

**Crossing the Field: Creating intra-active spaces through a participatory artists' event towards problematising art therapy**

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**Hippogryph Guide**



Figure 1 *Hippogryph*. Robin Tipple.

*A fabulous creature born of a mare and a griffin.*

*The Hippogryph is a symbol of impossibility and love.*

*Carrying us on an epic quest of chivalry, desire and justice.*

*Flying like the wind around the world and to the moon.*

*To convey to us the intangible heritage of humanity.*

The mythical creature, the Hippogryph<sup>i</sup>, has become one of our many guides in traversing and thinking into our collaborative, intra-active, art installation 'Crossing the Field'.

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This impossible hybrid creature of legend allows us to be in touch with multiple entangled connections across time and space (Barad, 2007). It leads us deeper into trusting and using art as the process of inquiry in unfolding understanding of the cultural and political significance of art and space in rethinking relationships with the everyday places in which we work. It begets us to *go with* this live encounter with the unknown and towards problematising art therapy practice, re-evaluating assumptions, allowing new views and deeper awareness to emerge.

'Crossing the Field' arose in the context of the International Art Therapy Conference: 'Finding Spaces, Making Places: Exploring social and cultural space in contemporary Art Therapy practice' held at Goldsmiths University 13-16 April 2016 (Lever & Linnell, 2017; Lever et al., 2016; Lever et al., 2017). The impact and potential of this experience continues to preoccupy us, and we felt moved to think into it further at the International BAAT/AATA conference July 2019.

As part of beginning this review, we wish to acknowledge the valuable work about spaces and places for art therapy such as; Wood on the art therapy studio (2001); Kalmanowitz & Lloyd on the portable studio and political conflict (1997, 2005); Hyland-Moon on studio art therapy (2001); and, Fenner on the places for art therapy (2017). Here we are not suggesting a new way to offer art therapy nor an alternative context for practice. Rather, this chapter is conceived as an emanation from the conference presentation arising from our collegiate friendships that span space-time-place-matter, over decades and continents; distilled into this Morris-Westwood offering.

We respond to the call of the wild, and a desire to open the casement and to fly into the cosmic unknown. To embark on a journey through past-present-future, an instinctual opening up-out and beyond, towards a relational and indeterminate ontology. We are interested in investigating the materials of 'Crossing the Field' in "the spirit of diffractive readings" taking account of "agential entanglements of intra-acting humans and non-human practices" (Barad, 2012); reaching towards an innovative research process to heighten awareness of the human, physical and ethical dimensions of art therapy theory and practice.

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Barad refers to Haraway who says,

...diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of [story-making about origins and truths]. Rather, diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness. (Barad, 2012, p. 51).

Barad is talking about a shift “towards diffraction, towards differences that matter...a matter of entanglement, an ethico-onto-epistemological matter”(ibid). Inspired by these emerging philosophies; of the inseparability of ethics, being, and knowing we share materials, unfolding a unique interweaving of this collaboration.

### **Fieldwork - artist-art-therapist-researcher - Fusion**

‘Crossing the Field’ began as a series of conversations on our experiences of the radical shifts and changes in the place of, and spaces for art therapy in the UK. Provoked by the crisis of whole populations of people traversing the globe in search of a place of safety and refuge, these discussions grew into the concept of a collaborative tent city on the College field.

At the same time our colleagues in Australia (Anita Lever and Sheridan Linnell) were moved by similar concerns to imagine an intra-active tent-shaped installation of builders’ plumb bobs and lines, a void space inside the positive space suggesting tension, precision, intention; a place where borders are articulated. *An idea germinated in two places on opposite sides of the globe about how we could explore related themes of space and place.*

We invited collaboration and together created an installation, offering delegates a series of art-based sessions over the three days of the conference. During which participants moved between indoor and outdoor spaces co-constructing an encampment of embellished tent structures on the field; responding to and extending the plumb bob installation indoors or the visible tent city outside; drawing making and moving; touching the space, the void and the present. Visitors approaching from multiple entry points were

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invited to follow the contours of the outside in order to find what is folded inside (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). In 'intra-action' (Barad, 2007) with each other, our 'selves', the site, the materials and some provocative philosophies, a 'third space' (Bhabha, 2004) of art therapy began to emerge.



