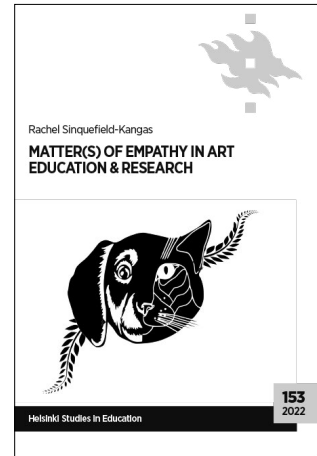


Matter(s) of Empathy in Art Education & Research

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I would like to begin my discussion here by proposing a question to you. The question is- *what could happen if education were to integrate empathy through art?* Imagining what such possibilities surround this question has resided at the heart of my doctoral thesis which I present to you now.

By closely exploring artistic practices of art viewing and artmaking and their connections with empathy, this thesis illuminates matter as a matter of importance when it comes to empathy in art education & research. Objects, materials, matter(s) play an essential role in artistic practices in helping us both to materialize and recognize what it is that matters.

The word matter(s), as it is written in the title of my thesis, is done so to indicate how 'matter' in its physical, material contexts, are also important constituents in circumstantial matters for example, in the socio-political and/or technoscientific issues of our time.

Art and empathy have a past, present, and hopeful future. The past that art and empathy

share frequently gets overlooked in present-day empathy studies. Empathy was translated from the German word *Einfühlung* by Edward Titchener in 1909. During that time objects of art played a fundamental role in helping *Einfühlung* theorist (German Aesthetic theorists) develop empathy as a concept. According to prominent empathy historian Susan Lanzoni, early *Einfühlung* theorist held a panpsychist view of empathy, suggesting matter was imbued with a mind-like qualities or a soul. Throughout decades of empathy's study empathy's meaning evolved, so much so, that how we describe empathy today is in fact the *opposite* of its original meaning.

Presently, the concept of empathy suffers from a lack of clarity, and this has not made studying empathy any easier. Empathy is commonly understood today as either compassion, "I feel your pain" or as perspective taking, "putting yourself in someone else's shoes". Technically, both are examples of empathy. However, strictly assigning empathy

Table 1. Batson's Eight Empathic Phenomena (slightly modified from original)

| Concept 1 | Concept 2 | Concept 3 | Concept 4 |
|--|---|---|---|
| "Knowing [an]other's internal state, including their thoughts and feelings" (p.4). | "Adopting the posture or matching the neural responses of an observed other" (p.4). | "Coming to feel similar feelings as [an]other" (p.5). | "Intuiting or projecting oneself into [an]other's situation" (p.6). |
| Concept 5 | Concept 6 | Concept 7 | Concept 8 |
| "Imagining how [an] other is thinking and feeling" (p.7). | "Imagining how one would think and feel in [an]other's place" (p.7). | "Feeling distress at witnessing [an]other suffering" (p.7). | "Feeling for [an]other who is suffering" (p.8). |

a singular definition limits our understanding of empathy's full potential. Promoting or valuing one definition of empathy over others, makes empathy venerable to manipulation. As empathy can be used to promoted selected political agendas, making way for educational policies to implement social curriculum that prescribes how, what, and who students should become. Empathy is not always warm and cuddly, as the concept is often flaunted. Empathetic behaviors are neither good nor bad. According to social psychologist Daniel Batson, there are currently eight distinct empathetic behaviors. Batson (2019) also suggests that empathetic behaviors do not occur in isolation, rather, in evoking any one empathetic behavior, we also solicit others.

Early on in my research I decided to not to give empathy a specific definition, but rather to focus on all conceptualizations in trying to understand its connection with art. Particularly, I wanted to examine situated events of art-viewing and artmaking and how empathetic behaviors occur within these activities.

Visual thinking strategies

My research journey began with exploring empathy and art viewing. For this I used arts-based research methods in the form of

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VTS is a form of aesthetic interview developed by Abigail Housen in the late 80's, that Philip Yenawine later helped developed into educational curriculum. It uses three simple questions to solicit viewers' aesthetic experiences of a particular artwork.

- What do you see going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

In my first study participants were asked these VTS questions while looking at this illustration from Shaun Tan's graphic novel *The Arrival*. Participants' self-report surveys indicated they experienced more than one empathetic behavior during their art viewing experience. The empathetic behavior *imagining what another is thinking and feeling*, was reported as having been experienced by everyone. In concluding the study suggests that engaging groups in socialized activities of art viewing manifests empathetic behaviors, and that activities of art-viewing elicits empathy in ways that fosters participants' abilities to change, or see, meanings within the illustration, in new and different ways.

