

**Co-creating Embodied, Sensory, and Interactive Knowledge  
through Art-Based Research**

Anastasia Seregina<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Anastasia Seregina (corresponding author) is a Lecturer in Marketing at Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London, SE14 6NW, UK, [a.seregina@gold.ac.uk](mailto:a.seregina@gold.ac.uk)

**Abstract**

In the past few decades, there has been a growing amount of interest toward alternative research methods within consumer culture research. The goal of such approaches is to engage understanding in a more sensory, bodily, discursive, and experiential manner. Nevertheless, while aiming to transgress traditions of research, alternative approaches often end up inadvertently repeating existing structures of knowledge. To provide a perspective on how alternative research methods could utilize the full power of the tools they introduce to research, this paper introduces art-based research (ABR), a methodology that approaches knowledge in an interactive, emotional, and co-created manner. In practice, ABR is a process-oriented methodology that involves taking on artistic practice as part of research. ABR further employs a different approach to what knowledge is, how and when knowledge is created, and who is a part of knowledge creation, thus providing an avenue for novel perspectives to understanding within consumer research.

**Keywords:** alternative research method, art-based research, artistic practice, artistic research, interactive knowledge

## **Introduction**

In 2012, Seregina (2014, 2018) started exploring experiences of fantasy as part of a consumer culture research project. She was interested in understanding what the concept of fantasy means as an experience on a bodily and interactional level, exploring these phenomena via means of ethnography and in-depth interviews in the context of live action role-playing games. In engaging in these research methods traditional to cultural consumer research, Seregina was getting deep into the culture and lived meaning of fantasy. Yet, she was faced with a conundrum. Seregina was dealing with experiences that are, at their core, bodily and emotional. In the context of the research, fantasy experiences thus emerged as expression and interactions that informants never had nor fully could verbalise, yet ones that they were extremely aware of in other forms of understanding. Such a situation is not unique to Seregina. Valtonen, Markuksela, and Moisander (2010) have expressed the frustration of translating sensory and bodily knowledge into text in the context of fishing. Wood (2015) similarly describes his dismay over the lack of interactive, affective understanding in research, which, he believes, is purported by the prioritization of printed word in academia.

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

On a practical level, a variety of so-called 'alternative' research methods have been developed to aid the engagement of knowledge in a more emotional, bodily, and sensory

manner. These aim to conduct research, represent findings, and engage audiences in ways different from traditional academic text through the use of video (Belk and Kozinets 2005; Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten 2014), poetry (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Downey 2016), sensory ethnography (Pink 2015; Valtonen, Markuksela, and Moisander 2010) creative writing (Brown 2011; Schouten 2014), photography (Basil 2011; Ozanne, Moscato, and Kunkel 2013), and art installations (Modrak 2015; Broeckerhoff and Seregina 2016).

Yet alternative methods face many issues that deter their users from utilizing the full power of their research tools. As will be explained in more detail, alternative methods are rarely used without traditional methods or textual aids, losing a lot of their novelty through verbalisation. The use of alternative methods further tends to focus on gathering or analysing data, with the overall methodology still taking on traditional academic form. Such approaches *do* allow for giving more power and voice to informants, but rarely consider wider audiences and are inclined to structure interaction via traditional academic text. Overall, alternative methods tend to be constrained by the traditions of academia that they aim to flee from, thus recreating traditional forms of knowledge or translating alternative approaches into them.

Moreover, while taking on a variety of artistic tools as part of alternative methods, cultural consumer research has not fully explored or engaged artistic processes in themselves as part of research practice. In line with this, previous consumer research has called for exploring how artistic processes could be engaged in research. For instance, Sherry and Schouten (2002) call for more methodological exploration of artistic practice as an aid to research, while Canniford (2012) and Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) call for research methods that engage expressive artistic processes.

In order to address the above issues and develop the use of expressive, interactive, artistic processes as part of research, this paper introduces the methodology of art-based research (ABR). ABR is an approach that utilizes artistic practice throughout the research

project as a way of exploring phenomena and communicating with audiences. The methodology shifts focus from the product of research to the process of research, giving room for experiences, relationships, and dialogue to be created through it. ABR thus requires a different attitude toward research and knowledge creation from both researcher and audience, pointing to an epistemology that is interaction and experience oriented. The methodology further requires continuous reflexivity, breaking researchers' and audience's assumptions, as well as making them question their understanding and look for new meaning. All in all, ABR provides an overarching methodology with focus on artistic practice that restructures the entire research process, its representation and expression.

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

### **Alternative research methods in consumer culture research**

Consumer culture research has a long-standing history of using alternative research methods in order to engage experience and understanding from bodily, sensual, and affective perspectives. It is important to note that these alternative methods do not form a single methodology, using a variety of tools and approaches. Nevertheless, the emergence of these methods arises from a similar need to overcome limiting structures of research traditions.

Consumer culture research is an interpretive research field that was born out of criticism toward positivist and post-positivist logics that are heavily emphasised in consumer research. Instead of adhering to a strict research protocol that accurately answers research questions that correspond with a 'true' reality, interpretive approaches seek to describe

contextual, perceived realities through a continuously evolving and adapting research design (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Yet the interpretive approach has its setbacks as well. As Sherry and Schouten (2002) write, interpretive work tends to be dominated by the “authoritative voice of realist ethnography” (220) through the thick description of social worlds. They add that such work fails to tap into emotional, co-created, lived meaning and **experience**. Wood (2015) follows a similar line of reasoning, adding that such research often fails to tap into the affect, subjectivity, discursiveness, and aesthetics of lived experience.

**Commented [Office1]:** Similarly, Pomies and Tissier-Debord (2016) suggest that researchers should approach their research and research objects in a similar way that artists approach their artwork.

Getting more specific, Moisander, Valtonen and Hirsto (2009) argue that the focus on existential phenomenology in interpretive consumer research tends to be too individualistic, thus failing to take into consideration cultural complexity. They suggest developing a more discursive research approach that takes into consideration cultural dynamics and cultural structuring of consumption. On a practical level, they propose the use interactional interviews, in which knowledge is created collaboratively among researcher(s) and participants. Following these notions, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) have argued that research focuses too much on the subjective descriptions of the inner worlds of individuals, which puts aside social and cultural aspects of human life. They suggest that we need to “bring consumers alive as real people” (399) through better contextualisation of research that takes into consideration intersubjective dynamics of cultural, societal, and historical structures.

As a response to the above, consumer researchers have taken up alternative research methods, moving toward knowledge that is created through interactive means of exploring the research phenomenon, context, and informants. Researchers hope to engage new ways of understanding by using tools outside of the norms of traditional, academic text and language.

