JOANNA NEIL
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW & UNIVERSITY CENTRE, BLACKBURN COLLEGE

DRAWN TOGETHER: A CONVERSATION WITH THE COLLECTION. A DIGITAL AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY INTO THE CREATIVE MAKING PROCESS

IDENTITIES | REFLEXIVITY | CREATIVE PROCESS | AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY | NARRATIVES

ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER PRESENTS THE FINDINGS FROM A DIGITAL AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PROJECT THAT FORMS PART OF A PHD BEING COMPLETED WITHIN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

This context has enabled the author to examine the convergence of her roles and identity as a creative practitioner and education professional in the creative arts sector, with the research intersecting arts practice, pedagogy and digital technologies. Digital auto-ethnography was used during a weeklong residency at the *Hunterian Museum* (University of Glasgow), to turn a lens onto the self for insight into a personal creative practice. Using a digital voice recorder, *Go-Pro* headcam and private and public digital platforms, the research examined how digital technologies can be used to facilitate reflection in the creative making process and make this reflective activity more visible to the self and others. The author's own identity was scrutinised throughout the research process as this shifted between educator, researcher and practitioner, as well as transitioning into resident artist/researcher. Through this self-reflexive methodology the author considers how digital technologies could encourage students to also approach their own practice with more self-awareness and reflexivity.

RECORDING THE MAKING OF THE WORK BECAME PART OF THE MAKING PROCESS, ENABLING THE INTERSECTING IDENTITIES OR ROLES OF ARTIST AND RESEARCHER TO FREQUENTLY MERGE.

CONTEXT FOR PROJECT

As part of *The Hunterian Associates Programme* I spent five days as an artist in residence for the project: 'Drawn Together: A conversation with the collection'. It explored the creative making process from my point of view as artist (inside observee) and researcher (outside observer). Using a digital voice recorder, *Go-Pro* headcam and private and public digital platforms, the research examined how digital technologies can be used to facilitate reflection in the creative making process and make this reflective activity more visible to the self and others. My creative process was documented from beginning to end on a project blog (drawnconversation.wordpress. com) with the completion of sculptural textile artefacts. These outcomes refer to and were inspired by an existing fine art textiles practice, the research methodology, conversations with visitors and the scientific laboratory equipment found in *The Hunterian* museum collections. The project captured the decisions taken within an emergent creative process that responded to the museum space, its artefacts and visitors. It was observed how both examining practice and using technology could inform, form and change this practice.

Throughout the residency, roles and identities shifted. The visitors to the museum were both an audience to and participants in the research; they observed and contributed to the creative process with their own drawings and played a part in conversations with the author about the creative work as it was evolving.

The public blog space was used to construct a narrative of the emerging work and provided the author with a virtual audience to reflect with in addition to the real audience. My identity was scrutinised throughout the research process as this shifted between educator, researcher and practitioner as well as transitioning into resident artist/researcher. Moving through the liminality of observer and the observed created interesting tensions and opportunities for reflexivity. The technology allowed the revisiting of captured data and re-listening to conversations and thoughts. Recording the making of the work became part of the making process, enabling the intersecting identities or roles of artist and researcher to frequently merge. This was often where the most significant insights into practice took place.

The documented process attempted to make a hidden world more visible by capturing what was being thought about and experienced emotionally to reveal the anxiety, confusion and fear behind what at first glance, looks like a seamless and easy process. My post-residency reflective account records my initial aims of the project: 'to observe my own creative making process to give me insight into what is felt and experienced emotionally, as well as what and how something is made' (Neil 2015: 1). I wondered if observing my own practice would significantly change my practice or my understanding of it and in turn affect how I worked with students.

The PhD has been an opportunity for me as a researcher to examine

the intersections of my roles and identities as a creative practitioner and education professional in the creative arts sector. My practice has shifted from being a painter to fine art textiles. Also. I am interested in the creative process itself, having taught in the secondary, further education (FE) and higher education (HE) sectors across a range of disciplines. With an additional interest in digital technologies as supportive tools for teaching and learning, a central question to my research is: How can technology best support a more analytical, critically reflective and visible process for creative practices?

The residency was designed as an auto-ethnographic project to form one of two strands for the PhD to investigate my own practice with digital technologies to capture, recall and re-see the creative process. I hoped to gain insights into the experiences of making creative work and become a more empathetic educator. The purpose of the research was two-fold: as a resource to make an experienced and emerging practice both visible and accessible to a wider audience, and to make my experience more visible to me for the development of my practice as a creative practitioner and educator. My findings are being used to design a second strand, a student centred research project where students will embark on their own digital auto-ethnographic research. This part of the project hopes to make an impact on how digital technologies can be used to encourage a more self-aware and reflexive approach to a practice, for those transitioning between student and practitioner.