Figure 2 *Every place I have ever worked.*

We identified with *the artist in the art therapist* and wanted to open up a collaborative and inclusive exploration of space and place with as many delegates as possible. We imagined the installation to be somewhat fluid and on a big scale. We bought the structure for Anita and Sheridan's plumb bob installation, which was initially conceived to be on the field. But, when they arrived from Australia the outdoor elements proved difficult for the delicate nature of the plumb lines, so this was moved to an indoor space looking out onto the field. While we (Lesley and Jill) inhabited the field, creating different areas and tented provocations to invite the collaboration of conference participants including themes such as "Austerity Measures"; and making banners and signage resonant of the work of the artist Bob and Roberta Smith<sup>ii</sup>. An artist concerned with social-political issues. We thought about Tracey Emin's "*Everyone I have ever slept with*" tent installation<sup>iii</sup>, and associated this with

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“*Every place I have ever worked*” (Figure 2). We noted how art therapy is often pushed into/resides on the margins, the erosion of art therapy studios and how digital/virtual approaches/spaces have emerged. Asking ourselves questions about the virtual and physical presence of bodies in spaces in the making of relationships (Figure 3).



Figure 3 *Pixelated*.

Working visibly on the field sparked conversations with our contemporary art and design colleagues. Relationships were navigated differently in the open, it became about the materiality of the place. Negotiations with the gardeners about lawnmowing, the history and protocols concerning the ancient trees with preservation orders. It was a surge of something notably different.

However, personal discussions with our team colleagues caused us to consider whether our project was overly ambitious? And, to wonder where we might belong or fit within in the conference forums and boundaries. We found ourselves drawn to challenge some of these expectations and to play with the transgressive possibilities. We went *with and against* the flow. We felt invigorated by our explorations and encompassed this sense of doubt in our evolving methodology.

Inspired by the work of Bachelard (1994) we immersed ourselves in artistically investigating the campus. By walking together and photographing various locations and

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features, we became sensitised to the political power embedded in the fabric of the place. From this material we produced a 10-minute film to present at the first session. This artwork significantly developed our relationship to the place/s and space/s of the site and in turn became an artistic invitation to others to collaborate. As part of the preparation we also became energised by collecting resources, recycled materials and gathering sufficient quantity and diversity usable in the outdoor elements. In this process we were extended to working with scale and issues of climate and ecology. We also considered and negotiated our collaborators' permission to gather photos, recordings, films; and, these also became artworks, records and a narrative of the 3 days.

As part of the conference welcome, we invited delegates, to make a small plasticine object to contribute to the making of a miniature world as part of the field installation. These objects were placed between two sections of crumbling concrete. Viewed from above these looked like two giant foot prints (*maybe of an unknown creature like the Hippogryph*). This became a site for the artwork of the large-scale hands of Robin Tipple (Conference Convenor) made by our colleague Kristen Catchpole. *Unfortunately, these hands have since gone missing, thought to be stolen.*

The plasticine miniatures were arranged in a caravan between the sculpture of Robin's hands, and a protective shelter made with some recycled fencing (Figure 4).



Figure 4 *Robin's hands by Kristen Catchpole and miniatures.*

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Barad asks:

When two hands touch, how close are they? Which disciplinary knowledge formulations, political parties, religious and cultural traditions, infectious disease authorities, immigration officials, and policy makers do not have a stake in, if not a measured answer to, this question?... Many voices speak here in the interstices, a cacophony of always already reiteratively intra-acting stories. These are entangled tales. Each is diffractively threaded through and enfolded in the other. Is that not in the nature of touching? Is touching not by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within? (Barad, 2012, p. 206-207).

This is one far reaching thought evoked by these artworks.

### **Encampment viewpoints - lines of flight**

Artist William Kentridge (2014) recognises *art as knowledge*, with the studio as the place for the creation of meaning. He points to an insufficiency in the linearity of language, the notion of thoughts that follow on from each other. Instead, Kentridge proposes a “highway of consciousness”, in which layers of thoughts can be available as fragments of images and words seen all at once, and in relation. “How through this cacophony of excess and uncertainty and indecision, we invite the viewer to sit with us and contemplate the impossibility of finding sense.” (Kentridge, 2014, p. 52). We join with this invitation taking up lines of flight in curating this assemblage; to reveal some of the matter and mattering arising from the event.

...A concrete strip next to the giant foot prints became a natural place for the lighting of a daily fire for the duration of the sessions (Figure 5). Negotiated with College Security, and within health and safety regulations this fire became a beacon, a centre of community, a source of warmth, of home and hearth as well as of wildness and taboo.

