

The third assemblage of knowing:

*Attraction, care and absorption
as three working-values.*

*An overall style to mending when working
with the delicate weave of a body with/in pain
to lessen the risk of more pain.*

(Creative synthesis: Three textile working-values panels)

Three textile panels, three attributes as working-values

The final assemblage of knowing came after the write-up of book five. The content came from reviewing all the research content, including the pieces in my research collections box. When I re-touched the textile panels reconstructed from the rabbit's deconstructed, shown at the end of volume two, I felt moved to act.

I responded first to the pieces from the panel that I liked. These material pieces brought instant joy to my process. I trimmed them from their past positions without hesitation. I was unsure what to do with them, but it felt right and worth a 'deconstructive risk'. Next, I trimmed away pieces that I also liked, but my response between these pieces and those I was strongly attracted to was different. These pieces seemed quieter in their material qualities. They were delicate, and I needed to handle them with care.

The last group of cut-away materials carried a solid metaphorical connection to reconnection in my inquiry work. These pieces were not as aesthetically pleasing as the other two, but what they held, stitched, or marked on their surfaces was essential and seemed important to keep. The pieces reminded me of what and how I had come to know, accumulatively, inch by inch, affecting my skin across many cycles of inquiring.

I placed my three clusters of materials onto three freshly trimmed pieces of beautiful open-weave silk. I found balanced compositions for each reconstruction and stitched the pieces into place.

Next, I turned to read my full research document and created the map-like sheets of words shown in the introduction of this book. I then aligned words and ideas to three new panels, as I did for *The Whole-Body Woman* and her cloak. In doing so, I came to identify 'three working-values' for supporting bodies living with/in pain. These values I have named attraction, care, and absorption.

I have adopted the phrase 'working-values' from Allen's (2004) 'action-values', adapted from Heron's 'being-values' (1996). The "values-laden nature of doing", as highlighted by Allen (p. 48) and in alignment with Heron, is an appropriate connection to my three attributes, as I noticed their presence connected to my way of doing woven throughout my research. Using the word 'work', I acknowledge their labouring contributions and the benefits I foresee beyond this research space and into a professional therapeutic arts practice. I propose that these working-values are an overall style of mending that considers the risk of further damage or harm to a body with/in pain when engaging in forms of mending using the arts therapeutically. I present what I have come to know about each attribute as a value and how it works to mend.



Attraction, textile working-value panel

Attraction as a working-value when working therapeutically with the arts to support people living with/in on-going pain

Emotions impact on physical pain and physical pain impacts on emotional states. Negative imagery can increase pain ratings (Gandhi et al., 2020). Positive events whilst exposed to stressors can produce a soothing association, which lessens negative effect and positive interpersonal connection is a key resource in preserving the quality of life for people with on-going pain.

My responsiveness to attraction in arts-making inquiry brought ease and comfort to my body in pain. Working with what attracted me offered me positive experiences and evoked pleasure. When difficult content appeared in the therapeutic space, my attraction to arts-making materials and forms enabled a capacity to stay connected to the inquiry and my body, when previously I would have fled the discomfort. These pleasant encounters with more-than-human contributors balanced-out the stress or negativity of pain-filled content.

With attraction, I did not need to force my way into a connection with difficult therapeutic material. Instead, I found a quiet and subtle joy in my work, which was comforting, calming and gently energising. When my hands touched fabrics that felt right to my senses, with tools that complemented my needs and met my physical abilities, I felt joy. When I was attracted to others arts-making styles and abilities, such as Barb's fine art skills or Jan's beautiful seamstress sensibilities, I wanted to engage with their offerings. When I liked pieces I had created, I wanted to care for the work and treat it with respect. In turn, I sensed these actions of care towards pain-related content, seep into my skin, softening the pain in my body. I have come to know attraction as having a positive influence on my pained body.

