

Collaboration

Theodore Parker

Documentation for Day 5 of Lab 5: Exploring Musical Identities
Estonian Academy of Music and Theater

The final day of Lab 5 at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater focused on collaboration through an Autoethnographic lens. In providing a whole day for participants to work together through a common theme, we hoped to exemplify that Autoethnography may be additionally useful for developing strategies in collaborative group work. Most of our Lab had focused on Autoethnography as a tool for revealing identity or our assumptions there of. Though this is certainly an intentional benefit, we felt it was also important to allow participants to collaborate with others in order to reveal how different identities produce variations in perspective around a given theme. Often group work in the Arts focuses on compromise for the benefit of group success. However, in this type of goal oriented group structure, in which compromise is paramount, individual identities and perspectives can be overlooked. In our collaboration, we framed group work not through a focus on achieving consensus, but instead as an opportunity to expose our own narrow perspectives and misunderstandings by interacting with identities which differ from our own.

The day started with an explanation regarding the pathway to be followed when engaging in a collaboration. It was emphasized that we were not looking for the participants to arrive at singular unique answers towards the questions we would pose to them. Instead, we wanted them to experience the scope of perspectives which expand outwardly when different identities are asked to express their opinions around a given issue. Our main goal was stated to be understanding how the individual's world view, background, and culture frame their own ideological positions in life, and that by opening up towards understanding the wide variations that exist in any singular group, we can create a deeper sense of our own selves and access the uniqueness we can provide in addressing any social or community orientated problem. The phrase we kept referring to throughout the presentation was "*understanding the self through the other*".

The pathway itself, shown in Table 1 below, is a step by step basis for how to proceed in approaching a collaborative Autoethnography (Chang, Hernandez, Ngunjiri 2013: 91). Due to the large amount of data which can be produced during the process, its fundamentally necessary to have a strategy in mind for how to collect and organize the process. Following the pathway expressed in the table helps to keep the group focused as well as prevents a leader from establishing their own method for how to approach the collaboration. It is important that in this kind of collaboration, each team member feels they are of equal standing inside of the group. The methods themselves were to be freely chosen by the individuals in the group. They could choose from any of the possibilities

provided during the previous 4 days. For example, a group could decide to use interview methods during the Preliminary and Subsequent data collection stages, or memory tactics which were discussed in the 2nd day.

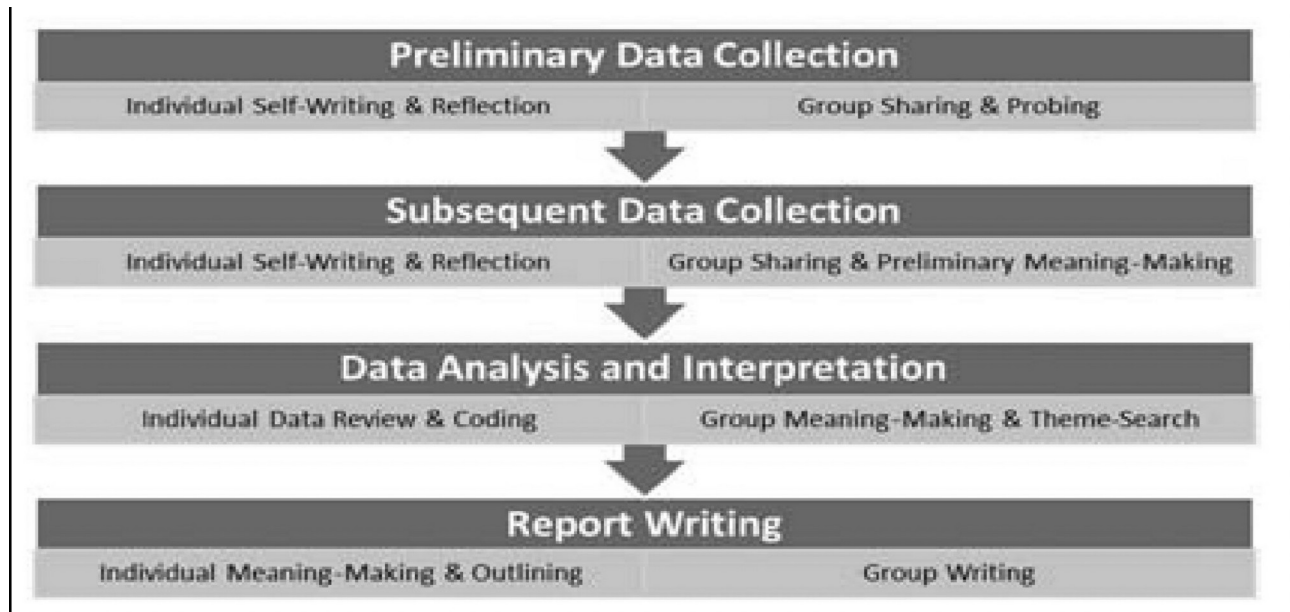


Table 1.
Pathway of Collaboration

Once the pathway and intentions were made clear, we posed three possible questions for the group to attempt addressing collaboratively. The questions were:

1. Considering the role of an artist in society, in what ways could your individual artistic experience be applied beyond your own artistic ambitions?
2. Does artistic research have a role in the society outside of its implied applications towards artistic practice?
3. Is the art/music making process enough, or does the artist have an ethical obligation towards addressing the socio-political aspects of their communities?

The groups were then to decide amongst themselves which question they wished to address. Each of these questions share a common theme and are intentionally broad in scope. As RAPP lab consists of a certain attitude or world view regarding Artistic Research and its possible benefits for helping artists develop skills for influencing their communities, we felt it would be interesting to directly address those concerns by asking younger Artistic Researchers to consider the role of arts in society. The broadness of such questions is to intentionally afford a certain degree of diversity in

perspective. Specialized research questions are certainly a necessity for addressing any gap in knowledge, but in this particular circumstance the actual answers to such questions was not the desired effect, but the experience of traveling the pathway in pursuit of a wider understanding.

After the pathway, goals, and themes were made clear to the participants, we then organized groups of three for pursuing the task. The groups were given three hours to spend with each other. Additionally, we provided them the freedom to choose where they would host the collaborative work, either on the grounds of our academy, or outside of it. We also chose not to have our team monitor, advise, or interfere with them in any way, so as to avoid a sense of hierarchy. After three hours it was agreed we would return to the same space where the morning session had occurred and share with the wider group how the experience felt to enact.

A number of comments should be addressed regarding our collaboration day and how it may have been improved for producing a resonance with the intended experience. Firstly, the allotted time, 3 hours, was perhaps a bit too short to really dive into the material. Many of the groups only made it past the 2nd our 3rd stage of the table provided above. Even in cases where groups were able to make it through the whole table, individuals reported feeling overwhelmed with the amount of data collection required to achieve the exercise in a 3 hour time limit. In future attempts at similar activities, it would be best to take a whole day in order to provide more time and less stress for achieving the desired effect. Additionally, most of our Lab was designed in order to focus on the individual uses of Autoethnography which translated to many activities being done alone or with one other person during the proceeding week. This led to many of the participants feeling as if they were not familiar with the other members of their group. This can cause some friction with the intention, as people often need time to get to know their collaborators in order to feel secure in expressing their own perspectives or world views. In this case we suggest to also include more collaborative exercises prior to enacting a collaborative Autoethnography, in order to help participants to develop a rapport with each other earlier in the week.

Bibliography

Chang, Heewong; Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura; Hernandez, Kathy-Ann C (2013). *Collaborative Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc.