

The Scope of Artistic and Poetic Dispositifs in Health and Mental Health Research

Alcance de los dispositivos artísticos y poéticos en la investigación en salud y salud mental

O alcance dos dispositivos artísticos e poéticos na pesquisa em saúde e saúde mental

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Abstract: Introduction: A common theme that has characterized the evolution of qualitative methodologies in recent decades is a “transdisciplinary turn” in the form of the incorporation of techniques derived from the arts. Objective: To carry out a critical analysis of this trend in the field of health and mental health, through the description and explanation of the scope of two dispositifs, the artistic and the poetic. Method: The work is developed from duo-ethnography, understood as a dialogic process that generates new meanings to social phenomena and epistemological constructs. Results: The described dispositifs have a significant impact on the relationship of artistic expression with the foundations of qualitative research. Conclusions: The arts have pushed qualitative research to move beyond logocentrism in representational concerns. As a consequence, the use of art is no longer thought of as a tool, but as an experience of construction of subjectivity that allows an authentic experience of construction of reality with the active and critical involvement of the researcher in their projects.

Keywords: qualitative research; art; health; mental health; duo-ethnography.

Resumen: Introducción: Un tema en común que ha caracterizado la evolución de las metodologías cualitativas en las últimas décadas es un “giro transdisciplinario” en forma de la incorporación de técnicas derivadas de las artes. Objetivo: Realizar un análisis crítico de esta tendencia en el campo de la salud y la salud mental, a través de la descripción y explicación de los alcances de dos dispositivos, el artístico y el poético. Método: El trabajo se desarrolla desde la duo-etnografía, entendida como un proceso dialógico que genera nuevos significados a los fenómenos sociales y constructos epistemológicos. Resultados: Los dispositivos descritos tienen un impacto significativo en la relación de la expresión artística con los fundamentos de la investigación cualitativa. Conclusiones: Las artes han impulsado

Note: This article is part of the dossier “Qualitative methods for social transformation, interculturality and resilience”, which brings together papers produced in the context of the VI Summer School on Qualitative Methodologies for Social Transformation in the Border Zone, held on January 13 and 14, 2022 and coordinated by the Escuela de Psicología y Filosofía in conjunction with the Departamento de Ciencias Sociales de Universidad de Tarapacá, Sede Iquique, Chile.

la investigación cualitativa para ir más allá del logocentrismo en las preocupaciones representacionales. Como consecuencia se ha dejado de pensar el uso del arte como una herramienta, sino como una vivencia de construcción de la subjetividad que permite una auténtica experiencia de construcción de la realidad con la implicación activa y crítica por parte del investigador en sus proyectos.

Palabras claves: investigación cualitativa; arte; salud; salud mental; duo-etnografía.

Resumo: Introdução: Um tema comum que tem caracterizado a evolução das metodologias qualitativas nas últimas décadas é uma “volta transdisciplinar” na forma da incorporação de técnicas derivadas das artes. Objetivo: Realizar uma análise crítica desta tendência no campo da saúde e da saúde mental, através da descrição e explicação do alcance de dois dispositivos, o artístico e o poético. Método: O trabalho é desenvolvido a partir da duo-etnografia, entendida como um processo dialógico que gera novos significados para os fenômenos sociais e construções epistemológicas. Resultados: Os dispositivos descritos têm um impacto significativo sobre a relação da expressão artística com os fundamentos da pesquisa qualitativa. Conclusões: As artes têm impulsionado a pesquisa qualitativa para ir além do logocentrismo nas preocupações de representação. Como consequência, o uso da arte não é mais pensado como uma ferramenta, mas como uma vivência de construção da subjetividade que permite uma experiência autêntica de construção da realidade com o envolvimento ativo e crítico do pesquisador em seus projetos.

Palavras-chave: pesquisa qualitativa; arte; saúde; saúde mental; duo-etnografia.

Received: 07/07/2022

Accepted: 09/29/2022

How to cite:

Marxen E, González Gutiérrez LF. The Scope of Artistic and Poetic Devices in Health and Mental Health Research. *Enfermería: Cuidados Humanizados*. 2022;11(2):e2939. DOI: 10.22235/ech.v11i2.2939

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Introduction

One common theme that has characterized the evolution of qualitative methodologies in recent decades is the strong emphasis on the incorporation of concepts and theoretical resources from the social sciences and the arts. ⁽¹⁾

García Canclini ⁽²⁾ called this phenomenon the “transdisciplinary turn” that builds bridges between the arts, anthropology, and sociology. In particular, artists have pushed qualitative research to go beyond logocentrism in representational concerns, even without resolving the authoritarianism of representation itself. ⁽³⁻⁵⁾

One of the important achievements of the arts consists in offering epistemological experiences, ^(3, 6) in the sense that “art processes are epistemological places where art and society, aesthetics and sociology, rethink their ways of making and knowing”. ⁽²⁾

In particular, certain contemporary art projects “show a strong possibility ...to combine theoretical, sociological or scientific research with a feel for the ways that aesthetic form can influence collective process, so as to de-normalize the investigation and open up both critical and constructive paths”.⁽⁷⁾ Among the numerous projects that have been developed by artists, some examples that stand out are Dora Garcia's *Mad Marginal* series on mental health and madness as well as on resistances to psychiatry from 2009 to the present^(8, 9) Eduardo Molinari's¹ *Archivo Caminante*^(10, 11) as resistance to official and institutionalized archives and history; Dignicraft with their documentary about responses to urban violence, *Tijuaneados Anónimos: Una lágrima, una sonrisa* (2009), and some of their community and participatory projects such as *Milpa Transcomunal* (2018).⁽¹¹⁾ As Holmes stated, the “projects carried out in this way have complex referential content, but they also depend on a highly self-reflexive and deeply playful exercise of the basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, expression and relation”.⁽⁷⁾

On the part of social science researchers, the arts have been incorporated in all phases of academic research: from the conception of the research topic to the collection and analysis of data, and even to the dissemination of the results.⁽¹²⁾ In the field of qualitative research, the widespread use of art and poetry as methodological tools has generated a series of reflections in which the voices of the participants as well as that of the researcher are integrated to generate new understandings of the human experience.⁽¹⁾

Numerous contemporary artists and researchers share the desire to oppose totalizing and dominant narratives as well as universalizable responses in order to de-totalize their works or texts.^(2, 3, 6)

Research based on artistic and poetic dispositifs has coincided, each in its own way, in the deconstruction of key concepts such as research, participation, collaboration, otherness, transnationalism, institutional critique, archiving, and archivism.

