The Visual Matrix Method:
Imagery and Affect in a Group-Based Research Setting

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Abstract: The visual matrix is a method for researching shared experience, stimulated by sensory material relevant to a research question. It is led by imagery, visualization and affect, which in the matrix take precedence over discourse. The method enables the symbolization of imaginative and emotional material, which might not otherwise be articulated and allows "unthought" dimensions of experience to emerge into consciousness in a participatory setting. We describe the process of the matrix with reference to the study "Public Art and Civic Engagement" (FROGGETT, MANLEY, ROY, PRIOR & DOHERTY, 2014) in which it was developed and tested. Subsequently, examples of its use in other contexts are provided. Both the matrix and post-matrix discussions are described, as is the interpretive process that follows. Theoretical sources are highlighted: its origins in social dreaming; the atemporal, associative nature of the thinking during and after the matrix which we describe through the Deleuzian idea of the rhizome; and the hermeneutic analysis which draws from object relations theory and the Lorenzerian tradition of scenic understanding.

The matrix has been conceptualized as a "scenic rhizome" to account for its distinctive quality and hybrid origins in research practice. The scenic rhizome operates as a "third" between participants and the "objects" of contemplation. We suggest that some of the drawbacks of other group-based methods are avoided in the visual matrix—namely the tendency for inter-personal dynamics to dominate the event.

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1. Introduction

In this article we introduce a new group-based and affect-rich research method, based on imagery and visualization – the visual matrix. It was developed in the context of the "Public Art and Civic Engagement" (PACE) study (FROGGETT et al., 2014) of how two different artworks—one durational and processual, the other permanently sited—impacted on a town. PACE aimed to develop an analysis of the cultural significance, value and impact of artworks based on the public's experience, rather than their effects on the economy and environment. This analysis contrasts with the metrics of engagement that feature in many public art evaluations. We compared the process and findings of the visual matrix with those of a focus group and this helped to throw into relief its distinctive nature and potential applications. In this article we describe and illustrate these differences. We also highlight the theoretical resources that underpin the visual matrix and mention other research settings in which it has been used. We conclude with a summary discussion of what the visual matrix delivers. [1]

As a prelude, the reader is asked to view a visual matrix extract, recorded for demonstration purposes, of an exhibition by Lancashire-based artist, William TITLEY.[1] In the video, participants are working with imagery, feelings and ideas arising from photographs of buildings, streets and everyday life in Lahore and Chandigarh. The facilitator asks participants to associate to the photographs, and then to each other's images and thoughts. The images produced through their shared associations occupy a "third"[2] position between what they bring and what the exhibition evokes in them as they respond to unfamiliar cultural contexts from their own experience and imagination. This third is defined by symbolic, aesthetic and affective characteristics that give form to the personal and cultural encounter taking place. Via the elaboration of images and the feelings that they arouse, meaningful connections are formed among participants and between participants and the exhibition.

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1 http://vimeo.com/97731002; filmed by Graham KAY, Fully Formed Films, final version uploaded June 30, 2014.

2 See FROGGETT and TRUSTRAM (2014) for the discussion of the "aesthetic third" in a museum context, and FROGGETT, ROY, LITTLE and WHITAKER (2011) for the development of the concept in a study of "New Model Arts Institutions and Social Engagement."

Figure 1: Chandigarh (From the exhibition Lahore-Chandigarh, April 2014. Artist and photo: William TITLEY)

Figure 2: Lahore (From the exhibition Lahore-Chandigarh, April 2014. Artist and photo: William TITLEY) [2]

The language used is stimulated by accumulating imagery. It is affect-laden and sensuously grounded. Feelings in the room take shape through the sharing of images, emotions and ideas. "Danger" and "hope" sensed in the photographs are associated with assassinated public icons—the fallen "super-heroes" of John F. KENNEDY, Mahatma GHANDI and Martin Luther KING, not pictured in the exhibition but produced in response to it. The feeling of danger arises from unspoken anxiety at the vulnerability of visionary leaders and political projects deemed progressive in Western eyes. Hope rests in "impossible" icons representing a sweep of humanity, Caucasian, African-American and Indian. The photographs are of public spaces, buildings and scaffolding, creating a tension between fragility and support, which is aesthetically sustained but emotionally unreconciled. "Support" for these cities will come neither from post-colonial

largesse, nor from charismatic leaders, but from the everyday bustle of creativity and the meditative architectural urban spaces portrayed. Some of this is made explicit in the matrix, some is simply hinted at and explored in an interpretive process that follows. [3]

1.1 Visual matrix in a research context

The visual matrix, and the process of analysis, offer a methodology concerned with capturing complexity, with social and affective processes of "becoming," and with a multi-sensory range of experience. We have considered how to reconcile, within the research process, principles of emergence and "experience nearness" (GEERTZ, 1974) underlying the matrix, as well as the critical researcher distance and contextual awareness that enable a move towards findings. The visual matrix rests on the imaginative and affective capacities of participants and researchers and at first sight may seem expressive of a particular time, place and group. However we will show how it can reflect the situation of the participants and the wider social context of which they are a part. In common with other psychosocial methodologies[3] it depends on reflexivity of the researchers and aims to avoid psychological or sociological reductionism, seeing the personal and the social as indissolubly intertwined. A key feature of psychosocial studies is their sensitivity to the tacit, latent, unarticulated and unconscious dimensions of experience that pervade everyday life and societal-collective processes, as well as the research encounter. Explorations in psychoanalytically informed social science have thus been central to methodological development and are key to our selection of theoretical resources from British and continental traditions. The most significant are highlighted in Section 1.3 and explained at greater length in Section 4.1 when we address the question of interpreting the visual matrix. Our starting point and guiding psychosocial principle is that participants bring dispositions, experiences, fantasies, anxieties and desires and these are expressed through the shared affect, images and ideas of the matrix that elaborates on the expressive and symbolic potentials of a culture the participants hold in common. [4]

1.2 Precursors of the visual matrix

The social dreaming matrix offers a precedent where dreams have enabled reflection on shared social concerns (LAWRENCE, 2005; MANLEY, 2014). Social dreaming is a group-based process that elicits associative thinking. Participants bring their ideas to the shared space of the matrix in the form of dreams, other images, allusions, thoughts and feelings. The "emergent accumulation," or collage of overlaid associations appears to belong to the matrix rather than to particular individuals within it. Psychodynamic interactions are therefore minimized. Ideas may originate in the participants' life historical experiences but they take on character and meaning in juxtaposition with other elements in the shared whole. [5]

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3 See for example CLARKE (2006) in support of psychosocial reflexivity, HOLLWAY and JEFFERSON (2012 [2000]) for a discussion and application of these principles in relation to the free association narrative interview method, and FROGGETT, CONROY, MANLEY and ROY (2014) for their development within a creative methodology based on scenic composition: also FROGGETT and HOLLWAY (2010) and HOLLWAY and FROGGETT (2012).

