's job to do thorough background work. However, ABR allows for research to become more accessible among and beyond research fields.

Reflecting on the above through the lens of traditional academic work, we are once again faced with double standards. While there are conventions to writing and reading academic work, no one is expected to be guided through how to read each specific journal article. We follow academic structures to obtain meaning of what we read, yet readers of academic books and papers are definitely not interpreting the words they read in the same way. For instance, concepts such as identity are experienced and understood differently in various cultures, with a reader's cultural, linguistic, historical, and societal background constructing an individual point of view to approaching such a concept in reading a text. Therefore, text is also subjectively perceived and open to interpretation, with text-based forms of knowledge providing only an illusion of rigid, objective, neutral meaning.

Epistemology of ABR: How does ABR approach knowledge?

In taking on ABR, my exploration of fantasy experiences was not only restructured in terms of research practice, but it also required a different take on epistemology, that is, what is considered to be knowledge, what makes it valid, and how it can be attained (following Scotti and Aicher 2016).

> *Engaging in an artistic process is about letting go of preconceived forms, frameworks, structures … the ways in which you are 'supposed' to do, write, present, communicate research … and diving into the problem at hand. It's about tapping into things that you know are there, your gut feelings if you will; the emotions, experiences, as well as connections between ideas and concepts and meanings … it's about tapping into those implicit, not fully conscious things that you cannot formulate or describe yet, and bringing them out into the open through art. ABR requires trust in the process; trust in that the art will allow you to lead yourself to what you are looking for. Because there is no one way of doing things, no step-by-step rulebook, no blueprints. You need to create the structure of what you are doing through experimenting. It's scary and uncomfortable, but it pushes you to the limits of your capabilities and to the limits of your knowledge, allowing you to find new possibilities for understanding what you are exploring. It's about finding how things fall together, how the puzzle works and what are its pieces. This involves a lot of trial and error, doing and redoing. Taking on inconsistencies, paradoxes, issues, and exploring why they exist as they do, how they work within the context. You find patterns and you begin testing them. And when they click, you know it works. ABR allows you to grasp at the threads of what you cannot yet weave and try out how the threads could be interlaced in order to create the patterns that you are exploring.*

ABR can be said to approach knowledge as sensory and bodily, as relational and interactive, and as continuously developing and changing. Firstly, ABR approaches knowledge as it is felt and lived by and among individuals. Here, knowledge is not an object or a recording to be passively transferred from one person to the next, but it rather emerges as sensory, bodily experience (Douglas and Gulari 2015). ABR engages experiential knowledge, connecting to patterns of knowing and doing that are tacit in their essence (Scotti and Aicher 2016). As I describe above, ABR processes allow for researchers to engage meaning that they cannot (yet) consciously grasp or fully describe, and meaning that does not fit existing structures of meaning. In practice, such knowledge emerges through artistic processes, which create a context that promotes bodily response, exploration, discovery, and dialogue (Springgay 2003). Malchiodi (2007, 2018) explains that such multisensory knowing is achieved through tapping into different levels of experience: kinaesthetic/sensory (action and exploration without direct goal), perceptual/affective (expression of self, creation of form and patterns), cognitive/symbolic (intentional and schematic problem-solving), and creative (personal expression through use/combination of the previous forms).

Secondly, knowledge within ABR emerges through active and interactive meaning-making among researcher, the context, and audiences. In practice, this takes place through doing and/or interacting with ABR within the specific time and space of the work (Blumenfeld-Jones 2016; Leavy 2018b). In my work, art was created via interaction of the researcher with the context, engaging personal experiences and the experiences of informants. Audiences interacted with the art in a communal setting, feeding off the atmosphere and others' engagements, as well as discussing and exploring their own perspectives. Individuals would provide various interpretations based on their experiences and associations, building on each other and creating greater understanding through an interactive combination of viewpoints. Knowledge within ABR thus emerges as participative

meaning-making, which can be verbal and rational, but is also bodily, sensory, and spatial. In inciting dialogue and expression, ABR allows approaching critical and emotional topics, which may be otherwise difficult to explore (Pigrum and Stables 2005).