This has undoubtedly invigorated the relationship of researchers with their work contexts as never before, in addition to promoting the use of different interpretative tools for the construction of a narrative discourse in which the experiences of the participants are paramount.⁽¹⁾ The tradition in qualitative research has mostly been oriented toward the general interpretation of narratives, usually limited to the interview in its different modalities as well as to other instruments such as focus groups or discussion groups. However, Denzin and Lincoln⁽¹⁾ pointed out the importance of the impact of the arts in general, and that of literature and the performing arts. One of the consequences of this appropriation of techniques derived from art, theater, literature, cinema, and photography is the focus on a real attempt at interdisciplinarity, which goes beyond theorization; on the contrary, these transferences are converted into the possibility of creating realities shared between the researcher and the research phenomena. The experience is not only represented (in a text), but it is also performed (staged), such as in the ideal case of a collaboration with the researcher and the participants or those involved.⁽¹²⁾

Accordingly, this article proposes to account for two dispositifs —more specifically, the artistic dispositif and the poetic dispositif— as bridges that establish the networks between the arts and the foundations of qualitative research. In this sense, we describe these dispositifs to then see their impact on qualitative research in health and mental health. We also offer a critical view of the “false democratizations” that often coincide with the use of the arts in academic research. With respect to mental health, the dispositifs support the

¹ Consult Molinari's work at this link: <<http://archivocaminante.blogspot.com>>.

construction of a subjectivity that allows for an authentic experience of reality construction. They offer new narrative languages, which complexify the experience of storytelling—a central aspect in the construction of human identity. ⁽¹³⁻¹⁵⁾

Furthermore, in terms of health, the dispositifs can help us to go beyond biomedical models based on statistics and epidemiology. They present alternatives to the commodification of human afflictions and extend the gaze beyond the individual patient toward the physical discomforts of collectives and social injustices. ⁽¹⁶⁻²⁰⁾

Methodology

By means of duo-ethnography, we explore and consider each other's experiences and conceptions of the artistic ^(3, 4, 6, 19, 27, 39, 51, 58, 62) and poetic ^(27, 32) dispositifs. Among the different approaches to duo-ethnography, we highlight the definition offered by Sawyer and Norris, who stated that: “In duoethnography, two or more researchers work in tandem to dialogically critique and question the meanings they give to social issues and epistemological constructs. Working with a critical partner, duoethnographers select social phenomenon or themes to investigate”. ⁽⁸¹⁾ From this methodological perspective, the forms of relationships mediated by conversation and the use of artifacts are strengthened in order to enhance the results of research based on this methodology. Duo-ethnography has been applied in qualitative research since at least 2005. It has been developed with the aim of considering researchers as a site for “archeological examination of the formation of our beliefs, values, and ways of knowing”. ⁽²¹⁾ It has often served as a dialectical process of critical and polyphonic tension in order to overcome supposed gaps and opposing ways of thinking and being in the world. ^(21, 24, 26) Duo-ethnography is not merely a dialogue but rather a co-construction of knowledge by dialogue partners with their perceptions of cultural artifacts so as to generate new meanings. ⁽²¹⁾ We believe in dual learning through investigative conversations and in the learning partnership model, ⁽²²⁾ “which is grounded on the notion that individuals take action for their own good as well as the community through a learning partnership”. ⁽²³⁾ This requires a dynamic and imaginative process, which becomes pedagogical for the researcher-participants themselves as well as for their readers. ⁽²¹⁾

In our case, we place special emphasis on already-existing epistemological constructions in terms of artistic and poetic dispositifs. For this reason, we have reviewed prevailing experiences and the existing literature. This has led us to the inclusion of a remarkable number of references that may exceed the amount of a usual academic article. This extensive bibliography has helped us to develop new understandings of qualitative research on health as well as mental health.

In addition, duo-ethnography, according to the arguments of Sawyer & Norris, ⁽²¹⁾ does not involve uncovering the essence of something (a phenomenon) or someone (a mental essentialism), but rather realizing the exploration of life stories that relate to the meanings that people attribute to their experiences, as mediated in dialogue. In this sense, we speak of a “relational reflexivity” and of a “meaningful dynamic practice” ⁽²⁴⁾ instead of a linear and constrained research construct. ⁽²⁵⁾

More specifically, our duo-ethnography is based on our collaboration, collegiality, friendship, and common interests in our research within the arts, which we have developed together trans-geographically between Colombia, the United States, and Catalonia since 2015; our duo-ethnography is precisely the result of this relationship. ⁽²⁶⁾ For the present text, we sometimes worked on our paper independently and at times synchronously. We

accompanied the writing with long virtual conversations as well as very frequent exchanges of WhatsApp messages. It is worth emphasizing the importance of mutual commitment and trust for this methodology.

The artistic dispositif

In line with what has been discussed above, that is, the constant increase in the inclusion of art in and by different disciplines, we deem it important to differentiate artistic practices that know how to challenge the hegemonic discourse from those that perpetuate it, those that use art for social control.⁽²⁷⁾

To achieve this goal, the concept of the “artistic dispositif” has been described in order to facilitate its application in qualitative research that employs art.

