

Employing visual artefacts to generate oral and visual data: An exploration of *e-ma*

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Keywords

Applied Visual Enquiry (AVE), *E-ma*, 絵馬, Visual methods, Qualitative data, Belfast

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Preamble

Applied visual enquiry (AVE) is an arts-based methodology and theoretical frame which hypothesises that visual arts, in a myriad of forms, from mark-making and collage through model-making and drawing to realia and artefacts, possess an inherent proclivity for something other, something beyond the surface dimension, and beyond perhaps, their immediate or original intention or use. That is to infer that it is demonstrable that visual processes and visual artefacts have a propensity to be deployed in the pursuit of a secondary aim, an aim which, in many instances surmounts the original purpose of use. In this case, the Japanese votive tablet, *e-ma* (絵馬) was used as a means to engage the largely voiceless citizens of Belfast's 'Donegall Pass'

(58)

with the theme of hope. This research demonstrates that in this role, *e-ma* proved to be an extremely potent tool for eliciting both visual and oral data. And that rather than being unidimensional in nature, this data was extremely varied and textural resulting in the discovery that they assist in producing visual data of three kinds and oral data of four. Examples of these data are presented in this research, along with contextual data consisting of cultural, historical, and social data of both a primary and secondary nature.

Introduction

As has been discussed elsewhere (Woollock, 2008, Woollock, 2014, Woollock, 2017, Crosby & Woollock, 2019, Woollock, 2019a, Woollock, 2019b) the burgeoning theory of Applied Visual Enquiry (AVE) postulates that visual methods and visual materials have a proclivity to be employed for secondary purposes. This theory recognises that visual arts, from mark-making and collage through model-making and drawing to realia and artefacts are imbued with the capacity for more than their original intention. That on a number of different strata, from physical engagement to the act of spectatorship, visual arts have an important role to play in the act of discovery. Whether this discovery be of self or other is largely irrelevant; the point to note here is that it is possible for the qualitative researcher to design into their research model, certain outcomes which, from a wide toolbox of visual approaches can help derive or elicit the required data. Like other methodologies visual methods are simple a conduit through which to engage and extract the desired data and choosing the appropriate

visual approach is of paramount importance if the data to be harvested is to be of the highest quality.

Project *e-ma* was a qualitative action-based research project which ran between September 2013 and September 2016 in a deprived working-class area of South Belfast, called the 'Donegall Pass' (the Pass). Conducted by the author as doctoral research and funded by a competitive award from The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL), Project *e-ma* set out to use the Japanese cultural artefact *e-ma* (絵馬) as a means to engage the citizens of the Pass with the idea of hope. Whilst in Japan it is largely customary for visitors to shin-tou shrines to write their hope or wish on an *e-ma* (rather like the Western tradition of conceiving a 'New Year's Resolution'), in this instance, and in keeping with the principles of AVE, citizens were asked to paint their hope. From various intimate workshops conducted at establishments throughout the Pass, more than 160 citizens gathered to paint their hopes. From these workshops, several outcomes occurred. Firstly the *e-ma* were used in the group to generate oral data and secondly they were then displayed on a large wooden frame in the local park, where they generated further types of oral data and visual data too; both of which are presented here.

This research paper consists of two sections. The first section will present *e-ma* in the context of oral data generation. It will be demonstrated that this data consists of three forms; surface reading, informed reading, and interpretation. Using a given theme of 'safety,' three *e-ma* will be discussed each of which will be 'read' in light of its corresponding function. Following this Section Two will demonstrate

(60)

that *e-ma* can elicit oral data of four kinds; monologue, group discussion, focus groups, and ethereal data. This section, however, will only present examples from the first two categories. An example of the third category, 'focus-group data' can be found in Woollock, 2017.

Section One: How *e-ma* give rise to oral data

As noted in the preceding section, the reading of *e-ma* consists of three possible variations demonstrated by the image below:

Firstly there is the surface reading (1), something which may be akin to a readerly or linear/literal reading whereby the image represents something to the viewer which is read and interpreted at surface level — face value. An image which then leads the reader to a point of understanding based upon that surface interaction. This *texte lisible* is

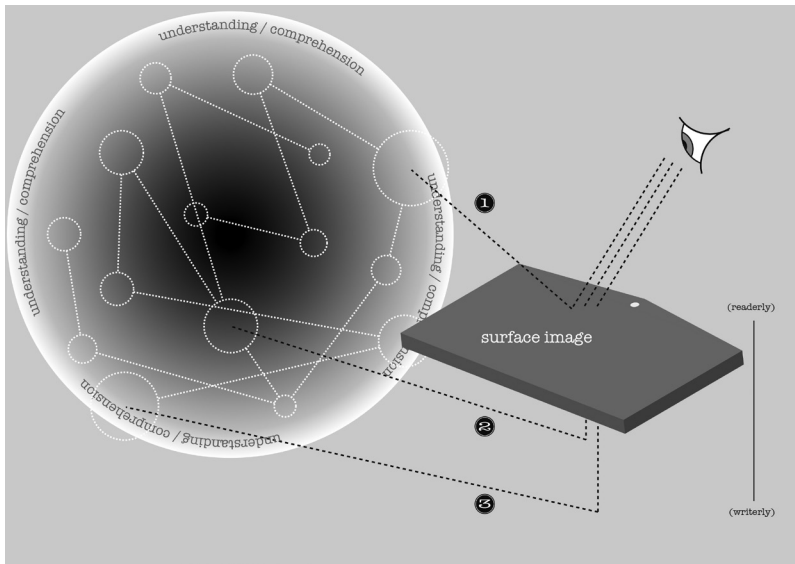


Fig. 1: How *e-ma* give rise to visual data.