My second study explored connections between artmaking and empathy. The object of the suitcase, which had been mentioned



Study 1. Tan, S. (2008) *The Arrival* (Illustration). Reprint with permission from Lothian Books.

seventeen times by participants in the first study, reminded me of how *Einfühlung* theorist used art objects art in their earlier studies of empathy. Artmaking, involves objects and various materials in both their physical capacities as well as their meaningful ones. This brought me to question, how it might be that non-human objects, I called the ‘things’- factor into instances where empathetic behaviors occur during activities of artmaking.

Ruminating back to perceptions of empathy and panpsychism, I began searching for theories that could expand my knowledge and understanding regarding the nature and potential of objects, materials, or matters. Little did I know this would require a departure from the prevalent traditional positivist theories occupying my own mind at the time. And it just so happens, theories of this kind do exist. However, coming to understand these theories involved stepping beyond of the

confines of my own comfort zone, taking an entirely new outlook on life, and re-thinking how it is I come to know and be in the world.

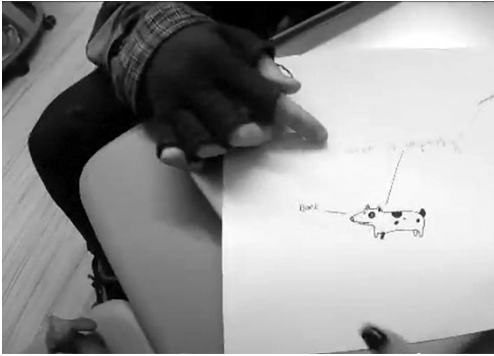
It required a shift in my knowing about the world, to my knowing and being of the world, a paradigm shift. But, as they say... shift happens!

In the field of social sciences, Feminist new materialisms is a specific domain within posthumanism ideas. New materialisms take seriously the liveliness of matter or things. The post in posthumanism does not mean after humanism, rather it indicates a refusal to differentiate ‘human’ from ‘nonhuman’ as separate categories of their own.

Feminist new materialisms shifts the spotlight off humans onto broader assemblages. This is done in efforts to dismantle Cartesian dualistic understandings of the world that seeks to separate the mind/body, subject/object, or self/other. This does not mean humans are forgotten, alternatively it means that non-human others are equally attended to.

Agential realism is a theory developed by feminist studies professor Karen Barad whose background includes a PhD in theoretical partial physics and quantum field theory. In their theory agential realism, agencies are real, both human and non-human. However, agency does not belong to any either one of these entities. Agency come from enactments, or the ongoing materializations of the world. Things, objects, materials, people do not pre-exist as outside one another, alternatively they exist as things-in-phenomena or entanglements.

My onto-epistemological shift led me to explore the ongoing relationalities between art and empathy by tracing connective threads of objects, materials, matter used in artmaking in their agentic capacities to reshape the artmaking process. In study 2 non-human others, namely cats and dogs emerged from one video artwork. When tasked with creating a video artwork to answer the question ‘what is



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empathy' a particular video artwork emerged revealing underlying frictions between the participants as to whether cats or dogs sound be the topic of their video artwork. The agentic capacity of the dogs/cats, throughout their video artmaking endeavor become recognizable when the participants change the question from 'what is empathy' to 'why are dog empathetic'. During the video Raija, one young participant, using dogs to think with generates two answers to the question: "Because when your excited the dog is excited" (emotional contagion) and "and...umm...they come to see what's wrong when your sad" (compassion).

Defining empathy within agential realism, empathy is evoked here as Raija comes to recognize the nature of herself in dogs and the nature of dogs in herself. Further, this study illuminates how re-thinking the concept of embodiment and objects, materials, matter as phenomena allows us to map the entangled

agencies of human and non-humans, and how as entanglements, these work together in evoking empathetic behaviors during activities of art making.

The third study again uses video arts-based methods to examine empathy and artmaking. Education students seeking an emphasis in visual arts and music, worked collaboratively in creating videoart works around the collective 'garden' theme. The garden theme was inspired by young climate activist, Greta Thunberg. They also shared written portfolios describing their artistic processes. Objects, materials, matters, specifically flora or plants are re-thought through their temporalities as phenomena using the concept of spacetime-mattering.