Text and language are often put above all other forms of representation of knowledge, both within and outside of academia. As Linstead (1994) and Blumenfeld-Jones (2016) explain, the power and authority of text and language in contemporary culture are heavily

linked to the preferred type of knowledge in Western society overall, which is rational and regulatory (Gummeson 2001), clearly recorded and presented (Finley 2003), as well as focused on answers and truth-value (Scotti and Aicher 2016). Bleiker (2001) suggests that the prioritisation of textual knowledge is connected to social science being largely positivist and realist, elevating writing as a neutral, objective faculty. Eisner (1997) explains that such knowledge based in claims, assertions, and propositions *requires* text and language for its formation. Yet, as Meyer et al. (2013) show, experience cannot always be placed into syntactical units that text would demand. In line with this, Warren (2002) stresses that language is a limited medium, as it involves no experiential aspects: no body, no emotion, no sensation. Meyer et al. (2013) agree and stress that language is just one way we communicate and engage with knowledge; just one medium of understanding; just one medium research.

Next I describe some of the central forms of alternative research methods taken on in consumer culture research, after which I propose the main issues that the use of such methods face, which I aim to resolve via ABR.

### *Visual media*

Visual media, such as photography, is probably the most popular medium for alternative research methods. The use of photographs and other illustrations is by no means alternative in itself; visual evidence is a common supportive element of ethnography and other interpretive research methods. Meamber (2013) even suggests that use of such visual media is *mandatory* in researching contemporary culture that is ocular in its nature. However, engaging visuals as a form of knowledge in their own right allows for new perspectives in research. As Meyer et al. (2013) explain, visuals can provide knowledge that is not linear and sequential, but rather

holistic and immediate. Following such notions, consumer researchers have taken up visual media as a focal point of research, approaching it in a variety of ways.

Visuals are often approached as a point of analysis. For instance, Scott (1994a, b) explored how individuals read, understand, and respond to the text and imagery of advertising. Schroeder has also explored visuals and especially photography from a variety of perspectives, investigating how individuals view, appreciate and critique imagery (2010), how individuals create photographic representations of their selves (1998) and their reality (2011), how individuals creating meaning via imagery (2002).

The *creation* of visuals has also been taken on as part of research. Heisley and Levy (1991) were among the first to use 'autodriving' in consumer research. In other words, the researchers photographed informants and then used these images in interviews as a form of photo elicitation, asking individuals to comment on and negotiate their own behaviour (see also Basil 2011). Taking on photography as an active representation of the researcher's point of view, Holbrook (1998) and O'Guinn (2015) have conducted research in the form of photo essays. Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel (2013) engaged a more active approach from the point of view of informants. They used the method of 'photo voice,' which gives informants quite a lot of freedom to take photographs that represent their lives in a specific subject matter.

Going beyond photography, researchers have also engaged in the creation of collages and drawings (Williams-Burnett and Skinner 2017). Reflecting the idea of photo elicitation, researchers have used a variety of visuals to evoke emotions and meanings in interview settings (Christenson and Olson 2002). Research has further taken up a variety of visual arts. Most notably, Modrak (2015) created designer axes as a part of her exploration of symbolism and authenticity in consumption. Taking on a similar focus on visual arts, the Consumer Culture Theory conference has hosted an Art Gallery Track since 2014, which showcases



projects using various visual media as part of research. These have included paintings, drawings, sculptures, and installations.

It is worthwhile to note that within alternative research methods, overwhelming primacy is given to visual form. For instance, as Scott (1994), Stern (1989), and Meamber (2013) have stressed that visual knowledge is central in contemporary culture. Bell, Warren and Schroeder (2014) further discuss 'visualising the linguistic turn.' However, there are many other ways of knowing besides seeing, as I discuss next. Stressing only the visual may run the risk of re-creating the limiting structures alternative methods aim to go beyond.

#### *Moving image*

The use of moving image is another popular alternative form of conducting consumer research. Wood (2015) explains that moving image allows for both researchers and their audiences to have a more affective and lived experience of the research.

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

There are varied perspectives on what the function of moving image is in research and how it should be used as representation. Schembri and Boyle (2013), for instance, describe the medium of video to be the closest a researcher can come to seeing the world through someone else's eyes, thus allowing for more authentic and rigorous interpretation. In contrast

to such 'representational' work, Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten (2014) offer an alternative 'expressive' approach to videography that "emphasizes the evocative power of moving images" (2019), aiming to explicitly create other worlds for audiences to engage with.

#### *Alternative use of text*

Consumer researchers have further promoted the alternative use of text as part of research. Most notably, poetry has gained a lot of traction as an approach within consumer research. Poetry has a strong presence in academic conferences (namely, the Consumer Culture Theory conference), as well as in research outlets, both as part of more traditional texts (Canniford 2012) and as publications in their own right (Schouten 2009). Sherry and Schouten (2002) describe poetry as grasping presence, emotion, and unmediated personal experience through resisting the reduction of experience to clinical, scientific language. Poetry emerges as a more affective way of *writing* research for researchers and a more affective way of *engaging* with research for audiences (Canniford 2012; Downey 2016).

In addition to poetry, consumer researchers have engaged in other forms of creative writing with the aim to use text in a less scientific manner. For example, Brown (2011) and Schouten (2014) have engaged in the use of prose as part of research. Taking on a somewhat different perspective, Stern (1989) has proposed the use of literary criticism in order to deconstruct ads and understand how consumers read them. Stern (1998) and Brown (2012, 2017), while remaining within traditional academic text, have advocated reconfiguring *how* we write such text. Stern specifically addresses the narrative structure of such work, suggesting that interpretive research can become akin to fiction writing. Interestingly, Leavy (2009) discusses similar ideas of conducting research through fiction in the context of ABR.

### *Performance, interaction, and the senses*

Lastly, a variety of interactive and performative approaches have been used as part of research. One popular approach is sensory ethnography, the aim of which is to widen perceptions and address the multi-sensory human experience delicately (Pink 2015).

Nakamura (2013) stresses that an important benefit of sensory ethnography is that it takes into consideration perceptions beyond sight and engages media other than text. To provide an example, Valtonen, Markuksela, and Moisander (2010) explored smells, sounds, temperatures, touches, and aches as part of their research on the practice of fishing.

In a similar manner, other approaches have allowed researching behaviour as a holistic, multi-sensory, cultural entity. For example, ethnoconsumerism “studies actions, thoughts, language, institutions, and their interconnections between the categories” (Venkatesh 1995, 27-8), thus allowing researchers to go beyond an emic perspective to develop deeper, engaged knowledge. Pitts and Gross (2017) have used the ‘audience exchange’ approach to create conversational, interactional understanding via dialogue. On a more bodily level, Bode and Chauvin (2015) have used music in their work, and Bode (2010) has proposed a performance-oriented approach to research. Modrak (2015), in connection to creating visuals, engaged in artistic interventions as part of research, while Vincs (2007) engaged in dance in his academic work.

### **Resolving issues faced by alternative research methods**

As it becomes apparent, a wide array of alternative approaches has been taken on in consumer culture research. Yet, as Firat and Dholakia (2017) note, research making use of alternative methods may not be fully utilizing their potential. While alternative methods have

certainly developed our approaches to knowledge and its creation, they still face many constraining issues. I explore these next.