Employing visual artefacts to generate oral and visual data: An exploration of *e-ma* (61)

situated close to the anthropological notion of emic data insofar as the observer is situated outside of the text and is not necessarily present in the construction of its meaning. An example of this might be someone writing or painting the word 'peace' on their *e-ma* from which the reader might naturally draw the conclusion that the participant hopes for peace; not an unreasonable conclusion. The second level of reading (2) follows a similar, largely linear or readerly trajectory as the first; however, it has the added dimension of being informed. Rather than reflecting off the surface towards a point of understanding, the viewer instead interrogates the surface, slipping below the surface reading to assimilate the image with their own understanding of the subject in a wider context. What McMasters means when he states that, 'it is impossible to know what you are creating without knowing the context within which it will be produced and experienced.' (McMasters, 2008: 15). An example of this might be someone reading the same 'peace' *e-ma* mentioned above, who then learns that the painter is from Belfast. To this knowledge they then bring their own understanding about, for example, the conflict in Northern Ireland which then adds depth and texture to the initial surface reading, reflecting back towards a point of understanding, based on both the initial surface impression and further personal insights. The final way of reading (3) aligns with Barthe's (1970) idea of writerly or interpretive texts and differs from the first two in terms of its endpoint, and like the previous two posits, this idea is also based upon the viewer reading the surface image, and like the second case, they also dip below the surface. Unlike the first two instances, however, in this case the

reader/viewer sees *e-ma* as a predominantly writerly text. This *texte scriptible* becomes a constructed response whereby the researcher guides the narrative and elects the content of what becomes the text, blurring the lines between fact and fiction à la Clough (2002). Although this is similar to the anthropological notion of emic data, whereby the researcher is situated and draws from their own experiences of the field, this last idea also draws from a more postmodern persuasion insofar as it begins to play with notions of truth and 'authenticity' à la Baudrillard's (1994) concept of simulacra. It begins to suggest that the idea of absolute Truth is questionable and introduces common postmodern themes of pastiche, bricolage, and plurality. Finally, it is briefly worth noting similarities between the above and Umberto Eco's (1990) concepts of neo and paleo-television. Insofar as the idea of neo-television which is self-referential and 'talks less and less about the external world' (1990: 246) corresponds somewhat to Barthe's readerly text and the first type of visual data. Conversely paleo-television 'talks about the external world' (ibid) and corresponds somewhat to Barthe's concept of the writerly and the third type of data.

Of the three approaches outlined above, we prefer to align ourselves with the latter reading and to draw my own conclusions or leave the reading open. From an academic perspective, however, I find it preferable to read *e-ma* à la second variation, and it is this approach which I concluded was most useful in analysing *e-ma* as visual data. This is perhaps especially pertinent from the standpoint of an insider-researcher, someone who knows the context within which these *e-ma* were painted, and knows something of the people and the place.

The samples of *e-ma* below are all on the theme of 'safety' and are taken from the one-hundred and sixty-five which were painted by workshop participants over a period of about one year. This theme was identified when the *e-ma* were coded and thematically grouped by members of the 1st Irish Boy's Brigade (Donegal Pass), [hereafter called BB]. This inter-generational group sifted through all the *e-ma* and resolved to code them by democratic consensus amongst the members present. Whilst this coding is by no means finite or 'correct' (it was not intended to be), it represents one genuine reading of the *e-ma* by those who were both active in the Project, and live in the local area. This approach was chosen to counter the top-down, didactic patterns of much 'socially-engaged' arts practice the author had encountered in Belfast. The following example, 'Safety' is presented here because it demonstrates the three types of visual data *e-ma* generate.

Data from thematic analysis: Safety

What is interesting about the images below, is firstly the fact that a seemingly 'simple' topic yielded such a diverse range of interpretations and representations. Secondly, that it is somewhat sad that in the post-postmodern epoch, to be safe is a prevalent hope. We wonder how many citizens in the developed world, living in relatively prosperous cities, have such a hope. Furthermore, given the data in relation to wealth and poverty disparities in Belfast, we further wondered if those in adjacent, more affluent neighbourhoods would have hoped for something which one would have anticipated being a right not a privilege. The three *e-ma* below were chosen to illustrate a salient

(64)

point regarding the visual data which arose from the workshops; that being the nature and notion of interpretivity. It can be argued, for example, that the three images below become increasingly more abstract and in effect move from a relatively 'readerly' text (figure 2), through a somewhat relativistic middle image (figure 3), arriving at a significantly more 'writerly' image (figure 4). In the first instance (figure 2) the image is simply the word 'safe' writ large; clearly this led the BB coding group to unequivocally assign it to the 'safety' thematic group. The participant's intentions are relatively straightforward and



Fig. 2: 'Safe' (Peter, Protestant male, aged eighteen)

the *e-ma* required little decoding at face value; furthermore it would be risky to infer that the participant meant something located excessively tangential to the surface meaning.

