

# Theorising Arts-Based Collaborative Research Processes

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## Introduction

In its report into interdisciplinary research entitled *Crossing Paths* (2015) the British Academy elaborated on what they identified as the potential benefits, but also the many challenges, of working across disciplines to achieve research goals which address enduring problems in the world. In this chapter we explore some of the issues raised in the British Academy report as we believe they resonate with our own experiences of how creative arts methods can be incorporated into an interdisciplinary research project. We document and analyse how we used arts-based methods from the outset in our work, which was built around a collaboration across disciplines, modes and professions on the AHRC funded project *Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, Law, the Body and the State*, (AH/L006936/1). We theorise here our collaborative and transformative practice by drawing upon thinking firstly from new materialists (e.g. Barad, 2003; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012) and secondly from *interthinking*, a concept developed by applied linguists and educational psychologists (e.g. Littleton & Mercer 2013). New materialism (discussed in detail later in this chapter) explores what Barad (2003) names *intra-action* between components of phenomena which shape each other by coming into contact with each other. For our work this could involve examples of discussion of research planning being shaped by, and transformed by, exploration using metaphor and dramatization. Interthinking (also discussed later in the chapter) supports our understanding of how the different modes of communication, including languages, facilitate collaborative problem-solving in teams. Translingual practice (drawing upon Canagarajah's 2013 term for the flexible uses of language and other modes of communication for specific effects whether communicative, poetic, activist or other) occurred regularly in our collaborative work reported in this chapter (see also Fay *et al.*, 2016, for deeper discussion of translingual practice).

The chapter takes the following structure: i) background to the interdisciplinary research project; ii) selected principles from new materialist thinkers and writers on interthinking in language and education, as deemed relevant to this chapter; iii) the presentation and discussion of two vignettes from the project of arts-based, collaborative, transformative and translingual practice; and, iv) a conclusion with reflections on implications for future research projects seeking to implement and conceptualise their own interdisciplinary, arts-based research.

## **The Researching Multilingually at Borders Project**

Between 2014 and 2017, our international team of creative artists and academics covering areas including music, theatre, poetry, textiles, law, global mental health, modern languages, applied linguistics, anthropology, sociology, intercultural communication and education collaborated on a research project exploring the role of language in contexts of pain and pressure. The sites for the research were defined in a wide range of ways and included, in brief, an ethnography of border processes in Bulgaria and Romania (see Gibb & Danero Iglesias, 2017), an online community of learners of Arabic initiated by the Islamic University Gaza (see Imperiale *et al.*, 2017), the learning of modern languages in the border state of Arizona, USA (see Gramling & Warner, 2016), the legal practice spaces in the Netherlands and Scotland in which asylum appeals are heard (see Breda & Zwaan, 2015; Craig, 2014), a global mental health intervention in Uganda (see White *et al.*, 2015) and the further education classroom in Scotland where young people who are unaccompanied refugees meet and learn together (see Frimberger *et al.*, 2017). These sites illustrate the diverse and interdisciplinary ambition of the research project and provided the opportunity to explore potential challenges, as noted in the British Academy (2015) report, that such work across disciplines often entails. The case studies also serve to contextualise the people and sites to be engaged in the arts-based research processes of the project.

The project had two overarching aims which were:

1. to research interpreting, translation and multilingual practices in challenging contexts, and,
2. while doing so, to evaluate appropriate research methods (traditional and arts based) and develop theoretical approaches for this type of academic exploration.

In practice, the academic disciplines represented in the project operated as five case studies, each of which was guided by its own research questions. There were also two hubs (covering creative arts and researching multilingually, henceforth CA and RM) which worked collaboratively together and across the case studies and similarly were guided by their own research questions. The authors of this chapter were members of the two hubs (Frimberger, Sitholé and Tordzro were members of the CA hub and Andrews and Fay were members of the RM hub). The RM hub had the following as their guiding research questions:

- a. How do researchers generate, translate, interpret and write up data (dialogic, mediated, textual, performance) from one language to another?
- b. What ethical issues emerge in the planning and execution of data collection and representation (textual, visual, performance) where multiple languages are present?
- c. What methods and techniques improve processes of researching multilingually?