Tom Sparrow (2015) proposes that positive sensations immanently orient and integrate our body. As I traveled with attraction and the presence of calmness with just the right 'dash' of excitement that attraction in arts-making evoked, I sensed a balance between valence and arousal, anxiety and pain. When negatively valenced emotions appeared, the positive emotions experienced in the arts-making dialogues minimised my pain and anxiety (Ahmad & Zakaria, 2015). The excitement of attraction, created forward movement, when dissonant content and discomfort in my body can cause me to freeze and stall. My heart felt settled and warmed by the positive sensations I felt. Quite often fatigue would disappear. I was interested rather than feeling stressed or dragging myself through the inquiry process. Often I gained energy where moments before I had been bone-tired. Attraction-filled experiences were pleasant.

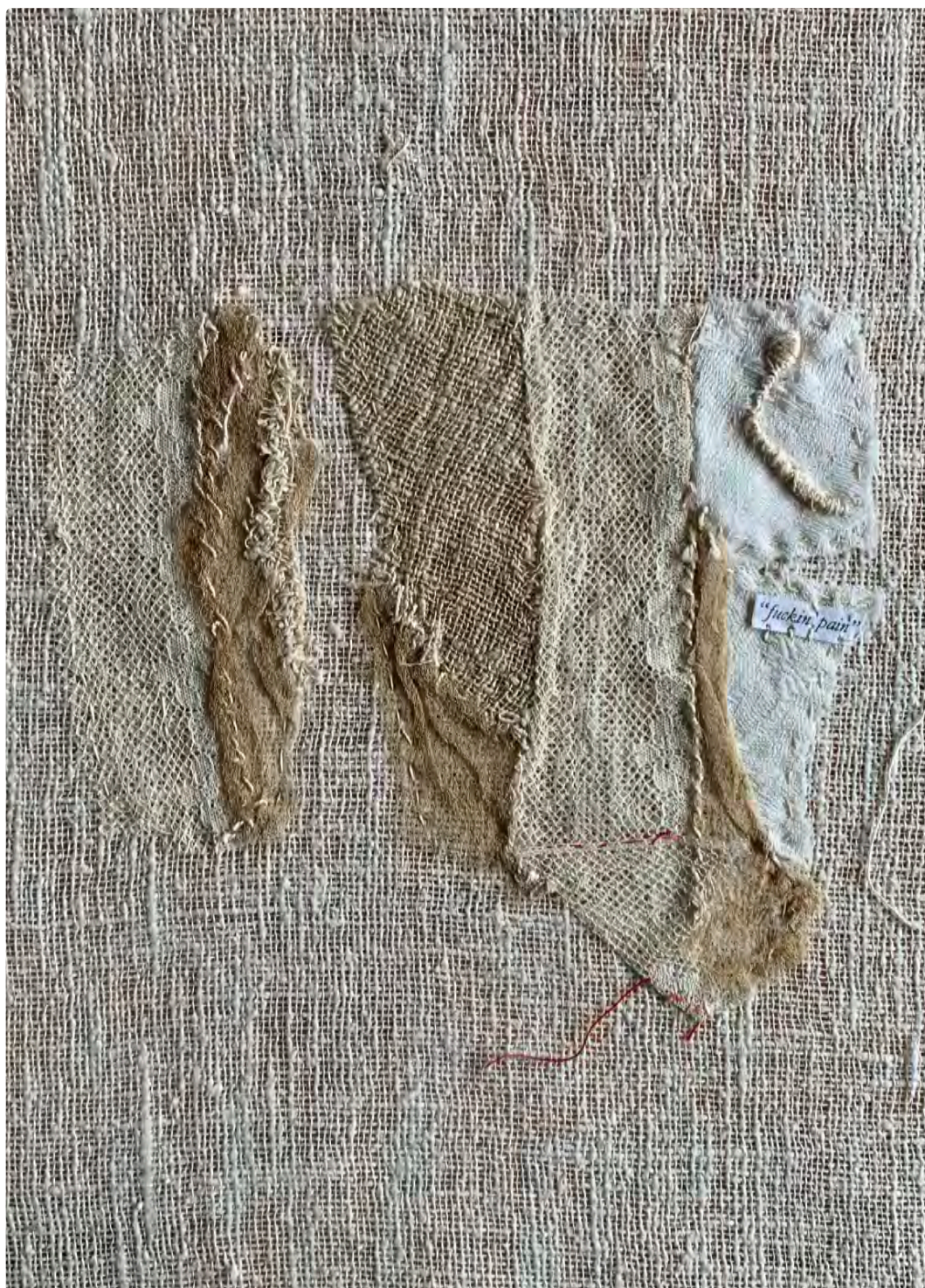
Rozendaal and Schifferstein's (2010) phenomenological inquiry into pleasantness speaks of the positive experience elicited during interactions with artifacts (p. 55). From their 'list of pleasantness themes', I resonate with their aesthetics theme in relationship. This theme describes 'pleasantness experienced in sensorial stimulation' (p. 57) and includes variety, simplicity and harmony. By embracing multimodality into my arts-making process, an array of sensorial stimulation were available. As mentioned, the content I worked with was not always comfortable to be with, but in the discomfort, I was learning, taking risks, pushing boundaries,