It is based on Foucault's descriptions of the dispositif, according to which it is a totally heterogeneous whole made up of “discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions”.⁽⁷⁾ Thus, the dispositif is a structure composed of an enormous variety of elements; they can be abstract, such as discourses, or tangible, i.e., institutions in their architectural forms. Given this multiplicity of purposes and elements, the dispositif establishes networks through these elements in a relational form. The dispositif always responds to an urgent and emergent need in society, which is why it always has strategic and concrete objectives. At the same time, it is situated at the crossroads of power and knowledge. It is from this position that it gives shape to and conditions knowledge.⁽²⁸⁾

In the case of the artistic dispositif, it feeds back into the contemporary need for cognitive creativity in life and in research. For this purpose, institutional boundaries and limitations in the arts, social sciences, and humanities must be suspended. New knowledge is constituted, creatively challenging institutionalism.

Furthermore, the artistic dispositif is based on Guattari's concept of the *agencement collectif d'énonciation*: the collective “agency” of articulation. The latter, as defined by Guattari and Deleuze^(7, 29, 30) and Guattari,⁽³¹⁾ results from the flow of desire that leads to a multiplication of the self, to a new relationship with others, with language, with images and things.

The need for cognitive creativity is also reflected in the desire to articulate alternatives to hegemonic discourses, to the dominant subjectivations of neoliberalism and totalitarianism. In this sense, the artistic dispositif encompasses artistic research works that lie opposite to over-codifications. These works are then capable of producing “new figures, forms, constellations—in short, original material and cultural configurations that are inseparable from collective statements... ‘an articulation of collective speech’”.⁽⁷⁾ Hence, the arts are transformed into a “mobile laboratory and experimental theatre for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural change”.⁽⁷⁾

However, in the face of the constant instrumentalization of the arts, many art institutions such as museums, universities, and art schools often function as normalizing dispositifs, following the rules and imperatives of the financial economy and the dominant neoliberal discourses. Bourdieu and Haacke⁽³¹⁾ were able to explain rather well how multinational foundations managed to abuse the arts to accumulate symbolic capital, “good press”, in order to hide behind their less popular capitalist methods.⁽⁶⁾

As explained above, the dispositif is always situated at the crossroads between knowledge and power. To challenge the dominant discourses of capitalist exploitation, social control, and oppression, the artistic dispositif must take the form of a counter-dispositif. This

counter-dispositif openly contests the co-optation of the arts by neoliberal power agencies. It resists the abuse of the arts by extreme right-wing politics as well as rejects capitalist patronage. In this way, it opens the horizon to new ways of inhabiting the world beyond dominant subjectivations.

The poetic dispositif

For the purposes of this article, we recognize the poetic dispositif as the use and appropriation of poetry and its different resources, techniques, and rhetorical figures as a platform for the collection and interpretation of information associated with qualitative research. All these poetic incursions in qualitative research are framed within a qualitative methodology called poetic research, which has undoubtedly opened the panorama for the incorporation of alternative narrative forms so as to understand the research phenomena found in the particular experiences of the participants. ⁽³²⁻³⁴⁾

The process of generating the emergence of poems can be a matter that involves, for example, the transformation (remediation) of the text of an interview into a poem that derives a second type of narrative, one that transfigures a dialogue of voices into the construction of a poem that integrates the voices of the primary conversation. In other words, a complex narrative order, as expressed in the poem, is generated —the product of an interview or conversation between the participants.

For Faulkner, ⁽³⁵⁾ poetic research involves the use of poetry within qualitative research, including the transformation of “research interviews, transcripts, observations, personal experiences, and reflections into poems or with poetic forms”. ⁽³⁵⁾ Poetic research is considered as the incorporation of poetry in one part of qualitative research, with its basis being the inclusion of literary arts to represent human experiences in an authentic and sensitive way.

The impact of poetic research can be exemplified in the case of Apol, ⁽³⁶⁾ who illustrated the way in which the processes of resignification of sensitive human experiences could be generated, specifically the genocide that took place in the city of Tutsi, Rwanda in 1994. Apol, during successive meetings in that country, developed a form of poetic research with the survivors of the genocide in order to generate comprehensible processes, mediated by a reflective construction with a poetic tone, that represent the experiences of these people, much like the self-reflective work performed by the researcher. Two work perspectives intersect, constituting one of the principles and impacts of this methodology: the configuration of a poetically narrated experience that allows for the resignification of limited experiences as well as the creation of an opportunity for the participants to express their subjectivities without the limitations of a discourse focused on the deficit or of a discursive construction centered only on the victim's condition.

At present, the development of research with the strong poetic and experimental tone of artistic writing is reflected in a variety of conceptual and experience-centered themes and perspectives. Explorations of collaborative writing can be identified to blur the line between creative and academic writing. In addition to the use of the collage technique, a self-reflective gaze has been created through the construction of a network poem, which allows for the strengthening of the researchers' gaze with a powerful language such as poetry and a graphic expression centered on the collage. Likewise, Borti, ⁽¹⁴⁾ employing an exercise centered on autoethnography, described the significance of his own childhood from moments silenced in the past, which came to life through the construction of two poems that are representative of

that period of the researcher's life. Poetic research also accounts for the understanding of processes of political intervention. ^(14, 15)

Discussion

The two dispositifs described above have a significant impact on the relationship between artistic expression and the fundamentals of qualitative research. This makes it possible to account for psychosocial practices with a critical view, those which work in favor of cultural and social change, thus preventing a fall into false democratizations.

In what follows, we develop the scope of the two dispositifs with respect to research in health and mental health in the form of a dialogue.

—In this sense, Eva, how can an artistic counter-dispositif generate transformations in the daily lives of people associated with a qualitative research project?

—The researchers of an artistic and poetic counter-dispositif know how to create spaces for alternative narratives that go beyond the usual techniques employed to collect information in classical qualitative research. In other words, they go beyond the use of instruments such as the interview and the focus group and take the step of opening up narratives that involve the critical sense provided by the arts and poetry. They have this critical capacity, first of all, because of their greater symbolic efficacy as compared to verbal expression. They benefit from the freedom that allows them to surpass what is verbally constrained. This may be attributed to the ability of the arts to condense different times in a single work. ⁽³⁷⁾ A work of art can include the denunciation of a present malaise or injustice that has its causes in the past, and it can simultaneously open the horizon and reveal possible alternatives: a different future, a coming freedom.