- d. How does multimodality (e.g. visual methods, 'storying', performance) complement and facilitate multilingual research praxis?
- e. How can researchers develop clear multilingual research practices and yet also be open to emergent research design?

The CA hub had the following statement as its guiding, overarching objective:

to produce creative synthesis and a constant dynamic of translation between languages, place and media throughout the project.

This will be achieved by

1. Translation of research data, concepts and findings from academic form into live performance, through the creation of a playtext by the project playwright, Tawona Sithole, based on data from all the project components, which will be rehearsed, produced and performed in Scotland, Ghana, and other countries in which research will be conducted;
2. Community drama and rehearsals in each of the case study sites where forum theatre workshops will allow for the exposure of otherwise silent dynamics of language, power, narrative and pain relevant to participants in each context and the RMTTC 'hub';
3. Capacity building and training across the project and its different contexts in using performance to represent specific translation and interpretation processes and practices (and issues such as silence and 'the untranslatable') through other media.

The project made use of alternative conceptualisations of linguistic competence in real world contexts, namely, Phipps' (2013) linguistic incompetence and the use of arts methods as languages in their own right, with equal status to oral and written languages. In her 2013 paper, Phipps explored how, by reflecting on everyday realities of migration in the twenty first century, it may no longer be of use or value for researchers and practitioners to maintain a belief in the attainment of linguistic competence as the desirable outcome of language learning which necessarily precedes engaging with users of a specified language. Phipps' alternative way of thinking, based on her own experience, is to appreciate the potential of speakers who are in more socially powerful positions to express their linguistic solidarity by showing their linguistic *in*competence when using a language that is not expected to be used in a particular context. Phipps advocates the benefits of being a beginner learner of a language and showing oneself to be a learner of a language when interacting with people who may be experiencing pressure and pain, for example in the context of seeking asylum.

This conceptualisation of language provided a foundation for our researcher team to embark on our research (with each other and with our collaborators and research participants) with an awareness of how, in real life contexts, expressions of solidarity may come from language

incompetence as well as language competence. It also opened up the opportunity for the research team to name and acknowledge the linguistic resources held between us (they were: Twi, Tigrinya, German, Italian, Arabic, French, English, Dutch, Bulgarian, Turkish, Danish, Shona, Ndaou). The use of these resources in our research practice, in spite of, and because of, our varying levels of competence, is illustrated and discussed further below.

In addition, Phipps' work (e.g. 2013), and that of Frimberger *et al.* (2017), have focused on the use of the arts as a language which, they argue, has great potential to communicate through diverse modes (visual, oral, written) in contexts where participants have experienced trauma. In our project we collaborated in using these specific arts-based techniques throughout the duration of the project in our research practice: i) working with printing and textiles using symbols valued in specific cultural contexts (e.g. see Tordzro, 2016, for research practice using Adinkra symbols); ii) poetry and spoken word (Phipps *et al.*, 2016); iii) craft techniques (Frimberger *et al.*, 2017); iv) dance; and v) drama. The discussion in this chapter is based, as noted above, around two vignettes of researcher-artist collaboration within the research team. Other examples of arts-based practice which involved research participants beyond the research team (e.g. clients in an NGO for refugees in Romania) also took place but these are not the focus of this chapter.

