

Title: A möbius paradigm for artistic research: Entwining qualitative practices and the uncanny in further elaboration of a collage method of inquiry

Título: Un paradigma de möbius para la investigación artística: el entramado de prácticas cualitativas y el desasosiego al avanzar en la elaboración de un método de investigación de collage

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January 15, 2014

A paper for the 2nd Conference on Arts-Based Research and Artistic Research: Insights and Critical Reflections on Issues and Methodologies

Granada, Spain, January 29-30, 2014



Fig. 1. Kathleen Vaughan, Opening double spread, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

Abstract

With reference to *Made Flesh*, the artist-author's graphic-novel-in-progress, this illustrated paper outlines the author's methodological explorations using the möbius as an image of the art-research dynamic, and collage as a conceptualization of a method of practice. The author proposes the 'uncanny' as the aesthetic and affective modalities of both the möbius and collage, and also as an essential quality of a dynamically charged artistic practice.

The möbius is geometry's paradoxical looped form that appears to have two sides, but in fact has just one – which the author suggests is a productive way of construing the entwining of art and research. Playing with this notion of the strangeness-of-two-that-are-one, the author further suggests how concepts of the uncanny (associated with artistic practice) and cognitive rigor (aligned with qualitative practice) must both figure into the development of an artistic research practice that is methodologically robust and personally/culturally resonant.

With respect to collage, the paper notes that the generativity of its juxtapositions may facilitate productive engagement with fundamental questions of method in artistic research: how to inflect the intuitive choices of artmaking with research-oriented rigor, and how to make transparent and useful to others the hands-on stages of creation – specifically, how to find appropriate equivalents to qualitative research's 'data collection and analysis.' In demonstration, the author juxtaposes her own work *Made Flesh* (digital collage) with the conceptually and formally aligned creative work of two contemporary artists, Eija-Liisa Ahtila (expanded cinema) and Susan Rothenberg (painting).

Key words

Möbius, uncanny, collage, method, rigor, strangeness

Extended Abstract in Spanish

En lo referente a *Made Flesh* [que se hace tangible, literalmente: vuelto carne], mi novela gráfica en progreso, este ensayo ilustrado describe mis exploraciones metodológicas usando la cinta de möbius como una imagen de la dinámica de la investigación artística, y el collage como una conceptualización de un método de práctica. Hago una mención particular del 'desasosiego' como modalidad estética y afectiva tanto de la imagen de la cinta de möbius como del collage, pero también como una cualidad esencial de una práctica artística dinámica.

La cinta de Möbius es la paradójica forma orbital de la geometría que parece tener dos lados, pero de hecho es sólo uno; esta forma, sugiero, es una forma productiva de construir el entramado entre el arte y la investigación. En la vida real, una möbius es fácil de crear, y se puede hacer tomando una cinta de papel, torciéndola una vez o más, y uniendo los dos extremos. Una característica de la cinta de möbius es que "un insecto puede arrastrarse desde un punto de la superficie de la cinta a cualquier otro punto sin nunca cruzar un borde" (Pickover, 2006, p. 8). Jugando con esta noción de lo extraño que es concebir dos que son uno, la autora además sugiere cómo los conceptos del desasosiego (asociado con la práctica artística) y del rigor cognitivo (alineado con la práctica cualitativa) tienen ambos que figurar dentro del desarrollo de una práctica de

investigación artística que sea metodológicamente robusta, y personal y culturalmente relevante.



Fig. 2. Plamen Yordanov, *Double Möbius Strip* (2002), Chicago
http://www.plamenarts.com/double_mobius_strip_-_chicago_2002.html

Al discutir la técnica de collage, el ensayo esboza brevemente los acercamientos históricos al collage tanto en la práctica de la investigación cualitativa como en la investigación artística, uniendo estos dos aspectos de la Möbius. Destaco los aspectos de mis anteriores investigaciones metodológicas, las que indican nueve características de una práctica de investigación a base de collage, articulando mi posicionalidad y mis obligaciones éticas hacia mí misma y los demás; los principales paradigmas de la práctica (los míos orientados post-positivamente hacia el feminismo, los estudios culturales y la crítica); y la orientación de mi estrategia de investigación como investigación artística. Estas representan las primeras tres de cinco fases del proceso de investigación tal como fue discutido por los teóricos Norman Denzin e Yvonna Lincoln (2012, p. 12). Esta etapa actual –la cuarta– tiene el objetivo de teorizar para nombrar métodos de colección y análisis de datos, incluyendo la práctica del collage en esta parte del proceso. Al trabajar a través de la lente de este paradigma de investigación cualitativa, busco encontrar formas que le den voz a lo que de otra manera son los aspectos relativamente silenciosos e intuitivos de mis propias prácticas de investigación artística. Considero que no estoy sola, como artista que trabaja en un contexto académico, en mis dificultades con el método.

Me esfuerzo por conjugar las elecciones subconscientes y semi-automáticas del quehacer artístico con el rigor orientado a la investigación, y por hacer transparentes y útiles a los demás mis conocimientos de las etapas prácticas de la creación y sus vínculos con las prácticas de conocimiento.

Como nota al margen, la forma en la que entiendo la investigación artística es mediante el término usado comúnmente en Canadá: *research-creation* [investigación-creación]. Definido por nuestro cuerpo federal de financiamiento para la investigación, el Consejo de Investigación de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (SSHRC, por sus siglas en inglés), *research-creation* es

... un proceso creativo que comprende una parte esencial de la actividad de investigación, y fomenta el desarrollo y la renovación del conocimiento a través de innovaciones estéticas, técnicas, instrumentales y otras. Tanto la investigación como el o los trabajos literarios/artísticos resultantes deben satisfacer los estándares de excelencia de los colegas y deben ser aptos para publicación, presentación pública o para su exposición. (2012)¹

El proyecto de *research-creation* que aquí se discute es *Made Flesh*, el cual, dentro de la forma de novela gráfica, usa dibujo, fotografía y collage digital y analógico en una exploración de interrogantes sobre el amor y la pérdida, el lugar y la pertenencia, el duelo y la representación, específicamente con respecto a la muerte de un querido perro. Éste es un trabajo actualmente en progreso, y por ahora consiste de ocho paneles sencillos o dobles que exploran mediante imágenes y texto la desconcertante coexistencia de la rutina diaria con la profunda aflicción emocional y la desubicación a partir de duelo. El duelo en cuestión es por mi primer perro, Auggie, quien aparece en la novela gráfica como un compañero fantasmal para mí y para mi segundo perro, Baloo. Al trabajar en este proyecto, me sentí cada vez menos satisfecha con los resultados, que aunque técnicamente logrados, parecían de algún modo estáticos y sin profundidad emocional. Como artista, me sentía insatisfecha. Como investigadora, no sentía necesariamente que con mi trabajo estaba logrando una buena labor para abordar las interrogantes de la investigación, las cuales eran “¿Qué nos puede enseñar el duelo por un perro querido acerca de la ética y del placer de vivir con otros?” y en segundo lugar, “¿Cómo puede la práctica visual contribuir a y representar el trabajo de un duelo?”