Thirdly, ABR provokes individuals to active knowledge-creation through a process that is continuously reflexive (Finley 2003). ABR requires constant questioning of all processes, including the medium, skill, evaluation, and 'reading' of the research, as it involves the creation of knowledge with no set framework or mode of expression. Having to build the whole process from scratch each time pushes the researcher to be continuously aware of the whole process, keeping them from falling into old patterns. As a result, the researcher needs to deeply understand and to be continuously reflexive of the research context, research phenomenon, and research audiences. At the same time, the audience is also required to be continuously reflexive in order to be able to engage with the work. Barone and Eisner (2012) write that ABR 'disrupts' the research process both for the researchers and the audience through breaking "our comfortable assumptions" (19). In requiring reflexivity, ABR opens up the potential for deeper understanding of phenomena from a variety of perspectives.

Evaluation of ABR: How can we assess ABR?

As ABR is a research method, it becomes placed under the scrutiny of academic evaluation, with credibility, evaluation, and validity becoming central, yet problematic questions that ABR faces (Leavy 2009). Consumer research using alternative methods as well as interpretive consumer research overall have a long history of similarly having to defend their validity within academia (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). This is unsurprising, as, just like ABR, interpretive consumer research questions the nature of positivist knowledge that is tied into verification and finding 'truth' (Eisner 1997; Jones 2006; Leavy 2009).

Researchers have suggested that ABR is not taken seriously as a research method because its outcomes are not concrete (Pigrum and Stables 2005) and because academia is biased against the intellectual capability of art (Finley 2003). As a reaction to this, Simons and McCormack (2007) argue that ABR provides a different *type* of approach to knowledge, which frees it from the reductionist categories of traditional research. Traditional forms of evaluation thus become insufficient and inapplicable for ABR, says Eisner (1997).

Barone and Eisner (2012) agree that researchers should avoid static criteria for evaluating ABR. They believe that it may be more useful to look at whether the work is coherent, generates new ideas, invokes feelings and thoughts, deepens conversations and discourses, and has social significance. Similarly suggesting non-static criteria for evaluation, Finley (2003) adds that we should observe whether ABR is useful or harmful, gives voice to subjects, is reflexive or visceral, and provides opportunities for communion. Leavy (2018b) presents a very similar set of evaluation criteria, stressing that evaluators should look at whether the research was carried out well and ethically, whether it provides substantial contribution to the research field, and whether it is accessible to a wider audience in an interactive manner. It is important to note that the evaluation of ABR does not focus on judgment of artistic merit, as noted earlier (Canniford 2012 has discussed similar notions).

Williams-Burnett and Skinner (2017) suggest that the assessment of research using creative means should be done via selecting evaluators knowledgeable of the particular field and practice. These could be artists, teachers, and other professionals with a background in the particular media and methods. A similar approach can be seen in use in the Consumer Culture Theory Conference's Art Gallery track. While not all of the work presented in it could be called ABR, all of the submissions do take the form of artistic work. The way the submissions are evaluated is not that different from other conference tracks: appropriate reviewers with relevant experience and backgrounds are found by the track chairs, with

reviewers evaluating a submission for its relevance, rigour, and insightfulness. In fact, traditional academia does not function very differently from Williams-Burnett and Skinner's (2017) suggestion: journal articles are accepted through a set of carefully selected reviewers, and PhDs pass via the evaluation of a set of experts.

I suggest that it is further important to evaluate ABR with the particular characteristics and aims of a specific project in mind. This means contextualising the evaluation to the medium and form of the work, its goals, and context of presentation. For example, if the aim is to create hyperrealistic depictions of informants through drawings, we should evaluate for perceived realism, but if the aim is to create emotional connection to a marginalised group via an interactive performance, we should evaluate for verbal and non-verbal audience response and consequent new relationships to said group. As the ABR method is inherently contextualised, so should its evaluation be.