### **Theorising Arts-Based, Translingual, Multimodal, Collaborative Research Processes**

New materialism is: 'A *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things' (Barad, 2003: 802). Barad continues by stating that performativity is 'a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real'. This way of explaining how we construct and represent reality encourages us to move away from a reliance on language as the main medium and invites attention to modalities such as, in the case of our research, music, visual arts, dance, theatre and poetry. Barad's challenge to an over emphasis on the power of words also leads her to address the dangers inherent in habitualised, disciplinary-bound ways of thinking and researching and as such, has particular relevance for our interdisciplinary and arts-based project. She states (2003: 810) that

If we follow disciplinary habits of tracing disciplinary-defined causes through to the corresponding disciplinary-defined effects, we will miss all the crucial intra-actions among these forces that fly in the face of any specific set of disciplinary concerns.

The concept of intra-actions invites us to pause on and notice what happens when experiences, ideas, phenomena meet and have an impact on each other. These intra-actions, for our project, could have taken multiple forms, such as, uses of arts-based methods in contexts where they might not conventionally be practised, using methodologies within disciplines which are not usually associated together or prioritising certain languages in research and de-prioritising others (e.g. taking

an English-last approach, Phipps, 2017). For Barad (2003: 802) ‘the move towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g. do they mirror nature of culture?) to matters of practices / doings /actions.’ This emphasis on the importance of doings and actions, along with the call to reject a reliance on language, can provide a new materialist theoretical framing for our arts-based, interdisciplinary research work which sought to explore human experiences in contexts of pressure and pain and to remain aware of how languages or silence were used in such encounters. The vignettes provided below are offered as examples of our work and can be considered as doings and actions.

In her doctoral research exploring migratory aesthetics in what she names arts-based strangeness research with international students in Glasgow, Frimberger (2016) makes use of new materialist thinking. Frimberger draws upon Patti Lather’s work (2013) in analysing images generated in arts workshops in which she explores knowledge production which is not limited by linguistic description but rather, ‘language, bodies, objects and the environment are seen as involved in a constant, meaning-making process’ (Frimberger 2016: 5). Frimberger’s contribution to this chapter and the research project, along with the CA hub colleagues, was to encourage doings, actions and intra-actions which moved the research team beyond language-based explorations of our project research questions. However, the commitment to integrating arts-based practices into the project from its earliest days and the influence of new materialist thinking did not preclude our attending to how our project-wide linguistic resources were used in our collaborative working. The next section focuses on how Littleton and Mercer’s (2013) work on interthinking shaped our reflections on how interdisciplinary discussion was also central to our research.

### **Interthinking**

There is a large body of work in the education literature which analyses and promotes dialogues as a foundation of learning (see, as examples, Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986; Littleton & Mercer, 2013; Alexander, 2017). These works have focused on peers (adults or children) interacting together in specific contexts such as school classrooms and university seminar rooms. They have also explored adult-child interaction in homes and teacher-pupil, lecturer-student interactions in educational settings. In such studies, researchers have focused on a wide range of linguistic phenomena such as aspects of language acquisition and ways in which parents scaffold children’s utterances (e.g. Wells, 1986) and cultural patterns of interaction in communities and families (Heath, 1983). Alexander (2017) takes as his starting point the educational benefits of dialogic approaches to teaching and learning, and not the uses of and features of language in use in their own right. Littleton and Mercer (2013) also focus their work on what language is used for by groups of speakers and how it achieves, or not, those purposes. To delineate this specific research focus Littleton and Mercer coin the term *interthinking*, which they apply to discourse analyses of interactional data from group

activities in real-life settings such as musicians in band practice sessions, workplace meetings between colleagues, and pupils interacting while using an interactive whiteboard. Within their data sets, the authors explore talk as (2013: 13) ‘a social mode of thinking – language as a tool for teaching-and-learning, constructing knowledge, creating ideas, sharing understanding and tackling problems collaboratively’. We note that in the first example of this type of social thinking, which is facilitated through talk (interactions in band practice sessions), that language is not the sole mode of communication as music itself serves to generate ideas and initiate problem-solving.