There are other precedents for the use of dream-based imagery and associative thinking in a matrix, for example in art therapy (LA NAVE, 2010). MERSKY (2008, 2012, 2013) has developed "social dream-drawing." Images, objects and social dreaming have been used with art exhibitions (BIRAN, 2007; WERDIGIER, 2010). MANLEY (2010a) used social dreaming to record responses to slavery alongside an exhibition of objects and images on the abolition of the slave trade. Instead of dreams, SIEVERS (2007, 2008, 2013) uses the "social photo-matrix" to investigate the significance and resonance of particular photographs. In developing the visual matrix in a social research context we too have departed from dreams, with their inherent unpredictability, and worked with a variety of sensory stimuli to set thoughts and feelings in motion in the matrix. These have included photographs, dance, drawing and poetry. The choice of stimulus orients the matrix towards a specific research problem. [6]

Associative thinking lies at the heart of psychoanalysis where free association impelled by "involuntary ideas" (FREUD, 1991 [1900], p.113) offers the analyst insight into patients' unconscious mental processes. BOLLAS (1995) who also writes on associations in everyday life, maintains they are central to the ways in which we disseminate our being as we move through ordinary activities where our "psychic meanderings create new and deeply textured psychic intensities" (p.55). Associative thinking in a matrix differs from free association in psychoanalysis, not only because of the absence of clinical setting and therapeutic relationship, but also because participants provide stimuli for one another so that their meanderings become inter-woven ceasing to reflect the uniquely personal journeys of individuals. Although some threads remain distinct, others merge into the matrix, so that the texture and pattern of the whole is experienced as a shared, and partly unconscious social process.[4] [7]

1.3 Theoretical influences

We have found it necessary to splice together theoretical resources from different traditions to convey the nature of associative thinking in the matrix itself and the interpretive process that follows. Thus we refer to the Deleuzian conceptualization of rhizomatic thinking (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1988) to describe the diverging associations of the matrix with its fluctuating moments of intensity. We have drawn upon an account of attention and attunement in object relations theory, primarily the work of BION (1967, 1970, 2000 [1961]). WINNICOTT's (2005 [1971]) notions of potential space and transitional phenomena have enabled us to understand the creativity of the visual matrix. LORENZER's (1986) concept of "scenic understanding" has helped us to think about the conjunction of personal and cultural experience; how to interpret the matrix as a complex whole; and the relationship between imagery and the language in which it is presented[5].

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4   Discussion of the nature of pre-conscious or unconscious processes operating during the visual matrix is beyond the scope of this article. Of interest is work by LONG and HARNEY (2013) identifying an "associative unconscious" at work in social situations.

5   We have found that our research analyses have greatly benefited from putting our concepts into dialogue with LORENZER's explorations of depth-hermeneutics, especially the notion of the "scenic." While we recognize we are limited by the relative scarcity of English language translations of his work, we draw upon a text in English (LORENZER & ORBAN, 1978). We

Theoretical hybridization has helped us to combine an account of the experiential "presence" of the matrix with the "elsewhere" of societal context that emerges through its interpretation. [8]

2. The Visual Matrix and Post-Matrix Discussion

The visual matrix produces complex data with sensory, affective and performative elements. It demands sensitive facilitation and a number of conditions and steps:

1. Participants (6 -35 with approximately one facilitator per 10-15 people) assemble in a space where they can work uninterrupted. Depending on the research focus or question, participants may be selected using whatever sampling frame is appropriate to the research question. No previous knowledge or experience of the method is required.
2. Stimulus materials—for example projected photographs relevant to the research—are displayed in order to prompt visual thinking. Participants are encouraged to allow their own images and associations to emerge.
3. Participants and facilitators sit in a "snowflake" pattern, avoiding direct eye contact and speaking into the shared space rather than to one another.
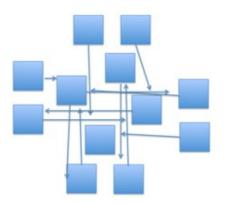

Figure 3: The "snowflake": Squares represent chairs and arrows the gazes of participants. [9]

4. The facilitators invite expressions of images, associations, thoughts and feelings as and when participants wish, without turn-taking. They emphasize that no judgment or interpretation will be made during the matrix itself.
5. The matrix runs for an agreed time—usually an hour. The facilitator takes a non-directive role, modelling the associative process of expression if the

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have also benefited from the annual meetings of the International Research Group for Psychosocietal Analysis, an inter-disciplinary group devoted to furthering empirical and theoretical development in psycho-societal research. The group has been particularly fruitful in providing a space for interaction between the researchers from British object relations and Lorenzerian traditions. Two compilations of articles using Lorenzerian approaches have emerged from this group: in *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* (2010), edited by BERESWILL, MORGENROTH, and REDMAN, 2010; also in *FQS* (2012), edited by SALLING OLESEN. In this article we would not claim to be undertaking a strictly Lorenzerian analysis. Rather, we ask how the conceptualization of a scenic register of experience enriches our thinking about empirical research data, alongside and in combination with other theoretical resources.

matrix wanders into analysis or discussion. The expression of images takes precedence over discursive exchange as participants contribute thoughts and feelings. Together, they generate in the minds of participants a collage-like accumulation of imagery, affect and ideas. A researcher takes notes of the contributions, and the proceedings are usually audio-recorded.

6. After the matrix there is a short break, chairs are re-arranged into a semi-circle and participants are encouraged to reflect on what has emerged, together identifying clusters of imagery and associated thoughts and feelings. Typically, the facilitator "image-maps" these ideas on a flip-chart and participants link themes and intensities of feeling.[6] The discussion can be audio-recorded for later interpretation by a series of research panels. [10]

3. Public Art and Civic Engagement (PACE)

In 2012 Ilfracombe, a small town on England's North Devon coast, hosted two public artworks: The first was a single-sited iconic sculpture and the second was a complex, durational work that re-imagined citizenship. Damien HIRST's Verity, a 66.4 foot bronze statue has been loaned to the town for 20 years and towers over the waterfront. Based on DEGAS' Little Dancer of Fourteen Years, HIRST intends it as a modern allegory of truth and justice. An anatomical cross-section of Verity's head and body reveals the skull and developing fetus in her womb. She stands on a base of scattered legal books and carries traditional symbols of justice: a sword brandished to the sky and scales held off balance behind her back. Her installation evoked both controversy and celebration and her arrival was accompanied by a fireworks display.

Figure 4: Close up view of Verity (Artist: Damien HIRST. Photo: Authors)

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6 Other formats for a post-matrix session are currently under investigation, including use of participant drawings and interpretation through movement.

Figure 5: Distant view of Verity (Artist: Damien HIRST. Photo: Authors) [11]

Alex HARTLEY's Nowhereisland is a many-faceted artwork that is durational, non-site specific, physical, interventionist, elaborated in the minds of participants, and a utopian idea. The physical island was constructed from the debris of a retreating Arctic glacier, towed into international waters and declared a new nation before journeying around the South West peninsular of England for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. It arrived in Ilfracombe in the summer of 2012, appeared briefly offshore, then seemingly "vanished." It was accompanied in "terrestrial reality" by a mobile embassy van and in "virtual reality" by its website, that hosted 50 resident thinkers and enabled some 23,000 online citizens to vote on its evolving constitution in real-time during the spring and summer of 2012. A year-long public engagement program preceded the artwork's arrival and it was greeted by choirs, processions and marching bands. Local schools developed extra-curricular events around its themes of eco-sustainability and global citizenship.

