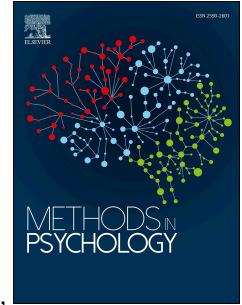


# Journal Pre-proof

Sustaining Life on Earth: An Arts-Based Research Exploration of Collective Lived Experiences of COVID-19

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**SUSTAINING LIFE ON EARTH: ARTS-BASED RESEARCH EXPLORATION OF  
THE COLLECTIVE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19**

**Nancy Gerber<sup>1</sup>, Karin Hannes<sup>2</sup>, Marco Gemignani<sup>3</sup>, Jacelyn Biondo<sup>4</sup>, Richard Siegesmund<sup>5</sup>**

**Lucia Carriera<sup>6</sup>, Elisabetta Biffi<sup>7</sup>, Madeline Centracchio<sup>8</sup>, Mandy Archibald<sup>9</sup>, Gioia**

**Chilton<sup>10</sup>, Janet L. Kuhnke<sup>11</sup>, Angela Dawson<sup>12</sup>, Jorge Lucero<sup>13</sup>,**

**Nicky Haire<sup>14</sup>, Sara Scott Shields<sup>15</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Florida State University (USA); <sup>2</sup> KULeuven University(Belgium); <sup>3</sup> Universidad Loyola Andalucía (Spain); <sup>4</sup> Thomas Jefferson University (USA); <sup>5</sup> Northern Illinois University (USA);

<sup>6</sup> University Milano-Bicocca (Italy)

<sup>7</sup> University Milano-Bicocca (Italy); <sup>8</sup> Florida State University(USA);

<sup>9</sup> University of Manitoba(Canada), <sup>10</sup> George Washington University(USA), <sup>11</sup> Cape Breton University(Nova Scotia), <sup>12</sup> University of Technology Sydney(Australia), <sup>13</sup> University of Illinois(USA), <sup>14</sup> Queen Mary University(Scotland), <sup>15</sup> Florida State University(USA)

Corresponding author: Nancy Gerber, Ph.D, ATR-BC

Email: ngerber@fsu.edu

Address: Florida State University

Department of Art Education  
143 Honors Way  
William Johnson Building #1011  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306

This study was conducted virtually. It originated from Florida State University.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Florida State University.

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### **Abstract**

This article presents the philosophy, innovative methods, and final aesthetic synthesis of a collaborative arts-based research project about the lived experience of COVID-19. The project was initiated in 2020 and completed in 2022. Nineteen international arts-based research scholars participated as co-researchers, submitting their arts-based and narrative responses to the project. The six-member core research team guiding the project collected and organized the submissions while simultaneously entering into immersive, iterative, dynamic, arts-based data generation, dialogic analytic and syntheses processes with co-researchers, and each other. Materials-discursive analytic processes, arts-based responses, sensorial coding, intersubjective dialogues, and arts-based assemblages conducted iteratively throughout the project. The performative result captured the sensory, embodied, and emotional experiences of the evolving stages of the pandemic as identified by and resonant with the co-researchers and multiple audiences. These stages were identified during the project by the co-researchers as: initial anxiety and panic; reflection and creativity; and resilience. The final synthesis of the project is an arts-based and performative piece using video and interactive gallery venues representative of these stages.

**Keywords:** arts-based research; arts in research; covid-19; pandemic

## **Sustaining Life on Earth: An Arts-Based Research Exploration of Collective Lived Experiences of COVID-19**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a new global phenomenon with public health, socio-cultural, and geo-political implications. Almost universally, it touched psychological, sociological, and physiological systems shifting our complacency, reawakening anxieties, exposing inequities, and introducing us to a new way of life (Galea et al., 2020; Gemignani & Hernandez, 2022; Kaubisch et al., 2022; Kuri & Schormans, 2022). Inspired by the impact, experience, and related challenges of these events, our core research team, consisting of the six original founders of the Arts-Based Research (ABR) Global Consortium (<https://www.abrglobalconsotium.org/>), decided to develop an arts-based research exploration and aesthetic synthesis of the pandemic. The purpose of this research project was to study the lived experiences of COVID-19 as expressed in aesthetic forms, arts-based assemblages, and narrative reflections created by an international group of artists/scholars. Primarily our intentional aim, using arts-based data generation and analytic practices, was to explore, convey, synthesize, and document the beyond-words lived psychosocial experiences of the pandemic. We aimed to capture the co-existent sensory-embodied, emotional, relational, and imaginal realms of the phenomenon inaccessible through traditional discourse or research approaches (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Gerber et al., 2020; Gerber, 2022; McNiff, 2008). Secondary to that intentional aim, and related to the collaborative aspect of the research, was an emergent goal—the cultivation of a supportive research community.

Both the intentional and the emergent aims led to the development of creative and robust ABR strategies and processes for the data generation, analysis, meaning making, representation,

synthesis and authenticity. It raised important questions about how this global lived-experience could be captured in the multi-genre arts expressions; and, how methodologically we could juxtapose, assemble, and construct meaning from these collective arts-based and narrative expressions.

Arts-Based Research (ABR) is an emerging philosophy and method that infers multiple ways in which the arts can be used in research. These multiple approaches differ fundamentally by the philosophical positioning, the centrality of the arts processes or products, and the degree of arts-based activity and immersion of the researcher(s). ABR approaches are sometimes thought to exist on a continuum and are referred to as various iterations of arts-related, arts-informed, and/or arts-based research practice (see Table 1). The approach selected is based upon the research purpose, researcher aptitudes, philosophy and positioning, and the role of the arts in responding to the questions (Archibald & Gerber, 2018; Gerber et al., 2020; Knowles & Cole, 2008). In our study we employed the approach we call “Arts-Based Research Practices.” The reason for selecting this approach was the centralization of the art as the primary philosophy and method of investigation, analysis, synthesis, and representation which best aligned with the questions, epistemic, and data for our study. The role of the core and co-researchers was collaborative and immersive in all aspects of the arts-based research processes. Consequently, the data generation, analysis, aesthetic synthesis, and representation was conducted collaboratively with core and co-researchers using multiple interactive art genres, reflective group dialogues, and artistic processes. The collaborative aspect aligns with ABRs social justice leaning providing diverse interpretations and critical evaluation contributing to the authenticity of the final aesthetic synthesis. The role of the arts is to explore, illuminate insights, synthesize, document, and experientially evoke the aesthetic meaning of the phenomenon under

investigation (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner 2008; Gerber et al., 2020; Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 2008). The specific philosophical perspectives and methods are described explicitly throughout the remainder of the article.

Initially, we posed two research questions to engage the participants in reflective arts-based explorations: 1) What is your experience of and relationship to the COVID-19 pandemic?; 2) How would you express, portray, and describe your lived experience during and/or after the COVID-19 pandemic? As the study developed, we added a third more methodological research question based on the emergent aims and related data: 3) How does the iterative, immersive, and reflective process of collaborative arts-based investigation create methodological art-based practices that depict, evoke, and document the multi-sensory embodied collectively experienced accounts of COVID-19?

Consequently, the rationale for the project was based on three major premises. First, the philosophy and purpose of ABR proffers an entry point into inquiry that transcends traditional rhetoric allowing access to aesthetic and creative ways of multisensory knowing and experiencing. As such, ABR illuminates the sensory-embodied and emotional responses essential to understanding underlying beyond-words human experiences of the pandemic inaccessible through other research traditions (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner, 2008; Leavy, 2020; Gerber & Myers-Coffman, 2018; Gerber, 2022; Gerber et al., 2022; Gerber et al, 2020; McNiff, 2008). Second, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the entire world, instilling affective and embodied responses. Because of the widespread impact of this global phenomenon, we thought it essential to conduct an in-depth ABR investigation which best aligns with multisensory, emotional, and embodied experiences from COVID-19. In psychology and neuropsychology it is well documented that experiences resulting from varying degrees of trauma to our systems are

“encoded in visual imagery and bodily sensation” and therefore not retrievable or expressible in traditional language (Gantt & Tripp, 2016, p.67). Consequently these are experiences that can be more readily expressed through art and, at the same time, are ontologically created and become real through art-based practices. This is the onto-epistemic dimension of ABR (Barad, 2007), which will be further illustrated later on. Finally, we wanted to engage co-researchers who had both the lived experience of the phenomenon as well as knowledge of ABR practices so we could explore both the pandemic and ABR innovative practices together.