A feature of the writing on interthinking from Mercer (e.g. 2000) is that not all dialogues are deemed to be effective in terms of achieving the intended collaborative goals. Three types of talk are defined: disputational, cumulative and exploratory, with exploratory talk, in which speakers build on, challenge or generate new thinking or actions, being designated as the most effective for achieving goals. In our large, interdisciplinary and arts-based research project we met together as a whole team of twenty people and as well in smaller case study plus hub teams. As has been noted in one of the few published explorations of team-based interactions in a large research study (see Creese & Blackledge, 2012), the work of meaning-making within research can be seen in the space of project meetings. As the authors observe:

whole-team meetings provide a window into the process of analysis as colleagues brought to the table their emergent understandings of the phenomena under investigation. In these meetings we did more than listen, arguing, negotiating, contesting, agreeing, introducing our different perspectives and histories as we attempted to make meaning out of observed linguistic practices. (Creese & Blackledge, 2012: 307)

Creese & Blackledge (2012) articulate the complexity of their process of discussion as a research team, involving contestation as well as agreement, and this work can be seen as sharing features of Littleton and Mercer’s (2013) interthinking. In the vignettes below we present extracts of collaborative practice involving interthinking which, in the context of our project, was also mediated by material means such as textiles as well as drawing upon the linguistic resources within the team to stimulate discussion, shared poetry writing and reading, and reflective writing.

### **Collaborative transformations**

In this section we offer two vignettes of what we name collaborative, translingual and transformative practice between the two research hubs in the RM project team. The doings and actions of these two vignettes took place within the first year of the three-year project and as such formed part of the exploratory work establishing how we could work together across modes, and professional and disciplinary borders. In each vignette some elements of the first-hand experience of collaborative working are offered, with an accompanying contextualisation of the work, and then a

discussion follows which draws upon ideas from new materialism and interthinking, as introduced above.

*Vignette 1: Working with Metaphor and Movement – The Well*

Vignette 1 sets out an experience of the joint hub working on what we named hotspot texts. One year into the three-year project, a joint hub meeting was agreed in which ideas could be exchanged between the CA and RM hubs. In the spirit of working closely with creative arts methods throughout the project, the CA hub invited the RM hub to spend a day in their workspace which they named a lab, signalling the intentionally experimental nature of the work carried out there. To facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaboration between us all, Richard Fay proposed that we each write about one or more *hotspots*, ideas or experiences identified from the project so far as being thought-provoking or puzzling and which might merit creative exploration together. The term hotspot was deliberately chosen as not being a typical term used within academic research or as belonging to a particular methodological tradition which might constrain the nature of our interaction. Rather, it was hoped that the hotspot concept would open out our discussion and collaboration and allow us all to embrace creative arts and multimodal dimensions.

In practice, each colleague wrote approximately one paragraph for each of their hotspots (typically between two and four per person). The hotspots covered areas ranging from nhorwa, tasaamuh, speech and writing, to researching interculturality. In keeping with the project's attention to researching multilingually, as seen in this list, colleagues drew on their linguistic and cultural resources to shape their reflections. Nhorwa was offered by Tawona Sitholé (CA hub) and it drew upon a word and concept from his linguistic resource of Shona and of a practice in which gifts were offered to guests. Tawona's hotspot was how our interdisciplinary and multimodal research and collaboration could involve us in sharing gifts of insights drawing on our distinctive sources of knowledge and experience. Tasaamuh was offered by Mariam Attia (RM hub), originated in Mariam's Arabic resources and referred to the concept of acceptance or tolerance or letting be, which Mariam explained as being relevant to her understanding of how to engage together in a complex, interdisciplinary, multi-site project.