Figure 6: Nowhereisland off coast (Artist: Alex HARTLEY. Photo: Max McCLURE)

Figure 7: Nowhereisland Embassy (Artist: Alex HARTLEY. Photo Max McCLURE) [12]

The research explored public response to these artworks by comparing what might be elicited in a visual matrix with a focus group. A visual matrix for each artwork was advertised as a public event, each attended by between 12 to 16 people. A third matrix on Nowhereisland was held for 16-18 year olds in the school where teachers had enthusiastically collaborated with the Nowhereisland project. At the beginning of each event twenty photographs, randomly downloaded from the internet, were shown in succession in no particular order. A focus group (advertised as a Citizen's Forum) was held as a public event and attendees were asked to compare the effects of the two artworks on the town. All the material was analyzed by research panels that were able to consider the differences in process, quality of thinking and the nature of the findings that the two methods could deliver. [13]

The visual matrix aims to produce an accumulation of images, thoughts and feelings—a product of the diverging associations offered by participants in the shared space of the matrix itself. Each matrix produces a distinctive emotional climate and clusters of images that originate in the life experiences of individuals. They bring these to bear on their experiences of artworks as re-animated in the matrix. However, because the associations offered by individuals are triggered by expressions of others the accumulating imagery of the matrix gradually acquires an inter-woven character. The outcome (an inter-woven collage of imagery) is social and shared rather than collective.[7] The strength of the visual matrix thus lies in the emergent structure of shared thoughts and feelings that offer a window onto the lived experiences and cultural resources of its participants. [14]

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7   Throughout this article we will use "shared" rather than "collective." The latter tends to denote a collective mind, and may imply collective unconscious in the Jungian sense. "Shared" refers to a process in which all are involved, or a setting that participants inhabit in common, but where individuation is not erased so that thoughts and images can still originate in personal life historical experience and be shared within the matrix.

In a focus group the facilitator moderates and steers discussions, to allow participants to compare and contrast views, revealing different opinions. It is a discursively mediated process that produces coherent arguments and counter-arguments, moving towards distinct conclusions. One disadvantage is that less powerful voices can be easily subdued. It may also inhibit expressions of ambivalence and paradox and attempts at illustration of ideas through figurative language, although this depends in part on the skill and intention of the facilitator (KRUEGER, 1994). [15]

3.1 Focus group and visual matrices in Ilfracombe: Summary findings

The *focus group* elicited contrasting opinions on instrumental, social or economic impacts of the artworks but showed minimal interest in the artwork's artistic quality. The opening statement and many of those that followed claimed authority and expertise in matters of community decisions conferred on them through positions of power and status. The group was preoccupied with the so-called "Verity effect": benefits to the local economy and cultural tourism as a result of the statue's erection in the town. The sculpture had been "good for the town," whether people liked it or not. Damien HIRST's international reputation had attracted business; car parks were full, art galleries had opened, and restaurants were flourishing. Ilfracombe could now be "sold" as a town of "art and good food" and could compete with other cultural centers in the South West of England. A note of disquiet sounded towards the end: "How much would we have been prepared to pay for Verity, had she not been a gift?" Nowhereisland could not compete with the lasting physical, social and economic contribution of Verity. The artists were "chalk and cheese," Alex HARTLEY was less famous and the island was a temporary presence. Some who saw this artwork simply as an object felt it was a waste of money. However, others acknowledged Nowhereisland's educational purpose. There was a sense that something might remain in the town's memory from the visit but little inclination to explore this or to think about Nowhereisland's artistic value. [16]

The *visual matrix* for Verity dwelt on metaphorical aspects of the sculpture: the female figure, initially alien and now accepted as "one of ours." Pregnancy was aligned with strength and compared to the Statue of Liberty resisting a tidal wave —then contrasted with Canute, unable to resist the waves of Ilfracombe's decline. Verity's warrior stance balanced her fecundity, understood as symbolic of a town expectant of regeneration after years of decline. The visual matrix encouraged questions linking the statue to town and community. What might it now produce out of itself? Corrosion had already aged Verity—was aging without giving birth also a metaphor for the town? [17]

The v*isual matrix* for Nowhereisland in the school stimulated concern and hopefulness in relation to climate change and citizenship. Images reflecting the island's journey from the High Arctic were followed by melting ice and heating tropics. What would this world become? What would they become? What would the responsibilities of citizenship be? The shared memory of the island's visit generated a wish for enduring community, that had been briefly realized as

people from town and school had welcomed it together. Through awareness of Nowhereisland's web presence and global reach the young people had developed for themselves a wide network of connections and associations to the artwork. [18]

In contrast, the Nowhereisland *visual matrix* in the town was attended largely by older adults who voiced a different experience, concerned with the island's vanishing, its barrenness, and pervaded by nostalgia for something lost before it had been understood, or its riches enjoyed. The island evoked the disappearing world from which it had come, and through the embassy, banners, marches and choirs recalled past communities, now uncomfortably "retro." However the tensions within the artwork itself were understood: the distance of the empty island and the "close up" hand-crafted detail of the embassy van. The island in the mind was a provocation, imaginatively populated with trolls by children and grandchildren, but leaving adults to deal with their own disappointment. [19]

3.2 Differences between visual matrix and the focus group

The table below contrasts key features of the events, illustrating them with quotations from participants in a visual matrix and focus group in the respective columns.

Visual matrix	Focus group
Associations are participant led with "soft" facilitation: "I have this image of the polar bear on an iceberg, and it's melting, like the rock."	Discussions are chaired and moderated: "I want to draw the focus back to Nowhereisland and the education strand."
Captures emotions often expressed though imagery; speakers rarely claim authority. "... that whole summer, the torch journey. I felt the attitude of the country shifted, built around this idea."	Works through discursive argument; speakers often position themselves. "I am a relative newcomer and have been forming my view along the way. The arrival of Verity has, in my view, created a sense of optimism."
"Experience-near" visual imagination—image-based, scenic, metaphorical, allusional. "Swallows and Amazons[8] ... children sail around a lake and create tales of adventure around the islands."	Viewpoints are offered, discursively formed and "experience-distant." "I am one of the people who didn't want Verity at the beginning ... I didn't feel it had anything to do with the heritage of Ilfracombe."

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8   "Swallows and Amazons" is a rather dated children's classic, written by Arthur RANSOME (2012 [1930].

Visual matrix	Focus group
People speak to the visual matrix as a whole rather than one another. "I was pleased to get this piece of island, something tangible, like a piece of memory."	Analytical argument and counter-argument, sub-groups and alliances. "... is it art for all? And as it is intellectual, how does that engage with the public as a whole. You talk about the Verity effect, but with Nowhereisland, apart from the school what did it do for the community as a whole?"
Expression of emergent and unrecognized ideas and emotions; relation to artwork revealed indirectly through stories and metaphors. "I used to collect worthless stones from the beach, bits of rock from childhood, from holiday or moment. I remember in particular this stone like a perfect sphere."	Expression of topics for debate, capturing what is already understood. "The arrival of Verity has been particularly significant, supported by both councils ..."
Accent on shared affects complex emotions and ideas. "... the island came from so far away, and then alone in the harbor, so distant. Distant things can come close."	Accent on personal rational contributions; especially related to financial investment. "... complete waste of money ... it was moored up there because it was broken down and people were openly laughing."
Communication is branched and networked, relational, embodied, imaginative. "... the polar bear is back and the journey ..." "... the feeling of temperature, cold and ice, and landscape with forests and more population." "... the rocks on the island ..." "... united a lot of people who became citizens. It's about knowing, really knowing what you are getting involved in."	Communication is sequential and linear, ideas are individual, positional and intellectual; resolution of ambiguities and conflicts. "I am an elected member for Ilfracombe town council, an elected member for North Devon district council and I also Chair the Ilfracombe tourism marketing group, so I have a pretty good idea what is going on."