Many of the above suggested criteria are already present in traditional academic evaluation of research, and, as discussed above, can be easily assessed by experienced professionals. Audience participation and interaction emerge as perhaps the trickiest to evaluate. Leavy (2018b) agrees and suggests the following ways to tackle the assessment. Firstly, evaluators need to consider whether the work is sufficiently accessible to audiences both within and outside academia, as well as whether the work is engaging or participative. This refers to both practical (and possibly physical) accessibility as well as conceptual accessibility. Secondly, evaluation can be done via soliciting audience feedback. This can take on a variety of forms depending on the specific media and space employed in the project, and can include things like using response cards, holding feedback sessions, providing online feedback forms, and having group discussions or debriefings. For example, in my work, audiences were engaged for feedback in one-on-one and small group discussions. Accessibility was further ensured through choice of venues as well as the choice

of language in both presenting the artwork and advertising the events. While Leavy mainly discusses textual and verbal forms of feedback, I would suggest feedback could also take other forms, such as creating visuals, doing group exercises, or engaging in performances.

Value and legitimacy of ABR: What is ABR's relationship to and impact on traditions?

Taking on ABR is valuable to academic work for a number of reasons that are pertinent to existing research traditions. To begin with, ABR can help solve the issues raised at the start of this paper in the context of alternative methods. The approach allows for conducting research that is inclusive of and co-creative with a variety of audiences, giving them voice and power. Moreover, ABR does not emerge as an aid to research, but is rather an overall approach that pushes research to take novel forms by questioning each element of its process as well as expanding beyond traditional, academic forms of writing into a variety of media.

ABR also addresses issues raised by consumer culture research using traditional methods. The methodology allows for multisensory understanding of experiences and the co-creation of knowledge, becoming an important tool for researchers striving to conduct discursive, nonrepresentational, or performance-based research. ABR provides the means for conducting research that is contextualised and interpersonal, thus overcoming issues of lack of sensitivity and contextualisation, as well as the overwhelming focus on individualism (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Moisander, Valtonen and Hirsto 2009). Researchers can tap into lived experience and engage in multisensory discourse, tying their work more deeply into cultural and societal issues.

ABR further becomes an important political tool for critiquing structures and accreditation systems of traditional written work by pointing to the subjectivity and constructed nature of academic text, its form, and epistemological characteristics. Moreover,

by taking on a means of communication that does not require jargon, ABR can help overcome issues of preference for Anglophonic language and cultural contexts. This would allow engaging contexts and impacting consumers' lives more directly, as well as reaching wider audiences, both within and outside academia.

A lack of jargon can also create a strong platform for interdisciplinary collaborations, somethings that many academic institutions strive for, but are still largely lacking. For instance, ABR can become an important approach for furthering feminist, postcolonial, transformative, and action research. These share aims amongst themselves and with ABR (Leavy 2009), – such as questioning traditions of research and re-orienting the relationship between researcher and informant, – but may not yet have the means to work together.

Reciprocally, ABR stands to gain from consumer culture research. As Seregina and Christensson (2017) write, consumer culture research coming together with ABR would allow the latter to become better informed about topics of consumption and production as part of contemporary culture, topics that are still commonly stigmatised and thus left unaddressed outside of business school settings. Moreover, such collaborative work would allow ABR to reach new audiences in academic institutions, organisations, businesses, and research contexts that have been readily available only to consumer researchers.

Sadly, the legitimisation of ABR in practice can become extremely problematic, as the academic publication system as well as the economic and social capital of academia that are directly tied into it are almost exclusively geared toward text-based knowledge. ABR does not fit into nor does it aim to fit into these frameworks, making career development difficult for researchers using ABR. The issue of legitimisation is even more pertinent for ABR that results in no tangible evidence, such as a performance or a workshop, as existing frameworks of accreditation are built on the assumption of research always providing proof of its existence. In many artistic fields, such instances of ABR may be documented via video,

ethnographic notes, or photographs. Many proponents of ABR feel pressured to provide documentation in publication outlets and are thus forced to fit their work into the form of explanations or extended abstracts in order to gain recognition for their work. Yet this pushes ABR into the traditional forms of communicating research that it aims to overcome.