Para avanzar con el desarrollo de mi práctica de collage para coleccionar y analizar datos, busqué otros trabajos artísticos que mostraran un interés común y diferentes puntos de vista sobre preguntas acerca del amor y la pérdida de un animal compañero. Teniendo en cuenta la orientación del Consejo de Investigación de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades hacia una evaluación positiva de los colegas expertos, busqué obras que estuvieran bien logradas no sólo para mis propios estándares, pero también para los de la amplia comunidad artística profesional. Me encontré con una instalación de video de múltiples canales de una artista finlandesa, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, llamada *Hour of Prayer* (2005), así como las pinturas con temas centrados en perros de la americana Susan Rothenberg, particularmente una pieza que no parece nunca haber sido nombrada, terminada o lanzada comercialmente, pero que es el tema de discusión en un video corto de la serie de televisión americana *Art 21* (Miller & Ravich, 2010). Estos dos trabajos abordan específicamente la muerte de los perros de las artistas y las implicaciones personales y profesionales de esta.

¹ Please see further discussion of this definition and its 2013 rephrasing on pages 10-11, below.

Al trabajar con los proyectos de estas artistas, así como con la escritura personal y crítica que pude encontrar sobre ellas, me di cuenta de que este proceso era más profundo que el de las conocidas comparaciones de la revista literaria, o que ejercicio para el campo de *research-creation* al que se ha llamado *artistic audit* [inspección artística] (Haseman, 2006, p. 8). De hecho, los trabajos de estas artistas, así como mi propio trabajo, sirvieron como datos para analizar. Exploré cómo las obras artísticas de ellas lograron su efecto comunicativo y estético, y comparé estas creaciones con mi propio trabajo en progreso, creando un tipo de collage analítico. Mi intención al hacer esta comparación fue conseguir entender cómo mejorar *Made Flesh* y alinearlo con mi investigación y mis intenciones creativas, para agregar aliento y profundidad a mi compromiso con mis preguntas a investigar.

Mientras que hay varios enfoques que puede uno adoptar para efectuar este análisis comparativo, el crítico modo visual y analítico que prefiero es el que propone Gillian Rose (2012) quien articula tres diferentes sitios en los que el significado se forja en el trabajo visual: el sitio de producción de la imagen, esto es, las circunstancias específicas, la hora y el lugar donde se realizó el trabajo; el sitio de la imagen misma, que puede incluir sus aspectos formales, sensoriales, fenomenológicos o afectivos; y el sitio de muestra, o el proceso por el cual los significados de una imagen son renegociados por un espectador específico o un grupo de espectadores (2012, p. 19 ff.).

En este caso, elegí explorar los aspectos que se relacionan con la situación de la imagen misma, primordialmente sus cualidades formales y afectivas. Con respecto al trabajo de Ahtila, mi análisis se concentró en la manera en que ella usa sus cuatro pantallas como un lienzo variable, ya sea como una forma de yuxtaponer hasta cuatro escenas diferentes, o para crear un panorama completo. También examiné detenidamente el uso que ella hace de cuadros negros o vacíos, siempre considerando cómo mi conocimiento más profundo del uso que ella hace de estos recursos formales, estéticos y conceptuales podría realzar mi propio proyecto.

De manera similar, analicé las pinturas de perros de Rothenberg: la que se muestra en el video, así como otras dos obras completas, *Gert* (2010) y *The Yellow Studio* (2002-3). En estos casos, consideré el aspecto de la fragmentación, del recorte, y la sugerencia de *hors champ* [fuera de cuadro], como la teoría de cine de Deleuze lo plantea (Deleuze, 1983). El punto era pensar sobre la importancia para Rothenberg, y para mi propio trabajo, de lo que ella conservaba en el cuadro y de lo que eliminaba, en este caso, la nariz todopoderosa del perro mediante la cual ella olfatea y comprende su mundo, cualquier pintura o atributo del proceso artístico, ¡y la artista a sí misma!

Al usar estos trabajos y mi propio proyecto creativo en progreso como datos, y al analizarlos y compararlos uno en relación a los otros, llegué a tres observaciones clave que ahora me están ayudando a mejorar mi propio trabajo:

Uno: Una narrativa lineal me parece muy simple. A través de este proceso he encontrado que la forma de la novela gráfica tradicional basada en cuadros secuenciales – la forma que he usado hasta ahora – no evoca suficientemente la manera desordenada de pensamiento lateral como yo entiendo mi propia experiencia de duelo. Como resultado, ahora planeo usar estas imágenes como viñetas de experiencia y añadir elementos visuales en otros medios, reflejando otras realidades y realizando el sentido del collage.

Dos, y en relación con lo anterior: El trabajo debe representar la experiencia interna más completamente, balanceando las realidades externas claramente articuladas. La estética visual que he creado es muy transparente, clara y mimética de la realidad externa. Necesita más ruptura, más coraje, más indicadores de la realidad interna y sentida que la protagonista experimenta conforme se desarrolla la historia, o quizá de lo que los perros sienten.

Siguiendo la misma línea de pensamiento, y tres: El trabajo necesita más fragmentación, más '*hors champ*'. Es decir, mi trabajo necesita más indicadores de un mundo más allá del que yo presento. De algún modo, he creado un mundo muy cerrado, muy contenido: un mundo que parece resistirse a la muerte, resistirse al duelo, que se mantiene fuera de la experiencia del colapso y la fragmentación del duelo, aun cuando los narra. En otras palabras, parece que he caído en la trampa de la paradoja de la representación, que crea un mundo aun cuando nada lo sostiene.

Puedo arribar a estas observaciones gracias a mi profundo análisis de las exitosas obras de Ahtila y Rothenberg. No creo que hubiera podido llegar a las mismas útiles conclusiones si simplemente hubiera dependido de la reflexión, que es usualmente el núcleo del método de *research-creation* (Scrivener & Chapman, 2004). A mí, reflexionar exclusivamente en mi propio proceso me hubiera dejado con un mundo demasiado pequeño con el cual comprometerme y hubiera requerido que fuera yo la fuente primordial de mi propio aprendizaje. Hubiera experimentado menos de las obligaciones y placeres de una conexión más amplia en el mundo social de la práctica y la investigación creativas.