Visual matrix	Focus group
Exploratory process works towards understanding. Interpretation explored how the matrix had dwelt on the female figure, initially alien and now accepted; a sense of community identification, with Verity seen as transformative for the town's identity. "I was pregnant at the time and lying down. I was so uncomfortable, nine months pregnant and overdue, wondering when is the baby going to come? And it was like Verity gives me a sword in my hand. " "There isn't much negativity anymore. - They've given up - Got used to it, accepting it. They were shaking initially. - The alien has become part of the community now."	Debate, judgment works towards finite conclusions. Conclusions focused on the additional visitor numbers and the financial value of the work to the town. "... the fact of the matter is that there have been a lot more visitors ... the first 6 months which was not good weather we had 6000 additional cars on the pier."
Experience is of an open-ended process unfolding, eliciting creativity. "I remember I was working. On that day, when the island came round I saw it come in as I was working." "I have this image of the polar bear on an iceberg, and it's melting, like the rock." "It brought the whole town together, lots of people."	Experience of a citizen's forum is a staging and exchange of thoughts and opinions, ordered and reproduced. "Nowhereisland was not a thing to look at, it was a medium to prompt thinking." "For me it had gone to a different area, it wouldn't qualify as art." "It was about the environment and all those things, which is not the art side."

Table 1: Key features of the visual matrix and focus group compared [20]

4. Understanding the Visual Matrix

How can we conceptualize the experience of the visual matrix and account for it theoretically? What conditions are required? How do we move from data to findings? What relation between researcher, participants and field of investigation does the visual matrix imply? In what other fields of research might it be used? These questions are addressed in the sub-sections that follow. [21]

4.1 How can we conceptualize the experience of the visual matrix and account for it theoretically?

The quality of attention, visualization, thinking, feeling and verbalization in a visual matrix is strikingly different from a discursively structured group discussion. At a series of workshops in May 2014, entitled "Thinking Beyond Measure"[9], mixed groups of arts professionals and academics who had experienced working with the method described the thinking in the matrix as dream-like, creative, colorful, intriguing and playful. Some found it emotionally arousing, moving or unsettling. Others described alternation between absorption in a shared image or idea and drifting off into personal associations, some of which were never voiced. They recalled incidents and scenes from their pasts, often from childhood, and recounted them through association, metaphor, metonymy, and allusion. [22]

Thoughts in a visual matrix do not progress in a linear fashion but lead to associations which cluster around ideas in moments of intensity, before dispersing, forming other clusters and then being picked up again later. This non-sequential process with its fluctuations of affect and the coming-into-being of patterns in the thinking recalls DELEUZE and GUATTARI's rhizome, "... an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by circulation of states ... all manner of 'becomings' " (1988, p.21). In the rhizome each "node" gives rise to new divergences and configurations. [23]

Whilst the process imparts a sensation of timelessness and non-linearity, the density of connections in the rhizome increases exponentially, so as to create Deleuzian "multiplicities" that "continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other" (p.249), as suggested in Figure 8. These rhizomatic multiplicities emerge as nodes of significance that can be momentarily captured as a "scene", in the Lorenzerian sense, discussed below. The animated version of Figure 8 shows the intensities of color, representing the images and affects of the matrix, pulsing, fading, re-emerging, moving and connecting in a visual metaphor for the movement of thoughts and images in the matrix itself.

9   The workshops were organized by Situations, the Arts Agency that produced Nowhereisland in partnership with the Psychosocial Research Unit at The University of Central Lancashire. Their primary purpose was to feedback and consult with arts sector professionals on the value and applications of the visual matrix.
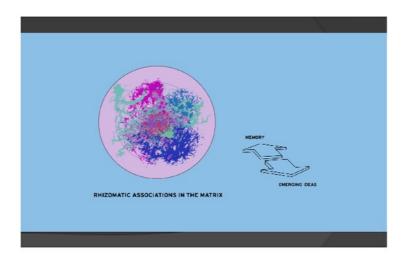
Figure 8: Rhizomatic associations in the matrix [24]

In the visual matrices in Ilfracombe, nodes of intensity frequently appeared as multiple imagined or remembered scenes in which personal experience was expressed in imagery that enabled the speakers to share complex ideas in a cultural form intelligible to all. They also appeared as a result of merging, overlapping and clustering of emergent affects and meanings. For example, the affective metaphorical resonance of "barrenness" was poignantly recognizable for the adults, evoked by the empty glacial "wasteland" of the island and conveying the town's long years of stagnation and disappointment as it struggled "to give birth." In Deleuzian terms in this affective space, the participants in the matrix were "becoming" Nowhereisland, which was "becoming-town" in shifting, multiple layers of active significance.[10] The oblique reference was to the "other" public artwork—pregnant Verity who heralded optimism and renewed generativity. [25]

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10 The Deleuzian idea of becoming is important to understand how the visual matrix works with the shared affect of the participants. Deleuzian affect is defined by a state of activity and movement that never comes to rest. In Deleuzian terms, this state of unceasing affective activity is called "becoming" (MANLEY, 2010b, pp.70-71). Becoming is always immanent, that is to say it has no beginning or end and it does not describe representational states, but rather interior sensations and percepts (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1988, pp.21-22). Becoming also "deterritorializes" our preconceptions. In the context of the visual matrix, this means that something newly created comes to life which is neither in the "territory" of the artwork nor the town. When we say that participants are "becoming Nowhereisland," therefore, we do not mean they are close to the represented territory of Nowhereisland as a physical object and neither do we suppose that the latter is somehow representing the town in "becoming-town." Rather we are referring to the participant sensation of creatively sharing and engaging with the other participants and the artwork, and through the generated affect becoming something new. This newness is "difference" rather than "repetition" in Deleuzian terminology (DELEUZE, 2004). That is to say, the newness resides in the sense of difference in the created affective state rather than its signification or resemblance to any other state that might otherwise exist, for example in memory (p.193). The movement of becoming is the rhizome, the "break away from aborescence" (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1988, p.294). Our struggle in this article is to acknowledge the never-ending movements of affective becomings of the visual matrix, which we have defined as rhizomatic, while simultaneously acknowledging the empirical need for interpretation and definition: "In its becoming, the data is already multiplicitous—it is not dependent on being stabilized or known in an onto-epistemic project of qualitative research 'interpretation' and 'analysis' " (JACKSON, 2013, p.114).