In drawing connections between spacetime-mattering in agential realism context and indigenous cosmologies of place-though, which is an indigenous ontology that under-



Study 3. Research participants (2022). Image of "Lehtimies" from *Lehtikasa* (video artwork).



Study 3. Research participants (2022). Image of "Sock-n-buskin figure holding a potted plant" from *Create your own reality* (video artwork).

stands place and thought as deriving agencies from each other, this study suggests that empathy is conjured during activities of art making as of objects/materials pique our curiosity in coming to understand these better. As technoscientific actors, blending the boundaries between human and nature, two important characters, *Lehtimies* (Leafman) and the *sock-n-buskin figure sitting holding a potted plant* materialize within the video artworks. The study illuminates the pedagogical potential of spacetimemattering during practices of artmaking to evoke empathetic behaviors through objects, materials, matter(s) as temporal phenomena.

In agential realism *things* do not exist in isolation. Alternatively, they are things-in-phenomena. Phenomena constitute our basic units of reality. Intra-actions is a neologism Barad created to indicate how things, materials, matter, pre-exist as entanglements. According to agential realism, when things intra-act they are materially-discursive. Materials are discursive, and not in a traditional linguistic understanding, they discursively relate through their ongoing differences.

Arts-based methods

Using arts-based research methods to explore empathy in my studies, has brought awareness

to what potential using ABR methods can offer studies involving empathy. Often empathy studies rely on testing measures, the *Empathy Quotient*, *Jefferson Empathy Scale*, *Interpersonal Reactivity Index*, for example, as these are considered rigorous reliable apparatuses for measuring empathy through scientific study. The problem is that such testing measure only reveal limited information about empathy and those who *'have it'*. Such testing falls short in providing explanations as to *how* empathy works. In agential realism apparatuses reconfigure the world in new, material specific ways. Apparatuses are not innocent practices; they are boundary drawing practices determining what gets to matter and what gets excluded from mattering. Quantifying or measuring empathy (assuming we possess amounts) essentially dislocates empathy from situations where it occurs.

Such testing apparatuses used in contemporary psychology and sociopsychology further promotes anthropocentric values of empathy by focusing primarily on how empathy benefits inter-relational capacities of humans. Using ABR for my studies has allowed me to recognize that empathetic behaviors extend beyond human-to-human relations, as seen for example in studies II and III were cats, dogs, plants, and leaves are explicit in empathy performativity. It is often the case when testing for empathy, that empathetic

behaviors, get divided as either belonging to the mind (cognitive empathy) or as affective (emotionally). Using arts-based methods here has illustrated how according to agential realism, embodiment involves objects/materials/matter(s) as they form extensions of our mind-bodies in evoking empathy.

Engaging arts-based research methods for studying empathy has also provided glimpses as to the ways in which empathetic behaviors can be conjured for pedagogical integration. By thinking outside Cartesian subject/object dualisms and alternatively focusing on the ongoing relationalities of objects, materials, matter(s), educators can begin to recognize how artistic practices invoke empathy. Three pedagogical themes have materialized over the course of this study. The 1st involves rethinking the nature of subjectivity and objectivity. The 2nd relates to objects/materials/and matter(s) and their spacetime-mattering to transcend past, present, and future in connection with empathy. The 3rd is teaching objects, materials, and matter(s) as things-in-phenomena. By integrating empathy through art, educators' manifest empathy through relational ethics. Building responsibility, accountability, and caring for what matter(s).

In agential realism *performativity* is doing-in-being. Using arts-based methods has

allowed me to recognize empathetic behaviors as they are manifesting through both participants and my own actions. Using ABR methods to study empathy affords researchers' opportunities to closely examine *how* it is empathy works. Medical humanities researcher Claire Hooker purposes that empathy is not something we have or possess in amounts, alternatively empathy is something we *do*.

If you recall the question at the beginning of my speech -what could happen if education were to integrate empathy through art?

The studies here, suggests that using art education to integrate empathy allows us to do so through an ethics of accountability and responsibility. This is possible because during artistic practices participants are tasked with accounting for the role *they* play in responding to matter(s), be they socio-political, technoscientific, or any issues concerning our time they want to materialize. Susan Lanzoni suggests the way we image empathy matters, because 'these imaginings themselves can open up new possibilities for connection'. Integrating empathy with art education and research is essential for fostering empathy's complex, dynamic, materially entangled attributes. Expanding empathy across humans and non-humans and allowing empathy's transformative potential to collectively transpire in 21st century education.