Y así, este proceso de colección y análisis de datos que he comenzado, poniendo mis propios trabajos en contacto con los de Susan Rothenberg y Eija-Liisa Ahtila, puede y debe ser sólo el comienzo de un proceso más exhaustivo de evaluación y discusión entre colegas, a medida que me esfuerzo por fortalecer los aspectos exploratorios de la investigación artística sobre la cinta möbius que está en juego en mi proceso. Me apresuro a decir que no busco hacer esto a expensas del aspecto artístico de la ecuación, el desasosiego, el cual puede brindar misterio y relevancia como complemento maravilloso a la claridad del pensamiento basado en la investigación.

Key words in Spanish/ Palabras clave:

Möbius, desasosiego, collage, método, rigor, rareza

Introduction

While much is written about the philosophical basis of art as a form of research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Gray & Malins, 2004; Hannula, Suoranta & Vaden, 2005; Sullivan, 2010), many of us practicing art-making in university research contexts still grapple with fundamental issues of method. We strive to inflect the intuitive choices of artmaking with research-oriented rigor, and to make transparent and useful to others our understandings of the hands-on stages of creation and their links to knowledge practices. At the same time, we recognize and experience some of the ‘unspeakable’ aspects of art-making – aspects that, literally, do not lend themselves to linguistic elucidation, whether spoken or written. We also feel the need to preserve and respect the mystery – those uncanny elements – we find inherent in the artistic process. Thus, as artist-researchers seeking both system and description for our own processes, we may look to and borrow from qualitative research practices, while zealously guarding art’s specificity. It’s a delicate balance, working within and between these two well-developed disciplinary bodies of knowledge and modes of inquiry, which are both aligned and distinctive.

My current methodological work, to refine and understand a way of proceeding with and within the traditions of both practices, emerged from my dissatisfaction as an artist with the body of visual work I was creating. *Made Flesh* uses drawing, photography and digital and analogue collage in an exploration of questions of love and loss, place and belonging, mourning and representation, specifically with respect to the death of a beloved dog. I begin this paper, then, with a brief description of the artwork itself and its aims. I then outline the research journey I undertook as I aimed to improve my artwork with the help of qualitative research approaches and my own orientation to collage as both research method and artistic practice. I sketch contours of both qualitative research and artistic research, discerning in their conjunctions and distinctions a kind of möbius – geometry’s paradoxical looped form that appears to have two sides, but in fact has just one (see Figure 1 for an artist’s impression of the möbius) – which I propose as a useful way to understand the relationship between the practices.

The paper then offers a short historical overview of collage as an artistic and research practice, mentioning my own previous methodological theorizing of collage as an artist’s method for inquiry. Extending this theorizing with a new focus on the qualitatively-based practices of ‘data collection and analysis’, I propose that in-depth comparative discussion of a work of artistic-research-in-progress with others’ creations may be a means of adding rigor to the process of artistic research. Specifically, in a collage-like juxtaposition, I offer a comparative analysis between *Made Flesh* (whose eight images are interspersed throughout this text) and the conceptually and formally aligned creative work of two contemporary artists, Eija-Liisa Ahtila (expanded cinema) and Susan Rothenberg (painting). The paper concludes by returning to a consideration of issues of the uncanny and its companion on the möbius of human experience, joy.

Made Flesh

Currently, I am working on a graphic novel project called *Made Flesh*. Using autobiography as a starting point for an inquiry into questions of loss, mourning and representation, this project is a narrative, an extended digital collage of photography,



Fig. 3. Kathleen Vaughan, Second double spread, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

drawing, and text. Exploring the loss of a beloved animal companion (a standard poodle named Auggie, who appears in ghost form) and the challenges of building a life in a new city, the narrative works through the cycle of day's activities with a new dog (a standard poodle named Baloo) and a simultaneous change of seasons from winter to summer. *Made Flesh* addresses two research questions, one conceptual, the other methodological. The first question is, "What can mourning a beloved dog teach us about the ethics and pleasures of living with others?" And secondly, "How can visual practice contribute to and represent the work of mourning?"

The "work of mourning" is a phrase used by Sigmund Freud (1917/1991, p. 254) to describe the challenges of grief and bereavement. What that work might be has been variously configured by Freud and theorists since. Jacques Derrida (2001), for one, views the work of mourning as the impossible and necessary task of speaking or writing of the loss of a good friend. For Derrida, there exists a paradox in grief. One wishes to and must speak of the dead, but in doing so one risks objectifying the late friend, turning him or her into a story one tells about another. In this way, one backhandedly talks of oneself and one's loss – both a problematic aftereffect of objectification AND a legitimate and necessary part of this work of mourning. Further, for Derrida, the work of mourning is 'interminable, inconsolable, irreconcilable' (1996, p. 172-3) – that is to say, a central aspect of our human frailty and connectedness to others.

With these and other theories of mourning (Attig, 1996) in mind, I'm currently exploring the limits and possibilities of an *artwork* of mourning a dog in *Made Flesh*. I aim to articulate not only the relentlessness of life that goes on despite grief, but also the moments of pain and overwhelming loss that undo a sense of capacity and that obliterate naturalistic representation. I chose the graphic novel/comic form for this project for

multiple reasons. First, combining narrative and visuality, the graphic novel form would allow me to unfold a story through time, important to my evocation of an internal process. Second, I could benefit from comics' association with modern urbanity (Ahrens & Meteling, 2010), developing as comics did as part of the industrialized city's modes of mass communications: such a link was important for my place-based sensibility and the story's subtext, which had to do with relocating to a new city. And finally I could take advantage of comics' unexpected affinity for representing what is called "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, 1998, p. 2). Why this affinity? Perhaps because a work can capitalize on comics' associated tinge of social 'loserdom' or even shamefulness to portray the uncomfortable in ways that a more respectable art form might be reluctant to tackle (Worden, 2006, p. 896).

As background to this work, I also delved into theories of comics (McCloud, 1993, 2000; Dittmer, 2010; Groenstein, 2007)—which in their juxtaposition of panels I see as very much linked to collage. And I built, of course, of my history of artistic research that has previously engaged questions of loss and mortality (Vaughan, 2010). I sketched out the broad arc of the work and began.



Fig. 4. Kathleen Vaughan, Page in progress, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

However, after creating eight panels and exhibiting three as large-scale digital prints, I began to feel dissatisfied with the work. The panels themselves were wrought as I would wish, were technically and aesthetically achieved. And it was not that I was resisting doing the work of mourning as embodied by this project. It rather seemed that I was not finding my strategies of representation sufficient. They did not invoke enough of

the complexity, mystery or poetry of grief, seeming much too cut and dried. And so I stopped work on the graphic novel and – taking up my second, methodological question – considered what procedures would enable me to discover what I needed to do to right what seemed off-kilter about this work. I turned to both qualitative and artistic research practices, aiming to integrate aspects of both into these next steps so that I could preserve both the pleasurable aspects of the uncanny (associated with artistic practice) and the cognitive rigor (aligned with qualitative practice) that I believe must both figure into the development of an artistic research practice that is methodologically robust and personally/culturally resonant.