Because ABR takes on a different approach to the entire research process, consumer culture researchers taking on ABR would need to rethink the way their work is presented and 'published.' Consumer researchers using alternative methods still often aim to publish their work in traditional outlets, with many complaining about not getting such research published without the accompaniment of written work. Yet, journals and books have a strong history as textual media, and are inherently in their form language-based, a characteristic that needs to be honoured. We would thus need to take a different route in presenting of ABR work. Wood (2015) advocates that academics need to let go of their fear of 'breaking linguistic tradition' and take more risks by stepping beyond academically approved modes of work. It may thus be time for researchers to 'publish' alternative media beyond text-based outlets, as the latter will always bring us back to the dominance of language-centred knowledge and thus place research in traditional forms (ironically, that includes this paper). In practice, this means that researchers need to start 'publishing' their research beyond pre-approved, text-based outlets in settings that are appropriate for the research media and themes. Just like with the entire ABR process, there is no pre-existing blueprint for this, with the right outlet reflecting the aims and needs of the particular project. ABR can take place in public spaces, organisational venues, artistic spaces and theatres; as part of seminars and lectures; in digital spaces or as zines or even as traditional published forms such as books.

Circumventing traditional and accredited forms of publishing is not easy, and, in my opinion, it involves entering a political discussion. More specifically, it becomes a matter of changing the culture of how we view research and knowledge. It becomes about how we

approach ABR, how we talk about ABR, and how we defend ABR. In addition to conducting, presenting, and actively purporting ABR, there is a multitude of small ways researchers can make a difference in the culture of accepting ABR as legitimate research: explaining the importance of ABR work to those in power at your institution, applying for and gaining funding for ABR, including ABR into teaching at all levels and thus introducing it to future generations of researchers, standing your ground in including ABR work and references to it in publishing as well as personal and department-level assessment (such as the tenure track in the US or the REF in the UK). Becoming a spokesperson for ABR can be as little as getting recognition from your peers and colleagues through discussions in meetings or conferences, referencing ABR work in more traditional work, and presenting ABR projects not just as 'side projects,' but as real research. Slowly, these instances build up to stronger institutional recognition, such as attaining art tracks in conferences, having ABR recognised in assessment, or gaining institutional support for ABR that is 'published' outside the journal system. The slow process is frustrating, but necessary for gaining recognition and legitimacy.

Lastly, ABR reinvigorates the discussion on the topic of power in academia by highlighting the issues in traditional approaches and the overall structure of academia. ABR allows for questioning existing frames of conducting, communicating, and publishing research by working in a non-formulaic manner outside the pre-set system. This points to the rigidity and production-oriented nature of the system's structures, as well as the subsequent lack of room in them for creativity. Moreover, ABR points to the biases of traditional work via making visible the double standards placed on research in terms of skill, language, and context. ABR thus enters the debate of what counts as knowledge, how should research be evaluated and credited, who can/should act as a gatekeeper to research and on what terms.

Conclusions

ABR emerges as a methodology, through which consumer culture research can approach the exploration of contextualised, discursive, and co-created knowledge. In a setting privileging linguistic knowledge, ABR provides an avenue for understanding from novel points of view that tap into bodily, interactive, and continuously reflexive understanding via a processual and relational epistemology.

ABR is a useful way of approaching consumer culture topics, as it allows for critical, contextualised, and interpersonal exploration of experiential phenomena. Moreover, ABR can help solve issues raised by researchers using both traditional and alternative methods, as well as become an important addition to the political discussion on what is knowledge and what is research, what makes these legitimate and valuable, and who can/should decide these issues.

Of course, no ABR project is perfect. Each ABR project has its own setbacks and does not necessary thrive in each of its aspects. For instance, my work clearly lacked audience participation in the process of creation of the artwork. However, such drawbacks are educational to all participants; something to develop in future work, as I have already endeavoured. ABR focuses on the process of research and thus needs to be approached *as a process*, with its aim toward an ideal being a direction, but never a constraint or a target.

This introduction to ABR has provided one perspective on how research could co-create bodily, interactive, reflexive knowledge. I hope this helps researchers explore their practice and encourages them to engage in new approaches. Taking on new perspectives to research practice will allow academia to explore our world from new points of view as well as help us question and better our traditional structures of knowledge.