The innovative methodology of our study lies in the development of a synthesizing approach to merge primary artistic research evidence into a coherent whole giving expression to a shared psychological experience (Hannes, 2023). In reviewing the ABR literature we found it replete with theory, philosophy, scoping reviews, and exemplars (Coemans & Hannes, 2017; Frimberger, 2018; Gannon & Naidoo, 2020; Golden, 2022; Misra, 2019). However, there are noticeably fewer articles which describe actual ABR practice methods, specifically the centralization of the art as the investigative process of generating, analyzing, and synthesizing arts-based data. There are a couple of reasons for this gap. First, ABR researchers have been hesitant to describe formulaic methods believing that they are counter to the essential onto-epistemic nature of ABR (Eisner, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 2008). Second, due to the multisensory nature of the arts, the misalignment with traditional forms of evidence, and the difficulties in transferring arts-based evidence to the printed word, review authors may not yet have acquired the skills to analyze, interpret and evaluate other than narrative accounts of qualitative and creative research (Hannes, 2014). Nonetheless, there are promising trends in more recent ABR literature which clearly describe the processes of synthesizing multi-modal ABR evidence while also maintaining the integrity of the aesthetic onto-epistemology of the

arts in research (Archibald & Blines, 2021; Brinkman et al., 2019; Golden, 2022; Misra, 2019). Methods such as photovoice and a/r/tography (Doucet et al., 2022; Sinner et al., 2006) are clearly defined as arts-based research reflecting well-established methods for understanding, mining, and synthesizing the data. a/r/tography incorporates more of the fluidity of ABR practice while photo voice leans more toward arts-informed research. In other reports there are efforts to describe and/or illustrate the more immanent knowledge, visceral experiences, emergent fluidity, and intersubjective liminality which live in and are the focus of the dynamic process of ABR practice—data/evidence generation, analysis, and synthesis (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Mittner & Gjaerum, 2022; St. Pierre, 2019; Van Der et al., 2018). Mittner and Gjaerum (2022) proffer an eloquent attempt to describe these dynamic nonlinear processes as well as the complex intersections between research and intervention in their ABR study on dementia. “Through abduction, i.e., alternating between theory and practice, data collection and data analysis, and between fieldwork and writing, we had to plan, implement, and evaluate to make sense of the micro moments . . .” (Mittner & Gjaerum, 2022, p. 8). Ultimately, we proffer that the intangible, elusive, and dynamic nature of ABR, challenges description in verbal language resulting in an underrepresentation in the literature. Within that context, what follows is our attempt to engage you, the reader, in what we consider an authentic ABR methodological exploration and experience of a global phenomenon. Summarily, our project explored the interconnectedness of the COVID-19 phenomenon and ABR practice methods. Specifically we developed a creative robust ABR process approach to ABR practice based both in the literature and emergent from our own experience.



Table 1

*Arts-Based Research Philosophical and Methodological Continuum*

| Type  | Epistemology  | Arts Engagement   | Researcher Engagement  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Arts-Based Research Practice</b>   | Arts-based or aesthetic epistemic   | Art as data and investigation<br>Iterative arts processes<br>Singular or multiple arts genres<br>Immersion and Reflection<br>Iterative dynamic dialogic analysis<br>Art as Result and dissemination<br>Audience engagement and evaluation                               | Researcher Immersion<br>Researcher artistic competence<br>Researcher arts-based responses<br>Participant/ Researcher<br>Researcher reflection<br>Inclusion of Reflection of Others<br>Inclusive of evocative imaginal, emotional, sensory, embodied data |
| <b>Arts-Informed Research</b>   | Social constructivist, Post structuralist, Post-Qualitative, or other qualitative epistemic | Art and qualitative data equally valued<br>Singular or multiple arts genres or exemplars<br>Participant generated arts-based and interview data<br>Exemplifies or Amplifies Data or Results<br>Engagement of audience<br>Qualitatively understood thematically analyzed | Researcher/Observer and Researcher/Participant<br>Researcher collects arts-based data  |
| <b>Arts-Related Research</b>  | Social constructivist, Pragmatic, or other qualitative epistemic                            | Art as Peripheral Data<br>Singular or multiple arts exemplars<br>Participant Generated arts-based and interview data<br>Art as illustrative exemplars of qualitative data and/or results  | Researcher /Observer<br>Researcher collects arts-based data<br>Researcher collects textual data  |
| Reprinted from <i>Arts-Based Research in the Social and Health Sciences: Pushing for Change with an Interdisciplinary Global Arts-Based Research Initiative</i> by N. Gerber, E. Biffi, J. Biondo, M. Gemignani, K. Hannes, & R. Siegesmund, 2020, <i>Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research</i> , 21(2), <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-21.2.3496">http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-21.2.3496</a> . CC BY-4,0 |   |   |  |

To begin, we attempt here to provide a brief overview upon which we build throughout the remainder of the article. Our ABR process was based upon our ABR philosophy, the trends in the ABR methodological literature, and the identified need to collectively study the aesthetic beyond-words impact of the global pandemic. These dynamic issues and processes warranted a multi-purpose focus project including: the translation of ABR philosophy into an ABR methodology; the

application of ABR practices to the exploration of an impactful global phenomenon; and, finally, the engagement with a robust arts and community based methodological process. Central to this multi-purposed journey was the development of an innovative, systematic, robust, yet non-formulaic process of engagement with: the artworks, and art-processes; the narratives; the producers of the artworks; and, their individual and collective meaning relative to the pandemic. Consequently, our methods combined and juxtaposed the dynamic arts-based, textual, and sensorial reflective processes; group dialogues and joint reflections; assemblages and re-assemblages; and meaning constructions emergent from the multi-sourced and multi-dimensional data. Through engagement with these processes, we also created a community that embraced all of our co-researchers providing them with opportunities to actively participate in the data generation, analysis, aesthetic synthesis, and emergent meaning making. This community building, so necessary during the pandemic, became an essential intersubjective aspect of our ABR practice methodology, process of discovery, emotional holding and healing environment, and critical evaluation.

The process of arriving at the final synthesis, or the result, in arts-based research is equally and artfully significant as the result itself. As such, the final arts-based performative synthesis of this project uses video and interactive gallery venues that embody and reflect the aesthetic epistemic—revealing, evoking, and documenting the beyond-words lived experience of the pandemic. Furthermore, the final synthesis in this project aspires to: illuminate that which previously might have been unseen; connect and give equal voice to all; build a compassionate community; encourage insight, imagination, creativity, and dialogue; elicit and document powerful embodied human responses; encapsulate methodological, experiential and substantive tensions through form; and, expose and enhance our human relationships at a level beyond the

ordinary into the extraordinary during unusual circumstances (Archibald & Blines, 2021; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Chilton et al., 2015; Eisher, 2008; Gerber et al., 2020; Leavy, 2020).

Before leaving this introduction, we wanted to provide a roadmap to the article and the style in which it is written. We emphasize again that the description of any multi-modal arts-based research study in a two dimensional venue, such as the printed word, is challenging due to the spatial multisensory nature of the arts. In this article we try our best to weave a tapestry of multiple visual, poetic, and textual dimensions. We also weave in some contextualization of the project through the literature. The literature covered, in addition to the ABR literature cited earlier, is: 1) a very brief review of the pandemic literature to touch on some of the social and psychological implications of COVID-19 ; 2) ABR or arts related research investigating the pandemic; 3) the somatosensory theory of the trauma literature; and, 4) re-imagining the pandemic's implications through radical imagination, sociological reconception, and beyond-words approaches. Finally, beyond the literature, we present multiple styles of writing interwoven with arts-based data, diagrams or maps, poetic language, material discursive organization, dialogues and memos, sensory based descriptions, and performative results that we hope will allow you, the reader to join with and follow us through this journey. Our aim, as in ABR, is for you to experience the evocative nature of the journey and aesthetic power of the results (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

## **2.0 Background of our study**

The fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected our individual and collective psychological and psychosocial well-being was impetus for the project's conception. The continuing emphasis became about understanding the immediate and residual, and in some cases traumatic, experiences as expressed in the arts and narrative (Ansalem et al., 2021; Dadich et al.,

2021; Galea et al., 2020; Gemignani & Hernandez, 2022; Javad et al., 2020; Kaubisch et al., 2022; Kuri & Schormans, 2022; Liang, et al., 2020; Wu, et al., 2020).

The long-term impact of the global pandemic on the psychological and social fabric of the global culture and citizenry continues to require further study. However, some recent studies addressed the immediate impact and projected future implications. A couple of studies published early in the pandemic, emphasized the necessity for exploring the lived psychological experiences of multiple groups such as healthcare workers, populations at risk, and the general population regarding the degree to which they have experienced and are manifesting psychological distress (Ferro, 2022; Gemignani & Hernandez, 2022).