Qualitative and Artistic Research

In very broad strokes, *qualitative research* is variously described as inquiry that utilizes interpretation (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 8), as investigation that offers politically engaged interpretation of the empirical and social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, ix-xvi) and as an engagement concerned to "capture the observed, interpreted and nuanced properties of behaviours, responses and things," specifically using text (Haseman, 2006, p. 2).

Arts-based research shares some of these same qualities, and is seen as "an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable. ... Arts based research represents an effort to explore the potentialities of an approach to representation that is rooted in aesthetic considerations and that, when it is at its best, culminates in the creation of something close to a work of art" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 1). A related definition of arts-based research is "the use of artistic expression by researchers as a primary mode of inquiry" (McNiff, 2012, p. 5), whether these researchers are located in the social sciences, applied arts or arts fields. As such, arts-based research is thus closely related to *practice-based research*, a term that developed in the United Kingdom to describe "...research initiated in practice and carried out through practice" (Gray, 2000, p. 82) – in this context meaning art practice. As artist and theorist Graeme Sullivan noted, "Practice-based researchers were responsible for creating and constructing new knowledge that was grounded in the multiple realities and experiences encountered in the lifeworlds of individuals" (2010, p. 69). Here in Canada, practice-based research is more commonly known as "research-creation." Defined by our federal research funding body, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), research-creation is,

...An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). (2013)

Until a recent change in phrasing made assessment criteria more opaque, the SSHRC definition of research creation concluded by stating that "Both the research and the resulting literary/artistic work(s) must meet peer standards of excellence and be suitable for publication, public performance or viewing."² I particularly like that this

² Such was the phrasing of the 2012 version of the online definition, no longer accessible. Currently, the definition states, "The research-creation process and the resulting artistic work are judged according to SSHRC's established merit review criteria" (SSHRC, 2013).

definition includes some sense of the context of practice and the criteria by which work can begin to be assessed, that is to say, this description embodies a relational paradigm, and will return to this idea later in my paper.

As for the relationship between these forms of inquiry, some artist-theorists would wish to keep an arts practice entirely distinct from qualitative inquiry: British explicator of practice Estelle Barrett contended that practice-based research is "a new species of research" (2007, p. 1); Australian artist/theorist Paul Carter emphasized the distinctiveness of visual arts practice-based research by giving it a name, "material thinking" (2004), that reflects the specificity of the artwork's making and particular physical forms; and Australian theorist and drama educator Brad Haseman construes his version, "performative research,"³ as entirely distinct from what he calls "the binary of qualitative and quantitative research" (2006, p. 1). And of course, many traditionally aligned qualitative researchers would disdain any assertion of common ground with research conducted through the arts.

At the same time, the connections abound and are recognized even by those who work to tease out differences. Carter for instance, notes that creativity and imagination are at the heart of all research, and traces this recognition through the history of philosophy (2004, pp. 7-10). Admitting "a (soft) distinction" between the practices, arts education theorist Liora Bresler (2006, p. 53) proposes that at the core of both qualitative research and artmaking is an aesthetic impulse, one that shares a relational orientation to the Other, however construed. Speaking from my own vantage point in recognizing both the separate and the related aspects of these practices, I would propose that the relationship between qualitative research and research-creation might be productively expanded beyond the dualism. And that both topographical mathematics and psychoanalysis might help.

In aiming to visualize the relationship between qualitative and artistic research and understand it better in my own work, I searched for a model that demonstrates "that there can be a relation between two 'things'...which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction, a model which shows that while there are disparate 'things' being related, they have the capacity to twist into one another." The image that came to me was that of the Möbius strip, here described by feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1994, pp. 209-210).⁴

The Möbius strip is a fascinating conundrum, a surface that appears to have two sides, but in fact has just one side and one edge. Characteristic of the Möbius strip is the fact that "a bug can crawl from any point on such a surface to any other point without ever crossing an edge (Pickover, 2006, p. 8)—as indeed Dutch artist M.C. Escher visualized in his conundrum-based creations, such as the woodblock print of red ants on the move (1963). First explained in the 19th century by German mathematician August Möbius, a Möbius can be created by taking a strip of paper, twisting it once or more and joining the two ends. This visualization of a Möbius-in-the-making may suggest why I consider it an effective representation for the relationship between art and research: each

³ Haseman draws on J.L. Austin's ideas of performativity (1962) in which speech acts accomplish the utterance they voice (as in the statement, "I do", in the traditional western marriage ceremony). Haseman proposes performative research as inquiry in which "the symbolic data works performatively. It not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself" (Haseman, 2006, p. 5-6).

⁴ Grosz was proposing the Möbius as a model for the mind-body connection.

component can easily be construed as independent – on an opposing side of a strip of paper – as well as integrated – linked in imagination and inquiry. Crucial, of course, is both the twisting (the theorizing) and the will to bring the ends together (the practice). But the whole is more – and more strange – than the sum of its parts: in fact, I propose that the strangeness of the Möbius figure suggests a quality of the uncanny, which, can further help us understand the relationship between qualitative research practices and art-as-research.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, uncanny means “strange or unusual in a way that is surprising or difficult to understand” (2014). Less colloquially, more theoretically, the uncanny was explored by Sigmund Freud in his essay of the same name, originally published in 1919 (Freud, 1919/2003). Freud connected the uncanny to that which is frightening and arouses feelings of repulsion and distress (p. 123), and refers to an earlier study by psychologist and medical doctor Ernst Jensch (1906), who linked the uncanny with a sense of intellectual uncertainty. Freud’s etymological explication tied the uncanny (“Unheimlich” in German, with “Heimlich” meaning ‘home-ly’) to questions of home, specifically ‘un-home-iness’, which further suggests that the uncanny may be experienced by someone not sure of her ground as she contrasts an inner construct of the world as she knows or hopes it to be, with her divergent external experience. This act of strangeness through dissonance or juxtaposition recalls, I propose, not only the Möbius form, but also the practice of collage. After all, collage is historically and currently an artistic practice of bringing together divergent elements, and has recently emerged as a method used by both qualitative research and practice-based research.