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Figure 5 *Fire-warmth.*

We created signs and banners reminiscent of encampments and festivals (Figure 6).



Figure 6 *Space-Place-Elsewhere.*



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Figure 7 On the Surrey-Kent border.

The first migrants  
have been deported  
from Greece to Turkey  
under the EU deal  
to reduce the flow  
of People to Europe

We placed this 'matter-of-fact' painted headline on the historical border-line between the Counties of Surrey and Kent (Figure 7). The news story refers to the exodus of peoples fleeing war in Syria, poverty and persecution, and travelling on mass onwards towards safer countries of Northern Europe. The situation is immeasurably complex, and aggravated by long-standing ethnic and religious conflicts, the global financial crisis and subsequent economic collapse of Greece. Amnesty International reported that peoples were being detained in squalid conditions without access to information, legal aid, health care, food, or blankets. "The fear and desperation are palpable" (The Guardian, 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2016).

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We recognised this statement was placed on the Surrey-Kent border partly as a response to shame. This came to light when a participant brought us in touch with a mother's pain due to the death of her child, throwing into disconcerting contrast the careless and emotionally disengaged position of placing this uncritical reportage of the plight of unknown 'others'; 'elsewhere' at the farthest reach of the field. We wondered now if this also related on another existential plane to shame and the female body? Perhaps connected to the female body present and evoked in 'Tomb-Abject-Womb-Unknown' (Figures 8, 9). This pregnant hybrid creature lying inside the tent has been reincarnated in several art/exhibition sites in the life of the art therapy training at Goldsmiths (Figure 10). We questioned what else we place at the farthest reaches of the field?



Figure 8 *Tomb-Abject*.

Figure 9 *Womb-Unknown*.



Figure 10 *The Hybrid Creature inside the Tomb-Abject–Womb-Unknown tent.*

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Barad helped us think about this:

But what if the point is not to widen the bounds of inclusion to let everyone and everything in? What if it takes sensing the abyss, the edges of the limits of “inclusion” and “exclusion” before the binary of inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, mattering/not-mattering can be seriously troubled? What if it is only in facing *the inhuman—the indeterminate non/being non/becoming of mat-tering and not mattering*—that an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference can arise?

And

Being in touch with the infinite in/determinacy at the heart of the matter, the abundance of nothingness, the infinitude of the void that is threaded in, through, and all around all spacetime-mattering opens up the possibility of hearing the murmurings, the muted cries, the speaking silence of justice-to-come. (Barad, 2012a, p. 216).



Figure 11 *Golden Balloon*.

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We see our own reflections on the surface of a discarded Christmas shop window display; part of our trove of recycled materials (Figure 11). What intra-actions are available in this visual hapticity? What ‘murmurings’ can be heard? Stepping into the void...What are ‘the conditions of im/possibilities and lived indeterminacies’ that are integral to this ‘other’ representation of ourselves? How might we think about the coincidence of the displacement of peoples occurring (*elsewhere*) across the globe, and the event of the Art Therapy conference at Goldsmiths? How are we positioned as educators/art therapists/artists in relation to the commodified systems in which we work that are integral to our education and practice? What does this mean for justice-to-come?