In the second instance (below), however, the participant has rendered a colourful scene of text and an enclosure, there is also the added motif of a flower. Initially we thought that this young participant had not understood the basic directions and had simply painted her *e-ma* because perhaps it reminded her of a door sign. After observing the BB group code all *e-ma*, and listening to their insightful observations and suppositions, the conclusion was reached that their reading was more accurate than the author's. Firstly, most of the houses in the Pass

built after the redevelopment are small two-bedroomed terraced or semi-detached houses and bungalows, and perhaps this girl (who came with her parents and brother) really did hope for her own space, her



Fig. 3: 'Ellie Room!' (Name unknown, Belfast-born Chinese female, aged eight)

own room. In respect of the encompassing theme of safety, however, the coders discussed how one's bedroom, especially for a child, can be a safe-space, a point which resonated.

Finally, the image in Figure 4 (below) is extremely abstract and open to multiple interpretations and readings. Again, at first glance we perhaps would not have coded it in this category, and yet in this instance too, after listening to the coders' discussions, the author came to accept their supposition. That being the bright yellow ball in the centre represents the Donegal Pass and alludes to the sun; to warmth and comfort, whilst the blue surrounding the centre is akin to the raging seas. The blue represents chaos, tumultuousness, and danger, and thus the central portion is safety.



Fig. 4: 'Safe' (Barry, Protestant male, aged early-thirties)

The three examples of *e-ma* are indicative of the entire body of *e-ma* and allude to the types of hopes participants painted and the way unique ways they chose to render them. Furthermore, in selecting these *e-ma* as general examples, it has been demonstrated that the hypothesis proffered; that surface images can be interpreted in numerous ways has become apparent.

Concluding remarks

What emerges as both interesting and pertinent from the above findings are the similarities between the author's own coding and that of the BB. Having spent so much time as an observer in the Pass, it is also reassuring to note that these two sets of findings are further corroborated and triangulated by incidental conversations, anecdotes and hearsay encountered in the community. As intimated above, the findings from the visual data, were further corroborated by informal conversations, which were further replicated in the feedback which is discussed in the next section, 'oral findings.' The following section presents, or rather, re-presents some of the visual data accompanied by commentary and discourse from those who actually painted *e-ma* which are presented alongside. Because of the democratic principles offered through the workshops many participants felt comfortable and empowered enough to refuse the request to speak to camera about their *e-ma* or discuss their mark-making further. Whilst, as someone trying to embody Freire's theory and be a democratic researcher, this felt like a wonderful affirmation of democratic values and practice, it did mean that it was difficult to collect as much quality oral data as we

Employing visual artefacts to generate oral and visual data: An exploration of *e-ma* (67) might have wished. And whilst the author could have interpreted the participants' data more, they chose instead to provide an unfettered platform where their words could stand alone. This has been attempted in the next section. This section forms a complement to and builds upon the idea of presenting unfettered visual data, however, the subtle difference of providing the voices of those who painted some of the actual *e-ma* alongside is intended to represent *e-ma* and perhaps disrupt the viewer's personal assumptions. The intention being to also add an extra dimension of insight into the thoughts, ideas, motivations and lives of those citizens who gathered together at various workshops to paint their hopes and wishes onto an *e-ma*; to in effect stimulate dialogue between the reader and the informed image.

Section Two: Oral Data

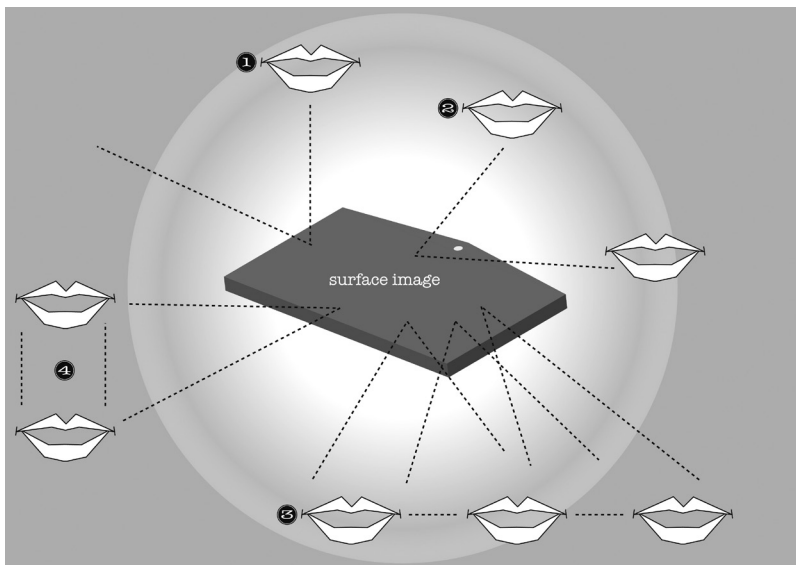


Fig. 5: Illustration of how *e-ma* generates oral data

As stated in the introduction, in presenting data from this research, we have taken the step of separating it into two kinds according to type; visual and oral. In the previous section, we presented a small selection of visual data grouped around the most prevalent theme which arose out of the BB coding; Safety. These *e-ma* were presented with an accompanying sub-text which, it is hoped, would allude, in part at least, to the variety of ways in which *e-ma* can be approached, and the various levels at which they can be read. The primary function of that section was to focus on the presentation of visual data. This section, however, now shifts the balance away from the visual to the oral, and places the emphasis not so much on the interpretation, reading, and layered deconstruction of *e-ma*, rather it places the focus of our gaze squarely on two of the four types of oral data which *e-ma* has the potentiality to give rise to. As has been stated previously, it has been identified that *e-ma* elicits oral data of four kinds which are depicted in the illustration above: 1) monologue; 2) group discussion; 3) focus groups, and more 4) ethereal data¹. This section, however, will present examples of two of these; monologue, group discussion data. Focus group data was omitted because it has been presented elsewhere (Woollock, 2017), and ethereal data was omitted because it was not possible to record them well.