First, alternative methods are rarely used in their pure form, that is, they usually emerge as an aid to or with the help of traditional work. For instance, videography (Belk and Kozinets 2005; Schembri and Boyle 2013) and poetry (Canniford 2012; Downey 2016) are usually created alongside ethnography, with the alternative method becoming a technique of getting at what scientific inquiry had difficulties with. As a result, researchers often end up using alternative methods merely as ‘furnishing’ evidence of traditional research, as Wood (2015) points out. When taking on alternative methodologies more holistically, researchers often opt to publish the work with written explanations. In the context of videographic work, de Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) have noted that they always accompany video with explanations. They imply that this is due to the fact that a lack of guidance may feel threatening or uncomfortable to both researchers and viewers. Yet explaining research transforms knowledge into the safe and familiar forms of academic text, thus losing much of the interactional, lived characteristics gained through the use of alternative methods.

Second, alternative research methods often take form in data or its collection. For example, Schroeder’s work (2006, 2010), while being seminal for the development of visual methods in consumer research, mainly focuses on *analysis* of visuals, be these images pre-existing or created by informants. For example, in his 2010 paper, Schroeder explores how consumers use snapshot photographs to construct their identities, using the visuals as something to analyse through language, thus translating visual knowledge into textual. Similarly, Heisley and Levy (1991) take on autodiving to create interactive, experiential data via use of visuals. However, the knowledge takes on a traditional textual form through description and analysis. In such endeavours, images *do* allow gaining new understanding and exploring a variety of meanings. However, the form of knowledge remains the same: by

translating alternative media into textual mode, the research engages and communicates knowledge in a traditional academic format.

Third, research making use of alternative research media also ends up taking the *form* academic writing. For instance, videographies tend to take the structure of journal articles, transferring the same form onto film (Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten 2014). In a similar manner, Canniford (2012) explains that poetry becomes an expressive and insightful way of using language in academic writing. Pomies and Tissier-Debord (2016) propose approaching research as artwork, yet still assume it to take form in text. Hence, in trying to attain new forms of knowledge and understanding, projects engaging alternative research methods may be inadvertently repeating the exact patterns they are trying to flee from.

Fourth, the power that alternative research methods purport to give to informants is very limited. One of the main aims of alternative methods has been argued to be the development of interactive ways of creating knowledge and engagement of informants in a way that gives them more power (Belk and Kozinets 2005; Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel 2013). Yet, most of the time, informants gain only trivial power or voice in these approaches, as researchers either employ the alternative methods themselves or clearly control their use among individuals. Reflecting the above concerns, this often emerges as a translation of other forms of knowledge into academic text. For instance, Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) asked their informants to take photographs that “‘tell who you are’ or ‘reflect things of importance in your everyday life’,” yet these photos were then verbally deconstructed during interviews. Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel (2013) asked their informants to take photos, yet, once again, these photos are discussed, explained, and analysed using quite traditional verbal approaches. Hence, informant voices become constructed and constrained by the researcher, with alternative approaches potentially losing their interactional benefits.

Fifth, alternative research methods rarely actively engage their audiences. Researchers using alternative research methods have stressed the possibilities of using their tools to transfer emotional and sensory experiences, thus creating reflexivity and resonance in audiences (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Petr, Belk, and Decrop 2015). Yet, when considered, these audiences are often approached as passive entities to be strictly and clearly guided (Seregina 2017). For instance, researchers talk about making video viewable for audiences, forming audience response, and shaping audiences' understanding (Kozinets and Belk 2005; De Valck, Rokka and Hietanen 2009). As a result, audiences are dictated how to interpret and understand research. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility of audience members actively engaging in reading or watching research: discussions may be born out of reading articles or taking part in conference sessions. However, the central issue is that audiences are *approached* as passive by researchers and not expected to influence the work itself beyond emotional response or perhaps a commentary. Yet, it is very reductive to think of an audience merely as unresponsive receivers of knowledge. If we want to explore interactive, discursive, culturally embedded knowledge, we would also need to consider the audience as interacting with and influencing knowledge creation.

Overall, the use of alternative methods in cultural consumer research could be described as constrained by the methodological history it aims to flee from. A possible explanation for these issues be the dominance of language and text as a way of producing and expressing knowledge: this is a medium that expects very specific one-way communication with a passive audience. This may be a difficult logic to leave behind. Additionally, researchers seem to believe that the responsibility of meaning-making lies with the researcher exclusively (Petr, Belk, and Decrop 2015). Yet this restricts knowledge creation and interactive capabilities of developing understanding, as well as pacifies audiences and informants as actors who are meant to be gaining more power.

Moreover, the issues may be explained by the systemic resistance of alternative methods. Wood (2015) suggests that many researchers do not perceive alternative approaches to be sufficient in demonstrating research, and Heisley (2001) explains that they are deemed as less intellectual and less academic than text. Kozinets and Belk (2007), and de Valck, Rokka, and Hietanen (2009) further add that alternative methods are seen as entertaining and are thus not given the focus and attention that 'real' research is. Faced with such stigma, alternative methods have a hard time gaining legitimization and acceptance within a context with a long tradition of producing specific types of text. Alternative methods have difficulty in gaining visibility, impeding their spread and making researchers wary of their use.

It is, of course, ironic, to argue against traditional forms of conducting research by writing a research paper. In many ways, this paper will do exactly what it suggests needs to be overcome. Yet, to begin a multimedia discussion of these topics and present practical examples to the academic audience, this paper feels necessary. Next, I provide a perspective on how we as researchers can overcome the above issues in using alternative research methods, allowing us to explore more creative and interactive forms of knowledge.

### **Art-Based Research of Fantasy Experiences**

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

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

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

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

Next, I explore how an ABR project develops and is done in practice through the example of Seregina's work on fantasy experiences. I discuss the creating of ABR, the



interactive role of the audience, the epistemology of ABR, and the evaluation of ABR. It is important to stress that the example provided is just one way of using ABR; ABR is a methodology that can emerge in a variety of ways and using a variety of media.

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

As described in brief in the introduction, Seregina's work on fantasy experience aimed to understand fantasy (that is, the conscious experiencing of something as not real) as a bodily, interactive, lived experience. The context of research was live action role-playing games, which allowed the researcher to engage in the enactment of fantasy as a deeply interactive, emotional, and bodily performance. I will not discuss in depth the theoretical or empirical basis of the project here, rather focusing on the methodological characteristics of ABR taken on as part of it (see Seregina 2014, 2018 for more on the research project).