The development of the hotspot texts took place with all researchers in their home university and workplace, all within the UK but not in the same cities. A desired next stage was to meet face-to-face and move into a creative consideration of the ideas built into the hotspots, a move agreed by all as essential to continued joint working. We saw this as an opportunity for the RM hub members to work in the lab, or creative space, of the CA team, in Glasgow in a venue which was not part of a university. Once in the lab space, Tawona asked for us all to propose one or more metaphors which emerged for each of us from our thinking about our own and each other's hotspots. One of the RM team members, Mariam Attia, proposed the metaphor of a well. Mariam explained for researchers to draw upon their linguistic resources in doing their research multilingually, there is an analogy with the

act of drawing water for a well. For Mariam, the action is perhaps arduous but the rewards are plentiful. Guided by Tawona, an agreement was reached (quite quickly) to spend longer exploring the metaphor of the well and to move into different modes. To do so, all hub members worked in two groups and used movement, music and mime to explore the metaphor of the well. It was noted by us all that our individual and group work using movement brought us together to produce a collective output but was also shaped by our individual understandings of the actions and motions involved in drawing water from a well. These understandings, we reflected, were clearly shaped by our cultural and experiential lives so that novices and experts were apparent. We all felt that the metaphor of drawing water from a well opened up our understanding of working multilingually together in a research team. The well metaphor became, subsequently, a shared point of reference, which was returned to many times in future collaborative encounters. Tawona reflected on the collaborative learning of the two hubs after the movement and music work on the 'well' metaphor:

The 'well' had such an impact because it was another creative moment from the so-called non-creative team; it validated the use of exploration as a method of working; it helped us unlock meanings; and it has a universal sense and appeal. (Tawona Sitholé, Reflections on Hotspots document, May 2015)

Future team discussion of the well metaphor served as a reminder of our dual sense of the toil and reward involved in accessing the resources of a well. The photo below was taken during a visit to a city where part of our second case study was taking place (Bucharest, Romania) and provided a visual reminder of our metaphor work.



Figure 1: The well

By working together with metaphors the two research hubs engaged in interthinking to explore aspects of the project's objectives and methods as identified in the hotspots. The metaphor-work involved using words (generating ideas, proposing and accepting metaphors and reflecting back on processes and movement work) and also took us into embodied ways of collaborating where words were not prioritised or dominant. Writers such as Barad (2003) working in the new materialism paradigm deploy the notion of *entanglement* to convey how meanings and materials or matters operate together and have an impact on each other. Our physical work with our bodies to mime our engagement with a metaphorical idea which began with a reflection on our project's work throughout the free writing of hotspots can be considered as an act of entanglement, we argue here. We sought to identify, present and re-present shared ideas and understandings to each other in order to get to know them better and see how they, and we, intra-acted in our collaborative work together.

*Vignette 2: Identifying Hotspots of Curiosity – Moving from Themes to Poetry*

A second way in which the eight project members collaborated in the CA lab with their hotspots involved a series of activities, initiated by the CA hub and inspired by their creative ways of working informed by poetic, theatrical and musical techniques. The hotspots were performed with each one being read aloud by someone who was not the original author. This had the effect of presenting the hotspot for consideration by the team but in oral mode and with the inevitable lack of fluency which comes when readers are not familiar with the words or meanings lying behind what they are voicing. A reflective discussion of this process led to a proposal from the CA hub that a new stage of engaging with the hotspots would be to transform the hotspots into poetry. This stage would involve working with the original hotspot to select and re-present it in a poetic form. The process was engaged with in different ways by different team members as shown below (figures 1 and 2). RM hub member Jane Andrews' hotspot was transformed into a poem by CA hub member Tawona Sitholé, a published poet, whereas RM hub member Richard Fay worked with his own hotspot to explore the process of transformation from hotspot to poem himself. This across-hub collaboration in the CA lab space allowed time and opportunities for exploring and being playful with language in our research process.