In the first example; monologue data, we will present two examples of largely unidirectional dialogue which participants shared either directly with the author, or to the video camera; these narratives are presented verbatim. Whilst each and every person's

narrative and response is interesting, this approach to data collection demonstrates a number of problems. Firstly, monologue was found to be difficult to obtain if it is to occur spontaneously and ethically, as many participants felt self-conscious when directly addressing the camera; on a second level it can also be somewhat lacking in depth and texture. This lack was partly motivated by nerves, partly by the self-conscious act of talking to camera in an unfamiliar way, partly due to the location of the camera (in the workshop room) and partly because there was no interlocutor to stimulate discussion and ask follow-up questions. It was assessed that it didn't produce a very rich or textural kind of response, and so the practice was eventually discontinued in favour of other options.

The second type of data presented in this section deals with the presentation of a richer, more discursive or conversational type of data, which we see as being a potential crucible for, or locus of conscientização and transformation because it allows for challenges, questions and problem-posing. These data presented in this section arose from interaction with an intergenerational workshop which occurred in the Donegall Pass Youth Club. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, there is no verbatim transcript of that session. There is, however, a recount from field-notes and a follow-up discussion with the central protagonist, Rick, who painted the *e-ma* to be displayed. Whilst it should be noted that although it was not the intention of this research to touch on the discipline of art therapy (neither of the authors are art therapists), common through all of the stages noted above is a certain element of what Hackett and Rolston

(70)

(2009: 355) call 'catharsis through storytelling' (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983; Curling, 2005).

Oral data type one: 'Monologue data'

During the developmental stage, the pilot sessions were filmed with the consent of participants, and this was included in the ethics framework. The primary objective of this was to record the interactions and process of facilitation. From an early decision to have a video camera present in the room during the pilot sessions was born the idea to ask participants to provide feed-back to the camera in relation to the process of painting their *e-ma* and what initial meanings they saw or had intended to represent. Whilst several forms of this were experimented with, in the end it was decided that the camera should be mounted high on a tripod, rather like a CCTV camera so that its function and purpose be regarded not as a recorder per se. but rather like a panopticon (Bentham, 1798) a silent, and largely unobtrusive observer. In addition to mounting the camera high, the small screen was also turned to face the room so that participants could view what was being recorded. This allowed them to not only see the entire room, but also to see the reflection of themselves – to in effect have an intimate conversation with themselves. In many ways this turning of the screen on the audience replicates the mirror (Japanese: *shin-kyou* - 神鏡、しんきょう) one sees at *shin-tou* shrines in Japan. At shrines in Japan one typically sees a circular mirror made of polished metal which is placed on the altar.

Sadly, however, perhaps due in part to the nature of the camera set-



Fig. 6: Japanese *shin-tou* mirror, *shin-kyou* (神鏡) in situ at shrine, Japan

up, and in part to the confessional nature of the disclosure, the use of cameras as a means of recording data was not always successful, both in terms of the quality² of data it generated, and also the quantity. As a potential tool, however, irrespective of the demographic breakdown of a workshop, the use of a film camera to record simple monologue data does warrant further investigation and development, especially if the researcher is not embedded in the research context and does not have access to a greater depth of understanding to enhance the reading of the visual data ascribed to *e-ma*.

As has been established, it was very difficult to obtain monologue data for a variety of reasons; that said, however, this section will present two examples of data which at the very least demonstrate a consistently rudimentary set of responses, and at best, illustrates the depth to which the participants had considered the task of rendering their considered hopes.

Example: Milena's *e-ma*

Milena is a Polish immigrant working in the area. She has lived in the UK for a number of years and attended the first large workshop in November 2014 with her husband and young child. A confident woman



Fig. 7: 'Hope' (Milena, Polish female, aged thirty-two)

in her early thirties with a good grasp of English, she remains, for a variety of reasons, overtly Polish in her identity, dress, and demeanor. Her *e-ma* and monologue are as follows:

“Ok, I’m not really talented… ah, but I know some languages (smiles) so (pause) that’s a very (pause) com, difficult concept … how to portray hope, so for me (long pause) I’m not really (sighs) as I say talented, so for me, the expression of words are important so I put… um, the word hope in different languages, so it’s in English, my language which is Polish – Polish, nadzieja, надеятьсяег… which is in, er, Russian, and امید in Persian, er Farsi. And this here (points to blue triangle in bottom left-hand corner of her *e-ma*) is part of my mistake (smiles) I didn’t know how the paint will work. Basically in, so there are petals of flowers, (quickly) I think that’s universal… flowers always is hope and something is blossoming and giving hope for something longer, more persistent, more beautiful, so basically that’s the

idea (smiles)”

(Participant Milena, Polish female, aged thirty-two)