This temporality in the arts is not necessarily linear. More precisely, one of the advantages of artistic languages lies in the possibility of interrupting or even breaking the imperatives of linearity. In this way, dominant discourses can also be disrupted or reconstructed, and alternative narratives can be found. Let us take the case of collage: we work with pre-existing images that can represent the dominant discourses if they are cut out of the dominant plots (for example, from advertising, print or virtual news). They are cut with the scissors literally as well as metaphorically in order to be recomposed and produce a new image with different meanings. The same happens with textual collages. An already-written discourse is cut, disrupting its plot, in order to create a new story that is also not governed by the imperatives of linearity.

In this way, research can create spaces for heterogeneous expression and the free flow of desire.

For this, it is essential to radically take the knowledge of the participants seriously. It is a matter of considering the local knowledge of the people and the artifacts produced by the communities. These artifacts represent their place of expression and are capable of considering the impact of cultural mediations when qualitative research is conducted. ⁽³⁷⁾

—Let us move on to the importance of counter-dispositifs in health and mental health research. Luis, how do you see them in these fields? What can they contribute?

—We consider that poetic counter-dispositifs, in the case of what I am currently working on, constitute an intervention strategy that does not place emphasis on the classical diagnosis in health psychology. As Gergen ⁽¹³⁾ stated, within the study of therapeutic interventions, the

understanding of the poetic dimension of language had been forgotten. Gergen argued that through the poetic function, language operates—in the words of Russian formalism—as a de-automatization of language by imbuing verse with an alternative way of seeing reality; that is, the generation of a process of dense interpretation in which poetic meanings and images are expanded to the extent of the reader's interpretation and their own encyclopedic worlds. In this manner, Gergen affirmed the kind of language that the therapist must construct:

The therapist's language does not have to be valued as superior as a result of the therapeutic tradition: only by virtue of the participation to which the client voluntarily assents does this language acquire the property of producing meanings. At the same time, this allows us to appreciate not the client's isolation from others..., but his or her commitment to the process of meaning production. ⁽¹³⁾

Based on the above, the poetic dimension of the intervention should act on relationships and not on individuals. This would then allow for a disengagement with one of the most classic traditions in mental health: focusing on the “problem” within the person’s mind and not on the loop that they recursively build in their life experiences. This is similar to how Denzin, ⁽³⁸⁾ for example, described the importance of Mystory as:

a textual, cinematic, and multimedia montage filled with sounds, music, poetry, and images taken from the writer's personal history. This personal narrative is considered in relation with the discourses originating from popular culture... The audience co-acts the text, and the writer, as a narrator, works as a guide, a commentator, a co-author. ⁽³⁸⁾

As can be noted, the significant element of this openness to poetic and artistic narratives or counter-dispositifs involves what Gergen ⁽¹³⁾ called metonymic reflection, which involves the process of meaning construction through co-constitution. This requires the actions of one person in the conversation to be confirmed and reflected in the actions of the other person involved in that conversation. This would allow the person to reconstruct their own actions in the gaze of the other as well as in the reflection of their actions.

In this order of ideas, Katz, Clark, and Jameson ⁽⁴⁰⁾ warned of the need to create other types of narratives around the disease. Through social poetics, the authors managed to understand the process of the intersubjective construction of meanings of illness through the patients' own voices, which included personal experiences and the joint creation of narratives that lent new meaning to this experience, thus broadening the horizons of interpretation of their own actions and of the relational exchange that is crucial for a social constructionist view. Social poetics is understood as:

series of inter-related moments, their context and how they matter to the other participants, thus making them available for further dialogue and reflection and carrying them over as a practice resource for a wider community. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

It is important to note that from the particular experience of a group of people, this moment can become a resource that empowers a broad social community, thus generating social awareness about the disease. This implies significantly changing the way mental health is addressed into one that deconstructs the supposed impact of an intervention centered on an exclusive series of intervention mechanisms that repeat control mechanisms over and over

again, the aim of which is to perform a diagnosis based on discourses centered on deficit and the impossibility of change in people.

—This involves reflecting on the following question: How can we challenge the status quo of current interventions in health and mental health, which are centered on control mechanisms that interfere with dialogue and hinder the possibility of a meaningful change in people?

—In this case, a critical analysis of art and its social context is required, as well as an evaluation of its relationship with power and hegemonic discourse, the purpose of which is to challenge the mechanisms of control in health and related research rather than reify them. Among the different mechanisms of control in health, we can consider for example its exclusive foundation in epidemiological biostatistics, the one-sidedness of evidence-based research and instrumental research. At the same time, control is articulated in the biomedical model via the stifling of alternative models such as traditional medicines and indigenous knowledge, as well as in the morbi-centric model, which looks at health exclusively in relation to disease and its possible fatal consequences. ⁽⁴¹⁾

Our use of the phrase “control mechanisms in mental health” refers to psychiatric diagnoses, labeling, and categorization, which are particularly based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5, still in its 5th version) and which leave no room for the development of subjectivity. At the same time, psychiatric control manifests itself through prolonged institutionalization, over-medication as well as psychiatric and psychological methods that nullify subjectivity instead of promoting it. As a consequence, these lead to a deplorable institutionalization and infantilization.

Other forms of control are dictated by the market. In a totally privatized health care system, as is the case in the United States, economic profitability is a primary consideration in any treatment, along with legal “shielding” against possible lawsuits. The latter eventually leads to “defensive medicine”. The discomfort of the patient (called the “client” in the US, in accordance with capitalist logic) is commodified, which means that the patient's well-being is not the priority. As researchers, we must resist becoming “panopticon researchers”, that is, we must avoid collaborating within and for the dispositifs of control, disciplining, and neoliberalism.

Accordingly, we should consider the critical argument of Gergen, ⁽¹³⁾ who stated that all psychotherapeutic and psychiatric interventions should aim to transform a state of illness into a state of health. There should not be a return to the supposed stability of the self after the eradication of a crisis with the usual methods of change: medication, change of behaviors, ego control, among others. On the contrary, based on a social constructionist perspective, the intention should be to think about a continuous flow wherein health as a stable narrative is not a given; in contrast, it should be interpreted as a dialogue of diverse narratives that would allow the goal of therapy to be, in his words: “not so much in altering the mind as in improving the resources in order to enjoy viable relationships”. ⁽¹³⁾

Improving the resources of these relationships has practical implications in everyday life. These include reaffirming the importance of joint action among the participants of the therapeutic conversation and the construction of new discursive forms to narrate a problem or a crisis. Owing to the artistic and poetic counter-dispositifs, an alternative reality in relation to disease is created, and consequently, generative and collaborative processes are built, which undoubtedly have consequences for social practices involving the supposed health/illness dichotomy. As Anderson ⁽⁴²⁾ argued, it is important to configure actions that

are centered on dialogue, in which not only the verbal discursive premises of the participants are involved, but also the emergence of literary, poetic, or artistic expressions. This would undoubtedly be a reconfiguration of narratives and artistic dispositifs that will have a significant impact on people's lives.

—In this sense, Luis, could you provide a concrete example of the above, an example of research involving the poetic dispositif?

—In the field of poetic research, there are more and more examples not only of research works, but also of academic experiences with audiences from the world of qualitative research. These involve experimental writing exercises and the presentation of autoethnographic experiences by the poet-researchers. To begin with, as conceptual and methodological support for this particular methodology, we can mention a series of contributions that allow us to understand how this methodology can be developed in the fields of education, health, and in self-referential exercises by the researchers.

If we focus the emphasis of poetic research on the field of autoethnography or the autobiographical/autoethnographic voice of the researcher, we can consider the contributions of Moore,⁽⁴³⁾ who aimed at pulping the rejected art using poems, reinterpreting it in writing experiences to resist silencing in the face of sexual violence and to generate a counter-dispositif that recycles the traditional narratives around these experiences of sexual violence. In this same autoethnographic line, we find the poem written by Faulkner⁽⁴⁴⁾ about her personal experiences in relation to the idolized use of firearms in the United States, which can lead to extremes such as the massacre that occurred in a nightclub in the city of Orlando in 2016. Cruz⁽⁴⁵⁾ addressed the immigration experience of a university professor in the United States, intertwining the simultaneous identities of knowing herself to be an immigrant, a woman, a professor, and brown. Her five poems give an account of this epiphany and how it is re-signified through poetic writing.

In their political criticism of higher education in South Africa, Pillay and collaborators⁽⁴⁷⁾ carried out poetic research that was centered on the construction of a collaborative poem, designed to resist the neoliberal model that had been introduced in higher education in that country. This exercise of liberation through writing promotes an inquiry into the lived experiences of other academics in the face of these political and ideological dilemmas, which then provides a space for reflexivity as well as personal and professional fulfillment.

Now, in the presentation of research results and in showing to academic audiences exercises centered on poetic writing, we can consider the contributions of Prendergast,⁽⁴⁸⁾ who described in a poem the author's encounter with a member of the audience who attended a theatrical production in a prison. In this case, the poem took the form of a recounted experience with a poetic tone, which presented her impressions as a researcher, not only of the theatrical production, but of the conversation with one of the members who participated in the play. Likewise, Prendergast,⁽⁴⁹⁾ in homage to Carl Leggo, a representative author in the scene of poetic research, composed a poem that had been derived from the work of this author, formulating an imaginary conversation between herself and Leggo based on fragments of personal conversations, Leggo's own work, and some texts on posthumanism.

—Having seen some examples of the impact of poetic dispositifs, Eva, could you relate some significant experiences in the use and appropriation of artistic dispositifs?

—Regarding the artistic dispositif, one of the most powerful experiences seems to me the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA, The Andean Oral History Workshop), which was carried out in Bolivia. The work of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui^(50, 51) with the THOA is defined both by its focus on verbal knowledge and the sociology of images. In this practice, the verbal and the visual help to express alternate conceptions of the world and epistemes. They can excavate traumas from the past that were produced by colonial violence and state repression, therefore rescuing the erased parts of official history. The knowledge conveyed by images can reconnect us with the conflicts and crises of the past and thus help us to understand the present, in a manner like that of Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical images”.⁽⁵²⁾ For this author, dialectical images can simultaneously evoke both the past and the present. Hence, they can trigger the unexpected memory of a redeemed humanity. However, Cusicanqui^(50, 51) does not follow the dialectical path. Her Sociology of Images is based on the *Ch’ixi* epistemology of the Aymaras. *Ch’ixi* consists of contradictions, paradoxes as well as the hidden and the forgotten. It maximizes our capacity for thought and action, opening a third space where presumed opposites come together in a dynamic way, enriching and refuting each other, without hybridizing or merging. *Ch’ixi* offers a space for complementary opposites to think about the desired and the rejected, following the energy of desire.

Through the production of new images and the rereading of existing ones, a decolonizing practice is constituted, one that can recover repressed memories. The proliferating discourses of the collective unfold in various directions and are not collapsed into a linear and one-dimensional determination. Photography, film, and the long Andean traditions of social theater, paintings, and textiles “express moments and segments of a non-conquered past that have remained rebellious against the integrating and totalizing discourse of social science and its great narratives”⁽⁵⁰⁾ The resulting or re-represented images can surpass the verbally established beyond one single and determining signifier, thus opening new meanings and possibilities.⁽⁴⁾

Cusicanqui’s analysis of hegemony and subalterity coincides with Italian Gramscian anthropology. In this context, the work of Ernesto de Martino⁽⁵³⁾ focused on the re-historicization of subaltern culture and gave it a place of contestation in the face of hegemony and colonialism, considering it an active and creative form of resistance. In this way, the de-historicized past of the subaltern is re-historicized.