<p>Jane's hotspot</p> <p><i>Thinking about what can be achieved in <b>speech and writing</b> in both the project (e.g. the RM hub 'Ways of working' document) and in the research sites themselves. Initial examples include i) within contexts we have explored with a project doctoral student exploring legal processes and with Alison's (the project PI) guidance, and ii) within collaborative research work e.g. in conversation with Tawona he expressed his preference for discussing ideas, exploring 'burning issues' as more valuable than only exchanging written texts (emails or attached notes). This has encouraged me to think about the work of Karen Littleton and Neil Mercer (inspired by Vygotskian thinking) on what they call 'interthinking' and 'putting talk to work'.</i></p>	<p><i>(Jane's poem, authored by Tawona Sithole)</i></p> <p>researchers and participants  move between modes of communication  as well as between languages  benefits and disadvantages  spoken and written texts and interactions  shape the work being undertaken  how do we generate ideas together  and then capture them  moving between spoken and written texts  or moving beyond them in creative ways</p>
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<p>Richard's hotspots</p> <p><b>Multilingual Practice in Research Collaboration</b></p>	<p><i>(Richard's self-authored poem)</i></p> <p>and my brother asks me, as brothers do,</p>
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*I have been intrigued by our individual, shared, and collective practices within the project vis-à-vis the uses of a variety of languages, by our attempts to be linguistically inclusive and diverse and not to remain solely within the lingua franca English-medium academic discourse. There are lots of moments to reflect upon in this regard - our use of a word in any language at the end of the Glasgow meeting to capture our 'take' on those intense days of work together; Tawona's use of Shona during our events (e.g. 'Hekani'; his walk-about poem on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the Durham symposium); Robert and Julien's English/French spoken script/Powerpoint combinations; Nazmi's use of English and Arabic in his Durham Skyped presentation/ppt; and so on. For me this is a hotspot because my own reaction to these attempts is not yet clear. Nor is my response to the comments of others (e.g. Angela Creese's comments on Robert/Julien's English/French*

"so exactly what parts of your skill-set qualify you for the project in uganda?"  
hmmm . . . i'll start simply ....  
i play music, not really a creative artist, more a 'musiker'  
i play with languages, not really a linguist, more a  
'languager'  
but it gets complicated ...  
i support others, not a therapist, just a ???  
  
hmmm, 'well-beinger'  
i explore 'cultures', not an anthropologist, just an 'interculturalist'  
and even more complicated ...  
i fight injustice, not a lawyer, just an activist  
and i've never worked under siege, just in awe of  
what those who are can achieve  
i'm thinking about researching multilingually,  
but i am  
not researching multilingualism  
and it gets simpler ....

*mix; Alison's current strategy of reading authors in languages other than English and/or authors writing in English as a second language, and her reminder of the political scholarly habit of some feminist researchers of reading only works by women). Thus, I am left with an ongoing puzzle: given that we want our (academic as well as research) practice to be purposeful, but also that we want to challenge, in our own fields, the linguistic hegemonies that frame experience more widely and which contribute to the borderlands where discrimination, inequity, disadvantage, voicelessness, and trauma can be created and compounded by language hierarchies, how we might position ourselves vis-à-vis the 'wider currency' that English (and other privileged languages) have, a currency that for me raises all my post-colonial and UK-based angst (about Englishes) but for others (e.g. Elena from Cordoba in the RM-ly Network*

<i>project) can be more a matter of linguistic hospitality and/or a strategic choice to embrace the power that this language resource has acquired?</i>	
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The poetry based on the original hotspots was collected into a playscript by CA hub member Tawona Sithole and formed part of a performance (from both hubs) which was shared in a whole team meeting later in the academic year. The content of the hotspots is not focus of this chapter although it is worth noting briefly that the areas explored here by Jane and Richard dwell on issues such as, for Jane, how linguistic modes play out in collaborative research in terms of when and how speech and writing are used and, for Richard, how collaborative multilingual practice in research can be achieved. These areas for exploration indicate that, at the time of writing, the two writers did not feel a sense of certainty about how they should or could carry out their research but at the same time they felt they could identify areas which would merit further researcher attention.