The impact of the social distancing practices during the epidemic have attracted interest. Although there are not many historical precedents for the impact of social distancing, there are comparable experiences from natural or human-made disasters the result of which has been epidemic proportions of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, increased substance use, and even drastic upticks in child abuse (Ansalem et al., 2021; Galea, et al., 2020). Galea et al. (2020) suggested that although there are some immediate visible mental health reactions to the pandemic, the long-term impact of persistent social distancing is yet to be evaluated. Similarly, Javad et al.(2020) studied some of the immediate mental health effects from quarantine and social distancing, identifying key behaviors developed and exhibited by at-risk groups such as children, teens, and elders during times of quarantine. Furthermore it is posited that anxiety, depression, and social isolation can result in sadness and loneliness for both kids and adults who have been forced from their normal routine and environments (Galea et al., 2020; Javad et al., 2020, p. 994).

Nevertheless, the pandemic created a momentum in which many people began to create art, not only for therapeutic reasons, but also as a way of creating community and sustaining themselves under severe challenging conditions (Bauman & Burke, 2023; Gemignani & Hernandez, 2022; Ignacio et. al., 2022; Schwarz, 2023). It gave rise to a new evidence base to be considered in trying to understand the impact of COVID-19 on people's experiences (Abdulah et al., 2021; Dadich et al., 2021; Ferro, 2022; Kuri & Schormans, 2022). For example, Abdulah et al. (2021) collected drawings and paintings from children who were able to express and provide insight into their fears of infection, safety and home, and relationships with family. Kuri and Schormans (2022) explored the socio-cultural phenomenon of ableism for those with intellectual disabilities enacted and exposed during the pandemic. The authors sought to creatively overcome technological inequities and isolative quarantine challenges by adapting visual and storytelling arts-based research approaches promoting inclusive socially just research to elicit and amplify their collective voice. Highlighting the exposure of social inequities during the pandemic, Kuri and Schormans (2022) emphasized how arts-based research contributed to the disruption of "ableist ways of knowing and doing in research" (Kuri & Schormans, 2022, p. 7). Dadich et al. (2021) invoked positive organizational scholarship for young people in which arts-based research methods were used ". . .to examine, understand, and ultimately promote phenomena that is [sic] life-giving and flourishing, like experiences that generate positive emotion and/or bolster resilience" (p. 3).

Furthermore, as well-established in trauma theory, experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic may exist beyond-words in somatosensory expressions and visual imagery and thus require innovative research approaches (Gantt & Tripp, 2016; van der Kolk, 2014). It is well documented that intensive emotional distress, traumatic, social, and psychological experiences,

and resultant memories are not retrievable nor expressible in traditional language (Gantt & Tripp, 2016; van der Kolk, 2014). In this context, the arts have been used to provide another avenue for reconceptualization and expression of the multisensory preverbal narratives of emotional trauma which due to their nature are irretrievable through usual language (Gantt & Tripp, 2016; Lusebrink & Hinz, 2016). Based upon these theoretical premises, we proposed that the exploration of lived experiences of emotionally stressful disruptive events may be retrieved through the use of arts-based methods, which access sensory and embodied phenomena otherwise inaccessible through words (Gantt & Tripp, 2016; King, 2016; Lusebrink & Hinz, 2016; van der Kolk, 2014).

Furthermore, imagination and the arts provide the requisite philosophical perspective, visionary lens, and creative thinking to accommodate “complexities, chaos, and contradictions” (Sardar 2009, p. 436) while functioning to re-envision perplexing realities and initiate conceptual re-constructions (Camargo-Borges, 2018; Gerber, 2022; Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014; Montuori, 2011; Sardar, 2009). Imagination and creative onto-epistemologies provide constructs for re-conceiving and transcending challenging physical and psychological realities while arts-based expressions facilitate the communication of these individual and collective beyond words experiences (Camargo-Borges, 2018; Gerber, 2022; Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014; Montuori, 2011; Sardar, 2009).

The pandemic clearly exposed us to psychological stress, anxiety, and, in the extreme, trauma, individually and collectively. The mortal fears of illness and the social isolation challenged our resolve, but it also created a window for many to sit with the trouble and use it as a basis for creativity, reflection, resilience, and commonality (Gemignani & Hernandez, 2022). Although several research studies documented the

immediate effects of the pandemic and its psychosocial ramifications, few explored the in-depth beyond-words experiences of our global citizens. The aim of our study was to use arts-based and narrative reflective methods to elicit, collect, document, preserve, and share those in-depth embodied psychosocial experiences with our immediate global community. As suggested in previous literature, arts-based methods have proven their value to respond to potential situations of individual and collective psychosocial and socio-cultural trauma (Abdulah, et al., 2021; Dadich et al., 2021; Kuri & Schormans, 2022); and, stresses the importance of using the arts to access sensory embodied experiences and memories otherwise inaccessible (Eisner, 2008; Gantt & Tripp, 2016; Lusebrink & Hinz, 2016; van der Kolk, 2000, 2014).

### **3.0 Philosophy, Methods, and Procedures**

#### **3.1 Philosophical Context**

When describing an ABR methodological approach in more detail, it is essential to contextualize it within both our ABR philosophy (Gerber et al., 2020) and the emotional distress (Gantt & Tripp, 2016; Wu et al., 2020) resulting from the pandemic. Our ABR approach is based upon the premise that responses to a phenomenon such as a global pandemic, exist on multiple cognitive, sensory-embodied, and emotional levels which are correlate forms of knowledge. We call these ways of knowing an aesthetic epistemic which represents memories, paradoxical phenomena, relational patterns, sensations, and perceptions revived or triggered during everyday emotional distress and/or traumatic events. The aesthetic epistemic emerges and is inseparable from pluralistic intersubjective realities representing an ontological perspective (Chilton, et al., 2015; Eisner, 2008; Gadamer, 2007; Gantt & Tripp, 2016; Gerber, 2022; Gerber et al, 2020; King, 2021; Levine, 2005). Although these internal responses are often invisible and beyond the

reach of traditional research language, empiricism, or measure, they are a powerful influence on our perceptions, personal experience, and behavior warranting further understanding. This aesthetic epistemic also aligns with the philosophical assumptions of post-intentional phenomenology. Post-intentional phenomenology acknowledges the emergent, dynamic, and perpetually changing nature of the arts-based data as interwoven and rhizomatic “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987; Vagle & Hofsess, 2016, p. 234). Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) elaborate that “lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification” producing “phenomena and viscosity, or, on the contrary, acceleration and rupture . . . lines and speeds constitutes and assemblage” (p.4). Following these lines of flight with their paradoxical and simultaneous movements, speed, viscosity, and ruptures aligned with the ABR epistemic. Inherent in this type of inquiry, the processes of being and knowing blended in a fluid and inseparable whole (Barad, 2007). This onto-epistemological perspective of ABR aligned with phenomenological lines of flight, allowed us to open to and embrace the multidimensional dynamism inherent in the individual and collective experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were able to use iterative, immersive, reflective arts-based processes and dialogue to be receptive to and explore not only the visible and concrete data but also those invisible aesthetic data hidden, co-constructed, and revealed in the intersubjective in-between crevices inaccessible through words alone.

## **3.2 Methods and Procedures**

### ***3.2.1 Overview***

Situated within this philosophical context, we implemented an Arts-Based Research Practices approach in which we used the arts as the primary investigative method in all phases of data generation, analysis, synthesis, representation and dissemination. This approach included



processes developed both formatively and emergently during ongoing planning sessions, discussions, and multi-sensory reflections amongst the core research team and the co-researchers. Typical of most arts-based research approaches, ours was intentionally non-formulaic, dialectic, fluid, creative, and emergent, following the imaginative lines of flight in which data generation, revelations, and analysis were often simultaneous.

As mentioned earlier, although ABR is based in strong philosophical foundations, each ABR project is different. As such our project was co-constructed and co-created in response to the data, reflecting as a group and individuals, emphasizing aesthetic power, and engaging in collaborative interpretation (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Gerber & Myers-Coffman, 2018; Learmonth & Huckvale, 2013; Leavy, 2020; Sullivan, 2010). According to Learmonth & Huckvale (2013) “embodied levels of art-making” and “imagined sensations” contribute to the imagination and emergence of the image and its meaning (p. 106). In addition, the arts-based investigative processes are accompanied by strategic and rigorous methods of analysis such as “framing, encountering and critiquing aesthetic insights” (Kapitan, 2018, p. 224). These interactive practices and processes resulted in an innovative design providing the co-researchers, individually and collectively, approaches to creative discovery, meaning making and artful synthesis of the arts-based ideata illuminating insights about the phenomenon.