DIGITAL AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY AS METHODOLOGY

A literal definition of ethnography 'ethnos' and 'graphy' is 'people writing' or 'writing the people'. It is a methodology where researchers immerse themselves into a culture or subculture often, but not always, differing from their own, to conduct fieldwork. The writing takes the form of constructed narratives about the culture being lived with and observed and is often from the viewpoint of those being observed. The role, identity and presence of the researcher changes over the course of the study and the researcher does not always write themselves out of the research for example, in reflexive ethnographies, ethnographic memoirs and confessional tales (Ellis & Bochner 2000). For Ellis and Bochner (2000) this blurs the boundaries between ethnography and auto-ethnography. They state that how the methodology is defined might depend on the claims being made by those who write (Ellis & Bochner 2000). Their definition of auto-ethnography is an '…autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural…' (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 739). The 'auto' therefore directly and consciously includes the 'self' in the research and the culture being studied, although according to Ellis and Bochner (2000: 740): 'Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos) and on self (auto)'.

Although my immersion into the experience of a creative making

process could be framed within an educational ethnography perspective, which Preissle (1999: 650) describes as '…a study of the culture of human teaching and learning as they occur in peoples ordinary daily activities.' This would be more directly applicable to how the research could be applied in a teaching context after the residency (strand two of the project). My view at the time of doing the residency was that I was observing myself in the culture of the creative making process as situated in a museum context. From my post-residency reflective account I describe this context in more depth:

(The museum) represented a repository of source material as an established and well-understood convention – artists look at artefacts, the work of others, objects of interest for inspiration and subject matter for their own work. The visitors were invited to take part in this culture: making their own creative responses to the artefacts or to take part with me observing myself in this culture. The visitors were part of an established system: visitors to a museum that I interacted with while being in my own system: artist/researcher making an artwork'. (Neil 2015: 1)

Because I include digital tools and environments in the study I refer to this methodology as digital auto-ethnography. I used the digital to capture and to observe how I behaved in these virtual worlds. Mills and Morton (2013: 105) consider this as an opportunity to explore '…rich and complex connections between cyberspace and face-to-face contexts and situations…[to]…understand

the juxtaposition and simultaneity of different modes of sociality enabled by the internet'. I was interested in how the digital voice recorder, film and *Go-Pro* headcam would enable accurate visual and emotional documentation of my actions, feelings and interactions with others. I also wondered how taking aspects of my private reflective process into a public domain would affect my reflexivity. Digital auto-ethnography was used to try and give visibility to actions, behaviours and feelings usually hidden or not scrutinised and looking back at these to see patterns or behaviours I was not previously aware of. Alexander (2011: 101) describes this as '… illumination and transformation of the hidden or privatized meanings of culture and cultural experience'. The examination of my own reflexivity through the creative making process explored where reflection occurs and how it was experienced, documented and responded to:

An interesting dynamic of an auto-ethnographic approach is being both inside and outside of the research, sometimes each role is identifiable and distinguished by the activities engaged with. For example when physically making and thinking about making work I am the artist, when observing and writing about this experience I am the researcher. The thinking that is occurring is often a combination of the two; reflective writing/audio recordings that start off being about making or the practice become about the experience of looking at that practice.

(Neil 2015:1)

Examining the self as a creative practitioner enabled me to work with the complexity of being researcher and the researched, observer and observed in addition to considering

what impact these findings may have as a teaching practitioner. As well as being located in the field of auto-ethnography, a/r/tography – presented by Springgay et al. (2005: 902) as a methodology which is '… an inquiring process that lingers in the liminal spaces between a(artist) and r(researcher) and t(teacher)…', also frames this research well. They define a/r/tography as a lived inquiry process through '…art forms, writing practices, and roles as artist, researcher, and teacher' (Springgay et al. 2005: 904). Both as a digital auto-ethnographer and a/r/tographer I was able to conduct the project as an experienced creative practitioner and as a research practitioner. I was seeking to analyse the experience in order to change that creative practice and also my teaching practice. My embodied experience of observing and documenting the creative process as an artist and researcher not only informed my creative practice but also how I might go on to teach. My digital auto-ethnography could be shared and potentially become exemplar material for others wanting to use this methodology on their own practice. Chang (2008: 13) states that:

…doing, sharing, and reading auto-ethnography also help[s] transform researchers and readers (listeners) in the process. The transformation of self and others is not necessarily a primary goal of auto-ethnography but a frequently occurring, powerful by-product of this research inquiry.

SHIFTING IDENTITIES AND SPACES IN-BETWEEN: OBSERVING THE SELF

As a creative practitioner, who has moved through a fairly traditional fine art painting practice into a mixed media and predominantly textiles based practice and from a secondary school teacher of art and

design to an HE lecturer in textiles, I am no stranger to shifting identities. However, I did not fully anticipate the transition I would make when I began the residency. I describe this transition as an enculturation process, where I change from visitor to resident artist. My physical and emotional reactions are well documented and when I listen back to the first audio recordings I observe '…there is an awkwardness…which captures a physical reaction of being in a new situation and acclimatising' (Neil 2015: 7) and I sound nervy, anxious and apprehensive. I also consider what it means to be resident artist: 'I am not a visitor or employee but something in between, a hybrid, both – a visitor who doesn't leave' (Neil 2015: 22). I describe strategies that I put in place to help, which included isolating myself from the outside world for the week, '…the experience was immersive and although quite far from a true sense of ethnography I was immersed in a specific culture. The residency as a physical and virtual space was a lived experience' (Neil 2015: 20).