Seregina's work was initially going to be quite a traditional ethnography. Yet, when engaged in data collection, it became apparent to the researcher that these methods were not going to be enough. Seregina (2018) notes that exploring fantasy experience by means of linguistic and textual forms only felt restrictive, as these did not allow either the researcher or the informants to get into enough depth on the subject of fantasy experiences. It felt like discussions and observations did not describe lived sensations in enough detail and lacked emotional, experiential characteristics in their description, analysis, and representation. Crawford (2009) has similarly stressed that tacit knowledge may be beyond what we can say. As academic text felt restrictive and did not communicate enough, it became pertinent for Seregina to find other ways of engaging the exploration and representation of knowledge.

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

the ABR approach is thus to illuminate human life as it is lived through moving to new forms of representation and directly encountering phenomena (Simons and McCormack 2007; Leavy 2009). In this, ABR grounds nonverbal thinking and feeling, creating immersive and bodily awareness (Blumenfeld-Jones 2016).

In her work on fantasy experiences, Seregina turned to creating artwork as part of her research practice (see Picture 1). More specifically, she began creating paintings and mixed media installations in order to better understand the theory and the empirical context that she was engaging in. In discussing art and aesthetics, Collingwood (1938) theorised that creating artwork allows individuals to become more aware of and enhance their understanding of experiences. He suggests that this is due to artistic practice forcing us to step to the very edge of what we know, encouraging us to go further and thus engaging us in knowledge that would not be possible otherwise. In a similar manner, Barone and Eisner (2012) explain that engaging in various forms of creating art extends representation and expresses meaning that is beyond the means of academic text. Reflecting these ideas, Seregina notes that artistic practice pushed her to think and approach the subject of her research in new ways, thus allowing for novel perspectives and understanding. Novel forms of understanding emerged through breaking conventions and assumption, and through taking on creativity and intuition as part of research (Barone and Eisner 2012).

<insert picture 1 about here>

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

As it has become apparent so far, ABR involves taking on artistic practice as part of research. But does this mean? In taking on ABR, Seregina's exploration of fantasy experiences was completely restructured in terms of research practice. More specifically, artistic practice

became a major element of the process. Seregina describes creating paintings and mixed media installations as part of the research, with the artistic practice helping her engage the themes of research, creating and developing new knowledge about the studied phenomena.

In her 2018 book, Seregina describes her artistic process to usually start with a blank canvas or paper and the aim to express and explore a particular aspect of the project. Such aspects included theoretical concepts, strands of various interdisciplinary literature, her own fantasy experiences, and various other interactions she had with the informants and context. Driven by a need to explore and build understanding, art would emerge in a bodily manner as a process of trying to figure out and express experience that has no predefined form or logic and resists easy patterns; reproducing something that does not have structure by changing one's own perception and comfortable form of expression. Crawford (2009) discusses a similar process of knowledge creation in the context working as a mechanic. He stresses that whereas academic work is often deals with "the world as something of [academics'] own making" (82), working manually forces you to confront the world, deal with problems not of your own making, let go of yourself and focus on others. He adds that seeing and doing as iterative processes allow us to gain more acute vision of and active engagement with the world by responding directly to the others and holding ourselves responsible to them. Similar ideas are at the basis of Seregina's work: using embodied artistic practice, she was able to engage bodily, material, and emotional knowledge, thus gaining multi-sensory understanding.

Barone and Eisner (2012) explain that ABR emerges as investigation of the social world and as the transformation of that investigation into art forms. Holm (2008) continues that ABR can be produced either by the researcher, the subject(s), or both together. Seregina's work provides an example of researcher created art, even though informants were consulted throughout the process through interviews and discussions, and were thus engaged

in the process to an extent. More interactive forms of ABR could include things like artistic workshops or creation of artwork together with informants.

ABR can involve any form of artistic practice. In the example of the work on fantasy experiences, the media used were visual. Yet ABR does not focus on a specific medium, and research using the approach can emerge through various artistic processes and forms, such as paintings (Scotti and Aicher, 2016), collages (Vaughan, 2005), art installations (Ward 2016; Broeckerhoff and Seregina 2017), or poems (Rhoades 2016). ABR further combines various media. For instance, Minge (2006) used a combination of painting, writing, and performance.

The main outlets for ABR are usually *not* journal articles or books traditional to academia, but elements of the project may nevertheless be published in these traditional media for documentation or as parallel research. However, it is important to stress that these do not provide explanations of the work. Moreover, while ABR usually produces some kind of material, tactile, or expressive outcome, it is the process rather than the output that is at focus of the approach. Hence, it may be possible for ABR to leave no physical evidence of its existence at all. I address these issues in more detail throughout the next sections.

#### *Use of theory and other methods in ABR*

Artistic practice in ABR is heavily guided and informed by theory (Andersson 2009). In Seregina's work, process of creating art was based on various literature and discussions, and aimed to gain clearer understanding of theory and concepts, as well as their structures and connections to each other (see Picture 2). The artistic process ended up aiding the researcher in understanding theory through processing the knowledge via visual form. This allowed for deeper engagement with literature and its discussion with audiences.

<Insert Picture 2 about here>

ABR can further involve the use and support of other empirical methods (Andersson 2009). Interviews, discussion groups, and participant observation are often used as basis for practice. In Seregina's work, ethnography and in-depth interviews with live action role-players became a central basis and inspiration for artistic practice. Here, the focus of creating paintings was to figure out and better understand the researcher's own engagement in and interaction with others in the context of fantasy experiences (see Picture 3). The creation of paintings became an embodied process of understanding the researcher's own senses, actions, emotions, and interactions as well as those of others in more detail and from novel perspectives. This resulted in understanding that was felt and experienced rather than logically constructed via means of existing structures of academic text.

<Insert picture 3 about here>

As mentioned, ABR does welcome parallel expression via traditional textual means. Andersson (2009) explains that traditional expressions of a project using ABR do not need to be excluded because of artistic output, as long as the two do not restrict one another. In other words, the output of ABR should not be treated as data for or visualization of research, but rather as a process in its own right. Similarly, text should not emerge as explanation of ABR, but rather as a different version of the project. To link back to the literature review, the parallel expressions are not meant to explain ABR, nor does ABR furnish these expressions. Traditional research and ABR can, nevertheless, exist in symmetry, supporting and possibly informing one another (Andersson 2009; Busch 2009). Reflecting this, Seregina's work has found outputs both in more traditional forms of books and journal articles, yet also in the

form of artwork that has been presented at workshops, lectures, and art galleries. The two cast light on one another and have a similar basis, but are separate and parallel.

### *Researcher reflexivity*

Taking on ABR allowed Seregina to structure and articulate knowledge in a different way. In descriptions of her approach (2018), Seregina stresses that artistic practice pushed her to think in new ways and approach her work from new perspectives through taking something abstract and forcing into visual form via bodily practice. This opened an avenue for understanding that connected to feelings, senses, materials, and movements. The process is not pre-structured, and requires the researcher to oscillate between making, seeking, and reflecting, allowing for deeper connection with the work and becoming responsible to its representation on a bodily level. Understanding is furthered by working through the same themes in several iterations of art practice (see Picture 4).