Alfred LORENZER's elaboration of the "scenic" register in literary texts (1986) has given rise to a tradition of hermeneutic interpretation in German and Scandinavian research[11] that has been valuable in interpreting the visual matrix. For LORENZER, scenic experience is primary—we apprehend whole scenes sensuously and affectively before we identify elements within it. Furthermore the scene is always the result of an embodied interaction between the individual and the cultural material it configures. It is a composite of cultural signifiers and tropes that mediate awareness and communication, and unconscious wishes and dispositions of individuals patterned by life experience. The subjective and cultural ensemble of the scene is indissoluble and yet inherently unstable because the subjective and the social never assimilate entirely to one another— there is always something elusive, unconscious or in excess of what can be grasped and expressed. The scene can be conceived as the imaginary site of an encounter between the subject and a shared cultural world that finds symbolic expression in images or words. [26]

When the scenic register is fully present in language, experience is coupled to words, which as a result acquire vitality enabling it to be conveyed readily to others. In the visual matrix clichéd language uncoupled from experience is generally not present—participants relate to spoken images and those in the mind's eye. The primacy of the image impels them to seek words to present the image rather than explaining it. However, there are always points of ambiguity, and provocation, which elicit further unpredictable responses from others. It is as if each visualized scene, presented in a description, story, or metaphor, becomes a point where the attentive receptivity of the group gathers—a node where conscious and unconscious ideas take shape—before breaking away in new directions or circling back to previous scenes that have remained unconscious or in the hinterland of awareness and which come back into focus. In a Deleuzian frame these are the nodal points of the rhizome—zones of intensity and movement, where the connections that are being made between and across scenes acquire density, and the affects that are circulating in the matrix bind themselves to thoughts allowing distinctive emotions and shared feelings to form. It is for this reason that we have conceived of the matrix as a form of scenic rhizome. [27]

What conditions are required?

Attentiveness, associative thinking and visualization are achieved with soft facilitation informed by BION's theory of containment (1967, 1970). Containment provides the necessary condition for transforming fragments of sense impression that have not yet been thought into thinkable elements through a kind of "mental digestion" that allows sense data to be received and used. The prototype of the container/contained relation is the nursing mother/infant couple where the mother supplies containment through "reverie"—a form of attuned, sometimes dreamy, attentiveness. Once this capacity is internalized it can be stimulated by other

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11 In relation to the scenic register in language which is salient for the visual matrix we are
    indebted to Thomas LEITHÄUSER (2012) and Henning SALLING OLESEN and Kirsten
    WEBER (2012).

situations that recall and prompt the conditions of thinking in infancy. The matrix acts as a psychological container that stimulates a sense of reverie and contains participants' anxieties, allowing them to digest and make use of the spontaneous creative and unfamiliar thoughts and images that arise. Importantly, the container activates the proto-aesthetic faculty (PISTINER DE CORTIÑAS, 2009) so that form is found for feeling in the verbal presentation of imagery—or in Lorenzerian terms, so that the scenic is fully present in language. [28]

Reverie describes the quality of attention often achieved within a visual matrix—the calm, measured way people allow images to ripen before offering them. There can be sensations of discontinuity and provocation but in the course of a working matrix, for tracts of time, participants adapt to—or can become—the flow of affect and the aesthetic of the scenic rhizome as it builds. When this happens, receptive attunement accounts both for the experience of being contained by the matrix, and of being able to contain oneself and the material produced by others, so that what is personal becomes part of the multiplicities of others, creating a single scene of multiplicities—the scenic rhizome. The atmosphere at such times is meditative and participants avoid rushing into speech, preferring to attend to what is emerging, and how it is said and felt. If an utterance jars, people tend not to react—the usual response of a matrix is to assimilate and transform the idea. [29]

A working matrix also operates as a "potential space" (WINNICOTT, 2005 [1971]) where an idea can be explored without asking where it came from or who it belongs to. The potential space exists in-between subjective experience and the cultural realm. WINNICOTT describes it as the space of play, the crucible of creativity, and, in adult life, the location of culture. The potential space gives rise to transitional phenomena, neither internal nor external, personal or social, but simultaneously all of these things. It is a space where thoughts and images feel as if they belong to the self as well as to others. The matrix requires the tacit agreement of its members to accept and share the illusions arising through the proliferating ideas that are transitioned by others into new clusters of imagery.[12] [30]

4.2 From data to findings: Thinking from experience and interpretation

The research panel interprets the visual matrix and extrapolates meaning whilst paying attention to the here-and-now experience of the scenic rhizome. The interpretation has several phases, combining an inductive process that expands the meaningfulness of the data, with working hypothesis formation. Propositions are iteratively compared with the original data to see whether they are supported within the interpretation process as a whole. While deriving meaning from the matrix through successive interpretation panels, the complex experience of the scenic rhizome is respected. Working with the data inflects it with context and meaning as the researchers (in part unconsciously) select, filter and project into it, according to their own understandings and dispositions. For example in PACE one researcher could only hear the triumphalism of the Verity effect. Only by

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12 LORENZER was aware of WINNICOTT's theory of transitional phenomena and in an article with OBAN (1978) drew attention to its close relation to his theory of interaction forms manifested in scenic understanding.

being challenged and allowing herself to re-experience the matrix affectively, could she recognize a subdued but insistent story of how Verity had become "one of our own," symbolizing through her gradually corroding body a vulnerability that emerges with the irretrievable passing of time. [31]

The hermeneutic process (depicted through the diagrams below) aims to detect tacit social processes and emotions, as well as those overtly expressed. We have conceived the rhizomatic scene (Figure 8) as developing within a vortex (Figure 9), because successive research panels incorporate ever wider contextual concerns. In Figure 9, the rhizome is continuously present within the vortex, producing a tension for the researchers between the apparent timelessness of the matrix in reverie mode and the temporal process of the successive interpretation panels—a "non-chronological/chronological" tension (DELEUZE, 2005, pp.118-119). Both the scenic rhizome and the vortex are dynamic, but differently so. The rhizome branches and accumulates maintaining its own integrity without temporal progression. The art of the researcher is to apprehend its distinctive quality ensuring that this continues to inform the interpretation as it proceeds in time and considers meaning and context. The scenic rhizome recalls DELEUZE's description of the dream's potential for breaking up "sheets" of continuous time:

> "In a dream, there is no longer one recollection-image which embodies one particular point of a given sheet [a time-defined continuum]; there are a number of images which are embodied within each other, each referring to a different point of the sheet ... [weaving] a network of non-localizable relations ... In this way we extract non-chronological time" (p.119). [32]

As the interpretation proceeds through its phases, the progression of time tends to modify questions asked of the matrix from *what* was presented, to *how* and *why* (HOLLWAY & VOLMERG, 2010). However, the original collage of images remains and runs through the whole process.
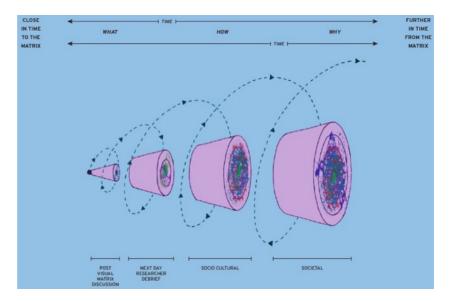

Figure 9: The hermeneutic vortex [33]

The *what*, *how* and *why* questions depicted on the timeline above the vortex tend to be asked in each phase and are not necessarily posed sequentially but interwoven. The emphasis is on *what*, when the interpretation is experience-near (close to the experience of the visual matrix), and on *how* and *why*, when with passage of time and process it becomes more experience-distant. The researchers maintain the chronological/non-chronological tension throughout the series of research panels by incorporating a return to the original matrix, and its sense of unfolding in the present, as part of each session. In this way, the *what-how-why* questions tend to circularity rather than sequential progression, despite the time-bound process of research panels. A description of the cycles of interpretation follows. [34]

a) *Post-matrix discussion* (already described) follows the matrix after a short break and is participant-led. It is the starting point for all that follows, involving a transition from the reverie of the matrix to discussion, which is still concerned with the qualities of experience evoked and meanings behind what has been presented.