Collage

Collage is evoked by qualitative researchers as a useful method, specifically as an arts-based way of framing data differently. Education researcher Joe Norris (2008) suggests that, "What underpins the creation of research collages is the attempt to construct meanings about the research questions and/or process, the participants, and emerging themes," (p. 94). Methods specialist Lynn Butler-Kisber, who has written extensively about the value of collage in educational research (2007, 2008), proposes that collage can be used as a reflective tool, as a basis of elicitation, and as a way of conceptualizing a response to a research question (2010, pp. 105-118). She suggests that collage "has attracted attention because it is a user-friendly medium, one in which the basic skills of cutting and sticking that are acquired early in life can be used" and is mindful of the influence of pervasive visual culture on an orientation to the visual in research practices (p. 102). In these days of ubiquitous digital screens, each featuring multiple visual elements (just for instance, the jumbo subway platform screens seen by mass transit users in Montreal and Toronto, who encounter simultaneous video content, streamed weather information, train arrival times, and news headlines) and our own split-screen on-line multi-tasking (streaming 'television' media while answering e-mails or sending texts), one could have grounds for believing that "everything is collage," as notable Canadian author Michael Ondaatje has suggested (2007, p. 16), in a novel that relies on junctures and ruptures in its characters' lives.



Fig. 5. Kathleen Vaughan, Single page, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

Of course, collage has a long and abiding discourse of practice in visual arts. About 100 years ago, artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, working independently each fractured painting's pictorial space by adhering to the surface of their works newspaper, chair caning, and other attributes of modernity's mass production (Poggi, 1991). Then and since, collage has often been linked with cultural transformation, or at the very least with dissent and cultural critique (Mesch, 2000). As states contemporary American artist

Martha Rosler, renowned for her photomontages and her orientation to socially engaged practice, "It is a truism that fragmentation besets modernity, and collage/montage is a symptom, a strategy, a form of resistance" (2007, p. 96). Indeed, according to art critic Laura Hoptman, writing about the multi-disciplinary collages in the influential 2007 New Museum exhibition, *Unmonumental*,

... the collages created at the beginning of the twenty-first century can be considered appropriate responses to contemporary fractures caused by vast political, social, and cultural unrest, technological change on an unprecedented level, and vicious, multi-national war. Two-dimensional expressions of the carnage of a suicide bomb attack, a roar of protest from an enraged crowd, the collision of signs in an urban landscape, the apocalyptic moment when art is finally subsumed by popular culture, contemporary collage work seeks to create a space between the rarefied museum and the chaos outside. (2007, pp. 10-11)

In my own work, I have described collage as "a juxtaposition of multiple forms, that is, an original composition in any media that brings together previously independent components, whether found or fashioned" (Vaughan, 2009, p. 10). I am aligned with those who from surrealist Max Ernst (1970, p. 256), to education theorist Joe Norris (2008, p. 94) and artist Laure Prouvost – who in her recent work *Farfromwords* (2013) integrates digital and traditional media in mashed-up room-sized installations – move collage beyond the basics of cut paper and glue into multiple communicative forms – expanding the field. My own considerations explore collage as a method for research-creation (Vaughan, 2005, 2007, 2009), often using my own practice as a basis for theorizing, as here. In writing linked to the method in creating the *Unwearables*, a body of textile sculptures addressing questions of family relation, loss, and mourning, I stipulated nine characteristics of collage as a method of artist's research⁵ (Vaughan, 2005, pp. 11-14). These characteristics are now ensconced as a basic orientation of my practice as an artist and researcher. I have enacted them in subsequent projects of research-creation, such as the body of work currently underway.

Using a qualitative research lens to consider my collage research method, I contend that my previous work was oriented to identifying how a collage lens could be useful in articulating specifics of the first three of the five phases of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12): that embodied by the socially situated 21st century researcher, who recognizes her ethical obligations to self and other; that of the major paradigms and perspectives of practice, mine being oriented postpositively to feminism, cultural studies and critique; and that of the orientation of the research strategy, which in my case is research-creation.

Denzin and Lincoln would identify the next stage of theorizing, its fourth phase, as, that of naming the methods of collecting and analyzing data (2011, p. 14). And it is that which I articulate here. In recognizing the relationship between qualitative research and research-creation as a Möbius, I aim to invoke and adapt the qualitative orientation to

⁵ These nine characteristics are that the research 1) is embodied in creative practice; 2) uses juxtaposition; 3) is interdisciplinary; 4) is linked to daily life and grounded in particular experiences; 5) is conducted by a situated artist-researcher; 6) is oriented to cultural critique and transformation; 7) is open-ended, with outcomes being seen as of the moment rather than definitive; 8) exists in multiple, provisional, and interdependent outcomes; and 9) consists of work that reflects, reveals, and documents the process of its own making.

collecting and analyzing my data in a way that adds meaning and rigor to my collage paradigm while still, I hope, giving place to the uncanny: I recognize that *Made Flesh* needs both. But I also recognize that I need to find new procedures at this point in my research-creation process, something that can move me out of this stuck impasse of dissatisfaction with my project and into clearly seen steps for improvement.



Fig. 6. Kathleen Vaughan, Single page, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

Current Procedures in Research-Creation

Currently, many commonly accepted procedures of research-creation are based in the twin pillars of reflection and documentation. The orientation to reflection builds from the work of Donald Schön (1983, 1987), who suggested that for those of us who are practice-oriented professionals (in arts, teaching, nursing, etc.), "Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action" (1983, 49). By reflecting on her actions, the practitioner learns from and improves her practice.

In later work, Schön (1987) theorized the relative benefits of reflection *in* practice, which takes place quickly and in the moment, and reflection *on* practice, a deliberate and considered activity after the fact, to deconstruct the practice through critical recollection and identify behavioural changes that could potentially improve the outcomes of another, similar instance. The entwined working of reflection in and on practice is the dynamic means by what a practitioner develops, bringing past experience to bear on new situations. Schön's work was updated with specific reference to practice-based research in the arts by Steven Scrivener (2000), who described an intricate system of reflection-in-action and -practice (RIAP) and reflection-on-action and -practice (ROAP) (p. 9), by which an artist can identify and document significant moments of creative research. He proposed that, "Each surprise during working, together with its associated frame, refuted theory of action, surfaced tacit knowledge, revised theory of action, revised frame and subsequent action, should be reflected on both with regard to its contribution to the project and its implications for future action and practice" (p. 11).

Relatedly, documentation has been proposed as a key methodological tool of research-creation, a way of tracking learning for further consideration and review. New Zealand artist-theorist Nancy de Freitas proposes that "Active documentation ... is a process of knowledge construction that may be regarded as a distinct research method appropriate to practice-based research projects in art and design. It can be used to: a) identify the evolution of a work process; b) capture accidental progress or problematic blocks; c) articulate those phases of work that become invisible with progress and d) provide the detached record that is necessary in the abstraction of research issues" (2002, p. 10). Similarly, Finnish artist-researcher Nithikul Nimkulrat writes, "The aim of this documentation is to make the creative process somewhat transparent by capturing each step the practitioner-researcher takes in the process, both consciously and unconsciously" (2007, p. 4).