One of the first things I did in residence was to make drawings of nests (figure 1 and 2) as they signified a beginning. Despite intending to start the residency without any pre-conceived ideas, I had anticipated looking at these. They could represent vessels or containers and they were 'textile like'. I refer to this decision as '…breaking myself in by doing something I feel comfortable doing' and that 'I could have been anybody in the space drawing' (Neil 2015: 22). I reflect that this was a sort of pretending, not intending to deceive or invalidate what I was doing but more as a playful term '…to make believe, from pretending would come belief… whether I feel like I am pretending or not does not make my presence in the situation more or less authentic' (Neil 2015: 22) (figures 1 and 2).

In my first summary I share a sense of relief at feeling more at home. By day two I am braver about my presence as an artist becoming habituated to the space. Rather than working secretly in a small sketchbook I start drawing on large pieces of paper and making more physical demands on the space. I observe that the auto-ethnographic process is like being a performer and spectator. I ask '...by making a public performance out of drawing was I inviting others to share my world too? Was this about marking my territory, stabilising my presence as resident or a practical tool to engage interest in what I was doing and inspire participation?' (Neil 2015: 30). It was perhaps trying to do all of those things but mainly served to help with my own transition as the audience participation was encouraged through approaching visitors and explaining what I was doing. The residency did not signify starting a practice from scratch but...

...a new chapter in my practice. However I was bringing my practice with me: many years of making, working, experimenting, projects and themes, techniques and experience, also sense making in different forms. It was not that I was suppressing this but the residency was an opportunity to see what emerged. What aspects of my practice would come forth and what would this new scenario enable to happen.

(Neil 2015: 21)

The residency was therefore an opportunity to look at my practice and varying roles and identities afresh and with the main focus to try and observe what I was experiencing through this reflexivity. The shifting identities of artist, researcher and education practitioner throughout *The Hunterian* museum residency can be understood through several aims and although not independent of each other, required
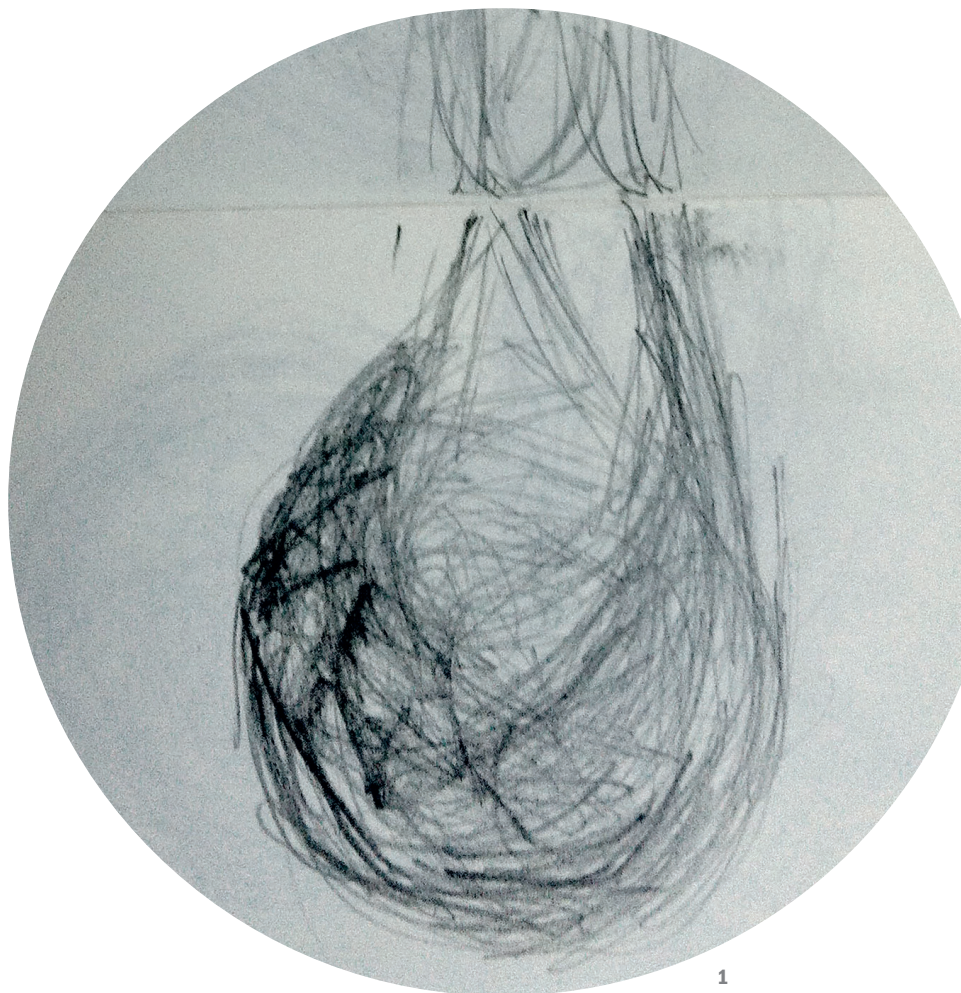
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I OBSERVE THAT THE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS IS LIKE BEING A PERFORMER AND SPECTATOR. I ASK '...BY MAKING A PUBLIC PERFORMANCE OUT OF DRAWING WAS I INVITING OTHERS TO SHARE MY WORLD TOO?'
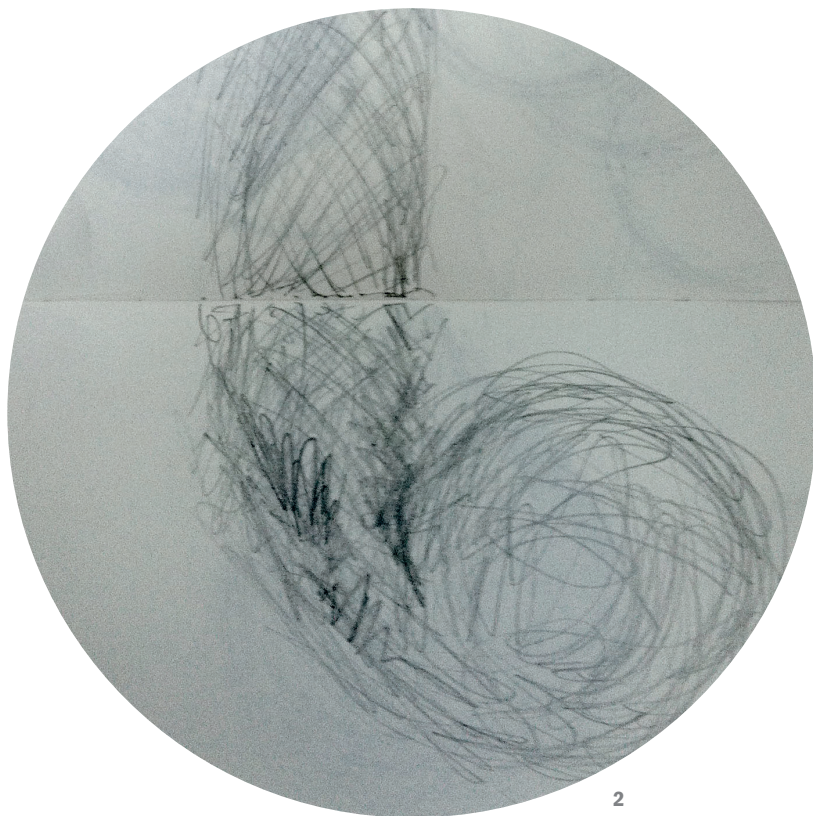
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a re-positioning of the self and an understanding of the self in each role.