supported by attraction. These experiences align with another of Rozendaal & Schifferstein's pleasantness themes, they call Progression. Progression, states Rozendaal & Schifferstein, includes pleasantness to learning, insight, challenge and discovery. When challenges arose in my inquiry-work, the 'difficult edge' was softened by the pleasantness I felt in my attraction to the arts-making. I could stay with the challenge. In staying with and through slow looking and doing, I began to see beauty where previously I had seen disgust.

Freeland (2001) describes the discovery of beauty as evoking inner harmony. Disgust created disharmony in my body and upset. Seeing beauty connected to pain and my body, positively changed my perception of my body. In this shift, I discovered a loving kindness towards my body in pain, which I had not experienced before. In seeing beauty, Dr Semir Zeki explains, that the medial orbito (mOFC), the part of the reward and pleasure centers of the emotional brain, lights up (Emory, 2019). Beauty, says Koren (2008), is a dynamic moment of poetry and grace. I found this gracefulness in arts-making materials and the wonderment of nature. I became happily 'held' in the 'poesis', the making, saturated by a sensuous visual caress (Marks, 2000).

I propose that to experience pleasure in the therapeutic approaches, evoked by attraction, when considering pain and hope for the body with/in pain, is not only okay, it is optimal. When exploring difficult content, the working-value of attraction has the potential to make discomforts manageable. By beginning with attraction, which can lead to joy and pleasure, interactions which might debilitate a body with a heightened nervous system can be lessened.

To work with what attracted me in arts-making inquiry, enabled hope. Being able to move forward with my pains, rather than feeling stuck, was hopeful. Attractive affordances opened up possibilities, which dropped away the negativity of living with ongoing pain. Coninx and Stilwell (2021), speak of "when the subject is responsive to more 'negative' affordances, [than attractive options for action], the world appears threatening or seems to close itself to the subject" (p. 7840). Attraction in arts-making offered me a kind and welcoming way into and forward for my body in pain. I could remain in my inquiry and grow the hope of living my life well in pain. Working with attraction has been a positive support for learning and experiencing positive emotions.



Care, textile working-value panel

Care as a working-value

I experienced care enacted in this research to be a steady attentiveness to detail. By embracing a slow process, pain appeared and was attended to with care-filled consideration. I encountered care coming from my hands, between myself, materials or tools, and in the artistic offerings created by my research companions. I experienced mending as carefully tending to the imperfect, with seams, joins and previous marks seen. Like the Japanese art of kintsugi, where the rebuilding is completed by hand, the repair is made visible.