As an outside observer, Milena’s *e-ma* might not make much sense. In the initial purely aesthetic dimension it seems that at a workshop about painting one’s hopes, she appears to have simply painted the word hope in a number of different languages. From the monologue, however, it is revealed that some of the unclear imagery is in fact a flower, to which she has attached significant meaning. What I find especially interesting about Milena’s deceptively simple *e-ma* is firstly the use of language, and secondly, the nature of the symbolism, both of which perhaps lead back to the same point. In terms of the language, which is the primary motif, and one which she speaks about first; language clearly defines her. In a negative way, perhaps, it defines her otherness, but in a positive way it also defines her strengths and her linguistic abilities, and perhaps even her past. In terms of the symbolism she chose there are two interesting points, firstly there is the unspecified nature of the motif, which perhaps points towards her own practice of shying away from claiming her Polishness; and this leads to the second point which is her declaration of the universality of the flower as a symbol of growth.

As intimated above, there were perhaps a number of influencing factors which limited the responses garnered and these could be addressed in subsequent research if desired. For us however, we do feel that the nature of talking to the camera without prompting does not work especially well with those who lack confidence and/or are

(74)

not used to such tasks. Because this approach did not yield especially insightful data and because it seemed to sit somewhat uncomfortably with participants, it was discontinued. Included below is one further examples, which although interesting (all data is interesting), is not especially revealing and is simply presented so as to give the reader another example of the types of monologues recorded.

Example: Neeta's *e-ma*

“O k... er... I have specifically written love and peace because I want er... er, that there should be peace and love in... everyvere (pause) not just in



Fig. 8: “Love” (Neeta, Indian female, aged mid-thirties)

my house... in my area, in... verever I stay, Belfast, it’s all the world, it’s because I want my kids to grow up in a very... or for their future, there should be peace... and, love.”

(Participant Neeta, Indian female, aged mid-thirties)

Oral data type two: ‘Discursive data’

The following section presents the second type of data, discursive data from four male participants from the Donegall Pass Youth Club. These data were chosen because they provided good examples of how

discussion can be stimulated between the researcher and participant if they have previously attended a workshop so *e-ma* become a stimuli for the discussion. These types of discussions, although very insightful, were usually very brief, this however, could also be due in part to the location of the video recording.

Example: Mark's *e-ma*

Mark is a youth who appears confident. He lives in the area and attends the senior section of the Youth Club. He can usually be found



with a group of four or five of his peers, hanging about or chatting. Mark is interesting partly because of the conviction in his politicised hope. Mark's *e-ma* and dialogue are as follows:

Fig. 9: 'Faith' (Mark, Protestant male, aged eleven)

AW: "So can you tell me what you painted?"

M: "I painted a Union Jack (quickly) 'cos o' my faith (quickly) an' I'm a Protestant!"

AW: "Alright, but you painted it quite interestingly because you painted (pause) (points towards *e-ma*) not only did you paint the Union Jack (points finger towards *e-ma*), but you put faith on it (pause) can you tell me about that?... 'cos when you, when you was doin' it... (pause)"

(76)

M: "I'm a Protestant, an' that's why I done faith"

AW: "Aha, but most people would have just painted the (jabs finger towards his *e-ma*) Union Jack but you painted... that's interesting I think..."

M: "The... (harder) if someone doesn' know what it means (kicks shoe against wall) means faith"

AW: "Alright, it means faith to you, alright, an' it's interestin' you call it the Union Jack, an' not the Union Flag, 'cos in England, we also call it the Union Jack, and here they call it the Union Flag... (pause) is there a reason why?"

M: (Shrugs) "I don't know"

Clearly Mark wanted to use this exercise as a means of asserting his Protestant identity. For him the word *faith* clearly transcends the purely religious use *du jour*, and occupies a quasi-cultural location which is not entirely clear or demarcated. Unlike in other parts of the UK, in Northern Ireland flags and emblems possess an array of connotations, meanings, and messages. This is especially true within Protestant culture, however, interestingly enough the incidences of painting Union Jacks was not a common occurrence³, despite anticipations to the contrary. As numerous people said beforehand, "All you're gonna get is them painting a load of Union Jacks." Mark's *e-ma* contains only two elements and as per Milena's, these elements are replications of a core theme; identity. Atop a very neatly and accurately painted Union Jack the word 'faith' is written and it is not immediately clear whether the flag and the text are

conjoined or whether the text is an added embellishment on the flag and, or whether the flag is subsumed to a mere background texture. Ultimately, it is perhaps unimportant, for what Mark wished to clearly state is that he, as a Protestant, hopes for the continuation of his tradition and his faith. A faith which he, as a Unionist or Loyalist, associates with the United Kingdom. The expression of hopes without being censored or censured is something which was fully encouraged in the Project; the freedom to express oneself regardless of current fashions or institutional censorship given Belfast City Council's 'Good and Harmonious' (1997) or The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 'Neutral and Harmonious' directives (2008), was an important factor for the integrity of the Project. That participants, such as Mark, felt sufficiently comfortable and empowered to render what he did, was a pleasing testament to the integrity and honesty of the Project and its legacy of attempting to align with FCP concerned as it is with liberty, justice, conscientização, and voice for all. It is, however, also a sad reminder that much of the community or public art which goes on in Belfast is required by funders to be inert and sidestep perceived representations of 'nationalism' or 'sectarianism'⁴ regardless of where the art is located and regardless of the fact that in theory at least everyone could represent themselves. An example of this policy was seen in regard to public art on Donegall Road, another poor predominantly Protestant, working-class area. The author was informed that organisers of a local historical project were bullied into trying to have 'offensive' images removed⁵. The images in question were of historic street parties/celebrations in which Union Jack

(78)

bunting was flying from the houses in a Protestant area; an historical record.