<Insert picture 4 about here>

As Leavy (2009, 2018b) stresses, heightened researcher reflexivity becomes a central aspect of ABR. Collingwood (1938) explains that creating art makes us more aware of our experiences, uncovering new ideas and aiding us in exploring them. Artistic processes thus help us think and experience, developing ideas and enhancing our understanding of them. Hatcher (1999) explains that this is due various visual and kinetic processes being helpful in synthesising patterns. Bennett (2011) continues that artistic practice reconfigures events and experiences, tracing connections and revealing meanings, which allows for generating new perspectives. Art does not record reality, but becomes a means of seeing it anew.

Graham (2000) proposed three ways in which artistic practice enhances understanding through its reflexive nature. Firstly, creating art pushes us to focus on the sensual and bodily experience of the particular medium (e.g., visuals for painting and bodily movements for dancing), making us more aware of said experience and allowing us to explore it. Secondly, in communicating via artistic practice, we become more aware of the expressed emotions and experiences as part of our lived existence. Thirdly, artistic practice pushes the limits of our understanding by suggesting previously unimaginable possibilities and questioning elements that seem unquestionable. Artistic practice thus helps us understand by pushing us to think and experience differently, and by questioning the norms of each element of our work.

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

#### *Artistic skill*

A central issue that is often discussed in relation to ABR is the associated artistic skill. 'Does this limit or expand the capabilities of research?' asks Chilton (2013). In other words, does engaging in ABR require a certain level of artistic skill, thus excluding many potential users?

In the case of Seregina's work, she had a background in art practice and in the medium of painting she chose to incorporate into her research. While having no formal education, Seregina did have extensive training in fine arts. Nevertheless, at the time of the particular research project, she could not be called a professional artist nor was she involved

in the art world in any extensive manner. In light of this, it is important to stress that artistic skill is not central to successful engagement in ABR.

Finley (2003) and Barone and Eisner (2012) argue that traditional evaluation of artistic skill is irrelevant to ABR, with focus rather turning to whether the process of creating and communicating through artistic processes is engaging to the audience. Jones (2006) suggests another way of resolving the issue of artistic skill: collaboration among practitioners. ABR does not need to be used in isolation, but can rather be done as part of cross-disciplinary collaborations (see also Andersson 2011; Busch 2009). Artistic skill is also problematic to focus on in evaluating ABR, as it becomes increasingly difficult to define, let alone assess in the contemporary cultural context (Barone and Eisner 2012).

While objective artistic skill is irrelevant to ABR, it is important to note that researchers using ABR need to, nevertheless, be aware and reflexive of the medium they are using. In other words, while ABR does not require a background with a specific medium, researchers should aim to learn about the medium they intend to use, the senses and knowledge that it taps into, the practice that it involves, and the background that it has. Different media allow researchers to tap into different aspects of experience, requiring different skills and evaluation. Furthermore, each mode of expression has its own historical and social context, which will influence its reception and use. For example, most Western individuals will approach paintings in a similar analytical and distanced manner, as they will have learnt this via their socialisation. A larger installation, on the other hand, may automatically invite more physical interaction. For instance, Broeckerhoff and Seregina's (2016) "Shopping at 'Capitalist Peace'" included a scene from a grocery store, with audience members invited to interact with the artwork as they would with a store shelf. In awareness of the characteristics of their medium, researchers can connect to their context and audience in deeper and more meaningful ways, allowing contextualisation and interaction.



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

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

A central aspect of ABR is a focus on knowledge creation as an interactive and co-creative process. As a result, audience members take on an active role in ABR. Audience refers to quite a wide and fluid group of individuals that interacts with the research either directly or via media. In this sense, the audience can include one’s informants and research context, and is not limited to the academic context. In fact, ABR actively promotes making research more accessible to audience outside of academia (Leavy 2018b). The audience is also not limited to the individuals that interact with the ‘ready’ work, but can involve interaction on any level of

progress. As I discuss next, the audience is present in all phases of research, thus influencing and co-creating knowledge at all stages of the process.

#### *Audience and artistic (process)*

As noted earlier, ABR can involve either researcher- or participant-created art (Holm 2008). Therefore, research participants can take on a very active role in the creation of research and its material or immaterial outcomes. This active participation can take on very different forms and can emerge on very different scales as part of ABR projects. In Seregina's work, participant involvement during the creation of artwork was quite limited. The artwork was mainly researcher-created, yet individuals from the research context were consulted during the ABR process and themes of the work were discussed with them.

Participation of the audience in creation of ABR can be much more active. For instance, Stoll, Sørmo, and Gårdvik (2017) used communal art to explore topics around marine debris using a variety of workshops that incorporated discussions and creation of artwork together. When taking on audience members as active co-creators, ABR stresses minimal guidance and intervention in the process, with art practice rather becoming a process of doing, making, and experiencing together.

The amount of audience participation during creation of artwork does not point to the success or failure of the research approach from the point of view of ABR. As Pigrum and Stables (2005) as well as Leavy (2009, 2018a) explain, the aim of ABR is to create expressive, emotional, bodily engagement among researcher(s), the context of research, and the audience of research. ABR does aim to approach and create knowledge in an interactive manner among individuals, yet this interaction need not take place during the creation of art.

Active interaction with research participants is in no way a novel approach. Consumer researchers using alternative methods have advocated interacting with research participants and allowing them to voice their experiences in new ways. For instance, Sherry and Schouten

(2002) as well as Canniford (2012) discuss how poetry allows communication of cultural and emotional meaning between researcher and researched more directly. Ozanne, Moscato and Kunkel (2013) created photography together with the participants, showing that this can have transformative social and political influence on the individuals engaged in the process. Reflecting Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto's (2009) and Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for research that is discursive and contextualised, alternative research methods allow both researchers and the informants to become reflexive about the social and cultural structures they are interacting in, thus providing possibilities for new types of knowledge and "making beneficial differences on the lives of consumers" (Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto, 2009, 343). Yet such approaches seem to only consider the co-creation of meaning between researcher and their informants/context, mainly emerging as data to be analysed. I suggest that the consumers whose lives researchers could be impacting are not just the informants, but also the wider audience of research. Moreover, the interaction in itself can become a form of knowledge, without the added translation of it into traditional academic form.

#### *Audience and artistic (product)*

As mentioned, ABR usually (although not necessarily) produces some kind of tactile or expressive outcome. This may take the form of writing, visuals, performances, etc. In the case of Seregina's work, the outcome took form in paintings and mixed media installations, with audience participation not being very active during the creation of the artwork. However, in ABR, the line between the process and product of research becomes extremely blurred. As Collingwood (1938) has argued, art does not exist in its physical manifestation, but it is rather continuous action, emerging as apprehension of it by and between artist and

audience. Similarly, Hatcher (1999) argues that art is at its core a form of communication, thus existing only in the interaction that it creates among individuals and the art.