In my arts-making encounters, I experienced care as intransitive, defined by Jewell (2015) as a type of care in arts-making that is directed not to a cause, image or idea external to the work but with particular attention to the work. The care abiding fully within the material body of the work itself (p. 54). I experienced an intimacy with this form of care by being in the present moment, noticing what lay in my fingers and actions upon surfaces. Intransitive care is “essentially an action... it is something that happens, that makes a difference” (p. 59). I took care of the material in my hands, and I felt care returned from my materials and tools. Care was reciprocal. Jewell explains, “the work and materials also administer actions of care, in a casual rather than emotionally responsive sense, and that the act of making is a dialogue, a collaboration, rather than an imposition of will” (p. 17). In this care-filled arts-making space, it felt ok and safe(r) for me to explore broken edges and damage with delicate material. Whilst doing so,

I elicit[ed] qualities inherent in my being, [was] familiarised with my strengths and frailties, and the blurred borderlands of my limitations. As such, material interactions map[ped] my being in new ways (Jewell, 2015, p. 61).

Materials, surfaces and forms became a mirror of care for my body. I touched and was touched by the broken, cut, stitched, brittle, decaying, musty or frayed, in my own time, carefully. My brokenness, decay and brittleness were attended to outside of the direct focus on my body. I learnt how to be with distressed surfaces and forms supported by care. Attending to mending was worthy of my time and attention, as I saw forms become stronger.

I also came to know care as a working-value in ‘how’ I inquired. For my pained researcher body, a structure that provided a container for emerging material to move within was key to enacting this care. These structures included, embedding MIECAT’s set of procedures into my arts-making; descriptive note-taking; my journals and notebooks with select purposes; the postcard dialogue; rabbit’s body pattern; *The Shirt*; and my stitched panels, offered me clarity and a base to work upon and within. The structure became ‘a known’, which reduced the stress that being in unknown spaces can evoke. I value emergence however through this research, I have come to recognise that my learning space is enhanced when I included a known component. This became particularly important when working with complex material. Lessening stress is caring for my body. Stress causes tension in my muscles, which I know contributes to flare-ups of pain. In this way, care became an ethical contributor to my body in pain and accessible access to learning.

Witnessing care being taken with artistic forms was also a significant contributor to care as a working-value. In my hands, after carefully dabbing and tending to three dimensional artistic form's areas of pain, I found myself later able to touch the form of my altered arm, bumpy and filled with metal, unpleasant to touch, with small care-filled moments of attention. Through this care, I began to realise that easing pain was my responsibility and this brought hope for my relationship with my altered body. From my companion's hands, I saw the care they had taken. In their artistic offerings, I saw the action of care of materials and forms embedded in their artistic forms, which related to my pains. I felt positively touched from a distance, by another's care towards my body. I feel calm when I see that care has touched object surfaces. I experience distress when I see it is missing. My sensations are possibly exacerbated by having a central nervous system that amplifies sensory experiences. There is a cultural connection in considering my family background of caring for objects and a direct link to my experiences of breakage of bones in my body. When I see that an object has been the focus of careful attention, a positive sense of the person, tool or material that has touched it travels with it. An aura of care-filled attention travels outwards from the form to me. I become calm in their presence. In recollecting my companions' offerings, I recall other artists whose artistic forms have had carried the same 'carrying touch'. These include Eva Hesse's sculptural pieces, which seem to freeze actions of care in materials that hang, saturated in solidified substances; Andy Goldsworthy's forms unable to stay together without a careful placement of each natural object; and Cathy Wilkes's matter-scapes as a "care-full articulation materialised in the ways in which objects are assembled, [that] creates an intimate and vulnerable environment" (Sliwiska, 2019, p. 287).

Wilbarger and Cook (2011) identify that people living with on-going pain can experience hypersensitivities across multiple sensory modalities. When I consider arts-making these sensory modalities include smell, auditory and tactile sensation.

On reflection, I observe with interest how I enacted care differently, across time and through encounters of touch. Initially, when I began a new form, I would take great care in my construction and what I shared with others. I would find 'safe places' for inquiry items to live between engagements. I protected them from damage or loss whilst I sensed they were vulnerable. When I reached a sense of enoughness my actions of care were still present but I experienced an openness to calculated risks. The more sense I made of the work, pain and my body, the more comfortable and safe(r) I felt to share my pains with others. I took risks, knowing that I could work with potential damage. This research inquiry, supported by care, brought me close to seeing nature and the realisation that I am part of the world. By being in nature, I have come to see that my body is fragile and that naturally, it will decay, break, and be wounded. My body is in my hands to look after for my future. I now see care for the body that lives with ongoing pain, as sustainability for a body with on-going complexities and preservation of ability. Actions of care in this research have met my body from the different directions mentioned, contributing to a careful attention of closeness to my body. Prior to this research, this closeness was near impossible to reach due to the disgust and horror of an altered body. Care encouraged the noticing of beauty, evoked by attraction.



Absorption, textile working-value panel

Absorption as a working-value

My definition of absorption is about trusting that what matters will sink into the body, through cycles of inquiry. What matters sinks into arts-making materials. What matters appears in actions and forms. With each repetition, deconstruction or reconstruction, I saw the elements of inquiry that were important. This gentle yet active way of engaging, worked with attraction to bring pleasure and care for my body lessen stress on my pained body. Feelings of fatigue for people who live with/in on-going pain may be more 'the norm' than the exception (Boggero, 2017). I needed a slow-build.

The slowness required patience and perseverance, spending time within content, and returning more than once to re-view, re-touch and return to differently. Ultimately, I needed to trust the process and that absorption was happening through arts-making, reflection, reaching temporary approximations and considered reflexive reactions.

My reflexive reactions were informed by staying with content that was already present, before mindfully bringing in new material or content. When the timing felt right, guided by an embodied knowing or response, I would return into an inquiry and collect pieces together into groupings. In some instances this meant considering what I wanted to work with, what was interesting but placed to the side and what no longer served me (or the inquiry). This happened across days, months or even years, with gaps in engagements. When I took elements from one form to create a new form, such as in the making of later rabbits and the life of *The Shirt*, I came to know more about each part. After completing a reconstruction, a raw potency which was previously associated with the part, seemed to drop away. It was as if the edges of painful material softened into surfaces, mine and material, through handling, time and distance. With each re-cycling knowings become clearer into sense-making, with no rush to make sense. This was a relief, removing any temptation to 'fix pain'. By embedding what had come before, I was never short of material for an inquiry, and there was always a place to start. Repetition of a form or process, enabled momentum. I was never stuck. This research has been a slow mending.

Materials and artistic forms were significant contributors in absorbing painfilled content, which slowly contributed to sense-making. They stepped in for my body during arts-making, absorbing on my behalf. I watched as watery substances absorbed into skin-like surfaces, not mine, but like mine. Abstract bodily encounters mirrored tension, tears in skins. I observed. When there was a consonant resonance between surface and material, I experienced an affectionate connection. Pain-filled content was given space, spreading out, and seeming more incrementally acceptable. To encourage a pleasant relationship in the making, I used materials and tools that I was attracted to (rather than repelled), being natural fibres, light weight surfaces, fine quality materials and water-based pigments. I came to trust perceptive shifts in my body towards my body and pain evoking content, even if I had not nor could not place logical words to what was happening. I become comfortable in the space of playing. Neuroscientist David Eagleman (2020) speaks how the brain reorganises itself rapidly and dramatically when something unpredicted happens quickly, such as a traumatic accident. He