2.4 Rick's *e-ma*

Rick is a youth of eleven, with a troubled past, who has worked through that to become an articulate and intelligent young man. He is quick-witted, sharp, with a thoughtful and sensitive disposition, and is a regular attendee at the senior section of the Youth Club. Like many youngsters in the area, Rick can usually be found hanging around with his mates in the streets or at the Park. When days are short and nights dark, he will frequent the Youth Club, when the nights draw out, he will likely be found building the bonfire⁶ or scavenging for wood. What strikes me about Rick, as with other members of his cohort, is how polite and respectful he is. Rick was very open to discussing his position and articulating his viewpoint based on his *e-ma*, and whilst he eventually did shift away from what he originally intended to paint, it was not so much as a result of pressure, rather, more so the result



Fig. 10: 'Safety [red, whites, and blue]' (Rick, Protestant male, aged eleven)

of being challenged to substantiate his opinions. This style of very direct debate is relatively common in the Pass, where people will generally freely exercise their right to express themselves and enter

Employing visual artefacts to generate oral and visual data: An exploration of *e-ma* (79)

into discourse. It is also testament to the way that Lorraine, the leader, runs the Youth Club in that, as long as attendees remain respectful of others, they are free to express their opinions, provided that they can accept a challenge from others.

On the evening of Monday March 2nd 2015, three youths, two female, one male from the senior section of the Youth Club took part in a Project *e-ma* workshop. Prior to this, a number of workshops with both the seniors and the juniors had taken place in the Youth Club, and the three members present that evening were the last of the cohort to participate. Because this workshop occurred during a regular Youth Club session, and also somewhat late in the life of the Project, in addition to the three participants, there were also a number of other youths present around the table who had previously participated their *e-ma*. In addition to the youths, there were also three adults present: Robert, Lorraine, the leaders of the Club, and the author. Because of the dynamics of the assembled group and the point at which the workshop occurred in the life of the Project, rather than being a linear affair like other workshops this workshop took on a much less formal or structured approach and was very discursive in nature. The remit and requirements of the session were conveyed by Lorraine, largely through discursive means, and as the three participants had either witnessed other workshops prior, or had heard about the Project from their peers, the need for a lengthy explanation was curtailed. The original conversation which took place on that evening was intense. During that discussion Rick was challenged to justify his opinions

regarding what he wanted to paint as a hope for the Pass. Initially (perhaps due to the suggestion of his friend who had previously painted an *e-ma*, seated to his right) he had indicated his intention to paint a Union Flag (Union Jack). Whilst he was naturally permitted to do this, his attention was drawn to how this assimilated to the notion of hope, which is the overarching focus of the project. Lorraine, who was facilitating this workshop, explained that Rick could paint the flag if he could articulate why it related to hope.

From the author's engagement with Rick, two pieces of data arose. Firstly, there is an a priori semi-fictional account of that original discussion which took place on March 2nd 2015, and secondly there is transcript of a conversation between Rick and the author, which occurred at the Youth Club the following week, on the evening of Monday, March 9th 2015. Both of these data will now be discussed in turn.

In the first instance, the author did not want to 'lose' the original unrecorded⁷, discussion between Rick and the group mentioned in above, because along with the BB focus group discussion (not presented here), this forms one of the twin pinnacles of the research and served to affirm our belief in the methodology and the power of *e-ma* as a dialogical and pedagogical tool for exploring hope in communities such as the Donegall Pass. In light of that importance the author sought a way to capture this intense experience, and whilst the obvious route would have been to simply use their fieldnotes, what occurred on that evening seemed to warrant more than a simple recount. In Autumn 2013 they had worked with constructing

postmodern, (semi)fictional narratives to recount pilot workshops where participants did not wish to be filmed, however, as the methodology became clearer and more focused, this approach became moribund. It wasn't until encountering Clough (2002), that the potential of (re)constructing a recounting of the original discussion was revisited. In *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research* (2002), Clough discusses the use of narratives which are located at the intersection of fact and fiction, writing which might be described as creative non-fiction, or narrative non-fiction. Continuing a long tradition (e.g Conrad, 2000; Hemingway, 1925, Thompson, 1970; Nelson, 1973; Hollowell, 1977; Fishkin, 1988; Mcniff, 2007; O'Brien, 2009 et al). Clough like McIntyre (2003) believes that, '[i]t is a conceptual commonplace [...] that one and the same segment of human behavior may be correctly characterised in a number of different ways.' (1996: 206), and this postmodern stance ask us to question the nature of reality and Truth in order that it may lead us to greater understanding of events (and perhaps ourselves); as Faulkner's oft quoted maxim goes, 'fiction is often the best fact.' Rather than seeking a verbatim recount, Clough follows a long tradition in journalism, writing, and anthropology, and argues that recountS (plural) together with other supplementary information either heard at the same or, in different contexts, enhances the textural nature of what is being recounted. In effect, to say that the resulting triangulated text is greater than the sum of its parts. From a postmodern stance we find this concept to not only align with our own epistemological stance, but furthermore, in a very real and practical sense; when, for example, the data recorder was forgotten, Clough's approach offers us a way

to reconstruct that interaction. It is arguable that fieldnotes, written after the fact, especially those which are 'thick' description (Gertz 1973) or less linear in nature, can be mixed together as Clough posits, with other conversations and anecdotes to give the reader a multiplicitous, and altogether greater insight into that which took place. Borrowing from this tradition I it was possible to construct a semi-fictional narrative which allowed the author to filter the original experience through themselves, which as Clough (2002) notes in a Zen-like manner, is 'the ultimate sources of data' (2002: 5).