- To embark on a creative journey as an artist in collaboration with visitors;
- To document this journey and use this documentation as a researcher to learn about my own creative practice;
- To document this journey and use this documentation as a researcher to learn about my own teaching practice;
- To create a final outcome;
- To use the documentation as an artefact for others to learn from.

As with traditional ethnographic studies, there are issues around being inside and outside the research, made more complicated with auto-ethnography when roles switch from observer to observee. The residency as a lived inquiry provided a process and multiple roles and identities provided different contexts to reflect from. Often, it was the shifts being made from one to the other, the in-between or liminal space that created the richer or more fertile reflective experiences. In the context of a/r/tography, Irwin (2004: 31-32) writes: 'There are spaces between and spaces between the in-between. There are multiple borders diffused again and again. And yet all the [32] while, we do not dismiss the lands that create the blurred perimeter of the borderlands'. I often felt that it was at the perimeter of these

'borderlands' where the more in-depth reflection occurred.

Using digital auto-ethnography, multiple identities within roles could be explored and examined, creating opportunities to explore the in-between or liminal spaces, which in turn encouraged more in-depth reflection and reflexivity.

> *In conversations with ourselves we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices and values...our accounts seek to express the complexities and difficulties of coping and feeling resolved, showing how we changed over time as we struggled to make sense of our experience...the text is used, then, as an agent of self-understanding...*
>
> *(Ellis and Bochner 2000: 748)*

The 'texts' that I produced in and on action as part of the residency took many forms: private, public, handwritten, digital, typed, spoken, internal and externally formed conversations. These different artefacts provided an opportunity to observe the self in unexpected ways with roles and identities revisited through other roles and identities.

This was not without its challenges, in my reflection on the residency I observe: 'I am tethered; I am always reflecting on what I am doing but by being bound to my role of observer of this process I cannot lose myself in the process as creative practitioner' (Neil 2015: 8). This appears to reflect a sense of loss or conflict that I felt at not being able to just make without *thinking* about making. However, there were different stages to my sense making. Although it was difficult at times, particularly in the residency when my thinking often felt clouded, it was the dual role of being a researcher of my process which gave me richer insights into my practice. It led me to

be more experimental, to unpick my practice further and to begin to make connections to different elements of my practice. Some of the layers to my sense making did not happen during the residency; it is the later reflections where my role shifts again and I reflect on what happened from an education perspective. I later realise that my practice has often been auto-ethnographic and that 'making the invisible visible' has always been evident in my work in different ways. I was able to re-see my practice in a new light and how it has always been about iteration, copying re-tracing to create something new and the process of making, the work being about process and the process being visible in the work.