Cusicanqui’s Sociology of Images has crossed the borders between art and the social sciences. In order to de-monumentalize and decolonize hegemonic knowledge, we need new instruments as well as new practices and innovative methodologies.^(50, 51) The arts are particularly well-suited to meeting this challenge.

Another example of an artistic dispositif is the work of Iconoclasistas, a duo formed in 2006 by Pablo Ares and Julia Risler, based in Buenos Aires.⁽⁵⁴⁾ They define their own work as “collaborative research devices, itinerant collective mapping, critical cartographies and pedagogical resources for community use”.⁽⁵⁴⁾ They organize graphic dispositivos for collective, collaborative, participatory action research. Their materials and methodologies are also available for free on the internet, through Creative Commons licenses, such as *Mapeando el Territorio* [Mapping the Territory],⁽⁵⁵⁾ *Crónica de un Mapeo* [Chronicle of Mapping],⁽⁵⁶⁾ y *Manual de Mapeo Colectivo: Recursos Cartográficos Críticos para Procesos Territoriales de Creación Colaborativa* [Manual of Collective Mapping: Critical Cartographic Resources for Territorial Collaborative-Creation Processes].⁽⁵⁷⁾ In their workshops,

participants are encouraged to take a bird's-eye view of the territory and conflict to be mapped. They aim at a change of consciousness, a simultaneous transformation of the self and the territory, as well as bidirectional feedback between artists and participants. Instead of creating an artwork and sharing it afterwards with the public, Iconoclasistas share a space and a methodology in order to develop an artwork with others. ⁽⁵⁸⁾

They prioritize “the community point of view and popular knowledge”, along the lines of the participatory action research developed above all by Fals Borda. ^(59,60) Fals Borda and Anisur Rahman ⁽⁶⁰⁾ articulate their projects in an extensive collective preparation phase. In Iconoclasistas' own words, this happens

based on the feedback from the organizations, groups, or communities with whom we are to work. The starting point in the collective research process is provided by popular, regional, and communal knowledge. Those that arise from lived experiences, senses, and perceptions. We are interested in recovering and working with gazes that have been made invisible by academic or institutionalized knowledge. The understanding developed in our projects is the result of a collective construction, and we aim to create a space of reflexive participation. When we unfold the working devices in our workshop, the participants already know they will work within a determined thematic frame and towards certain objectives. The core idea is to dialogue and to listen, and it is from there that narratives are shared and the dynamics in the workshop are adjusted. ⁽⁶¹⁾

Their work is frequently a form of protest against environmental plundering and exploitation that has led to the degradation of entire communities. This is manifested in works such as *Radiografía del corazón del agronegocio sojero* [X-Ray of the Heart of the Soy Wheel] (2010), which opposes the massive expansion of transgenic soybeans and pesticides, or *Megaminería en los Andes Secos* [Mega-Mining in the Dry Andes] (2010), which focuses on the destruction of the Andean ecosystem, with harmful consequences for the rights and health of entire communities. Iconoclasistas operate with the concept of “rebellious cosmovision”, which consists of the critical mapping of extractivism and environmental exploitation.

In the same vein, more recent mappings such as *Problemáticas socioambientales y alternativas populares* [Socio-environmental Issues and Popular Alternatives], carried out in Misiones, Argentina (2019), and *Salud* [Health] (2021, online with participants in Latin America) have highlighted the connections between extractivist industries, monocultures, the cultivation of transgenics, and the damage caused to community health. Simultaneously, they facilitated the mapping of Indigenous knowledge and gender with women who had faced patriarchal violence, as manifested in *Gran Chaco* (2021, online with Indigenous women from Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina). ²

In short, Iconoclasistas focus on the quadrinomial economy/agriculture-environment-gender-well-being. Methodologically, they combine research with art, critical cartography, graphic design, and participatory action research.

Staying in the context of health, I wish to stress the work of Jo Spence —both her career as an individual artist as well as her social-educational work. The English

² See the Map Library with projects in chronological order: <<https://iconoclasistas.net/cartografias/>>.

photographer always considered photography as a means of protest. She clearly distanced herself from the hyper-aestheticism that invaded institutional photography during the 1970s. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Her work embraced the family album, gender, and social class. From the time she was diagnosed with breast cancer until her death, her focus expanded to health, again following her concerns about gender, social class. Furthermore, she included her desperate search for alternative therapies as well as her refusal to the imposition of breast prostheses by male doctors.

Her series *Picture of Health?* (1982-1991) impressively documents this process. At the same time, she developed a practice that she herself called “phototherapy”: through visual diaries and collages, she documented the process of the disease, from diagnosis to frustration, and to daily life with the disease and her forms of resistance.

Although Spence did not perform as an academic, she was already ahead of many aspects of what would later be denominated as “interpretive autoethnography”. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ In this sense, by 1990, Spence had already articulated her intention to “reunite social and personal identities, politicizing personal narratives, and personalizing politics”. ⁽⁶²⁾ She discovered “the political and therapeutic potential of life stories and the restaging of traumatic family experiences, ... or the imposition of stereotyped behavioral patterns concerning gender and class. These ideas followed her previous research into the family album”. For the re-enactments, she made use of political-dramaturgical techniques such as Brecht's Epic Theater and Boal's Theater of the Oppressed. ^(18, 63)

Besides her artistic-photographic practice, aimed at subaltern audiences, she also held workshops with participants who dealt with the same political and personal concerns. Taking advantage of the accessibility of photography as a technique, she worked both with already-existing photos and re-staged images. The objective was to transmit the strength of agency, which was understood as the capacity for self-determination. The participants thus became active subjects, capable of rewriting their own history. ⁽⁶²⁾ In short: “Through political knowledge of oneself, it is possible to advance beyond the perfect image”. ⁽¹⁸⁾

—We have listed the advantages offered by the arts in the field of qualitative research, with a special emphasis on health and mental health. We have already mentioned “false democratizations” and artistic practices that reify hegemony instead of challenging it. So, Eva, what exactly do you mean by both risks, the risk of falling into “false democratizations” and the perpetuation of hegemony?