The second source of data is a transcript of a discussion held between Rick and the author at the Youth Club, which took place the week following the initial encounter (March 9th 2015). Despite having constructed the semi-fictional narrative noted above, there was also a desire to hold a follow-up conversation with Rick to see what he thought of the prior interaction. To that aim the author sought permission to return the following week to discuss the workshop with Rick. Lorraine said she would ask his permission and if this was granted, the feedback session with him could then be recorded, to which he agreed. The interaction which occurred in the follow-up discussion is an example of the discursive potential of *e-ma*. Although somewhat retrospective; recorded after the fact, it demonstrate how the starting point of using *e-ma* to explore hope was turned into a demonstration of Freire's 'problem-posing' pedagogy, a key construct in FCP. As is evidenced in the final exchange of that discussion (p.328), it is clear that Project *e-ma* as an extension of a Freirean theoretical frame provides the potential for the raising of critical consciousness;

conscientização; something which, when focused on hope in a deprived, working-class area like the Donegall Pass, could, it is hoped, move people towards social change.

Although it could be argued that the exchange amounts to no more than the author picking Rick's brain, jogging his memory, putting words into his mouth, or even perhaps exploiting researcher privilege to coerce him, that was not the case. Rick is a street-wise and savvy individual who was free to express himself as he wished. Before Rick's workshop the author had spent about six months in the area becoming known and trust-building, by volunteering at the Youth Club, with the South Belfast Alternatives' 'Street by Street' programme, in the St. Mary Magdalene Church, and elsewhere. Many of the participants had been involved in workshops for which ethical consent was obtained. Furthermore a leaflet had been distributed to each household which contained further information about the Project and its ethics (these were also on permanent display in the Youth Club). By this time, although the author had become known, almost none of the children or youths they spoke to were primarily concerned that they was 'researching' or that they were from Queen's. Most just knew the researcher's name and the fact that they was running 'that art project.' Despite being an insider-researcher, the author does consider Rick's recount above to be accurate and indicative of the potential of the Project for engaging people in transformative discourse.

Concluding remarks

Earlier in the paper we posited that Project *e-ma* gives rise to two primary types of data which can be considered under the terms visual and oral. This section attempted to present evidence which supports the second part of that claim. Just as the purpose of the first section was to present evidence to substantiate the claim that the process of the Project and its configuration or methodology gives rise to visual data of differing depths, so this section attempted to do the same with regard to oral data. This section was intended to provide evidence to support the claim that as a Freirean pedagogical artefact used as part of AVE, *e-ma* has the potential to bring forth oral data on the subject of hope towards the end goal of exploring key tenets of FCP albeit to differing degrees. As has been clearly demonstrated here, the oral data arising from the Project can be considered to be of several different varieties notably monologue and group discussion, with a further potential to generate focus group data. Each of the four types of data (with the addition of ethereal data, which has not been discussed, nor presented here) can be instigated by a shift in a workshop's focus or objective. This ability to change the outworking, the 'product,' means that the Project can ultimately be used for different purposes. In the same way that Freire himself, in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974), attempted to demonstrate the use of visual arts in the form of illustrations by Francisco Brenand⁸, so Project *e-ma* has responded to that legacy and demonstrated the potential of the Japanese artefact *e-ma* as a means of doing the same. However, as Lewis (2011) argues, the problem with Freire's use of visual arts to elicit oral data, or, as

a transformation or even problem-posing tool, lies in the fact that the image presented at the 'culture circles' was of a readerly nature. That is, an image was presented in which a given situation was encoded, and the task of the facilitator was therefore to draw the educands towards a common or finite understanding. This potential collectivist understanding differs significantly from the personal interaction with hope which can be garnered from an individual creating their own unique *e-ma*. In this context, *e-ma* encapsulates a visual representation of the individual's hope, which they then have the opportunity to articulate further if they wish. Whilst the facilitation of the workshop remains essentially the same, there are different processes by which these data can be derived, and from a research standpoint, seeking to utilise arts-based methods to elicit a specific type of oral data, Project *e-ma* presents a compelling case for future use and exploration within the wider framework of AVE. Further, the improvisational nature of the process allows participants to make the process and *e-ma* their own and to personalise their interaction, yet remain within a constructivist environment.