OBSERVING PRACTICE

Digital auto-ethnography as a methodology enabled me to observe my creative making process (practice) in a variety of ways. The tools for data capture were predominantly digital: an audio recorder, video camera and *Go-Pro* headcam, although notes were also made analogically in the sketchbooks, on scraps of paper and post-it notes. Images, including photographs of drawings, video and audio recordings were uploaded from and stored on a laptop, organised and reflected on using *Evernote* (a cloud based private space for collating images and notes) and the Wordpress blog. *Evernote* stored data but was also used as a daily private journal where notes were created in it as well as added to it. Visual recordings were hosted on the video hosting site Vimeo and audio was hosted on a platform Podbean. Figure 3 shows a still from a simply edited film which composited the viewpoint of observer and observed.

The processing and organisation of data collected during the day ensured that what was captured was re-visited and re-seen multiple times, providing several opportunities to reflect on, review and absorb the experiences of the day. This '...enabled me to see/create patterns, themes and think more deeply about my experiences as well as practice' and was, in part, possible from using the blog (Neil 2015: 7). In order to share my experiences with my audience I had to construct some sort of order but note that '...re-looking is more than seeing the same thing and thinking the same things again, re-looking is affected by a new position of the self, different formative experiences and time.' (Neil 2015: 7)

The blog became a space to re-observe my practice, albeit in a newly constructed way. The process was presented as a sequence but with different artefacts juxtaposed together. It enabled a consolidation of thoughts as a constructed timeline of the day and then week. At the end of each day the revisiting enabled new connections and links to be made, providing some clarity for the next day and possibilities. However, I did not always find this easy to manage:

> *....time to absorb the previous days experiences and plan for the day felt tight. I didn't feel that there was adequate time to distance myself and reflect holistically on my experiences. The experiences were fragmented and although they were captured and evidenced I didn't feel like I had time to respond... observing a days productivity produces a days worth of data and almost needs another day to process...*
>
> *(Neil 2015: 29)*

This tension did have an energy and overall I felt that these conflicts created a dynamic and fertile environment for new ideas and challenges to take place. The process of blogging gave me an additional space to think in and 'play' with ideas. Through trying to construct a narrative for others, my perceived audience, I was sense making for myself. The blog was a form of reflective activity naturally requiring a conversational voice and rather than rely completely on memory I was able to pull together multiple artefacts to help me expand on my experience again. Speaking my thoughts as they were occurring and recording them also documented my own sense making throughout each day:

> *There was an urge (and I think I did do it) to edit what was spoken so that it made more sense even in the private repository where there was no need to do that. Sometimes it was from a sense of embarrassment, that in the moment I had said something that then didn't make sense but because it was recorded [spoken] it was not immediately visible.*
>
> *(Neil 2015: 11)*

After the residency I wondered if the blog actually revealed very much about a practice at all. Not everything experienced was articulated, there were times when I felt emotionally tired from encounters with visitors and had too much going on in terms of ideas and consolidating experiences. These feelings are not explicitly expressed anywhere, '...it is perhaps hard to say precisely how we are feeling to others and ourselves in words because we do not want to express it or perhaps we can not express it or do not know exactly what it is we could express' (Neil 2015: 22). We also are selective about what is captured, '...although the intention is to capture my feelings and emotions as I go a long these become stifled through what I choose to share and when I choose to share it' (Neil 2015: 8). There are limits to

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digital auto-ethnography, ultimately we still choose what and when to record, see what we want to see and what we choose to see is open to interpretation.

PRACTICE: DRAWING

The work responded to the environment, visitors and the objects in the museum and shaped by an established practice, which was also being re-framed by these new experiences. Drawing therefore, became a significant element in the research both to engage the audience, and to explore, develop and reflect on practice as it was unfolding. Much of the practice during the residency was observational drawing, observing drawing and the thinking and conversations around drawing taking place. The process of drawing was explored and examined in many ways; some new and experimental like 'verbal' drawings using recorded audio of descriptions of objects, through to post-residency where imagery was revisited using different ideas and stitched drawings (figures 4 and 5).

How we look, perceive what we see, interpret, mimic and using drawing to think and see, all became recurring themes throughout the residency and subsequent development. Drawing became a reflective vehicle itself. It started the making process and I soon began to consider the technical skill of drawing, how drawing relates to looking and seeing, the contemplative space it provides and how others think and feel about and through drawing. My heightened awareness of observing my practice soon prompted me to break down what is experienced when looking at an object both physically and emotionally. Through using the headcam, film camera, acetate and marker pens I began to record the looking and recording of objects (figure 6). In depth consideration of closing one eye and alternating which can view the object, the affects of depth perception, produced drawings and films of drawing which changed my relationship to something I thought of as familiar. Through observing myself I was encouraged to look at what was habitual in my practice in new ways.