### ***3.2.2 The Multiphasic Method***

Based upon the philosophy of this ABR approach we began the project by developing three phases to act as guidelines rather than rigid procedures for the methods (See Figure 1). These phases were more dynamic and interactive than linear–iteratively and cyclically generating, evaluating, and assembling the data. Due to the emergent nature of this method, the study was designed to have two or more phases of interactive data generation and analysis. The

phases were implemented depending upon the ongoing collaborative evaluation of the scope, depth, and saturation of the arts-based data, assemblages, and narrative syntheses relative to answering the research questions. Although we basically followed these phases, it should be noted that they were created as an initial structure in the preliminary stages of the project and, although we followed them primarily for the ongoing consent of our co-researchers, adjustments were made as needed throughout as the project proceeded. The phases of the project were:

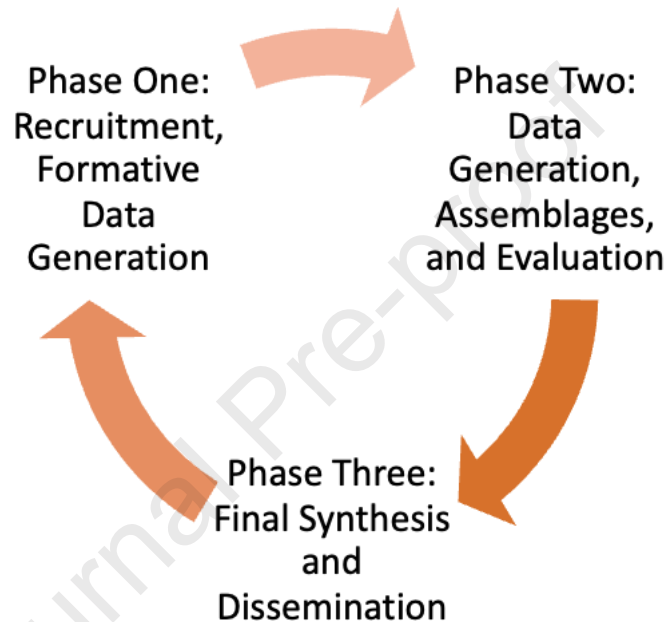
1. **Phase One: Formative Data Generation:** Recruitment, individual meetings with co-researchers, collection of initial arts-based and narrative data.
2. **Phase Two: Data Generation, Assemblage, and Evaluation:** Materials-Discursive Analysis, arts-based memoing, sensorial coding, research team dialogues and reflections, artistic assemblage, and co-researcher collective and individual meetings.
3. **Phase Three: Final Synthesis and Dissemination:** Data generation (if necessary), arts-based memoing and reflections; research team and co-researcher dialogues; constructing, de-constructing, re-constructing video and gallery assemblages; sharing with co-researchers; evaluation, final synthesis, and dissemination.

During the formative phases of the project we, the core research team, developed our research focus, questions, and methodological approach after which we wrote our proposal, and submitted and received approval from the ethics board. Next, we recruited co-researchers for our project. To accomplish this we decided that artist/scholars might best be able to articulate their lived experiences in various artistic genres. This was the sole inclusion criterion. To recruit these key informants, we distributed an international call to members of our ABR Global Consortium community to join in our investigation. We intentionally used the term co-researchers because this stance aligned with the intersubjective philosophy reliant on an

equitable and inclusive community co-created collaboration throughout all phases of the project. We distributed an invitation to join the study to 70 individuals. Twenty-four members responded and 19 co-researchers spanning ten countries and multiple disciplines volunteered and enrolled.

Figure

*Phasic Research Procedures*



Co-researchers represented Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Columbia, Italy, Spain, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The core team then met with each of the interested co-researchers individually to inform them about the project and procedures, answer questions, and determine if they wished to participate. Those wishing to participate were asked to submit an arts-based response to the research questions about their lived experience of COVID-19 along with a narrative describing their process of creating the arts-based response. Co-researchers were offered a time frame for the creation and submission of their arts-based and narrative responses. The co-researchers submitted multi-modality arts-based and narrative responses to our research questions using a private Instagram account and email

communications. The Instagram account allowed us and all co-researchers to see and respond to, if they wished, the cumulative arts-based submissions (Figure 2).

The generation and analysis of data occurred simultaneously beginning in phase one and continuing across the multiple phases. During phase two and phase three as necessary, the core research team entered into immersive, iterative, reflective, arts-based, and dialogic processes with the data, each other, and with the co-researchers. The process was fluid, dynamic, and iterative rather than linear—revisiting, re-envisioning, disassembling, and reassembling the data as illuminations emerged (See Figure 6).

In phases two and three we reviewed, assembled, and evaluated the data iteratively. The purpose of these processes was to analyze narratives and synthesize the arts-based data into a new art form that captures the collective experience and meaning,

To review the narrative data, we first conducted a *materials-discursive analysis*. For this procedure we had identified three *a priori* categories in our original proposal—emotional impact, social framing, and aesthetic power. As we coded the data, we identified and clustered emergent themes and aligned those clusters with the *a priori* categories. We then juxtaposed the arts-based data in varying configurations with the emerging textual themes and co-researcher reflections (See Table 2).

Following the materials-discursive analysis, we engaged in narrative and sensorial-based coding, responsive art making, collaborative and individual multi-genre textual and art memos, and group dialogic reflections. In sensorial coding, listening to and seeing the data the researcher is “immersed in the flow of the recorded interview, attending to utterances, silences, emotions, and the interactive dialectic between interviewer and interviewee in ways that are difficult when reading even detailed transcriptions” (Wainwright et al., 2010, p. 3). We kept

detailed notes, arts-based reflections, and sensorial evocations leading us along the various lines of flight (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987; Vagle & Hofsess, 2016), guiding our construction, deconstruction, and reconstructions of various arts-based assemblages and narrative syntheses. The preliminary assemblages and syntheses emerged as multiple iterations of concept maps, collages, and videos in which we juxtaposed and interwove various iterations of the data (See Figures 3, 4, and 5).

In response to these preliminary interweavings and assemblages, the team engaged in multiple levels of analysis and evaluation—intentionally listening for, reflecting upon, and attending to the illuminations and emergent new insights that posed new questions. For instance, as we created various layered assemblages of the arts-based data juxtaposed with themes from the narratives we discussed the criteria for these juxtapositions and configurations (Figures 3, 4, and 5). In this process we asked questions such as: should we look at arts-based assemblages based upon the aesthetic qualities and textual alignment; and should we consider how the dialectical tensions between the arts and narratives revealed new meaning? We began animating these elements and juxtapositioning them in video form with the goal of reflecting on the relationships between the arts-based and narrative data through factors such as timing, speed, composition, tension, sensation, and sounds. What was evoked in us as we watched, listened, and embodied the dynamic assemblage? How did intentional arrangement, auditory enhancement, and animation of previously static visual arts and text contribute to the conveyance of the lived experience of COVID-19? We discussed how different versions evoked different responses from anxiety and implosion to reflection, resilience, and meditation. Could these represent and resonate with a range of responses to the pandemic?

The insights and questions from the first and second phases, initiated a new phase requiring the elicitation of more in-depth arts-based data, additional team reflections, varying approaches to assemblages and meaning making, and individual and group consultations with co-researchers. Throughout the multiphasic process, which was more cyclical than linear, the team was simultaneously engaged in ongoing assessment and critical evaluation to determine whether the generated data, when assembled and analyzed, had substantively, authentically, and robustly resonated with the original study questions. We met with the co-researchers as a group regularly throughout the process to share the data, elicit additional reflections, and plan subsequent processes. We also met with each co-researcher individually as we began each phase to ask about their willingness to continue in the project, discuss their experiences, and collect feedback. Finally, we shared our emerging assemblages with small audience groups of students or conference participants to collect feedback on their reactions to the performances to evaluate its evocative and aesthetic power, resonance, and authenticity (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Kapitan, 2018).

In the next sections we present in more detail the processes and procedures with which we engaged during the data generation, analysis, and final synthesis processes.

### ***3.2.3 Materials-Discursive Analysis***

Initially, we organized and analyzed the narrative data submitted by the co-researchers by using both *a priori* categories--*emotional impact*, *social framing*, and *aesthetic power*--and emergent themes. We then categorically arranged, rearranged, and wove in the co-researcher arts-based responses and narrative excerpts identifying new emergent themes. We used a shared document for the coding process so that all of the core research team members could review the ongoing process. We primarily used an *in vivo* (Saldaña, 2021) coding process attempting to

capture the actual words from the co-researcher narratives. In this section we review the emergent categories and themes and align them with the *a priori* themes.