Conclusion

Much criticism levied at qualitative research, especially that which has historically been referred to as Arts-based Research (ABR) and Arts-based Educational Research (ABER) - terms we believe have been superseded by AVE, has been either its lack of 'robustness' or its inadequacy as a tool which can be re-used and repeated to check the validity of data generated or assist other scholars with similar research

aims. The first charge, perhaps levied by the more dominant and vocal quantitative research camp (sadly the direction which global academia seems to be headed) is simply a matter of framing and perception. It is simply a misunderstanding of the 'value' of measurement; that is to infer that the metrics used to 'evaluate' and 'judge' quantitative data are appropriate for that purpose and inappropriate for transferring to the qualitative realm; an obvious point, but one worth restating. The second criticism, however, is legitimate and worthy of closer examination. The second criticism relates to the 'flimsy' nature of qualitative practices and thus the highly subjective and context-specific of both methods and outcomes. What we mean by this statement is that whilst it is a moot point to state that qualitative data (like all data) is important, it is perhaps diminished by the fact that it is of a specific time and place, derived from a specific set of circumstances and/or a record of interactions that can largely not be replicated. Using *e-ma* within the framework of AVE attempted to address this second issue

Standing antithetical to the flimsiness of some qualitative tools, *e-ma* was chosen and used in both a sustained and systematic manner with the express intention that they might be reused by other scholars for similar purposes. As has been clearly demonstrated in this paper, from their use in the field, grounded data emerged which indicated *e-ma* has the potential to elicit two distinct forms of data; visual and oral. Whilst oral data can be divided into three forms; surface reading, informed reading, and interpretation, oral data can be grouped into four kinds; monologue, group discussion, focus groups, and ethereal data. With this knowledge as a starting point it is now possible for the

qualitative AVE researcher to work backwards to in effect deploy and employ *e-ma* is a specific way with the express intention of generating a specific kind of data, oral or visual. Furthermore, extending this still further it is now possible for the researcher to identify a very nuanced and specific type of data within the overall category sought. It is this potential to focus on and elicit a specific type of data which is perhaps the most important finding of this research.

- 1 In addition to this there is 'interview' data, but this has been omitted here as technically it is not produced by *e-ma* per se, rather, it is elicited.
- 2 In this context we use the questionable word 'quality' not as a means of judging the data per se, rather, we use it to indicate that much of the monologue data was of a very brief and superficial nature. And whilst some individuals did spend a long time explaining their hopes, for the vast majority who spoke (a fraction of the percentage of the entire body of participants) the response was merely something akin to 'here is my *e-ma*, this is what I painted', and perhaps a short 'why?' A level of disclosure which in terms of the visual data discussed previously, pertains to nothing more than the first stage of surface (first layer) reading.
- 3 From the one-hundred and sixty-five *e-ma* which were painted, only five painted the Union Jack in some form (3%) and of those only the one above and one more (1%) painted an immediately identifiable Union Jack, the rest had made interpretations of the flag, i.e. they had rendered the elemental parts of the flag but in a different colour scheme, and/or with a slightly different take; and two participants painted half a Union Jack merged with half an Irish tricolour.
- 4 Positive references to community pride, tradition, cultural expression, and heritage are not popular vocabularies in this debate.
- 5 This despite the fact that the images of flags actually do not actually constitute a 'flying of flags' and therefore do not contravene The Flags Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2000.
- 6 Bonfires or beacons are lit each year in Protestant areas across Northern Ireland on the 'Eleventh night' (July 11th) as a historical re-enactment of the beacons lit

to celebrate King William of Orange's victory over King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. 'Legend has it that the night before this victory bonfires were lit on the hills of Antrim and Down to aid William's navigation along Belfast Lough.' (McKittrick, 2010). The building of bonfires has transcended the once small affairs made with scrap wood, often located at street junctions or intersections, to become huge superstructures made with palettes. In this transition they have also become contested symbols of division, perhaps more noticeably with those who would identify with the Protestant tradition, many of whom leave Belfast around the 'Glorious Twelfth.'

- 7 The author had not taken recording equipment as this had not been negotiated, nor anticipated to be used.
- 8 Freire states that "The originals by Francisco Brenand were taken from me; these were done by another Brazilian artist, Vicente de Abreu." (1974: p. 57).

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和文概要

応用視覚藝術調査法は、藝術を基礎とする方法論ないし方法論的枠組みであり、以下のような仮説の上に成り立っている：「視覚藝術」は、標識（マーク）、コラージュから模型、絵画、そしてレリア（実在物）とかアーティファクト（藝術的オブジェ）と呼ばれるものまで、非常に多岐にわたる表現形式を含むものであり、表面的なレベルを超えて、あるいはさらに直接の用途や本来の意図をも超えて、何か他のものを志向する内在的傾向を有している。それゆえに、視覚過程と視覚藝術オブジェは、二次的な目的、多くの場合本来の使用目的よりも高次の目的、のために有用で有り得るといふ傾向を持つと言える。本研究では、日本の奉納祈願板絵である「絵馬」e-ma が、ベルファーストのドネゴール通り Donegall Pass の多くの名も無き住民と「希望」というテーマを結びつける手段として用いられた。研究の結果、絵馬は、視覚情報（イメージ）と聴覚情報（語り・物語）の双方を呼び覚ますための道具として極めて有効なものであることが証明された。また、本質的に単次元のもの（つまり平面的なもの）であるにもかかわらず、得られたデータは非常に多様でテキスト性に富んでおり、絵馬は3種類の視覚情報と4種類の聴覚情報を産み出す助けとなったことがわかった。本論文では、これらのデータの例を、文化的、歴史的、社会的情報を含む直接・間接の文脈的データとともに提示する。

キーワード：

応用視覚藝術調査法 (AVE)、絵馬、視覚的方法、質的データ、ベルファースト