—To challenge hegemony through artistic practices, it is necessary to comply with what Mouffe ⁽⁶³⁾ has called “critical art”. According to the political scientist, the term “critical art” is preferred over “political art” because the latter is considered redundant and inevitably leads to an incorrect topology. All art embraces a political dimension since it reflects a certain symbolic order. At the same time, politics always embraces an aesthetic dimension because “it refers to the symbolic ordering of social relations”. ⁽⁶³⁾ Both the political and the arts are always interconnected with the structures of society, which they can reify or challenge. The first would be like painting little flowers that serve as a frame around the hegemonic discourse. However, we are interested in arts that can challenge the dominant discourse. Critical art opposes the mechanisms of control and oppression in society, challenging hegemonic social discourses in Gramsci's sense, facilitating spaces for resistance, alternatives, and eventually, the potential for social and political change and transformation.

Now, what has been called arts-based research (ABR) ^(82,83) in the Anglo-Saxon world aspires to be critical, and its objective is to interrupt the dominant narratives as well as to join

the struggles for social justice. ABR intends to be transformative. ^(65, 12) In addition, the experiences are personified, acted (performed) and not only represented. ⁽⁶⁴⁾ However, I think that some US American authors rely too much on the supposed “good” qualities of art. On the one hand, they deeply believe in the de-hierarchization of the research process. ^(12, 64) Nevertheless, we know that no innocent image has passed through academia and its related institutions. Ultimately, the imbalance of power will manifest itself in various decision-making processes, such as the selection of the place of publication, of the exhibition or performance venue, the selection of the images, texts, and sounds as well as their format. Many times, these decisions are also guided by the career of the academic. Especially in the US, this means achieving the maximum possible visibility in their own favor. In participatory photography, for example, it is worth asking: Who ultimately owns the cameras? Who has the key to the workshops?

Arts-based research often claims the advantage of having a wider dissemination of research results. Indeed, performances, dramatizations, or exhibitions can reach a broader audience as compared to academic publications, which are often hermetic and published in specialized journals, many without open access. In return, the results of arts-based research can reach different and popular audiences, ones that go beyond academics. Repeatedly, research with the arts has been defended with the argument that “voice is given” to groups that do not have it in public. Despite this being a laudable motivation, it is worth becoming aware of the way in which “this voice is given”, how it is promoted and how listening to this voice is converted into an action. In an exhibition, a series of questions are important, such as the format of the images, how they are presented, what type of credits are included, what type of public is invited, how the public looks at the images, and the kind of access that is given to spectators. ⁽⁶⁵⁾

“Simply displaying images without attending to these various aspects of knowledge mobilization can result in the research having no impact or even in furthered silencing and marginalization of populations”.^{3 (65)} In the case of participatory photography or photovoice, the empowerment of those involved does not simply happen with the distribution of cameras, especially since they are also usually owned by the main researchers and their institutions. Even encouraging the participants to take photos of their experiences or giving them the opportunity of exchanging their impressions with each other and with the researchers, are not enough. These steps are merely a part of the process. As explained by Wang and Burris in the context of the photovoice, “empowerment includes at least four kinds of access: access to knowledge, access to decisions, access to networks, and access to resources”. ⁽⁶⁶⁾

In short, we must remember that art can always also operate as a “*site of exclusion*” (italics in the original, referring to Hooks, 1995) ⁽¹⁶⁾

We have to be attentive to the “false democratizations” mentioned by Delgado. ⁽⁶⁷⁾ We must not ignore the vicissitudes and power relations in research dynamics. According to Bourdieu, ^(68, 69) it is convenient to be critical of research processes and their hierarchies in order to include them into the analysis, since academics are “a dominated fraction of the dominant class. They are dominant, in so far as they hold the power and privileges conferred by the possession of cultural capital ... but ... dominated in their relations with those who hold political and economic power”. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

The ambiguity of this position stems from being dominated within the dominant group.

³ Own translation.

Additionally, Bourdieu recalls that:

belonging to the intellectual field implies specific interests, ... academic posts or contracts for editing reports or positions at the University, but also signs of recognition and rewards, often imperceptible to those who are not members of that universe, that can open up all kinds of constraints and subtleties. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

The dialogue that Bourdieu carried out with the conceptual artist Hans Haacke ⁽³¹⁾ has to be mentioned. Many of Haacke's artworks are related to institutional critique. This is a form of critical contemporary art in which artists reprove, through their works, the very political condition of artistic production, distribution, and reception by the official circuit of art institutions. Sometimes, the circulation of art serves as a metaphor for the discourses of capitalism and hegemony. Possibilities of breaking with it are shown through subaltern or utopian models (for the forms of des/utopia in particular, see the work of Roberto Jacoby ⁽⁷³⁾ and institutional critique related to gender the Guerrilla Girls ⁽⁷⁴⁾).

In this spirit, Bourdieu ^(31, 68, 69) and Haacke ^(71, 72) pointed out how corporations accumulate with their "sophisticated" art foundations symbolic capital in the form of "good press", marketed and supposed as philanthropy. At the same time, they conceal their capitalist dynamics of human and environmental exploitation. In this context, Haacke's *The Invisible Hand of the Market* (2009) serves as an example. This artwork makes the title ironic by showing a real hand from the eponymous phrase. *Le Must de Rembrandt* (1986) juxtaposes the high-end brand Cartier and its collaboration with the apartheid regime in South Africa, known for the most brutal exploitation of its mines and black South African workers. At the same time, the Cartier foundation is considered as one of the most important institutions of contemporary art in Paris and the entire continent. Very early in his career, Haacke protested "against real estate speculators' deliberate pauperization of urban neighborhoods" ⁽⁷¹⁾ in Manhattan with *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Societies, A Real-Time Social System, May 1* (1971). This work led to the censorship of his first retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum. He also effectively exposed the power that La Caixa bank has within Catalan society, including the areas of art and culture. ⁽⁷²⁾ Besides Haacke, there are, of course, several other artists who have worked in the line of institutional critique (Hito Steyerl, Krzysztof Wodiczko, etc.), including those who have already denounced the institutionalization of this critique, that is, its absorption by the same mercantile dynamics of art that they had criticized at the time. Nowadays, artists are demanded not only to limit themselves to these denunciations through their works, but also to go one step further by activating structural changes and the deinstitutionalization of art.