> Example: In PACE the disappointment and nostalgia that pervaded the town Nowhereisland matrix was identified. This signified a shared feeling as well as a life historical and generationally inflected relation to the town. The post-matrix discussion is a critical bridge between the matrix and later interpretations by the research team. Returning to this experience, felt in the matrix and voiced in the discussion, enabled a connection to be made between reception of the artwork among this group and their experience of Ilfracombe's stagnation and decline. [35]

b) The *first interpretation panel* takes place very soon after the visual matrix, possibly the same evening or the next morning. It starts with each researcher speaking for five minutes, uninterrupted, on the strongest impressions that remain from the previous day. The panel works back and forth between emerging meanings and the original matrix asking how images and associations were offered, in what language and emotional tone. It considers fluctuations of feeling in the matrix as a whole. Researcher dispositions and habitual responses are identified in order to avoid over-interpretation or wild analysis.

> Example: In PACE the researchers acknowledged they found the Verity matrix rather unstable and at points inclined to intellectualization and two members of the panel had difficulty in offering associations of their own. They considered whether this reflected a quality of the artwork and its relation to the town or their own ambivalent aesthetic responses to it—for example the difficulty in reconciling the triumphalist warrior stance of Verity with maternalism. [36]

c) The *second interpretation panel* takes place ideally after some days break. The transcript of the matrix is read aloud to reanimate the experience in the researchers' minds, followed by five minute individual expressions of thoughts arising from the reading. The panel then moves into an interpretive mode, using the greater distance conferred by the break to establish further links between the material generated so far and context. Asking why the participants used particular

imagery, how affect emerged, and why it was expressed in a certain way, opens up unconscious/unarticulated aspects of the data.

> Example: In PACE the panel considered the difference between the concerned hopefulness that dominated the school matrix and the sense of nostalgia and loss in the adult matrix. Both were understood to be intimately connected with the emotional and aesthetic impact of the artwork. However ecological sensibility had been mediated by different generational experiences and positioning in relation to digital culture and globalization. [37]

d) The *third interpretation panel* with sector relevant outsider contribution achieves greater critical distance incorporating theoretical and contextual considerations to relate to the research question. Findings can be triangulated with other data such as interviews.

> Example: In PACE this panel compared the thinking in the matrix and focus group asking why the latter had concentrated on instrumental impacts. The inclusion of a public art expert supported a move to considering the implications of commissioning durational projects and whether cultural policy would only justify permanently-sited installations during prolonged economic austerity. [38]

4.3 What relation between researcher, participants and field does it imply?

Visual matrix methodology assumes that much experience is better symbolized through expression of images than discursive exchange. LORENZER took inspiration from LANGER's (1948 [1942]) characterization of the presentational symbolism of art and music, which enables an embodied register of meaning to emerge. The visual matrix favours the presentational symbolism of imagery and image-rich language over discourse and enables the researchers, also participants in the matrix, to maintain an embodied and affect-laden relation to the subject matter. [39]

The participatory conditions of the visual matrix, and its more or less freely associative character, relieve the researcher of taking a leadership role during the matrix. This also frees the group as a whole from dynamics in which the leader becomes an object of powerful projections, or where factions and collusions occur. MORGENROTH (2013) points out that research methods concerned with a shared realm of experience and psychodynamic interactions between participants have been used more extensively in German-speaking than Anglophone countries. In the UK, the focus group,[13] with its origins in marketing, is one of the most widely practiced forms of group interview, allowing clear distinctions of opinion to emerge through dialogue. In a focus group, however, the

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13 The focus group is a form of group interview, structured and facilitated to respond to a research question. The style is generally cognitive analytic, and it may be used to reveal how speakers position themselves within discourse and how knowledge is constructed. Facilitation emphasizes the drawing of distinctions and the expression of points of view and argument/counter-argument in order to move towards clear, but not necessarily shared conclusions. It is subject to alliances and divergence among participants. As with other forms of group process it can be dominated by powerful voices.

group itself is rarely the object of attention. The visual matrix contrasts with a focus group in that the participants speak to the shared space, so that accumulations of images, allusions, thoughts and feelings generally appear to belong to the matrix as a whole. Many of the overlaid associations originate in the life historical experience of individuals, but they take on character and meaning by virtue of their relation to the shared whole or collage which acts as an emergent "third." Interactions with potential for polarization can occur and are felt as perturbances in the flow of ideas (and they may be productive)—but the mode of thinking and speaking tends to favor the inter- or trans-subjective. People typically neither assent nor dissent to others' contributions. They discover resonances and dissonances that are voiced in allusive, metaphorical language, generating new thirds and further associations. [40]

Both the psychodynamic research group and the visual matrix work with emotions and affects and this can unwittingly reproduce in the group context social processes that have not been recognized or formulated. MORGENROTH argues that shared unconscious fantasy, when challenged, produces conflict in group members and is likely to be disavowed and desymbolized, remaining unspoken. Nevertheless it "presses" on the life of the group and is felt as provocation, which pushes the researchers to examine the psycho-societal contradictions that stimulate the fantasy. Group dynamics tend towards excluding anxieties or conflicts from discussion.[14] These are generally subdued in the matrix, as we have highlighted, however unconscious social processes still manifest themselves in "unspoken" aspects, which in the British tradition that has informed social dreaming, has been conceptualized as an "unthought known" (BOLLAS, 1987). [41]

In the visual matrix the unconscious life of the group brings participants' experiences into symbolization. Thus, the unthought known is given a space within which to emerge. Hence in our opening example above of the William TITLEY exhibition, the inchoate feeling of danger in the matrix, rather than being suppressed, finds form in assassinated political figures whose fates arouse a complex mixture of hope and anxiety and implicate participants as citizens of a post-colonial power. In any visual matrix, impressions received by participants are creatively transformed as psychic genera (BOLLAS, 2009) which hold shared meaning. This "receptive" (rather than "repressed") unconscious is "alive and capable of development [and] accessible to the impressions of life" (FREUD, 1957 [1915], p.190). Interestingly, FREUD describes this aspect of unconscious life as "meshwork" which has particular significance for the networked nature of associative thinking in the matrix:

> "The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation, cannot by the nature of things have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork

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14 MORGENROTH's example (2013) is of a group of women involved in night work who struggle to reconcile employment and family responsibilities, often at great personal cost. Yet in the group discussion, gender relations, a matter of intense interest but unresolved conflict, and a key factor in the pressures they face, are by common consent ignored.

is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up like a mushroom out of its mycelium" (1991 [1900], p.672). [42]

The intricate web of connections that grows denser as the matrix proceeds, produces affectively charged units of thought in various stages of becoming—like mushrooms out of a mycelium—that often appear out of sequence and complete in themselves, but whose links with each other depend on the substrate of connections from which they grow. The researchers who themselves help to produce this web of connections tend to become enmeshed within it. The interpretation process respects and draws strength from this and the continued imaginative engagement of the researchers that it implies. It also provides a structured process of "separation" whereby the critical distance needed to relate the findings of the matrix to the research question is achieved. [43]