### **Day 1 – It was sunny, the people came (Voices)<sup>iv</sup>**

*More people than we imagined – chaotic - a little frightening.*

*Being an individual in the vastness of space.*

*Feeling mad – free – finding new meanings.*

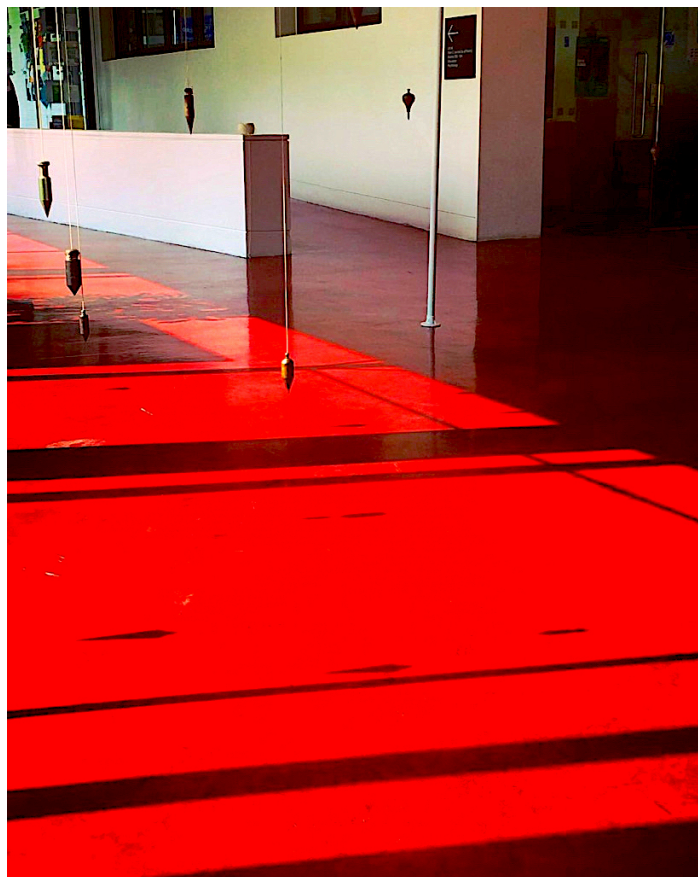


Figure 12 *Plumb bob installation.*

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*Trying to touch points of stillness with plumb bobs.*

*Evoking childhood memories – Dad wallpapering, misspent youth.*

*Marking territories–boundaries-edges-depositing trails of matter.*



Figure 13 Tents.

*Following lines of desire - Peeping inside tents – the horrifying tomb tent.*

*Feeling like an intruder – making offerings to others.*

*The tents as temporary.*

*Thoughts about refugees-homeless people-disrupted lives.*

*Leaving a camp might be frightening - at a camp we are together.*

### **Day 2 – It rained; people took refuge**

*Reluctantly entering the camp – feeling there is no place for me here.*

*Anxious about visitors to my tent, but they were friendly.*

*Feeling guilty for staying inside.*

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*This was the time - the moment - the chance.*

*Guided by energy like gravity that pulls the plumb bob into the centre.*

*I thought I would feel anxious and retreat into failure, but others came and helped me to make a wonderful free wind-blown tent and refuge (from the rain).*

*The patter of rain on the tarpaulin, skin against clothes, clothes against space, my weight against the tarpaulin, pushing against the sky.*