describes it as an upheaval in the body's design, our body's natural response, and whilst this form of reorganisation in the brain is swift, re-adjustment after such an upheaval is not. The brain needs to practice repeatedly with what it is working with, with action, "you need massive amounts of repetition to dig the subway maps of the brain" (p. 142). By returning numerous times into my experiences of pain, living with on-going pain and a body distorted by injury and surgery, my repetition of 'doing in arts-making', I suspect, created a positive change in my brain. Eagleman stresses that actions need to be linked to an internal incentive. The change he says is tied to anything relevant to your goals, "when a task is roughly aligned with our larger goals, our brain circuitry comes to reflect it" (p. 149). My goal was to reconnect to a whole body rather than live with a body in parts and I wanted to see how an arts-based inquiry might contribute to living with on-going pain. There were also small goals aligned with each making encounter to form a postcard, or a 3-D artistic form, or a panel.

Each arts-making encounter, was relevant to me, meeting small rewards and goals along the way. I was heartened and found hope by this final quote collection from David Eagleman (2020), when considering absorption.

What you spend your time on changes your brain. You've more than what you eat, you become the information you digest (p. 143)... Motor and somatosensory areas involved in navigating the body remain more plastic, because body plans change throughout a lifetime (p. 201)... Brains reflect not simply the outside world but more specifically your outside world (p. 142)... Your experiences with the world get under your skin (p. 219)

My relationship with my body did change, through action, over time, with practice and with relevance, slowly. The presence of pain within the body can remain a challenge, but to shift perception, influenced by positive external engagement, is an exciting and comforting ongoing prospect for me as a practitioner and as a body in continuous pain.

Closing words on pain and the value of attraction, care and absorption

The on-goingness of pain can create abnormality in the body's systems (K. Davis, personal communication, 10 September, 2020). This prolonged exposure to pain can change how the central nervous system processes pain, known as central sensitization (Sieberg, 2019). I believe this is important for a therapeutic arts practitioner to know, to inform practices, to lessen attributing to a feedback loop, which creates more pain and discomfort.

Sletten (Mayo Clinic, 2015) describes Central Sensitization Syndrome (CSS) as the escalation in the body's sensors. The signal sent to the brain becomes stronger, and the somatosensory cortex, where sensations are analysed, reacts and becomes sensitised. Sensations become more noticeable and uncomfortable. Pain, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, temperature, touch and smell can worsen over time, which leads to increased distress and difficulty. Sletten names this process as a sensory physical process, which through time and loops of feedback the body can work itself into higher and higher levels of distress.

Sletten defines four 'reactive and maintaining factors' that can 'feed-back in' making the problem worse (Mayo Clinic, 2015). Two of the factors, I see as relevant to therapeutic practice. These factors are behavioural and emotional. Behavioural can be described as the pain thoughts and comments that cause an unpleasant response and can worsen the situation. A behavioural pattern identified by participants Ruth and Anouk, and which I have known also, is pushing oneself when feeling 'OK' and then crashing with pain or exhaustion. Sletten states that this pattern stimulates more sensation and, therefore, more pain. The other factor, emotional, is connected to anxiety and stress. In this context, Sletten defines the brain as being under emotional distress, which increases sensory or physical distress. Physician Dr Marc Lourens (Madeleine Eames, 2023) explains that for a person with central sensitization, experiences that calm, soothe and reward the nervous system can 'tune down' the pain volume, improve function, and contribute to change. Central sensitization is also known as 'nociceptive pain'.

Through this research, I value creating inquiry spaces which: evokes positive emotions, including a visual attention on material that brings pleasure; actions that lessened distress by navigating away from fatigue; responding appropriately (for the body) to sensory unpleasantness; and changes of behaviours when actions led to physical pain. I want to support 'allostasis', 'the active process of maintaining homeostatic stability', rather than attributing further wear and tear on the body evoked by an allostatic load (Ahmad & Zakaria, 2015, p. 52). I believe that embedding the working-values into a therapeutic arts practice, when supporting a body living with/in pain to mend pains, will lessen contributing to more pain or damage for bodies with weaves that fray easily, like the beautiful damask cloth of rabbit Dis-ease. Please handle bodies that always know pain with care.