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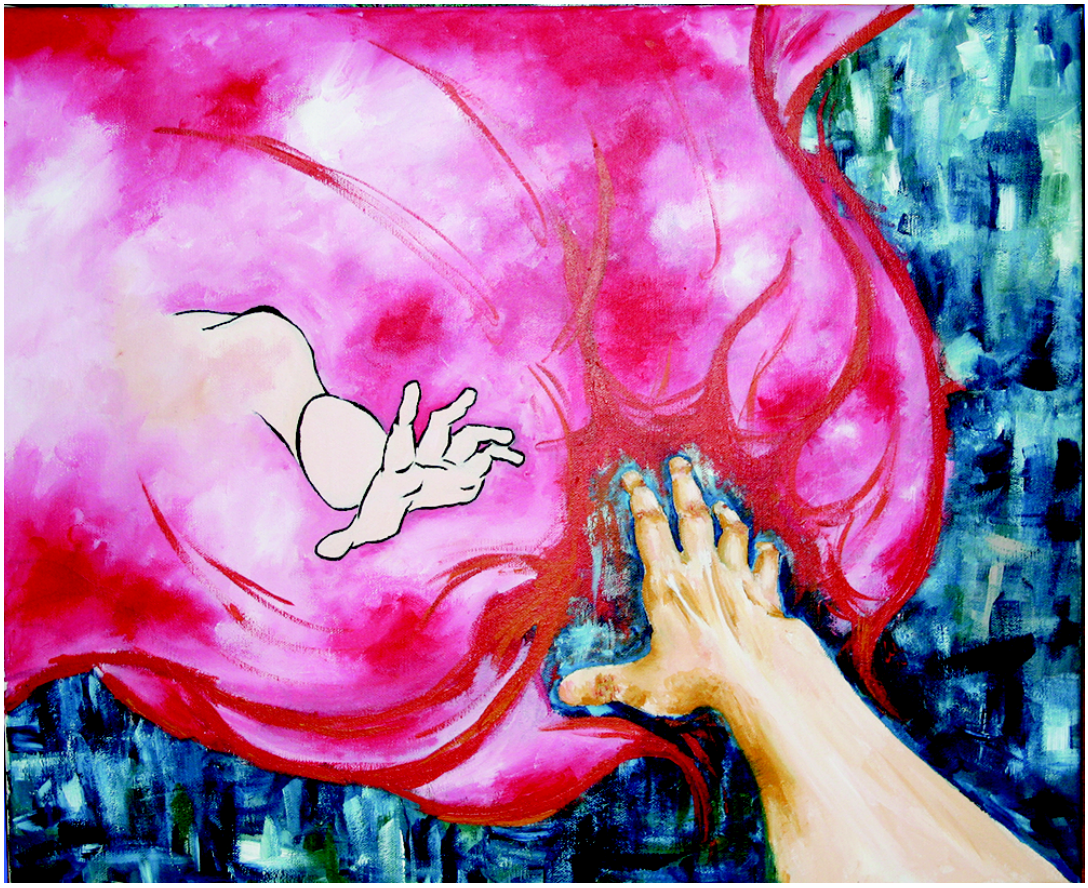
Appendices

Picture 1 ABR in practice.

Picture 2 Two iterations of artwork created through ABR. Both sets involved the exploration of a typology of fantasy experiences. On top, the earlier versions: "*Illusion of Escape*" and "*Activist Disillusion*;" acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm each, 2014. On bottom, the latter versions: "*Escapist Extension into Context*" and "*Activist Self Investment*;" acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm each, 2014-2015.

Picture 3 "*Desynchronised*," acrylics on canvas, 40x40cm, 2016. An acrylic painting created through ABR in order to investigate concepts surrounding the topic of temporality and, more specifically, the desynchronisation of time.

Picture 4 "*Reality Investments*," mixed media on canvas, 46x55cm, 2014. A mixed media painting on the subjective experiencing of fantasy created through ABR.



Picture 5 ABR being presented at different venues. On top: artwork being discussed by audience members at the Art Gallery track of the 10th Consumer Culture Theory conference held in the Fayetteville Underground, Fayetteville, AR, USA (photograph taken by Ekant Veer). On bottom: ABR artwork being presented at the art gallery Galleria 4-Kuus in Helsinki, Finland.