Figure 2

*Phase One: Instagram submissions*

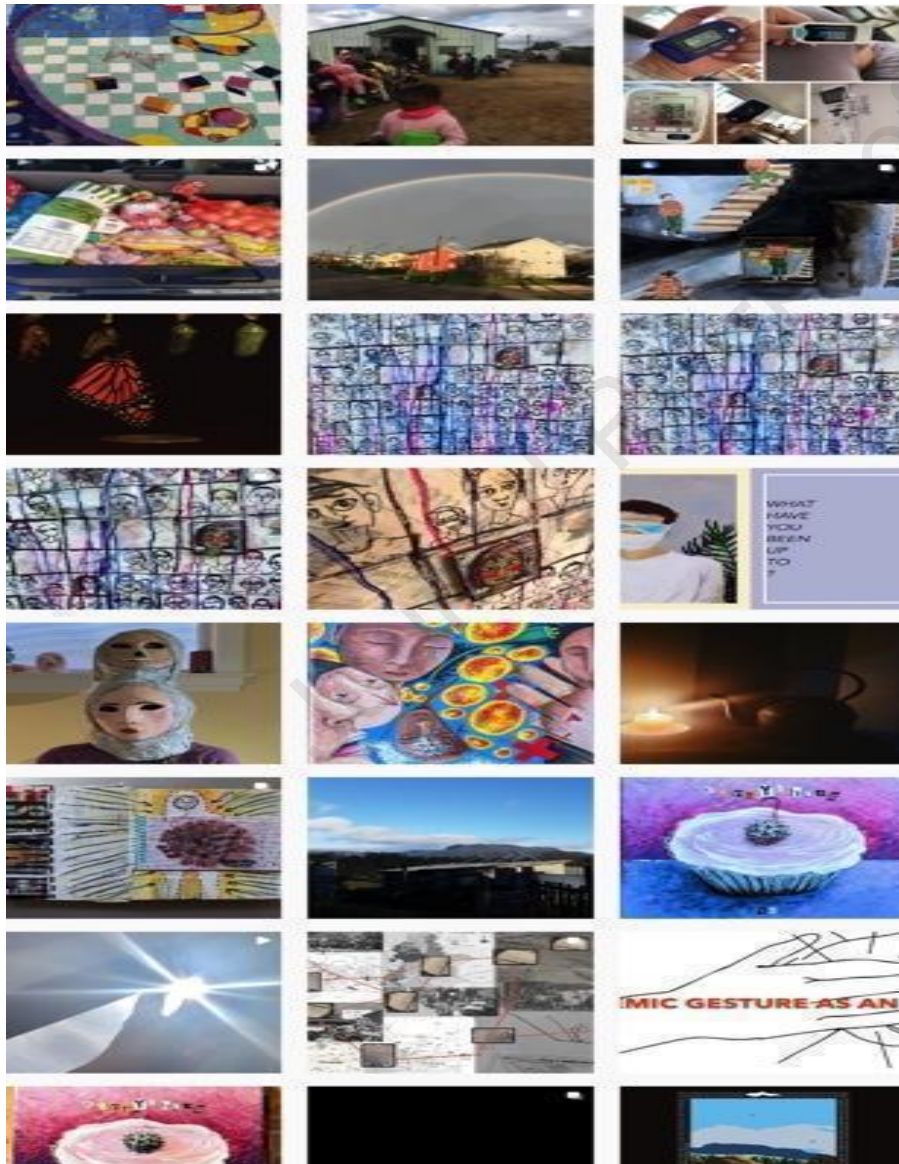


Figure 3

*Assemblage One*

Figure 4



*Assemblage Two*



Figure 5

*Assemblage Three*

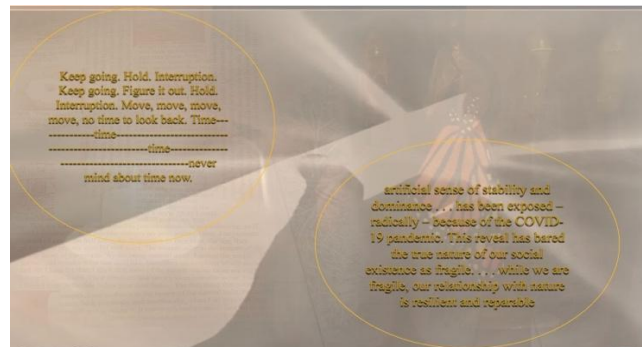
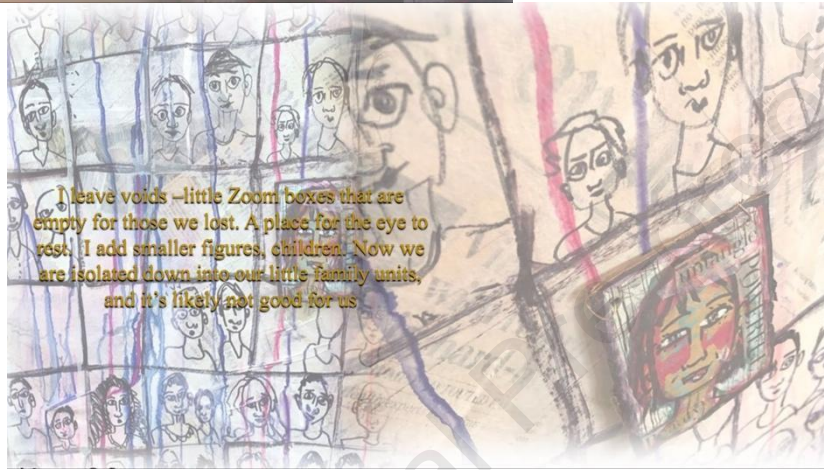
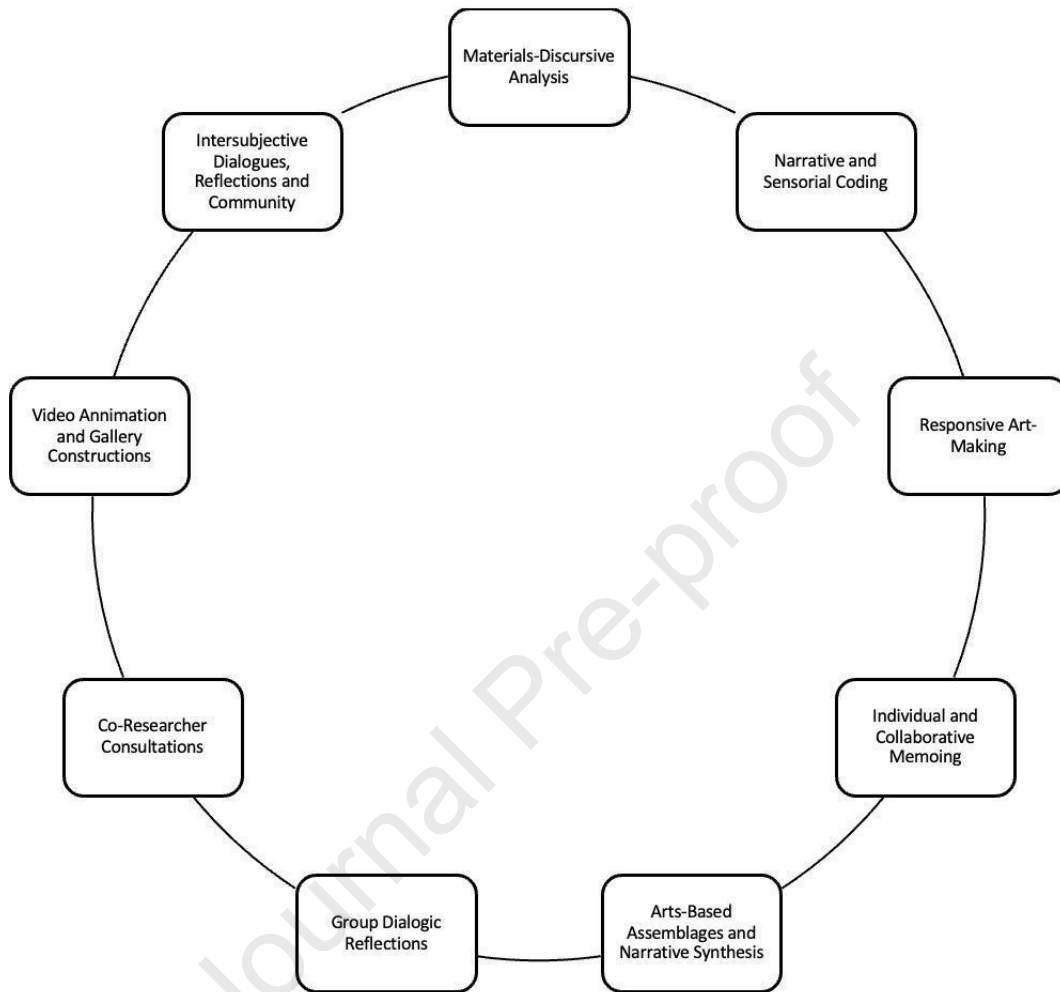




Figure 6

*ABR Multiphasic Method—Processes and Procedures*

In the first emergent category, *finding safety and acceptance*, the following subthemes emerged: inside/outside (emotional impact and social framing); being in and staying at home (emotional impact and social framing); safety and alienation (emotional impact and social framing); relationship stories (emotional impact and social framing); leaving home (social framing); anger, frustration, sadness, and guilt (emotional impact and aesthetic power); and time (emotional impact and social framing). The second emergent category, *adapting*, addressed the amplification of previously existing financial, health, and other conditions (social framing); employing creative adaptations (emotional impact); doing good (aesthetic power and social framing); and, realizing we are not alone (emotional impact and social framing). In the third emergent category of *dialectics*, negotiating the paradoxes and continuities of past/present and life/death (emotional impact) were raised; while emergent category four introduced *reflection and contemplation*, including mourning losses (emotional impact) and thinking about legacies (social framing). The fifth and final emergent category addressed the *use of the art process* for transformation (emotional impact and aesthetic power), the resolution of tension and conflict (emotional impact and aesthetic power), imagining (aesthetic power), addressing paradox and ambivalence (aesthetic power, emotional impacts and social framing), and considering visibility and invisibility (emotional impact and aesthetic power). An example of this thematic analytic process is captured in Table 2.