In presenting the research, an ABR process, therefore, does not end. ABR continues in the interaction of the audience with more substantial (but never ready) versions of the work. The audience and the context remain active parts of the research through participation and involvement throughout the process, with their role needing continuous consideration and reflection from the researcher(s), even when the research is seemingly done.

Reflecting these notions, the audience played an active part also in Seregina's work. The paintings and installations have been presented at a variety of venues, both academic and not academic (see Picture 5). At these events, the art pieces became a way of communicating the work that had already been done in the context of the ABR project, but, more importantly they also worked as a point of departure for discussions, revelations, and experiences, thus further developing and co-creating knowledge. Following such events, Seregina continued artistic practice, developing existing pieces or creating new ones.

<Insert picture 5 about here>

Seregina stresses that the instances of audience interaction are not merely contexts for getting feedback and comments of the research, but rather emerge as central instances of the research process. The art pieces opened up the topic of fantasy experiences for discussion, exploration, and development, providing the basis for lively interaction and multi-sided understanding. Audience members note having sensory and emotional experiences through the art, connecting these to their own past and knowledge, as well as gaining an avenue for novel understanding of both abstract concepts and tactile experiences. Understanding and meaning emerged in the interactions between researcher, audience, and art pieces.

The venues used for ABR vary a lot from project to project, depending on the needs and possibilities of specific media as well as desired modes of interaction. Venues may include galleries or conferences (such as in Seregina's work), but also classrooms or public spaces (Stoll, Sørmo, and Gårdvik 2017). Different venues allow for reaching different audiences as well as using different modes of and media for interaction.

#### *"Reading" ABR*

ABR allows for interactive, bodily, sensory meaning-making and knowledge creation. The essence of this approach lies in that it has no preconceived structure and is thus open to develop freely. Yet, having no scripted way of interaction can also be a great challenge. 'How can we read it?' asks Warren (2008). How can we be sure that the audience will know how to engage in the 'correct' way? Text has a seemingly straightforward way its audience can approach and understand it. But we have no 'right' way of understanding the knowledge provided by ABR, as it is subjectively perceived and open to multiple interpretations.

Similar issues have arisen in the context of alternative methods used in consumer culture research. As a response, videographers have, for instance, stressed the need to create moving image that is readily viewable and readable, thus providing the audience with a well-structured, guided experience (Belk and Kozinets 2005). Yet such an idea is in direct contradiction with the ABR methodology. ABR pushes the audience to form their own meaning and their own interpretation, not just readily consume one. The underlying idea is that by presenting the audience with something they do not fully understand, individuals become engaged.

Reflecting on this through the lens of traditional academic work, we are once again faced with double standards. No one is expected to be guided through how to read a journal

article. Yet, while we may all be able to read the words, the readers of academic books and papers are definitely not understanding or interpreting them in the same way. This is due to various cultural, linguistic, historical, societal, and even individual characteristics influencing the audiences of traditional written academic work. Hence, academic text is just as subjectively perceived as the various artistic media used for ABR.

The use of ABR requires the researcher to embrace a perspective on knowledge as contextualised, interactive, bodily co-creation with others. The co-creation does not answer questions by providing concrete pieces of knowledge, but rather raises them and opens them up for interpretation, discussion, and further inquiry. Hence, when ABR work is presented, the project is by no means over, as dialogue and interaction continue. The research takes on 'a life of its own' through individuals' interaction with it, and may live on without researcher participation, with meaning being continuously created and recreated (Andersson 2011).

As it becomes apparent, ABR is much more demanding of and thus has an inherently different relationship to its audience in comparison to more traditional methods. Becker (2007) explains that the approach requires a lot of input, effort, and contemplation both from the researcher and the audience. There is no existing blueprint for interacting, participating, and understanding, with individuals having to figure things out for themselves each time (Walton 1990; Hatcher 1999). This may, of course, be uncomfortable and intimidating. In fact, the arduousness of the approach is an important reason for why researchers are deterred from using such methods, Becker (2007) suggests. However, by raising questions and causing individuals to reflect, ABR allows for new viewpoints, deeper analysis, and increased understanding of phenomena to emerge. The approach creates a context for development of ideas interactionally, which leads to endless possibilities of interpretation, analysis, and embodied co-creation of knowledge (Hatcher 1999). To connect this back to alternative research methods used in consumer culture research, ABR allows researchers to overcome

the approach to audiences as passive entities and rather take them on as active and interactive participants of knowledge creation.

Moreover, using a form of communication that does not require a background in a limited context (such as specialised academic language or contextualised jargon) opens up the possibility for ABR to gain access to wider audiences both within and outside of academia. This provides avenues for cross-disciplinary co-creation of understanding, as well as impacting consumers' everyday lives directly through inciting criticism and conversation. This does not mean that research lacks theoretical basis or a basis in a research field. It is still the researcher's job to do thorough background work. Yet, ABR allows for the presentation of research in a way that is more accessible among research fields and beyond them.

#### ***Epistemology of ABR: How does ABR approach knowledge?***

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In taking on ABR, Seregina's (2018a, b) exploration of fantasy experiences was completely restructured as a process. Hence, it was not only the practice of research that was changed, but the entire approach to knowledge and its creation. Scotti and Aicher (2016) explain that taking on ABR involves taking on a different epistemology, in which knowledge is approached as affective and relational. Blumenfeld-Jones (2016) adds that such knowledge is collectively created and exists only within the reality of the particular context, in which the artistic processes and interactions take place. The knowledge is thus ephemeral and processual. Overall, ABR approaches knowledge as emotional and sensory, as relational and interactive, and as continuously developing and changing.

Firstly, ABR approaches knowledge as it is felt and lived by and among individuals. It is knowing through doing. As discussed in the introduction, the contemporary cultural and academic contexts privilege knowledge that is objective and neutral, and such knowledge is

best communicated via textual and linguistic forms. Yet, not all knowledge can be communicated or developed in this manner (Meyer et al. 2013). In contrast to the norms, ABR aims to engage knowledge that is not an object to be passively transferred from one person to the next, but rather emerges as sensory experience (Douglas and Gulari 2015). As a result, ABR does not create knowledge in the form of clear, linear, neutral answers, but rather engages intuitive, embodied knowledge that is interconnected between senses and experiences (Scotti and Aicher, 2016). Through this, individuals engage and connect to patterns of knowing and doing that are tacit in their essence, but also deeply situated and contextualised. Springgay (2003) explains that, in practice, the above-described knowledge emerges through the artistic processes that create a context of promoting emotional, embodied response, exploration, discovery, and dialogue. We do not gain a window to the world through a recording, but we engage and encounter phenomena directly. Barone and Eisner (2012) explain this idea from the point of view of academic research: ABR *creates* gaps rather than closes them through conclusions. The overall focus of ABR is thus not on the product of research, but rather the *process* of research as well as the relationships and dialogue created through it (Pigrum and Stables 2005). The approach provides no truth-values, resulting in intersubjective, layered meaning (Finley 2003; Blumenfeld-Jones 2016).