The same abuses of art that we have seen in the corporate world also occur in far-right politics. A very sad lesson was given by the North American Art Therapy Association (AATA), which allied itself with Karen Pence, the wife of former vice president Mike Pence during the Trump term (2017-2021). With the active support of AATA, she was able to market herself and her charitable mission by sponsoring art therapy in the US and beyond, with a special emphasis on pediatric oncology art therapy. This publicity hid the severe mutilation of the human rights of millions of people caused by her government. The affected people, in return, would not be provided by her art therapy services. In other words, on the one hand, she publicly dealt with child cancer patients but never with minors in detention centers on the southern border, who suffered serious trauma caused precisely by the Trump-Pence government itself.

In the words of Haacke: ⁽⁷¹⁾ “If art contributes to, among other things, the way we view the world and shape social relations, then it does matter whose image of the world it promotes and whose interests it serves”.

Art itself is neither critical nor disruptive, nor is it egalitarian by default. It depends on the artist and the researcher, who decide how they would apply it and what kind of meaning they would give it.

Likewise, arts-based research has considered creative arts therapies as one of its sources. ⁽¹²⁾ In art therapy, however, it stands out for its selection of uncritical references, its disregard for the instrumentalization by the extreme right (see above), and its reification of the official discourse of the white US pioneers, who very early on, during the institutionalization of art therapy, suppressed other African-American art therapists. One of the authors of ABR, McNiff, who is an art therapist, directly compared himself to a “shaman”. ⁽⁷⁵⁾ Fortunately, this self-designation was reprimanded as cultural appropriation. As Napoli, a Native American art therapist, said: “multiple generations of art therapists have been educated using these concepts without deconstructing this positioning of Indigenous healers as frozen in the past, universal archetypes, or as a metaphor”. ⁽⁷⁶⁾

In short, Walter Benjamin already knew in 1934 that art is extremely vulnerable since it can be “used” to convey democratic rights, but that it can also be “abused” for the opposite purpose: to “glorify power, whatever its creed”. ⁽⁷⁷⁾ He himself had to suffer the persecution of the Nazi regime to death-suicide and had to see how totalitarianism abused “art” as propaganda to justify its barbarities. In this context, Leni Riefenstahl would be a sad example of a filmmaker who worked for Nazi propaganda. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Against this background, it is alarming that in North American ABR, art has even been positively considered as propaganda. ⁽⁶⁴⁾

In summary, particularly in the US, ABR should question its own presuppositions in order to challenge dominant narratives and to operate as an artistic counter-dispositif.

By way of conclusion

We have shown the possibilities and challenges of the artistic and poetic dispositifs. They offer alternatives to logocentrism in academic research. Through their critical application, they can make flexible the hierarchies among the participants of qualitative research, as well as challenge academic institutions. However, it is convenient to be attentive to “false democratizations”, ^(6, 67-70) as we have explained before. The arts help us to delve into representational concerns, but they do not yet resolve the authoritarianism of representation itself ⁽³⁻⁵⁾ since poetic and artistic languages also have their rules of representation.

On the other hand, qualitative research strategies that integrate both artistic and poetic dispositifs manage to deconstruct the way in which art is employed in research experiences. Thus, the way in which the researcher is involved in their projects is not only transcended, but rather the power mechanisms inherent in the narratives of the protagonists can also be revealed. In other words, the use of art is no longer thought of as a tool, but as an experience of creating subjectivity that facilitates an authentic experience of constructing reality. In the field of mental health, this has relevant consequences. We highlight two points: First, mental health is understood as a concept that goes beyond the mental and the psychological, broadening its horizons to comprehensive health, which integrates the mental, the relational, and the social. The second consequence has to do with the emergence of new narrative

languages, which complexify the experience of storytelling, a central aspect in the construction of human identity.

Furthermore, in terms of health, the artistic and poetic dispositifs can help us to go beyond the biomedical model, which is based on statistics and epidemiology. They present alternatives to the commodification of human afflictions and broaden the view so as to go beyond the individual towards the discomforts of their social group. They must reveal the relationships between diseases and the conditions of inequalities in order to break the conditions of oppression. ^(78, 79)

Finally, the artistic and poetic dispositifs contribute to the dismantling of colonialist, capitalist, and patriarchal extractivist methodologies, as criticized by Sousa Santos, ⁽⁸⁰⁾ and demonstrate the proliferation of popular knowledge and resistance (see the example of Iconoclastas above). The same goes for the methodology of duo-ethnography. It has been shown to be very suitable for the development of artistic and poetic dispositifs since it helps to offer both the researchers and the readers new revelations. The fact that duo-ethnography is based on collaboration, collegiality, trust, care, and the commitment to relationships also contributes to humanizing the academic setting in favor of associative and relational learning processes. ⁽²³⁾ This happens in contrast to competitiveness and extractivism, and it is very much in line with the artistic and poetic dispositifs themselves as well as the epistemologies of the South as described by Sousa Santos. ⁽⁸⁰⁾ Duo-ethnography supports the agency of researchers through the active process of their relational history. With this, it offers a “critical communicative pedagogy” that helps to change cultural and social practices. ⁽²⁴⁾

Acknowledgments: We thank Kay Abaño for the English translation.

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Authors’ participation: a) Conception and design of the work; b) Data acquisition; c) Analysis and interpretation of data; d) Writing of the manuscript; e) Critical review of the manuscript.

E. M. has contributed in a, b, c, d, e; L. F. G. G. in a, b, c, d, e.

Managing scientific editor: Dr. Natalie Figueredo