The materials-discursive analysis was used to further intersect and assign meaning to the arts-based and narrative data while exploring the relationships between the submissions. We also used this process to explore and integrate multiple data sources and types as we added group dialogues, sensorial coding, and reflections. Finally, we used the categories to construct the final synthesis aligning images, narratives, and meaning.

Each phase of the project was a fluid work of art as we juxtaposed and interwove multisensory data types and sources. These processes informed the evolving phases, provided illuminative insights, and contributed to our increased understanding of the multisensory relational data, the emergent assemblages, and ultimately the final syntheses.

#### ***3.2.4 Sensorial Coding, Reflections, and Assemblages***

Following the initial organization and materials-discursive analysis of the arts-based and narrative data, we collaboratively engaged in moving these arts-based and poetic narrative responses from linear to spatial constructions. Through this process we emphasized honoring the basic aesthetic epistemic while creating coherency in the multi-dimensional assemblages and furthering the assignation of meaning. To accomplish this, we engaged individually and collectively in narrative and sensorial coding; responsive art making; reflective memoing of art submissions; group discussions with the core team; creating group reflections; and sharing the emerging arts-based and narrative syntheses with co-researchers. The sensorial coding—listening, seeing, feeling beyond the textual data— provided great insight into the embodied and emotional communications of the arts-based pieces while juxtaposing so many powerful and varied experiences. For instance, the sensorial depth and coding is exemplified by the following excerpt from one of our core team that we incorporated into the final performative piece.


#### ***3.2.5 Group Reflections***

Interspersed with and responsive to individual arts-based, sensorial, and textual reflections and memos, the core group engaged in group reflective processes. In these dialogues we reviewed the emerging arts-based, textual, and sensorial constructions, and shared our reflections on one document creating a formative narrative. The process of sharing these narratives helped us capture our critically reflective responses, while contributing to the iterative creation of the

emerging arts-based assemblages. These multisensory dialogues resulting in assemblage recreations illuminated the intersectional meaning of the arts-based, sensorial, and textual data emerging from the analytic and synthetic processes. Through this process each cor

Table 2

*Example of initial materials-discursive analysis*

| Code # | Code Name | Definition   | A priori category  | Rsch | Image  | Comments   | Reflections  |
|--------|-----------|--|--|------|--|--|--|
| 5.4    | Paradox   | Capturing paradoxical phenomena in the art process | Aesthetic<br>Power<br>Emotional<br>Impact<br>Social<br>Framing |      |  | <p>What better to capture that lack of real care than a poorly constructed superficial ransom-note-looking message ("everything is fine"), "fun" gumball pink and purple colors, and a sugary sweet treat with a "cherry" on top? As I reflect on this piece of art, I feel it in my gut. It's like one of those sweet gum seed pods plopped into the pit of my stomach to alert me that I need to keep my guard up (Rattigan).</p> <p>I am looking through an old <u>encyclopaedia</u> which my mother won as a prize when she was a child. There is a diagram of lungs with the caption, 'Here comes every breath you breathe'. I cut it out and <u>paste</u> it into my <u>sketch book</u>, next to a drawing I've done of George Floyd.</p> <p>Everything seems to link together – trees are the lungs of our cities – a man whose breath is brutally denied him – this virus. My values are <u>crystallising</u> – the urgency to care for our planet and our fellow humans, to repair the damage we have done(Rouse)</p> <p>What I had wanted to show as connected, seems fragmented, separate, doesn't hold together as</p> | <p><b>Everything is Fine:</b> I typically don't care much for sweets. They are deceiving to me. They smell delightful, they look delightful, but inevitably, they make my stomach upset. I don't enjoy the consumption of them. It is filled with guilt. Societal guilt, feminine guilt, expectations guilt, weight guilt. This cupcake is a liar, as they all seem to be. But this one is different. It reads its falseness <u>outload</u>. The message is a ransom note. Look more closely. That thing on the sweetness of the cupcake frosting? It's an imposter. It is dangerous. It will pierce your mouth. It tastes of dry earth. It will quickly awaken you to the deception of this all. We are not fine. I am not fine. We are not fine. Can you taste that dry, piercing earth in your mouth? That is the only reality present.</p> <p><b>Alison Rouse, Here comes every breath you breathe:</b> This is <u>straight forward</u> to me.</p> |

*Sensorial Coding (Co-researcher reflections Jacelyn Core team)*



I feel the haunting nature of this in my bones. It is penetrating. I wear my mask and carry my own death with me. You may see the smiling mask in the background, but that is not relevant. Don't look at that. Look at the gaping black spaces where the entry to my soul used to exist. That is gone. And now I carry my death atop my own head as a reminder of it lingering nearby always. Some may say I am already dead. That my skull is my reality and this mask tries to mask the reality. Emptiness in the eyes and mouth. Void of expression and breath. Why is no one else talking about this? . . . This is one of the most honestly expressed experiences of COVID I have seen thus far. When I say honestly, I mean for myself. Wait. That is not my own death. I carry your death. I can simply pass this off to whomever I meet very readily. Here you go. I give you death. I have that power. ever desired. So, do I carry my death or yours? Complete

lack of control or complete power? The mask eyes now read: I have lost all care for others. I have a power I never asked for, nor ever desired. So, do I carry my death or yours? Complete lack of control or complete power? And which is a heavier burden to bare?



The first thing that comes to mind in this image is warmth. I am so drawn to the beauty of the natural light, the strength of the metal. I feel warm, both physically and emotionally, when I sit with this image. I love its simultaneous strength and gentleness. It seemingly makes sense. Just on its own without words, it speaks to me. However, the accompanying text invites you to take a deeper look. How does one perceive what you have versus have-not, what has been taken, versus offered? I am juxtaposed between the warmth and the cold reality. Perspective. Of wanting to be in someone else's world when it is more your fantasy rather than their reality.

group team member's experiences, perceptions, and interpretations contributed to revealing new insight adding rich textures to the final synthesis. The unique perspective, sensory-embodied reflections, and contemplations of each of our core group members contributed to weaving an arts-based narrative inclusive of diverse experiences and embracing the tension of paradox. As arts-based researchers, we came to realize that this dialogic process was central to the illumination and authentication of the essential meaning of the project. Some excerpts from the group reflective practice are included here.

### *(Core team group reflections)*

Perhaps most striking to me are the dialectical tensions between messiness and sense-making, creating and critical reflection, the dynamism, emotionality, and multi-dimensionality of the art and the pull to critique or analyze in logically sequenced words. I think sometimes we are caught between railing against dominant paradigms, wallowing in the messiness, the excitement of the unknown and the surprises of revelation; and, the pull towards the familiar, the known, the mundane, and logical, and causal order. Perhaps those are the tensions that are reflective of this COVID-19 experience and its arts-based correlate expressions--the attempt to organize, resist, and make meaning rather or hang suspended in a chaotic albeit reflective and creative space where the unknown posits fear, contemplation and creative promise--to both feel also a micro-reflection of this whole experience--the anxiety of what to write, my thoughts are muddled, my emotions rampant--how do I capture that? And then, as if by magic, once I start writing and allowing my ideas to flow this honest reflection of my inner experience appears. To me that is the essential beauty and treasure of the arts process where for a moment in time we relinquish our hold on mundanity and venture into the land of magic where we can discover, live, and make meaning of ourselves and our world beyond the usual.