Secondly, knowledge within ABR emerges through active and interactive meaning-making among researcher and their various audiences. Becker (1982) explains that creating and interacting with art requires the full attention of individuals, forcing them to stop and think rather than to passively receive information. In practice, this takes place through doing and/or interacting with ABR together, within the specific time and space of the work. For instance, in the case of Seregina's work, audiences would often gather together around the art pieces, discussing them together and actively trying to figure out what the art meant from their perspective. Individuals would provide various interpretations based on their own



experiences and associations, building on each other's knowledge and thus creating greater understanding through an interactive combination of perspectives, which is greater than the sum of its parts. Wood (2015) has shown similar activities to take place in the case of his video work, showing how the research created discursive interaction, lived experiences, and co-creation of meaning. Knowledge within ABR thus emerges as participative, interactive, active meaning-making, which is bodily and spatial. Pigrum and Stables (2005) explain that this has a very practical outcome: in inciting dialogue and expression, ABR allows approaching critical and emotional topics, which may be otherwise difficult to explore.

Thirdly, ABR connects and provokes individuals to active knowledge creation through a process that is continuously reflexive (Finley 2003). ABR requires constant questioning of all processes, including the medium, skill, evaluation, and 'reading' of the research project. As a result, the researcher needs to deeply understand and be continuously reflexive of the research context, research phenomenon, and research audiences. At the same time, the audience requires continuous reflexivity in order to be able to engage with the work. ABR could thus be said to 'disrupt' the research process both for the researchers conducting it and the audience interacting with it through breaking "our comfortable assumptions" (Barone and Eisner 2012, 19). Reflecting the work of Collingwood (1938), creating art makes us more aware of what we are doing and pushes us onto the edge of our understanding, thus encouraging us to be active and co-creative. In requiring continuous reflexivity, ABR opens up the potential deeper understanding of phenomena from a variety of perspectives.

All in all, ABR approaches knowledge as an emotional, lived, bodily process that allows for new ways of its articulation through active and reflective co-creation. In practice, the aim of ABR is to create knowledge via personal and interpersonal bodily engagement among researcher, context, and audience that allows for a variety of interpretations and their combinations. This interaction becomes a way of co-creating and communicating meaning

through the engagement of artistic and aesthetic processes that involve the space, various materials, and the individuals present. The artistic processes go beyond logical, linguistic understanding, and turn toward embodied, negotiated meaning, allowing understanding to be approached in unexpected and even interventional ways.

The process of knowledge creation in ABR is, at least in theory, never-ending. Of course, in practice, projects do end and thus ABR does not emerge as a never-ending story. However, the approach taken on is one of possibility of continuous development with the aim of not providing a final answer, but creating a context for knowledge creation. It is the process not the answer itself that matters.

#### ***Evaluation of ABR: How can we assess ABR?***

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As ABR is a research method, it becomes placed under the scrutiny of academic evaluation. Yet, just like many other alternative approaches, a central issue that ABR faces is one of credibility, evaluation, and validity (Leavy 2009). Finley (2003) has suggested the ABR is not taken seriously because academia is biased against the intellectual capability of art. Consumer research has witnessed similar arguments in the context of alternative research methods (Heisley 2001). Moreover, interpretive consumer research overall has a long history of defending its validity within the context of academia similar to ABR. This is unsurprising, as, just like interpretive consumer research, ABR questions the nature of positivist knowledge that is tied into verification and finding ‘truth’ (Eisner 1997; Jones 2006; Leavy 2009).

Pigrum and Stables (2005) suggest that ABR is associated with fiction and lies, as its outcomes are malleable and open. As a reaction to this, Simons and McCormack (2007) argue that ABR provides a different type of understanding and approaching knowledge, which frees the research from reductionist categories. Following a similar line of thought,

Finley (2003) proposes that ABR provides understanding that is constantly changing in line with its cultural and political context. Hence, traditional forms of evaluation and validity become insufficient and inapplicable in the context of ABR (Eisner 1997).

Williams-Burnett and Skinner (2017) suggest that the evaluation of research using creative means should be done via selecting evaluators knowledgeable of the particular field and practice. These could be artists, teachers, and other professionals knowledgeable of particular media and methods. A similar approach can be seen in use in the Consumer Culture Theory Conference's Art Gallery track, which has been held annually since 2014. While not all of the work presented in it could be called ABR, all of the submissions take the form of artistic work. The way the submissions are evaluated is not that different from other conference tracks: appropriate reviewers with relevant experience and backgrounds are found by the track chairs, with reviewers evaluating the submission for its relevance, rigour, and insightfulness. In fact, traditional academia does not function very differently from Williams-Burnett and Skinner's (2017) suggestion: journal articles are accepted through a set of carefully selected reviewers, and PhDs pass via the evaluation of a set of experts. But what criteria should these individuals use when evaluating ABR?

Barone and Eisner (2012) agree with Eisner in that researchers should avoid static criteria for evaluating ABR. They believe that it may be more useful to look at whether the work is coherent, generates new ideas, invokes feelings and thoughts, deepens conversations and discourses, and has social significance. Similarly suggesting non-static criteria for evaluation, Finley (2003) adds that we should observe whether ABR is useful or harmful, gives voice to subjects, is reflexive or visceral, and provides opportunities for communion. Leavy (2018b) presents a very similar set of evaluation criteria, stressing that evaluators look at whether the research was carried out well and ethically, whether it provides substantial contribution to the research field, and whether it is accessible to a wider audience in an

interactive manner. Faulkner (2016) further stresses that these should be approached as 'flexible criteria.' She explains that just as with any quantitative or qualitative methods that has more longstanding traditions, the evaluative criteria are applied contextually and thus edited for each instance. Interestingly, all these proposals reflect ideas for assessment proposed by the 'interpretive turn' of consumer research (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

It is important to note that the assessment of ABR does not focus on judgment of artistic merit (Canniford, 2012 suggests the same in the context of poetry), as briefly noted earlier. The focus is rather on interactive co-creation of meaning and on engagement of all involved individuals. This communication is what has the most value in the ABR approach, reflecting the aims for developing discursive knowledge creation within consumer research.

All in all, the evaluation of ABR work should focus on rigour and ethics in conducting the research, contribution to research field and its discourses, as well as accessibility of the work to wider audiences in a way that is reflexive and interactive. Many of these elements are already present in academic evolution of research. Audience participation and interaction emerge as perhaps the most tricky to evaluate. Leavy (2018b) the following ways to approach these criteria. Firstly, the work needs to be sufficiently accessible to audiences both in academia and outside it, with the work being engaging or participative. Secondly, response can be evaluated via soliciting audience feedback. This can be done in a variety of ways depending on the specific media used in the project, and can include things like including response cards, holding feedback sessions, providing online feedback forms, and having group discussions or debriefings. For example, in Seregina's would, audiences were engaged for feedback in one-on-one and small group discussions.