Drawing was also designed as the main engagement activity with visitors to the museum. The purpose of the research was in part to examine the role of social construction in my reflective practice and resulting work and how visitors, as participants, and the real or perceived audience to the blog would influence my practice. It was my ideas and the dialogue I had had with others, and my observations of the drawings of others, that were the focus of conversations rather than my own drawings. Figure 7 shows a participants drawing and figure 8 shows how the patterns created from giving all objects the same scale influenced my experimentation. Drawings existed on the blog for others to see and for me to re-examine and there was face-to-face discussion about the participants' interpretation of their drawings as well as how they felt about the act of making drawings. My visual responses and ideas relate to both participants' drawings (visual) and interpretations (oral) of their work/experience.

AUDIENCE

The museum artefacts as subject matter were a starting point for the creative process but I was also interested in how face-to-face conversations with visitors and virtual conversations through the blog might inform and also form the work/creative process throughout the week and beyond. I was there to engage visitors in the museum through drawing, the research activity and my creative making but I also saw the audience as participants in my creative process. This created an additional dynamic, one that encouraged dialogue in different forms and iterations. Visitors who I had face-to-face conversations with remained 'present' through the voice recordings, reflections and summaries on the project blog, they also engaged in their own drawing activities that I was able to observe. Their engagement stimulated my own personal and private reflections on my making practice and research.

Visitors agreed to the extent they wanted to participate and the process of explaining the research was a useful reflective tool. I was not reciting a rehearsed explanation but finding new ways to articulate the research. This gave me opportunities to continually reflect on what I was doing and find better ways to explain it. The audience varied greatly in age and interest, which enabled me to reframe my research and practical work in different ways. This also changed throughout the week and towards the end '...how I interact with them and how they interact with me changes because each day the context slightly changes. The audience are getting a different 'me' each day and a different part of the process' (Neil 2015: 32).

Audience was significant to the research, both in terms of interactions with visitors and in my understanding of audience at different times during and after the residency. Although I imagined those I had seen in the day reading my reflections, I could not be sure who I was talking to, if in fact it was anyone at all, and whether that mattered, '...blogging may be about the writing itself as a process...where blogging is a narrowcast practice, it may be about interactions with others that are largely imagined' (Brake 2012: 1072). I engaged with the blog as if there was an audience reading it and the reality of whether they were there did not alter this. It was a

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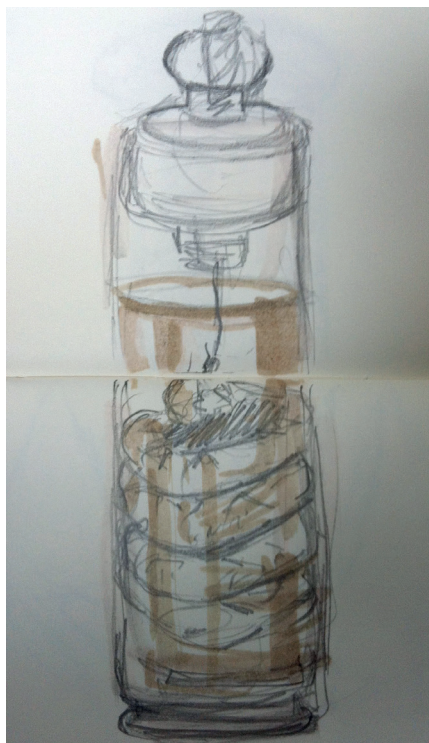
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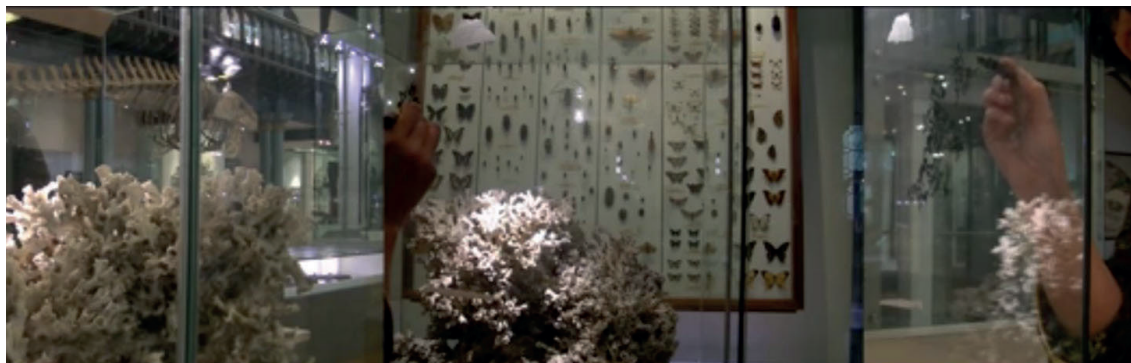
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space where conversational reflection could take place regardless of their being an audience or not, '…the story writing was very much about being for someone else to read but at the same time this process helped with my own sense making. The blog writing was a form of social interaction' (Neil 2015: 8). The real, imagined or perceived audience helped me to explore thoughts and ideas in different ways and to test out what I was thinking as well as allowing thoughts and ideas to become consolidated or emerge through conversations.