In my thoughts and Corona-related research projects, it feels like I am indeed running against time, but I hardly move forward. Is it me wanting to escape or disappear by trying to run faster than the light travels? Is it to escape the panopticon, all systems of government that restrict? Or should I interpret it as the opposite? Walk firm but slowly! Move! But not blindly forwards. Explore different pathways. Look at others. See them in what they create, hear them in their stories. Be all eyes and ears. Slow down time to cut yourself loose from the overpowering rattle of the world. Then give in again. Flow. Humanity creates these fallible units of measurement. One + One equals Two. But time flows. It has no beginning nor an end. It manifests itself in different directions. It connects matter with meaning. We connect matter and meaning. Therefore, our time together is proof of our existence. Without time, we would not have existed. Time equals what essentially is, human experience. Time is unity. It is the only thing that 'matters' in a world that falls apart and needs to be rebuilt again. So naturally, it 'matters' in the work we create.

In the COVID-19 ABR Study, the first level of analysis is not so much to synthesize or thematize, but to mark how this work resists this. The analysis is to find a way to find a new means of visibility—a new partition of the sensible as Rancièrè would put it—that allows a fullness of vision. Not a reductive conciseness that allows for easy comprehension.

### **3.2.6 Arts-Based Reflections**

Along with the individual and group reflections, sensory coding, and material-discursive analyses, we also created spontaneous and iterative arts-based responses. We used visual arts, dance, video, and music to capture, embody, and synthesize these fleeting but poignant emergent insights and illuminations that occurred throughout the project.



Figure 7

**Jacelyn Movement Reflection**



Figure 8

**Collage Synthesis-Nancy**

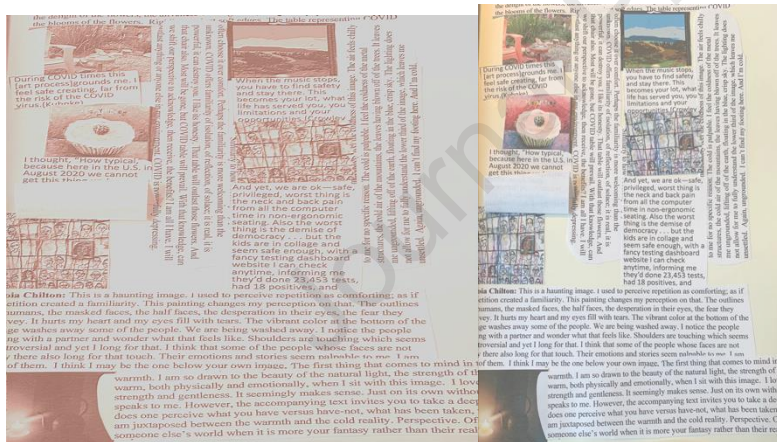


Figure 9

*Collage and Video Reflections –Maddie and Nancy*

*Image by Alison Rouse*



Through these arts-based reflective practices, we became more attuned to and immersed in variations of the intersections of dynamic arts-based and narrative data at different points in the analysis and synthesis. Our arts-based responses facilitated continuing dialogues as we engaged in shared creative reflections, re-assemblages, critical evaluation, multisensory responses, and syntheses from the diverse forms of arts-based and narrative data. Continuing throughout the project, these processes increased identification of assemblage and meaning making criteria. For instance the juxtapositions of composition, color, time, movement, sound, and paradoxical tension developed new ways of seeing and experiencing the data. The dynamism of these iterative arts-based reflections, assemblages, sensorial codings, and dialogic discourses amongst and between the core team and co-researchers, opened embodied connections and aesthetic insights into the lived experiences of COVID-19, resulting in a final synthesis, performative/exhibitive result.

### ***3.2.7 Intersubjective Dialogues, Reflections, and Community***

Central to this arts-based research process was our positioning and collaboration as both witnesses and co-researcher participants. We met regularly with each other as a core team and individually and collectively with the co-researchers at critical data generation, analytic, and evaluative points of the project. These meetings were invaluable in attuning to the nascent stages, nurturing the revelation of new insights, creating a forum for diverse and inclusive perspectives, co-constructing new meanings, and witnessing the resonance and/or dissonance of the developing arts-based syntheses with our co-researcher group. Through the experiencing, discussion of, and reflections on the evolving multisensory constructions, the group discourse illuminated and finalized the variegated narrative and meaning of our research.

In addition to illuminating new meanings from the data, developing a community of co-researchers contributed to a much-needed sense of emotional and interpersonal safety. The meaning and importance of the emerging creative community during a time of distance and isolation, was an unexpected, but welcome and necessary outcome. The community served multiple purposes, three of which were: providing a safe haven for sharing intimate experiences, reflections, and insights with each other; illuminating collective meanings and responses; and, emphasizing the importance of creative relationships during times of great isolation and anxiety (Galea et al., 2020; Gemignani & Hernandez, 2022; Javad, et al., 2020).

As we simultaneously navigated our own and others' pandemic experiences, we also uncovered related stories revealing social, cultural, and political issues and implications. As is often the case with ABR, the revelation of these unanticipated stories both surprised and inspired us as we continued to reflect on and contextualize our emotional and critical experience of the data (Figures 10 and 11). These related stories often came as a result of our co-researcher

submissions and discussions. The communal aspect of the research reaffirmed the importance of the collective and emergent intersubjective discourse as an essential aspect of our ABR practice as we invited the co-researchers to reflect on these emergent, surprising, and meaningful issues. Shining the light on the in-between typically hidden spaces is an essential and valuable aspect of arts-based research—peeling back the layers and revealing the underbelly of our microcosmic global community. No doubt these issues, related to the inequities, oppression, and power differentials that both underlie and impact the transmission, treatment, and experience of disease require further exposure and investigation.

Figure 10

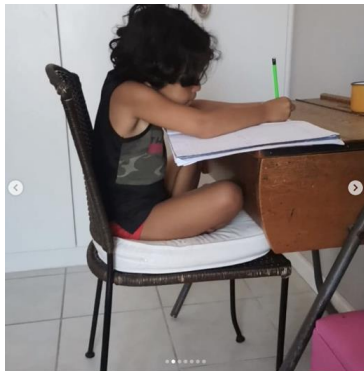
*Co-Researcher original work and reflection: Gabriela*



But in my world,  
The State captured all my goods  
Taken my providence  
And stripped me of my dignity  
I stand in a line begging for food

Figure 11

*Co-Researcher original work and reflection: Lynn*



When our kids tell their stories  
of the year 2020 what stories will  
they tell? Each one of them crying  
in their own way. Each one resilient  
beyond measure. They are our most  
treasured assets.

#### 4.0 Final Syntheses, Dialogues, and Assemblages

As we concluded our investigation, the discussions with the co-researchers, in addition to exposing underlying socio-cultural issues, also uncovered shifts in perception, experience, and emotional responses during various stages of the pandemic over time. The stages our co-researchers identified were: initial anxiety and panic; reflection and creativity; and resilience. With the identification of these stages of the pandemic we readjusted our focus and method to recreate different assemblages and narratives representative of and resonant with these phasic experiences. So, during the final synthesis we created small work groups of co-researchers and core team members to address these emergent new insights. Based upon the group reactions and feedback, we decided to use the video assemblages, the development of an online gallery, and the creation of an interactive responsive community space for the audience to represent these different phasic experiences from the pandemic.

The video had been identified by co-researchers and several audiences, as representing the phase of the initial pandemic that was most traumatic and anxiety producing with implosive and massive information delivered in a fast pace and in a compact space. So we formed the video group that worked to further explore that perspective, adding movement, music, sound mixing and visual arts-based responses to convey the experience of the initial phase and also to create the final assemblage and synthesis.

The idea for an online gallery emerged from the co-researchers' suggestion to include another assemblage of the data to capture the more contemplative, resilient, and creative phases of the pandemic. Consequently, we created an online gallery, which used the same arts-based responses, narratives, reflections, and themes reconfigured to represent the more contemplative

and resilient lived experiences of the pandemic. The gallery featured the original artwork of the co-researchers, artifacts of material discursive analysis, and sensorial coding reflections.

Deadend gallery spaces and maze-like wall configurations were created to echo the emotional feel of the pandemic. As different members of the group could choose art works from the data pool for their individual spaces within the gallery, some images are repeated in the overall gallery space. This sense of repetition and refrain resonated with the lived-experience of the pandemic.

Finally, we decided that since ABR is often evaluated based upon the response of the audience, we wanted to create an online interactive space to collect audience experiences. We chose to explore interactive platforms such as Miro. We developed this idea and used it at the European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ECQI) conference in 2022. We used this platform as well as shared the project with multiple other student and presentation audiences to collect responses beyond our co-researcher group. Although the project is limited to the core and co-researcher contributions, interpretation and representation, the diverse audience responses are used to evaluate the resonance and the evocative and emotional power of the project.

In ABR the results or final syntheses are not linear as they might be represented in more traditional forms of research. The lines of flight or rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Vagle & Hofsess, 2016) align more with the non-discursive processes, simultaneity, and multidimensional pluralism of the ABR onto-epistemic. So, as you read this paper you may realize that the processes of data generation and analysis were often simultaneous—the results often were emerging and intersecting with the data at various phases of the process.