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## Conclusions

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ABR emerges as a methodology, through which consumer culture research can approach the exploration of contextually embedded, discursive, co-created knowledge. In a cultural and academic context privileging verbal and textual knowledge, ABR provides an avenue for understanding from novel points of view that tap into emotional, multi-sensory, and bodily knowledge. It is important to stress that ABR is not a new set of methods for data collection or a new way of conducting research that will be published in traditional formats. ABR rather provides a different approach to research in the form of a methodology that approaches knowledge and the entire process of its creation and communication as a never ending process that is sensory and emotional, interactive and participative, reflexive and critical.

To refer back to the start of this paper and reflect on the proposed issues alternative research methods face, ABR allows for conducting research that is inclusive of, as well as openly interactive and co-creative with a variety of audiences. The approach goes beyond being an aid to research, and allows research to take novel forms by questioning each element of its process as well as expanding beyond traditional, academic forms of writing into a variety of media.

Of course, no ABR project is perfect. As the example used shows, each ABR project has its own setbacks and does not necessary thrive in each characteristic of the approach. Seregina's work clearly lacked audience interaction in the process of creation of the artwork. However, such drawbacks become educational elements to the researcher, something to better in future endeavours. ABR always needs to be approached as a process, with its aim towards an ideal being a direction, but never a constraint.

ABR becomes especially important for the field of consumer culture research, as the focus of its study is a highly aestheticised and visual culture, which is often experienced and represented in ways that are not textual or verbal (Warren 2002; Wood 2015). Using ABR as

a methodology allows researchers to tap into phenomena that are beyond written explanation and scientific classification as they are lived, without the need of translating these into text (Busch 2009). Moreover, as Barone and Eisner (2012) note, ABR is a very useful tool for explorative and critical work through its focus on emotional and embedded understanding. Such topics have been central for interpretive and transformative consumer research.

The collaborative, bodily, and experience-based approach to creating understanding together directly ties ABR into discussions focusing on the need for discursive, contextualised co-creation of knowledge within consumer research (Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto 2009; Askegaard and Linnet 2011). ABR also directly answers the call for methodological exploration of art practice and artistic processes as part of research (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Canniford 2012). Moreover, ABR develops the use of alternative research methods within consumer research in important ways. Consumer researchers using alternative methods have promoted approaching research through relational, non-textual forms of knowledge that build meaning and understanding interactively (Valtonen, Markuksela, and Moisander 2010; Hietanen, Rokka, and Schouten 2014; Downey 2016). ABR roots for this approach, but takes the position even further by approaching knowledge as a never-ending process, actively co-created with the audience.

ABR's audience also emerges as very different from that of traditional academic research. By stressing interaction that does not necessarily require long-standing knowledge and practice in a limited field, ABR becomes accessible both cross-disciplinarily as well as in context beyond academia (as e.g. Ozanne, Moscato, and Kunkel [2013] root for). This, in turn, allows researchers to engage with new fields and to have more direct impact within consumers' lives.

Because ABR takes on a different approach to the entire research process, it means that, in taking it on within consumer culture research, researchers would need to rethink the

way research is presented and 'published.' Consumer research using alternative methods still often aims to publish the work in traditional outlets, with many complaining about not getting such research published without the accompaniment of written work. Yet, journals and books have a history as textual media, and are inherently in their form language-based, a characteristic that needs to be honoured. We would thus need to go a different route to develop the use of these alternative methods. Reflecting on one's medium and process of research, it may be time for researchers to 'publish' alternative media beyond text-based outlets, as the latter will always bring us back to the dominance to language-centred knowledge and thus place research in its forms and traditions (ironically, that includes this paper). Wood (2015) advocates that academics need to let go of their fear of 'breaking linguistic tradition' and take more risks by stepping beyond academically approved modes of work. In practice, this means that researchers need to take a leap into the unknown and publish research using non-textual media beyond text-based outlets. I hope that this introduction of ABR will encourage researchers to take on a new attitude toward the whole research process in order to co-create bodily, co-created, multi-sensory knowledge that is communicated using a variety of media.

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**Appendices**

**Picture 1** ABR in practice





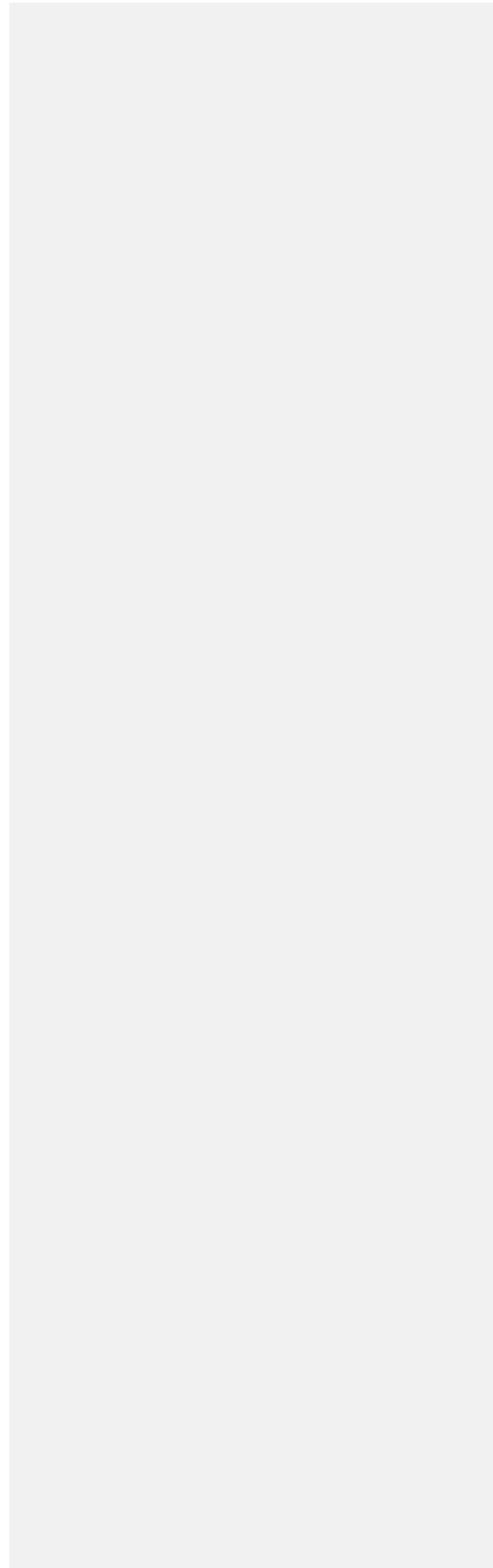
**Picture 2** An acrylic painting of the topic of desynchronisation of time created through ABR



**Picture 3** A multimedia painting on the subjective experiencing of fantasy created through ABR



**Picture 4** Two iterations of artwork created through ABR. Both sets represent the exploration of a typology of fantasy experiences, on the top the earlier version and on the bottom the later version.



**Picture 5**