My practice was informed by these interactions and I also allowed ideas to be formed from the thoughts and observations of others. Sometimes this was taking ideas that emerged from conversations and entwining them with other thoughts and ideas. The making of the work felt like a co-constructed process through dialogue and written reflection, illustrated in part by figures 7 and 8.

I feel very strongly that the blog provided me with a virtual audience who helped me write, construct stories and in doing so helped my sense making as a reflective activity. In digitally documenting aspects of practice with auto-ethnography I was also able to become an audience to my own practice. In the context of

performance Kirk and Pitches (2013: 3) place an importance on creative practitioners experiencing their work as a stranger and that the use of digital technologies '…can provide a distancing mechanism, putting the maker into the shoes of the viewer'.
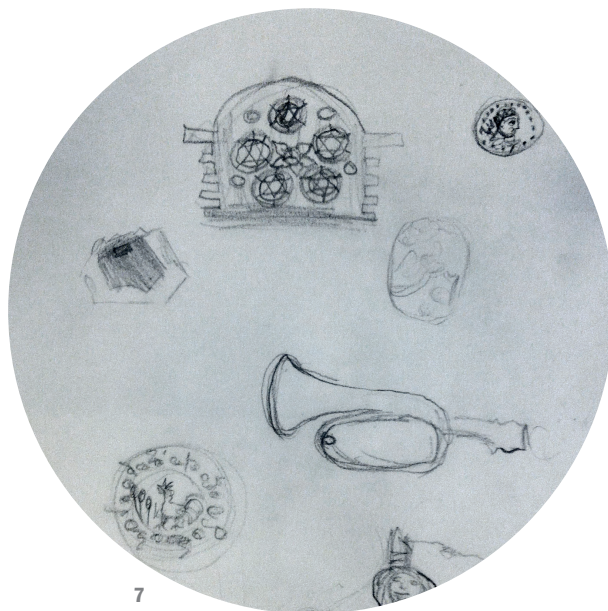
TELLING STORIES

I initially viewed the blog as a platform to share my making process with others and gain insight into my thinking and feelings. It was intended as an outward facing digital sketchbook, showing the work as it emerged as well as my reflective activity. I soon realised that the blog was a constructed narrative created from real experiences and observations, but it also presented an edited version of events, '…the reflective activity on the blog does not follow the chronology of the real day and a certain amount of editing and story telling is taking place' (Neil 2015: 36). This, Mills and Morton (2013: 78) describe as 'putting fieldnotes to work' where the researcher '…explores a range of approaches to framing, developing and extending fieldnotes and observations'. When adding to the blog I was aware of what the audience may want to read, so there were on-going decisions to make about what to include, and how to express this. The real version of events would have been repetitive, long streams of writing and

jumbled up as I was moving between recording, doing and revisiting. Although I recognised this 'story telling' as a reflective activity and important to my sense making, at the time I felt I was making an accurate documentary. Although I hoped my 'documentary' would be revealing '…the reality of this is so messy, confused, repetitive and unclear at times my construction edited and cut a line through it to create a chronology that was not there in such defined terms' (Neil 2015: 36). However, '…even realist ethnographers, who claim to follow the rules for doing science, use devices such as composites or collapsing events to tell better stories and protect their participants' (Ellis 2004: 126).

Through this re-ordering I provide a better summary or story for my imagined audience and although what was research and what was practice became confused, at times my research experiences became part of the creative process. Even though at the time I felt that the process of documenting the creative practice became too central to the subject matter of that practice. Leggo et al. (2011: 248) suggest that in our unpacking of '…our field experiences as an artistic process of creating rather than discovering information, our field notes become a source

of inspiration'. I had at times felt that the documentation (process) had contaminated the practice, but later I considered the final pieces '...a product of the creative process and a product of the research' (Neil 2015: 74). Now, some time after the residency I do not feel that any contamination occurred, instead the dual roles created a tension that enabled a deeper level of engagement and reflection to take place.

My sense making was conversational. Bohm (1996: 3), explains conversational exchange as '... [the] first person sees a difference between what he meant to say and what the other person understood...' which he suggests develops into an '...emergence of a new content that is common to both participants'. He likens this to an artist who, through their process of approximating what is in their mind, is continually making something new (Bohm 1996). This is a useful way to think about the creative making process but also sense making or making sense of that work. The dialogue may be with the self and/or with others and is a creative process in itself. The process of writing the same thing in different ways is also a way to wrestle with something new rather than just find the right way of expressing it. The blog became a particular sort of dialogue with the self and others. It was a form of sense making, which also created something new. Mills and Morton (2013: 78) describe the relationship between writing and thinking as 'intimate, interwoven and iterative' and claim that '...if ethnographers use writing to develop their thinking, then thinking also informs the writing and rewriting of fieldnotes'. It is with some irony that in my aim to capture and share the reality of my creative making process I became more aware and confident in telling reconstructive stories.