The field of education also has an understanding of the value of documentation to learning, notably through the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. This latter proposes that well-considered documentation can 'make learning visible' to teachers, parents, and the students themselves (Project Zero and Reggio Children, 2001; Project Zero et al, 2003): the challenge for the teacher-researcher is to catch learning as it happens, to be "more willing to create and trust the co-constructed, investigative, and evolving moments [found through documentation] as starting, middle, and ending places for understanding the children they teach and with whom they learn" (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006, p. 397). While this was written with teachers' documentation in mind, the artist-researcher faces related challenges of creating meaningful documentation: that of finding and sticking to a useful system; of actually capturing moments of learning rather than

simply a convenient stopping point in the work; of selecting from among a large array of data the most meaningful moments of learning, etc. The question of how one might usefully document one's own reflective learning is a larger one than I will address here.

Documentation and reflection are of course essential to a process of research-creation, with the consequent reflexivity being a basic tenet of postmodern standpoint theory (Haraway, 1991, p. 190) and a stipulation of my critically self-aware approach to collage as research method as noted above (p. 14). However, reflection and documentation are not, I contend, sufficient. Both processes rely on the individual to see beyond her own biases and limitations, bootstrapping her way to innovation and improvement. No question that this can be eminently achievable. But an emphasis on self-reliance overlooks the fact that learning is fundamentally dialogical and that such dialogue may be most effectively achieved with an attuned other. Especially with the imperative that works of art-as-research "include a fundamental, public, communicative contribution that is worth preserving" (Nevanlinna, 2002, p. 70), that – as exhorts cultural theorist David Scott (1999) – we be taking up questions whose answers are worth having, we must, I believe open our research-creation processes to input from others and look beyond reflection.

Education theorist Ben Kotzee (2012) offers a related critique of Schön's theorizing, pointing out that the researcher may not always be the best judge of her own success:

The problem with Schön's account is that what it means to do anything well is not a matter of individual artistry and personal construction, but of social judgement. In order for anyone to not only take part in a practice, but to take part well, it is not enough for someone to rely on their own interpretation of whether they are doing well, they must submit to the standards and criticism of other people. (pp. 14-15)

Of course, within the arts there is much room for individuality and multiple orientations to success, but there are still professional standards of practice and disciplinary discourses to consider -- and learn from. (As noted on pages 10-11 of this text, according to the earlier SSHRC definition of research-creation, the research and any works created "must meet peer standards of excellence and be suitable for publication, public performance or viewing.")

Accordingly, as I grapple with the making of *Made Flesh*, I propose to open up the research-creation process to input from others. This could of course take the traditional form of a studio critique, fine arts' signature form of pedagogy (Klebesadel & Kornetsky, 2009), a form of focused critical and constructive discussion with knowledgeable others. However, instead of or in addition to such dialogic learning, I propose a kind of further orientation to collage as method, a juxtaposition of other artists' works with one's own in a way that could be seen as a kind of data collection and analysis. It is important that the artist-research choose works that are aligned with her own, that there be sufficient thematic or formal preoccupations in common for a rigorous analysis of the factors of success in others' works to be usefully applied to one's own work. Sullivan, in his theorizing of art as research (2010), describes the kind of analytic process that is at the heart of a research endeavour:

Identifying similarities and difference among ideas, concepts, definitions, interpretations, and theoretical views is one of the most common methods of analysis used in research. A basic requirement is to locate common points or areas

of overlap whereby views can be compared and contrasted. In essence, one is looking for common interests and different views. (p. 211)

And so with respect to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of *Made Flesh* as a work in progress, I seek out others' artworks with common interests and different views on questions of love and loss of a beloved animal companion, works which are well achieved not only to my own standards but to those of the broader arts communities as well. As a component of the analytic phase, one in which one checks one's own progress and self-corrects, this juxtaposition of one's own artwork with others' is more extensive and in-depth than the self-positioning, due diligence work a researcher does in a literature review. That is, what I am proposing exceeds the "artistic audit" that Haseman (2006) suggests might be the practice-based research equivalent of a literature review, his version being more specifically artists-researchers' demonstrated awareness of "both earlier and contemporaneous productions which contribute to the overall research context for their work" (p. 8).

I am proposing a kind of critical, comparative visual analysis, a kind of collage procedure in which other artists' work can serve as a lens through which to better understand one's own and to hone one's own visions and practices, a kind of triangulation through others' achievements. The purpose here is not to create an either/or binary of opposition between artworks so much as to bring the various elements together, using the friction of juxtaposition to 'rub up a spark'— as art critic Leo Steinberg proclaimed the achievement of collage. He described a collage by Jasper Johns as "...two flinty things in a picture plane [made to] work against one another so hard that the mind is sparked. Seeing then becomes thinking" (1974, p. 14).



Fig. 7. Kathleen Vaughan, Double page spread, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

While there are various approaches that one might adopt to effect the 'rub', the critical visual analytic mode that I prefer is that of Gillian Rose (2012), who articulates three different sites at which meaning is made in visual work: the site(s) of production of the image, that is, the specific circumstances, time, and location where the work was made; the site of the image itself, which can include its formal, sensory, phenomenological or affective aspects; and the site of audiencing, or the process by which an image has its meanings renegotiated by a specific viewer or set of viewers (2012, p. 19 ff.). Rose further proposed that a critical viewer can explore each of these three sites from any one or more of three modalities that can contribute to the critical understanding of visual works: the technological, the compositional, and the social, this latter being Rose's shorthand for "the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used" (p. 20).

With Rose's schema in mind, I conducted a critical visual analysis of artworks created by two contemporary women artists who have an orientation to juxtaposition and the use of fragments and, moreover, who used these devices to explore the death of a beloved dog: Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Susan Rothenberg. Working at the site of the image itself, engaging its formal and affective aspects, I explore each artist's works in turn and then address their relevance to my own work and the insights this process offers for my next steps of making.



Fig. 8. Kathleen Vaughan, Double page spread, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

‘Data collection and analysis’: Other artists’ works

Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila is known for her multi-screen projections portraying interwoven points of view on a non-linear story, and that are often referred to as creations of "expanded cinema." Trained as a painter before she began creating film, Ahtila is always conscious of the gallery space in which her work is experienced, the physical structure of the screens (one or more) on which images flicker and the story unfolds. The artwork in question is *The Hour of Prayer* (2005), a 14-minute four-channel work projected onto an angled structure of four screens, a sculptural installation in its own right. (Images from and an installation shot of this work can be found on the website of the artist's New York gallery: http://www.mariangoodman.com/exhibitions/2006-01-19_eija-liisa-ahtila/)

While most of Ahtila's narrative pieces link to social and political issues enacted by fictional characters, *The Hour of Prayer* is autobiographical and deals with the death of her dog, Luka. Her first person narrative, relayed in the piece by actress Laura Malmivaara, begins in January in New York City in an evening snowstorm. Over the sounds of dense traffic starting and stopping through slushy roads, and against four screens of different footage, some shot from above as though from a hotel room window, and some from street level, where New Yorkers of all kinds struggle through the bad weather, the unnamed narrator speaks about a nightmare she had when visiting the city. In her dream, she couldn't find Luka.