The process of working with our hotspots and performing them in different ways (e.g. performing to those who had written the original versions; performing in new versions to the wider project team) had the effect of bringing us into close awareness of each other's observations and interpretations of phenomena on the project. In addition, the processes enabled us to spend extended time on working with ideas, words and sounds due to the stages of sharing and transforming them into different formats. This, we believe, supported our collective reaching of 'deeper meanings' as noted by Gameli Tordzro (CA hub member). The deeper meanings were enriched by poetic forms and by concepts and terms from several, not just one, language, keeping us close to our researching multilingually intentions in the project. Because we moved between free writing (of hotspots) to performed reading to poetry to performed script, we feel this was an emergent way of collaborating which sought to move far away from what might have been a conventional academic research process. New materialist thinking has encouraged us to define our process as valuing doings and actions over linguistically-constructed analyses of data. It has also allowed us to pause on and struggle with the complexity of what the project was concerned with and our research process. The outcome of it led us to identify future areas of exploration guided by what had been fruitful in our collaborative activities up to that point, thereby serving an agenda-setting function in our work.

The essence of the interthinking concept, explored earlier in this chapter, is that exploratory talk, or it might be multimodal dialogue, enriches human thinking and understanding through the collaborative engagement on problems or concerns held in common. In vignette 2 the collaborative aspect was built into the process through, initially, the sharing of individual writings and,

subsequently, the continued working with the ideas embedded in those writings. The writing became more creative as the collaboration developed (first poetry, then performance script) rather than remaining at a representational stage of research experience. As such our interthinking process was multimodally, and materially, shaped, thereby bringing together the two theorisations of interthinking and new materialism.

### **Concluding Reflections**

In this chapter we have theorised and exemplified an approach to weaving creative arts methods into a complex, multi-site, multilingual and interdisciplinary research project. Our work with creative approaches from the beginning of the project supported a different way of engaging with ideas, with each other as team members, and with participants in the sites of the case studies. This different way allowed us to engage with the materiality of the phenomena we as researchers were encountering and it moved us beyond a linguistic representation of our researcher experience and the experiences of the participants in our case study research into a multimodal form. Our approach and our theorisation using new materialism also enabled us to consider how we intra-acted in the study and this, we hoped, steered us away from othering our experiences or the people we worked with.

Our large research team sought to learn from each other from different disciplines, different expertise and experience in creative arts, different linguistic resources, and as such our collective discussion displays many of the features of interthinking. According to Littleton and Mercer (2013) effective interthinking also involves co-production of new ideas and understandings and can promote the appropriation of ideas across the group. In the case of our engagements, the forms of appropriation could be visualised and metaphorical, as was shown in the use of the well metaphor and the subsequent within-team referencing of this shared understanding. These multimodal forms stayed with us and were available for us to build on as common tools for our continued communication.

The prioritising of creative arts methods continued throughout the life of the project and has expanded the range of project outputs into film e.g. Tordzro (2016) *The Calabash People*, and Frimberger and Bishop (2014) *Welcome to Scotland*. Our groundwork in the first year of the project, which is reported in the two vignettes in this chapter, established for us our collective commitment to working collaboratively, across disciplines, arts forms, and languages. We believe that for researchers who are also committed to interdisciplinary and creative approaches to their research, time spent identifying and grappling with core concepts in a variety of modes can provide an essential foundation for the future effective completion of the research. To return to the British Academy's (2015) report on interdisciplinarity in higher education, we can see parallels between that report's findings and our own experiences of working with creative methods in a large, interdisciplinary research project. In the words of the report where UK higher education and research has not embraced interdisciplinarity:

It has perhaps nurtured a relatively simplistic approach in some disciplines, emphasising rigorous demonstration of cause and effect at the expense of efforts to understand society as a complex system of physical, technological, environmental, social, economic, political and cultural processes and feedback loops. (British Academy, 2015: 22).

In our creative arts and interdisciplinary work we have grappled with entanglements and sought to reach deeper meanings at every stage of our collaborative process.

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