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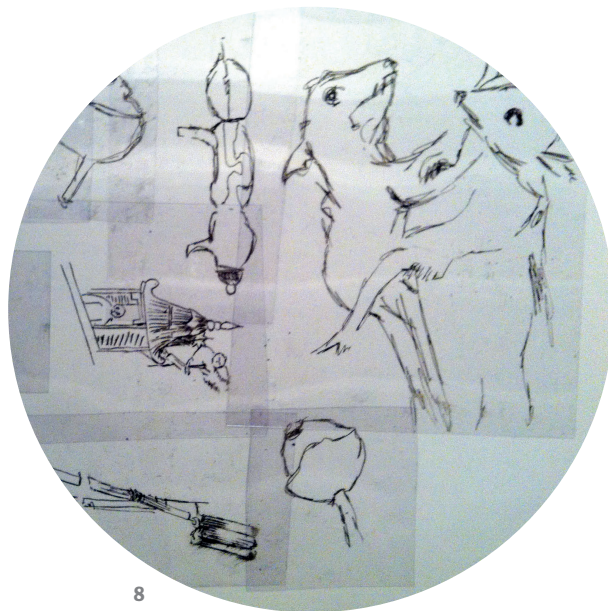
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My concern that storytelling fails to accurately capture, despite the use of the digital auto-ethnographic methodology, misses an important point. Ellis and Bochner (2000: 745-746) state that stories potentially distort the past because they 'rearrange, redescribe, invent, omit and revise' but they say auto-ethnography is not about accuracy and that the questions to ask are: [746] 'what are the consequences my story produces? What kind of a person does it shape me into?'

DIGITAL AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY AS PRACTICE: RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS

The residency was concluded after five days, a further three months of development resulted in several final pieces, three of which are illustrated in figures 9-12. The blog as a documented process is a piece in itself and holds many possibilities and threads for future work. The project made an impact on how I think about my practice, how it might develop, how it relates to my research and teaching and what it might have been all along. I feel ready to question my work more and to challenge myself with where I situate this practice. Reflexivity is a skill in itself and becoming more fluent is incredibly rewarding and fruitful. I feel that I experienced reflexivity driving a making process and not just being applied to it. Research, drawing, experimentation, making connections, play and decision-making are all reflective activities themselves.

One of my questions throughout the research was 'What does the creative process feel like?' In understanding what it means to be an artist we rely on end products, the constructed narratives made by artists or narratives

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constructed for them by others. But these often present something as simple, chronological or mysterious, something I have referred to as 'a lack of empathy to students', which can lead to teaching art practice 'as a series of mechanistic processes' (Neil 2015: 6).

Through this project I gained insight into my own creative making process and the spectrum of emotions experienced, which enabled me to examine how I worked with these, how I expressed them, how honest I was about them and what narratives I constructed around them. I could not really separate my making process from my research methodology, but accept that this is how I worked with auto-

ethnography. It enabled me to reflect on my existing practice and the emergent practice throughout the residency. My methodology only contaminated my practice as much as any of the other external factors I was influenced by.

The next stage takes my experience as a case study or practice model and an opportunity for students to potentially explore how documenting and sharing their making process could enhance and develop their reflexivity and working practices. This approach encourages students to adopt auto-ethnography as a tool for reflective practice with a view that digital technologies might enable a more analytical, critically reflective and visible process for creative practices.

Doing, sharing, and reading autoethnography [can] also help transform researchers and readers (listeners) in the process. The transformation of self and others is not necessarily a primary goal of autoethnography but a frequently occurring, powerful by-product of this research inquiry.

(Chang 2008: 13)

By encouraging students to consider what their practice is through what it means to be a researcher of their practice and an artist may encourage more curiosity, inquiry and insight into their practice as undergraduate students.

For students this could be critical as a structure to help them identify themselves as artists, to consider what the creative process is to them and to make the shift from student to practitioner. I will have to redefine my roles again, perhaps as researcher, teacher and participant. I will observe whether students are able to make more sustained, in-depth, critical, dialogic reflections on their work, their development and their identity as they make their own shifts from student to practitioners. This could be relevant to students learning from other experience of the creative process and also becoming more sensitive or reflexive about their own practices and transitions.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: Nest in Sketchbook from Day 1 (Neil 2014).

Figure 2: Nest in Sketchbook from Day 1 (Neil 2014).

Figure 3: Film still of observing drawing from day 4 (Neil 2014).

Figure 4: Observational drawing of specimen jar, (Neil 2014).

Figure 5: Stitched object in specimen jar, (Neil 2014).

Figure 6: Film still from observing drawing from day 3, (Neil 2014).

Figure 7: Participants drawing from day 1, (Neil 2014).

Figure 8: Experimental patterns of objects, (Neil 2014).

Figure 9: Coral, Wool felt, thread and glass, (Neil 2015).

Figure 10: Cells, Net, thread, glass etched, (Neil 2015).

Figure 11: Hyperbolic Paraboloid and Gemstones, Silk, thread, net and glass, (Neil 2015).

Figure 12: Detail of Hyperbolic Paraboloid and Gemstones, Silk, thread, net and glass, (Neil 2015).