*It gave me a sense of freedom to play like a child and run in the grass.*

*The fire burns warming and holding, waiting for our return.*

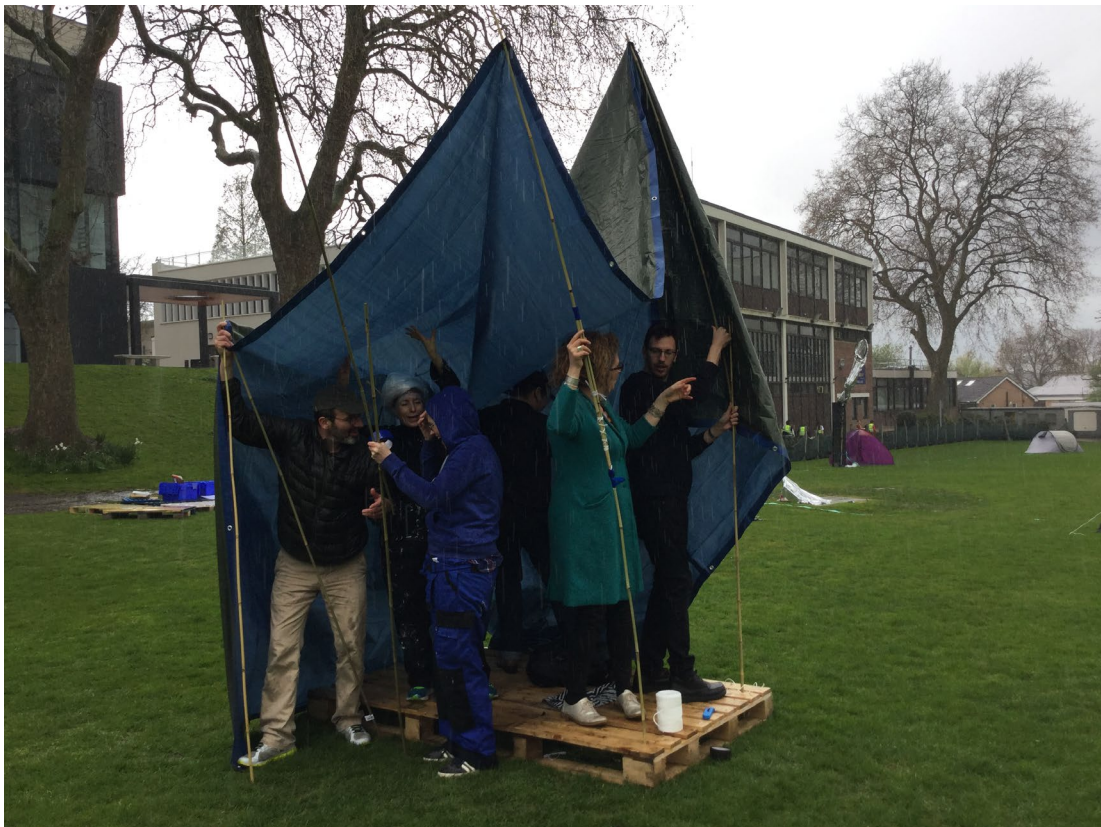


Figure 14 *Rain shelter collaboration.*

**Day 3 - It was cold, rain continued, people left**

*Breathing space. Bringing the dirt inside.*

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*Reflections on the window, beauty, serenity, shit, glimpses of the lives of others.*

*I held onto my pee and collaborated on a poem about where to go/not to go.*

*Being guided by foxes. We are all connected by food and toilet when untethered to the security of institution.*

*Sounds of ripping tape outside the flimsy tent made me feel vulnerable and exposed.*

*I thought about the roots we build when places become transient.*

*Conscious of so many lines, some which include and some that exclude people.*

*The wind pushing against me, impinging and comforting.*

*Surprised by the strong contrast of feeling safe and free.*

*From suspicion and fear, to the camp as a site of liberation in a dangerous world.*

*Coming together at the end is emotional.*

*Collaboration is intimate.*



Figure 15 *Inside review.*

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### Diffraction with a Burning Taboo



Figure 16 *Burning-Taboo*.

At the end of the conference we gathered around the fire, exuberant and exhausted. We placed a political placard (an unused art material) with an image of the Prime Minister David Cameron onto the fire. In context, Cameron had set in motion the Brexit referendum to decide whether the UK remained within, or left the European Union. The question was politically hostile and divisive, and provoked an upsurge in racist attacks linked to the leave campaign rhetoric such as the rallying slogan “Take Back Control” (*of the borders*), and its antecedent the Home Office “Go Home” vans in 2013<sup>v</sup>. Later we became in touch with a feeling of taboo; of what it might mean to share this image. It felt like an act of scapegoating, blame and violence; complicating our allegiance to non-violent protest. We consider our *place* within systems of power, patriarchy, privilege and white supremacy. Sensing violence and horror coming closer to us and bringing with it fear and shame.

*Effigy burnt, the crows reclaim their territory*



### Sometime Later...



Figure 17. Cards of collaborators with Morris-Westwood response.

In the studio we read out cards written by our collaborators; to each other. We performed this in day order and made a response with a branch fitted with charcoals and brushes dipped in ink (Figure 17). With the agency of nature, we explored the immensity of the experience and the moving testimonies shared. As the custodians of these poetic and personal statements we wondered about the meaning(s) of what we had performed, and about the potential impact on practices-to-come, and what justice might be done. We thought about spacetimemattering (Barad, 2007) where space–time–matter are entangled in a continual process of becoming. Unsettled and finding it difficult to think about we traced our connections through places and times.

Back in time to early 2011, and the events of the ‘Arab Spring’; a wave of pro-democracy mass demonstrations and peaceful protests that swept across Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa and the Middle East; in particular, to 18 days of protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square that brought together thousands of Egyptians demanding, and achieving, the resignation of their president, Hosni Mubarak. At this time, the revolution was explored by

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the Art Therapy Large Group (ATLG), within the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths. This coincided with research into the ATLG as an educational method, and the introduction of a research camera into the group, in order to foreground the visual. The camera became a potent symbol of the dominant educational model in the group, making present the socio-politics of the group dynamic, and raising ethical concerns about power, resistance, justice, and the production/ownership of knowledge (Skaife et al., 2019). This intersected with our conference trip to Palermo in 2015 where we presented the ongoing ATLG research, and first encountered the Hippogryph. By this time, Syria had split into factions, and violence, armed conflict, and mass exodus ensued. The media image of a drowned three-year-old washed up on a Turkish beach (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015); he and his family were Syrian refugees trying to reach Europe.