As she speaks, the images on the four screens shift quickly, reflecting the busy city rhythm in a sequence of New York street scenes. Then the action moves indoors, with slower footage of our narrator in her hotel room preparing to go to bed. Falling asleep, the unnamed narrator has a nightmare in which she can't find her dog.

Once Ahtila has established the parameters of her storytelling device—the visit to New York in winter, the dream, the dog—we go along for the ride as, next, two screens go black. On one of the remaining two, we see the protagonist addressing the camera against a dark ground in the first time she speaks directly to the viewer, while on another screen we see semi-transparent slow-motion footage of her dog running, superimposed on the reflected image of the hotel room in which she sleeps. She speaks, saying, "A few days later, when I was returning home, I thought maybe things in the dream were somehow reversed, that while in my dream I had somehow picked up the dog's anxiety about my being away, that despite all his efforts he couldn't find me" (Ahtila, 2005).

In simple, heartfelt language, the protagonist describes her strong connection to Luka, an accidental injury he experiences while out walking with the narrator, the discovery of his bone cancer and his radical medical treatment. In a rather reflective, calm voice, the narrator recalls her desperation to keep her dog alive. She said, "I prayed that we could keep Luka boy at least for the summer. And then later when Luka died on the eleventh of August, I blamed myself for not praying to have him at least until Christmas" (Ahtila, 2005).

Counterpoint to the straightforward storytelling is the rich and dynamic interplay of images. At times, all four screens are used to extend a panorama. But Ahtila also breaks up the screen space, using a single or double black screen as a compositional, conceptual, and emotional tool, to separate the speaker from the world she evokes to focus our concentration in on specific details, to leave just a little room for the viewer to enter the frame. It occurred to me that the black screens might also indicate the un-doing

of representation that is at the core of death, since there seems to be no good way for us to truly represent death itself.

There is much resonance and power of juxtaposition as used by Ahtila in *Hour of Prayer*. Juxtaposition implies that no single element is complete on its own -- with metaphorically rich implications for considerations of mourning, for in bereavement we feel partial, lost without the absent loved one. The deliberate display of this fragmentation, of this partiality, is one of the compositional devices of American painter Susan Rothenberg, especially in her recent paintings of dogs. Rothenberg came to prominence in the 1970s with now iconic paintings of horses created long before she moved to actual horse country, to the a ranch outside Santa Fe, New Mexico where she now lives (Auping & Buhler Lynes, 2009). In her large, gestural paintings Rothenberg represents deeply felt, occasionally shocking aspects of her daily life, including her canine companions, their miscellaneous doggie activities and, ultimately, the imminent death of one beloved canine companion.

Depicting a dog very much alive is Rothenberg's *Gert* (2010, and can be viewed at <http://blog.exhibitiona.com/2011/09/susan-rothenbergs-gert-hanging-in-elevator-at-sperone-westwater/>). She places the dog at the right of the panel, cropped so that her nose and her right paw disappear off the edge of the frame. Considering how important paws and nose are to a dog's engagement with the world, it is striking that Rothenberg has excluded two of Gert's key perceptual and relational capacities from the painted world. They exist in the world *outside* the painting, in the world that in filmmaking is known as the *hors champ*, whose invisible presence is felt even if material aspects are not seen (on the *hors champ*, see Deleuze, 1983, p. 29). We are left instead with a fragment of Gert, whose compelling and oddly human figure emerges from a roughly worked ground of dark brown, the hewn and over-hewn touch a Rothenberg signature.

A yellow dog also appears in Rothenberg's 2002-3 work, *Yellow Studio*. This painting, too, uses fragments--the dog with the cropped nose, the artist whose truncated arms hold an illustrated book and whose body is replaced by a reading lamp. Along the top edge of the frame are some non-specific studio furnishings--possibly a small table or easel, a shelf. Given that this piece is called the *Yellow Studio* we in fact see little of the usual attributes of studio life, paintings, artists' materials, or even a horizon or floor line that defines the space. These elements, too, exist in the *hors champ*, the off-screen space.

These two pieces of Rothenberg's are in fact just preamble to the painting that is most relevant to this discussion, a large unfinished and untitled work⁶ that appears in a short film on the theme of "Emotions" created by the American producers of the *Art 21* documentary television series about contemporary art (Miller & Ravich, 2010, viewable at <http://www.art21.org/videos/short-susan-rothenberg-emotions>), and available as supplemental website material rather than broadcast. The film begins with Rothenberg in a chair, smoking, discussing questions of beauty in her artwork, indicating her hope that her paintings "can be emotional moments for people." She speaks of the emotional challenges of creating a deeply felt work, the courage that she must summon. The camera shows us the large, creatively chaotic space of her studio, her abundant paints and

⁶ This artwork seems not to have been finished and delivered to Rothenberg's gallery in New York, whose registrar reports that Rothenberg will occasionally destroy works she is not happy with. (J. Burbank, personal communications, June 18, 2012). Perhaps Rothenberg's on-screen remark that this work is "just completely personal" suggests that she might not be intending or willing to sell the painting.

brushes, the unfinished works on unstretched canvas, tacked to the walls, an older black dog who ambles through the studio, obviously familiar with and part of Rothenberg's working routine.

After this minute of set-up discussion, we look with Rothenberg at one unfinished oil painting that is the focus of discussion for the remaining two minutes of the film. It's large, perhaps six feet high by eight wide, the image featuring a white dog crouching at the left side of the canvas, held by two large blue hands, the right hand extended from a long angled arm. From the bottom edge of the canvas, the toes of two red sneakers appear. While the dog appears disproportionately small compared to the gigantic human elements, in fact, given the size of the canvas, the dog could be just about life-sized. The background of the work is heavily worked in tones of white and off-white, into which the dog's paleness virtually disappears. In fact, the stone white ground comprises the vast majority of the pictorial space of the image, the figural elements taking up just a tiny portion of surface area.