The written work is insufficient to convey the arts-based results of this project. Typical of most ABR projects, the results are represented and disseminated in a performative or other art

form. As with most ABR projects, the results or final synthesis in this project aspire to: illuminate that which previously might have been unseen; to connect and give equal voice to all; to build a compassionate community; to encourage insight, imagination, creativity, and dialogue; to elicit and document powerful embodied human responses; to encapsulate methodological, experiential and substantive tensions through form; and, to expose and enhance our human relationships at a level beyond the ordinary into the extraordinary during unusual circumstances (Archibald & Blines, 2021; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Chilton et al, 2015; Eisher, 2008; Gerber et al., 2020; Leavy, 2020). Please visit the [Gallery and Video](#) to view the final synthesis of this project.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Throughout this project and process, we felt empowered by and embraced the messiness of arts-based research, immersing ourselves in the art, engaging with co-researchers and audiences, and emerging with elegant solutions, both on an individual and a collective level. The whole process of arts-based research is artful from beginning to end and beyond. The process of exploration, imagination, discovery, insight and illumination, reconsidering, reconstructing, reflecting, attuning, assembling are all equally valued with the final outcome. Consequently, central to our project and the ABR process was the experience of living through these phases embracing the surprises and illuminating truths hidden in-between, under, and around the more obvious. The closest we can come to describing the whole process and final synthesis in words needs to be more aligned with poetry than prose:

Inviting and collaborating,

Join us and join in

Viewing, reading, sensing.

Discovering

Witnessing, resonating,

reflecting

Organizing coding

Sensorial responses

Feeling and touching

Pausing

Collaging and mapping

Moving, seeing, listening

Surprise!

Insight

Circling back around

Revisiting

Iterating

Revising

More arts-based responses

Picturing, moving, musicking,

Feeling and sensing

Assembling and

reassembling

Figure 12

*Composite collage*





Forming and telling a story,

Deconstructing

Refrain and reframe

Pause,

waiting,

gathering

Looking in-between around and

under

Group and individual arts-based, sensory, and textual reflections,

Attuning

Embodied tensions and emotional evocations,

Uncovering

Constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing assemblages,

Sharing

Building community

Co-researchers experiences and reflections, and

Translation

Critical reflection and evaluation

All a part of a beautiful mess and ultimate outcome.

In closing, we would like to add that an artwork, process, and art performance are not isolated events, but relational activities that, through their practice, reconfigure their own matter and meaning. The art or matter develops its own agency, rather than being the result of interpretations or discourses (Cypher, 2018). In this sense, an artwork goes from being seen as

resulting from the effort of an artist's reflection and performance, to being seen as a material entanglement of the forces, agents, and contexts that shape it. From this perspective, art can be seen as “a dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still—an ongoing reconfiguring that exceeds any linear conception of dynamics in which effect follows cause end-on-end” (Barad, 2007, p. 170).

The thinking, doing, and displaying of an artwork is then a process, an intra-active mattering that does not refer to an object, but to a relational becoming, which in our collaborative inquiry, captured, conveyed, elaborated, and transgressed the lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our project captures, conveys, documents, and transgresses the emotional, multisensory, and embodied lived experience of COVID-19 that cannot otherwise be described with text or measures. That is the goal of arts-based research. Please visit the [Gallery and Video](#)

### **Acknowledgements**

It is with great respect, humility, and immense gratitude that we acknowledge the co-researchers as central contributors to this project. Their arts-based and narrative responses along with that participation in all phases of the project were essential to generating the knowledge,

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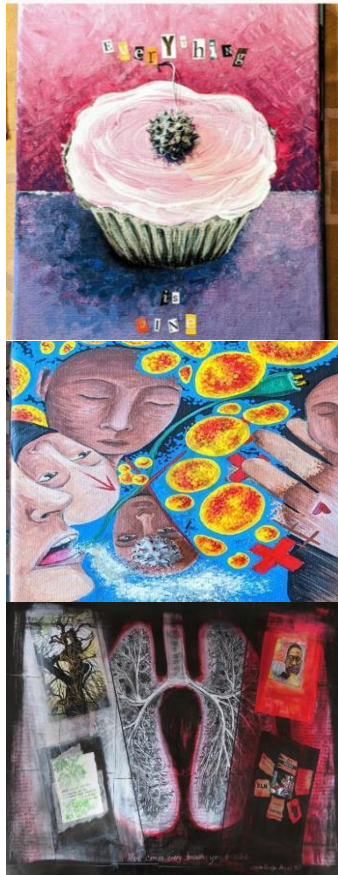
Table 1

*Arts-Based Research Philosophical and Methodological Continuum*

| Type   | Epistemology   | Arts Engagement   | Researcher Engagement  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Arts-Based Research Practice</b>  | Arts-based or aesthetic epistemic                                | Art as data and investigation<br>Iterative arts processes<br>Singular or multiple arts genres<br>Immersion and Reflection<br>Iterative dynamic dialogic analysis<br>Art as Result and dissemination<br>Audience engagement and evaluation | Researcher Immersion<br>Researcher artistic competence<br>Researcher arts-based responses<br>Participant/ Researcher<br>Researcher reflection<br>Inclusion of Reflection of Others<br>Inclusive of evocative imaginal, emotional, sensory, embodied data |
| <b>Arts-Based Research Practice</b>  | Arts-based or aesthetic epistemic                                | Art as data and investigation<br>Iterative arts processes<br>Singular or multiple arts genres<br>Immersion and Reflection<br>Iterative dynamic dialogic analysis<br>Art as Result and dissemination<br>Audience engagement and evaluation | Researcher Immersion<br>Researcher artistic competence<br>Researcher arts-based responses<br>Participant/ Researcher<br>Researcher reflection<br>Inclusion of Reflection of Others<br>Inclusive of evocative imaginal, emotional, sensory, embodied data |
| <b>Arts-Related Research</b>   | Social constructivist, Pragmatic, or other qualitative epistemic | Art as Peripheral Data<br>Singular or multiple arts exemplars<br>Participant Generated arts-based and interview data<br>Art as illustrative exemplars of qualitative data and/or results  | Researcher /Observer<br>Researcher collects arts-based data<br>Researcher collects textual data  |
| <p>Reprinted from <i>Arts-Based Research in the Social and Health Sciences: Pushing for Change with an Interdisciplinary Global Arts-Based Research Initiative</i> by N. Gerber, E. Biffi, J. Biondo, M. Gemignani, K. Hannes, &amp; R. Siegesmund, 2020, <i>Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research</i>, 21(2), <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-21.2.3496">http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-21.2.3496</a>. CC BY-4,0</p> |  |   |  |

Table 2

*Example of initial materials-discursive analysis*

| Code # | Code Name | Definition   | A priori category  | Rsch | Image   | Comments  | Reflections   |
|--------|-----------|--|--|------|---|---|---|
| 5.4    | Paradox   | Capturing paradoxical phenomena in the art process | Aesthetic<br>Power<br>Emotional<br>Impact<br>Social<br>Framing |      |  | <p>What better to capture that lack of real care than a poorly constructed superficial ransom-note-looking message (“everything is fine”), “fun” gumball pink and purple colors, and a sugary sweet treat with a “cherry” on top? As I reflect on this piece of art, I feel it in my gut. It’s like one of those sweet gum seed pods plopped into the pit of my stomach to alert me that I need to keep my guard up (Rattigan).</p> <p>I am looking through an old encyclopedia which my mother won as a prize when she was a child. There is a diagram of lungs with the caption, ‘Here comes every breath you breathe’. I cut it out and paste it into my sketchbook, next to a drawing I’ve done of George Floyd.</p> <p>Everything seems to link together – trees are the lungs of our cities – a man whose breath is brutally denied him – this virus.</p> | <p><b>Everything is Fine:</b> I typically don’t care much for sweets. They are deceiving to me. They smell delightful, they look delightful, but inevitably, they make my stomach upset. I don’t enjoy the consumption of them. It is filled with guilt. Societal guilt, feminine guilt, expectations guilt, weight guilt. This cupcake is a liar, as they all seem to be. But this one is different. It reads its falseness out loud. The message is a ransom note. Look more closely. That thing on the sweetness of the cupcake frosting? It’s an imposter. It is dangerous. It will pierce your mouth. It tastes of dry earth. It will quickly awaken you to the deception of this all. We are not fine. I am not fine. We are not fine. Can you taste that dry, piercing earth in your mouth? That is the only reality present.</p> <p><b>Alison Rouse, Here comes every breath you breathe:</b> This is straightforward to me. This experience affects our lungs.really considered that before. The rootedness of our lungs. I asked myself, “what do our lungs root to?” and immediately responded, “our breath.</p> |

**Declaration of interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

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