4.4 In what fields can visual matrix methodology be used?

Both the introductory example and the PACE study were concerned with public engagement with visual art, a field in which the visual matrix can complement established evaluation methodologies by capturing aesthetic and affective dimensions of audience experience that are hard to articulate. The method is very sensitive to how particular groups interact with public art—in PACE it highlighted generational experience and relationship to digital culture and eco-sustainability. We would expect it to be similarly sensitive to other group characteristics such as ability, gender or ethnicity and hence a useful tool for understanding audience segmentation from the perspective of artistic experience. [44]

Most importantly, the visual matrix gave expression to audience experience in a way that the focus group and interviews conducted during the study did not. It provided a means of understanding how the artworks affected the imagination of different groups of people in the town and how they set in motion social processes related to identity, belonging, hopes and anxieties for the future. The matrix worked with metaphoric and symbolic capacities stimulated by the artworks and with their emotional and aesthetic legacies. It was able in some instances to capture the psychosocial and artistic legacy of a temporary work a year after it had left the town. [45]

Visual imagination and associative thinking are a part of everyday life—most often invoked in day-dreaming[15] with its sensuous mental wandering and emotional unguardedness. They can be brought to bear on other fields, especially

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15 BION (1967, 1970) among other psychoanalytic thinkers assigns a particular function to dreamwork whether it occurs by night or day—he terms this alpha function, of which reverie is a part, and which is concerned with the transformation of otherwise meaningless sensation (beta particles) into a form that can be experienced, thought about, and remembered. In imparting form to sensation, as visual images or other sensory symbols, dreamwork provides the conditions of meaning making and activates the aesthetic dimension of mind (PISTINER DE CORTIÑAS, 2009). The dreamwork of the visual matrix activates aesthetic capacity in the participants, accounting for the imagistic productivity of the matrix, as well as transforming sensory stimuli into communicable thoughts. The scenic rhizome thus produced is equivalent to BION's "contact barrier" that separates the conscious and unconscious worlds of the participants and where the alpha elements as "visual pictograms" can be consciously thought while still retaining qualities of the unconscious (FERRERO, 2002, p.598).

where affective and embodied responses to phenomena are significant. The matrix offers a forum where meaning can be extracted from patterns of thinking and from how things are said and felt. Interpretation of the matrix can develop new conceptual and theoretical understanding. The following examples of studies completed, or in progress at the time of writing, herald a range of other applications. [46]

MANLEY, ROY and FROGGETT (Forthcoming) have used the visual matrix to understand how working with visual images can facilitate and support the expression of complex affect in people in recovery from substance misuse. The study includes a comparison of the use of the matrix with people in early and later stages of recovery from the same treatment center in the Greater Manchester area; a study of recovery in a community in London; and an investigation of the potential for using visual thinking in the context of a dance-inspired recovery organization in Liverpool. In the first example, the research indicates that the group-based sensitivity of the matrix revealed a striking difference in quality of thinking between participants at different stages of recovery, with a clearly expanded imaginative capacity in the later stages. Besides understanding changes in quality of thought, imagination and capacity for relatedness during the recovery journey, this might have implications for the therapeutic and social intervention likely to be effective as recovery proceeds. In the case of the recovery community in London, the visual matrix enabled the development and expression of complex thoughts, affects and desires related to housing and community relations. For example, expression of what it means to participants to live in houses connected through community was represented in images of clothes lines linking houses across streets; and the fear not achieving harmonious relationships with the community, the desire for this to become reality for people in recovery, was expressed through images of unusual "communities" of animals—wild and domestic—living together. These shared images speak of a yearning for community bonding, an affect beyond the mere need of a roof over one's head. In all of these matrices, the participants' drawings were used as part of the post-matrix interpretation process, a development of the interpretation process described above. [47]

In another study on "Psycho-symbolic Dimensions of the Breast and Breast Cancer "[16] the visual matrix is being used to understand the interwoven personal, social and cultural aspects of the breast as trope and organ, as it relates to the experience of breast cancer patients and healthcare providers, who often feel unable to accommodate the patients' particular psychosocial needs. Alongside other methods, such as in-depth interviews and participant writing, it has provided a space to explore the indescribable experience of breast amputation, a loss that for some escapes articulation in conversation. The loss of breast is accompanied by complex and mixed emotions—mourning, shame and gratitude to the surgeon for saving life. However expression of affect or trauma is often mediated through

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16 This study of HAGA GRIPSRUD, RAMVI, MANLEY and FROGGETT is located at Stavanger University and in progress at the time of writing. It builds on a larger study "I am not the same": Women's Experiences of Breast Cancer, Loss of Breast and Reconstruction in Cultural and Psychosocial Contexts (project owner: Stavanger University Hospital, in collaboration with The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, US).

rational statements, or by reproducing objectifying medical discourses.[17] In interviews with American and Norwegian patients, women reveal a pre-occupation with cosmetic appearance and passing as normal, as well as acceptability to husbands and lovers of bodies with missing breasts. However, in a visual matrix series on breasts and breast cancer hosted at the University of Stavanger in 2014 the matrix reversed this sense of traumatic mutilation, sadness and "castration": breasts were seen as organs of exuberant potency, and scarred chests of mastectomized women were turned into sites of female resistance. This was achieved through grotesquely fantastical imagistic humor where the dreaded absence of breasts becomes a weapon against male intruders, detractors and violators.[18] The implication is that primary or secondary surgical reconstruction and rehabilitation services may be wide of the mark because of their gender normative restoration of a stereotypically "whole" feminine body (CROMPVOETS, 2006). Some women may respond better to a feminine aesthetic that is not breast-dependent or that is directed towards integration of breast loss in the life-long process of existential and embodied becoming (HAGA GRIPSRUD, 2008). Although these conclusions are, for the time being tentative, the matrix would appear to offer the possibility of understanding the different ways in which breast amputation, despite its unspeakability and cultural stigma, can afflict the self-perception of women who undergo the procedure. The service implications—for example in terms of post-surgical breast reconstruction—are considerable. [48]

In another example, the visual matrix has been used alongside walking tour conversations and an ethnography in a research project located in the Men's Room, an agency that works with extremely vulnerable and marginalized young men in Manchester (HUGHES, ROY & MANLEY, 2014; ROY, HUGHES, FROGGETT & CHRISTENSEN, forthcoming). In the walking tours, young men accessing the Men's Room chose to explore "survival in the city" by leading a researcher through the urban spaces they inhabited. It was important to understand how in the midst of these often chaotic, risky, highly itinerant lives, and a funding environment hostile to creative approaches, the Men's Room could retain a sense of the values that informed its work and offer a dependable environment. The matrix provided staff and volunteers working with the young men with a reflective space to visualize hitherto unidentified aspects of what the agency offered and hence vital information on the conditions of sustainable therapeutic care for this group. It produced an image-rich and affect-laden language for a series of ideas and themes that emerged elsewhere in the research. For example, the subtlety of knowing how to accompany someone's journey without interfering was expressed through images related to bicycles. The bicycle is normally an individual form of transport, but in the matrix there were struggles to see it as a tandem with all the psychomotor tensions that entails. Bicycles also became a mass transport event where all were equal in nakedness and vulnerability. These images speak to one of the issues of care and support

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17 See HAGA GRIPSRUD et al. (forthcoming).