Followed in April 2016 by our collaboration with Sheridan and Anita in 'Crossing The Field' where we felt **'THE ETHICAL DEMAND OF THE FACE OF THE OTHER'** (Kentrige, 2014, p. 52); then, the UK voted to leave the EU; strike action by University College Union over the erosion to pensions, continued intensification of working conditions and the marketisation of education; and now, the Covid-19 pandemic.

The intra-actions continue...

Back in time to 4 April 1581, aboard the English galleon 'Golden Hind' moored in Deptford's Royal Naval Dockyard. Queen Elizabeth I knighted Francis Drake, pioneer of the slave trade and royal emissary for the colonisation, exploitation, and the structural oppression of peoples and lands. Statues of naval-hero-slavers look out from the façade above the central portico of the Deptford Town Hall, now a Goldsmiths University building. More recently, this was the site of a 137-day Student Occupation by Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action (GARA) March-July 2019. This protest was triggered by the lack of adequate response by the University management to an incident of racial abuse of a student election candidate. Management were residents of this building at this time, raising questions in the present about the 'the interconnected and intertwined' struggles of all institutionally oppressed individuals and groups. In particular, the occupation stood in solidarity with

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hundreds of security and cleaning staff, who are majority Black, Asian, and Latinx people of colour, whose employment is out-sourced and precariously contracted. Beyond the murmurings, a clear and outraged call emerged, the voices of marginalised people. This social action coincided with our presentation of this work at BAAT/AATA Conference, London 2019.

### **Tales of Entanglement in the Nature of Touching**

We set out to ask questions about the space and place of art therapy; and its political, social and cultural significance. Our artist stance aligned us with an *ethical arts of existence* (Linnell 2006). A notion developed in relationship to Foucault's *aesthetics of existence* which invites us to problematise the relationship with the self and transform it into a work of art. Close relationships with others, shaped as friendship, are vital to this ethical-aesthetic approach that questions how individuals problematise what they do, the world in which they live, and the means for transforming the relationship to the self (Foucault, 2000).

We come to awareness that we have enacted a response rather than provided an answer to questions about governance and resistance. We find we have destabilised and investigated this, opening up possibilities of exploration of what we might become.

Giving primacy to art and collaboration outdoors we opened up a live encounter with the elements and the materiality of the place-space-time-context of the conference enabling a shelter for diffractive space. This fostered new connections and relationships in a creative coming together of community. It connected us with wider influences socially and politically. These conversations took us in another direction, artistically and conceptually revealing more clearly oppression and racism in our everyday living-work-practice.

In terms of art therapy education, we are compelled to ask questions about power, such as, who has power? What is knowledge, what forms might it take, and who is involved in generating and validating it? Thus, challenging the normative notion of white, western, patriarchy, and privilege. And, asking how the limits we are experiencing today can be transgressed and moved towards more imaginative-radical-caring and restorative practices?

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As we write this now we question whether 'Crossing the Field' as an artwork could be experienced as a transgression of sorts – a rival space. However, a space that allowed us to question and re-think places and spaces in unexpected ways. We continue to create a diffraction with other humans, non-humans and guides such as; the Hybrid Creature and Hippogryph, to *go with* this exploration on the nature of touching. To gather fragments and make meaning. *Seeking questions, we are not yet aware of...*

Bound up in the entanglements of socio-political histories, peoples' experiences, philosophies, thoughts, beliefs, impressions, and associations, in locations, places, spaces, and materials; oddly entwined, incomplete, imaginative, unanswered, and open to further performance of something that oscillates between the abject/horrifying and as yet unknown.



Figure 18 *Entanglement-Interface.*

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<sup>i</sup> We encountered the Hippogryph in an ancient puppet theatre in Palermo, Sicily, Italy when we participated in the ECARTE conference 2015: <http://www.visitsicily.info/en/puppet-opera/>

Robin Tipple, Convenor of the conference used the Hippogryph as a metaphor at the conference and made this image (Figure 1).

<sup>ii</sup> <http://bobandrobertasmith.co.uk>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.saatchigallery.com/aipe/tracey\\_emin.htm](https://www.saatchigallery.com/aipe/tracey_emin.htm)

<sup>iv</sup> A distillation of messages gathered each day.

<sup>v</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%22Go\\_Home%22\\_vans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%22Go_Home%22_vans)