Rothenberg tells us the story of this piece, her voice halting and full of feeling, "We had this ... to put that dog down because she was in kidney failure. And I was holding her before the doctor did that. And I wanted to make a painting about it, how it felt and to remember her by" (Miller & Ravich, 2010). As she looks at her own work, Rothenberg sees the struggles that she has had to represent the feeling—the sadness and loss—that she wanted to convey. She speaks of her own attempts to bring the representation in alignment with the feeling, the problems being not in the depiction of the dog, but in the orientation of the hands and feet, the parts of herself that protrude into the painting:

I have had the arm everywhere you see this darker tone, I've had the arm there. <Laughs> Like this. Like this. Then I couldn't figure out where my, the feet should be. Then I couldn't figure out where the arm might be coming out of the body. And finally I decided to stop worrying about it. All I wanted was that dog held there and my sneakers grounding the bottom of the painting. (Miller & Ravich, 2010)

Moving from discussing the external image to her internal feelings, Rothenberg continues, "I just felt so sad and so.... I felt the loss of this dog quite a lot, so... And I tried to recover ... her for a moment in the painting. It's just completely personal." Shifting once more between form and feeling, Rothenberg closes the segment by stating, "You know, if I could put my bleeding fucking heart in there I would. But as it is it's her and my arms and my shoes, you know, in the most all-embracing kind of send off that I could give her" (Miller & Ravich, 2010).

There is much that I love about this painting and Rothenberg's description of it, much that it helps me to understand about representing the death of a dog and its aftermath. The surface is crucial here – Rothenberg's characteristically heavily re-worked and touched up surface. In describing Rothenberg's sense of touch, art critic Mark Stevens writes, "There is an elegant coming-apart-at-the-seams in the appearance of her brushstroke that refuses to lay claim to the image or to any complete meaning" (Stevens, 1995, p. 87).

The meaning of the work in question is alluded to by Rothenberg in the interview: her emotional connection with her dog. I appreciated the lovely little hesitation when she mentioned, after describing how deeply she felt the loss of the dog, that she "tried to

recover... her for a moment" (Miller & Ravich, 2010.) I infer that Rothenberg was trying to recover herself as much as she was trying to bring the dog she loved back into her life in painted form.

The immense feeling that is captured in Rothenberg's work—and in Ahtila's, in a more reserved way—is so strong that it breaks through the representational boundaries of the forms the artists choose. In Ahtila's case, it means creating multiple simultaneous interwoven visual narratives that play in counterpoint against the single spoken text. In Rothenberg's case, it means emphasizing the *hors champ* and bringing the tactile aspect of the work into prominence, correspondingly downplaying visual acuteness.

Through this analysis of these artworks, whose achievements I compared with my own in *Made Flesh*, I came up with three key observations that are now helping me improve my own work:

One: A linear narrative feels too simple. Through this process I've found that the traditional graphic novel form based in sequential frames – the form that I've used here so far – doesn't evoke enough of the messy, lateral thinking way I understand my own experience of mourning. Nor does a linear form relate sufficiently to my body of visual work, which does not use straightforward or single narrative as a communicative device. Consequently, I now plan to use the eight images I've created as vignettes of experience and add visual elements in other media, reflecting other realities and enhancing the sense of collage.

Two, and relatedly: *Made Flesh* must represent internal experience more fully, balancing the clearly articulated external realities. As it stands now, the visual aesthetic I've created is very transparent, clear, and mimetic of external reality. I'm understanding that the work needs more rupture, more grit, more indication of the internal and felt reality that the protagonist experiences as the story unfolds – or perhaps that the dogs feel.

Along the same lines, and so three: the work needs more fragmentation, more '*hors champ*'. That is to say, my work needs more indications of the world beyond the one that I render. Somehow, I've created a world that is too closed, too contained: a world that seems to resist death, to resist mourning, to be keeping out the experience of the collapse and fragmentation of mourning even while it narrates it. In other words, I seem to have fallen into the trap of the paradox of representation, which creates a world in the face of death and loss, where no world can in fact sustain.

In reviewing the common qualities of these adjustments, I realized that essentially they all amounted to a need in my work for greater acknowledgement and reflection of the disruptive, the disowned, the disquieting, that is, the uncanny. I return to Freud for a closer consideration of the uncanny, and find that he maintains that in the world of the arts (as opposed to what he describes as real-life experience [1919, 2003, p. 157]), the uncanny is more difficulty achieved. This is because the uncanny requires a kind of dissonance between the affective reality and one's cognitive expectations, and the world of aesthetic production being a world apart, it can establish its own rules about reality and expectations. We don't reality test fiction in the same way that we do life. So my challenge is augmented. In both art and life, though, Freud associates the uncanny with the return of personal feelings of childhood that have been repressed and forgotten (p. 147 ff.). Pushed away, reviled, these repressed feelings often have a quality of solitude, silence and darkness (p. 159) that resurges into an experience of the uncanny. This same

experience lies at the heart of human existence, no matter how orderly we wish and pretend it to be.

Of course, the uncanny is not the only experience at the heart of life, art or research. I would also propose that the uncanny's 'möbian' partner or complement exists as well and is the feeling of joy. Paradoxically, joy seems to be intermittently present even in the work of mourning that prompted my own and these other artist's creations. It seems, then, that the work of mourning can be seen as something that starts and stops and is interceded upon by joy. Taking up the work of mourning may require, then, the acknowledgement that the actions of the living can never truly capture the absence of the dead, that those of us who remain behind, alive, are complicit with the process of life itself, which dances us onward. This reality is described by philosopher Gillian Rose who counters Derrida's assertion of the endlessness of the work of mourning, stating, "The work of mourning is difficult but not interminable; beginnings may be made in the middle" (1996, p. 122).

Ahtila's *Hour of Prayer* embodies this truth. In the second part of her film, the narrator leaves Finland for an artist's residency in Benin. In the dust and heat of Africa, the narrator experiences a daily ritual. Just before dawn, the bells of the church would toll, waking the community including the local dogs, who would run towards the church and bark in response to the sound of the peals. As the narrator put it, "Every morning I awoke to this canine prayer. I just lay there, eyes still closed, smiling at the dogs praying. (Ahtila, 2005). Correspondingly, the panel of my own work that most pleases me suggests both sleep and a kind of prayer, also by the two dogs, who feel themselves at home together in my office regardless of their state of being and oblivious to my work of mourning.



Fig. 9. Kathleen Vaughan, Double page spread, *Made Flesh*, (digital collage, dimensions variable, in progress)

Perhaps, moving continually along the möbius through art to research and back again, delighting in its twists and curls, I can begin again from this middle of where I am now, both in my practices and in my life. I remain an artist associated with the university. As such, I hope I rise to the challenge articulated by Sullivan, in his exploration of artistic research:

By taking on the challenge of research within the framework of the university setting, and doing so according to the integrity of visual arts practice, perhaps the artist-theorist can claim the right to create and critique issues of human significance within the context of the arts. (2010, p. 213)

I would hope that such issues would include questions of mourning and joy, and perhaps even associated theoretical and methodological inquiries into the modes of human understanding and expression that best reflect these issues – that is, the arts.

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