18 This series has generated the visual matrix data for "Psycho-Symbolic Dimensions of the Breast and Breast Cancer;" principal investigator Birgitta HAGA GRIPSRUD (Stavanger University Hospital), co-investigators Ellen RAMVI (University of Stavanger), Lynn FROGGETT (University of Central Lancashire), Julian MANLEY (University of Central Lancashire).

for vulnerable people: to what extent is it either desirable or possible to move in tandem with others, or to join an individual's journey? On the other hand, there is a fear that someone left alone might fall. [49]

Yet another application concerns the potential role of the visual matrix in trans-disciplinary dialogue, where its particular virtue may be its ability to produce a "third space" between partners through an emergent conversation, where the terms of reference are themselves in negotiation and no settled discourse as yet exists (MULLER, BENNETT, FROGGETT & BARTLETT, forthcoming). A pilot study at the University of New South Wales (National Institute for Experimental Arts (NIEA) in September 2014, worked with two visual matrices conducted with visitors to the *Signs of Life* exhibition (curated by JILL BENNETT and Felicity FENNER). They were designed to elicit audience experience shortly after viewing the exhibition. One matrix responded to *Amnesia Lab*, an installation led by artist by Shona ILLINGWORTH who has an on-going collaboration with cognitive neuro-psychologists Martin CONWAY and Catherine LOVEDAY and with Jill BENNETT (NIEA); by way of contrast, a further matrix considered a digital medical visualization show *Body Image* by John McGHEE. *Amnesia Lab* was an experimental forum in an exhibition setting, bringing together memory experts and artists to explore how photographic images, sound and immersive media can advance our understanding of memory and forgetting. In public discussion forums accompanying the exhibitions artists and scientists affirmed reciprocal influences but struggled to articulate the effects on their practice. However, the visual matrices reveal the nature and quality of the art-science interaction through the imagistic and affect-laden responses of the exhibition audiences. In future work the third space of the matrix will be used as an alternative means of understanding the distinctive qualities of conversations between artists and scientists themselves. [50]

Finally, in a series of workshop-based research collaborations, led by Ellen RAMVI of Stavanger University, between a UK partner (the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire) and the Nordic Universities of Stavanger, Norway and Roskilde, Denmark, the visual matrix is being used to investigate life transitions in old age[19], from life to death, from mental health to various forms of dementia and from work life to retirement. Once again the objective is to determine whether the method is suitable for areas of experience, or imagined experience, which largely escape discursive representation. In this case the extreme sensitivity of the topics chosen is striking. For example in the workshop *From Life to Death*, the matrix was staged in a carefully controlled and highly containing setting enabling a small group to work intensively. The group explored the reality and fantasy of death and dying, both their own, and that of others, over a period of two days without unmanageable distress or trauma. What came strikingly to the fore was the capacity of a carefully constituted and "holding" matrix to "metabolize" difficult emotions, against which people might ordinarily be highly defended. Far from experiencing a feeling of relief as the two

19 The Nordic workshop series, entitled "Exploring Life Transitions in Old Age Through a Visual Matrix" is funded by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

days came to a close, some of the participants reported that they found it very difficult to stop. It may be that the processes set in motion by the visual matrix continue to work through in the ensuing days and weeks and this raises questions in regard to its potential therapeutic uses. These have not so far been explored and would require careful consideration of how to constitute it in a clinical or community based therapeutic setting. [51]

5. Conclusion: What Does Visual Matrix Methodology Deliver?

The visual matrix offers a method where the sensory, aesthetic and affective dimensions of experience are expressed initially through imagery and are not overwhelmed by words and discourse. It provides a setting where people can express non-verbal aspects of their relation to the object on which the research centers. These emerge into consciousness in the matrix, becoming available for further reflection. For the research panel, the matrix provides insights into social processes that give rise to BOLLAS' conception of the unthought know (1987). The new thought that emerges, does so in the course of the simultaneous, integral presentation that occurs in the matrix, what LANGER called "presentational symbolism" (1948 [1942], p.79). It is in LANGER's sense of the presentational that the visual matrix provides a different expression to that afforded by language and discourse. [52]

The visual matrix is sensitive to how particular groups produce shared experience. It has potential applications wherever a community of interest, practice or place has a common concern (though not necessarily agreement). In PACE the visual matrix provided a setting where the artwork could be considered in the presence of others. This comes closer than the solipsistic encounter to the conditions in which public art usually considered—inviting dialogue (FROGGETT et al., 2014). For people in recovery from substance misuse difficult feelings of shame and guilt, coupled with hope and desire, could be spoken through images (MANLEY et al., 2015, forthcoming). For workers supporting marginalized young men at the Men's Room in Manchester, the visual matrix allowed exploration of an ambivalence around themes of "home," "recognition," and the balance between "care" and "control" (HUGHES et al., 2014). In the arts, healthcare and social care the visual matrix has the potential to bring an experiential dimension to studies of impact, while offering insight into the questions of how and why impact occurs. It is especially useful in the context of mixed method research. [53]

The sensitivity of the visual matrix to social attributes needs to be further explored —for example how it differentiates gendered perceptions of a cultural phenomenon, or of the perspectives of professional and lay populations. It may be particularly valuable for understanding emergent processes for which no settled discourse exists, such as arts/science conversations, where a reciprocal influence is experienced but is not easily described. The visual matrix is not intended for the study of individual experience as in one-to-one interviews. However, there may be good reasons to combine it with individually-focused methods within study designs. Where narratives of individual change capture personal trajectories, the visual matrix clarifies the cultural contexts and social

imaginaries within which those trajectories occur. In the Men's Room, it provided a context where staff involved in complex care could re-visit their work in shared space, discovering a language for the experience of those they worked with rich in metaphor and allusion (ibid.). [54]

Questions arise as to the ethical implications of research that stimulates emergent and unpredictable thinking in relation to sensitive topics. Participants often observe that they surprise themselves by what they say in a visual matrix. As with any group-based method the limits of confidentiality should be clarified during recruitment. However, it becomes apparent once the matrix is underway that the process produces a shared accumulation of imagery, there is no expectation of personal disclosure and direct questioning is avoided. Providing the character of the matrix is measured, emotionally containing and non-judgmental—and this depends in part on careful attention to its preparation— there is time and space to decide whether to speak or remain silent. The experienced facilitator will ensure that the introduction combines a "just right" amount of information to allay anxiety with a "just right" stimulus to set in motion visual thinking rather than intellectualization. Since attention is always directed to the third of the emerging rhizome, individual utterances are shared and interweave with others in the matrix, contributing to the whole collage. Interpersonal dynamics, if they occur, are subdued—the visual matrix usually offers a respectful context in which participants can allude to sensitive issues, if they choose. Furthermore, since they speak from experience rather than opinion or role, the familiar problems of focus groups (whereby powerful voices dominate and judge) are generally avoided. [55]

Visual matrix methodology combines the "here-and-now" quality of thinking in the scenic rhizome with interpretation that unfolds in time incorporating wider contextual issues as the research panel responds to a particular research question. In this way the method combines the immediacy of experience with critical thinking achieved after the event through appropriate researcher distance, that nevertheless constantly strives to hold the experience-nearness of the matrix in mind. [56]

Acknowledgment

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