

Confirmative Praxis

Oliver Kirkham

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A Guide to Praxis

The report – included in this document – is not a report, but a outlines for a podcast with references and bibliography.

The writing style in places is informal, colloquial. This reflects the dissemination of my research as a podcast, available for anyone to listen to. Outlines are a functional document, intended to be prompts during the recording of podcasts. Therefore, only relevant information is detailed within the texts.

When listening to the podcast episodes do not expect linearity with the outlines, as by the very nature of a podcast with an informal tone, the conversations are tangential and rhizomatic; creating new meanings through the circling-back and combining of previous discussion.

All episodes of the podcast can be found on all major streaming platforms.

- [RSS](#)
- [Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Spotify](#)

A selection of images of works is included and should serve as documentation of a 'portfolio'. I define a portfolio to be like a snapshot of my practice at the time of the portfolio's creation, thus the work included is from many points in time within the period I've been working on this project.

Ep 1: Introduction with Oliver Kirkham

Intro: Welcome to Armchair Artist, a podcast about art, life and the in-between. My name is Oliver and I am here to outline what's going on in these first few episodes and perhaps the general lay of the land moving forward in this project

So let me set the scene. I've been tasked with writing a report as part of the Masters degree course I'm studying and as it's an interdisciplinary art course, we have the flexibility to submit creative approaches to the standard 5000 word essay.

I've wanted to do my own art-focused podcast for many years, and what better excuse to use this report as a test space for my concept. So the first handful of episodes will be about my artwork that I've made this year and art that has been featured in the end-of-year degree show. My struggles with suicide, and how my art practice has helped me to begin unpacking some of the events in my past has inspired this approach to my report and this podcast. I hope to inspire and to help others with similar experiences, contributing to the discourse on suicide and efforts to improve mainstream visibility.

In the UK, suicide is the biggest killer of people aged 35 and under (Papyrus, no date) and according to the Campaign Against Living Miserably, every year we lose 18 people to suicide (no date). This might not sound like a lot of people, but they are someones mother, brother, teacher, lover - people who have great influence on our wellbeing and sense of Self.

It is clear that more must be done to create a social context where everyone can feel able to talk about the subject of suicide.

So as this podcast mini-series is my university report, I will be covering specifics about the final exhibition, research themes and the odd bit of theoretical jargon that listeners outside of the university might not understand. Please stick with me as I hope to explain and extract the points of interest and make them make sense! And if you have any questions then you can always email in at armchairartistpod@gmail.com - links in the description.

I'm now going to talk about the main inspiration behind the work and the podcast, namely my latest suicide attempt that profoundly altered the course of my life. Please pause and skip ahead if you're sensitive to hearing specifics about suicide.

In December 2023, I made a serious attempt on my life. I jumped from the top of a multi-storey carpark, breaking bones in my spine, feet and pelvis. I also sustained severe nerve compression - all of these injuries resulting in long term changes to my health. I spent several months in hospitals and began thinking about where to take my art practice during a ceramics workshop at a spinal rehab ward. It was clear to me I had to use this experience to make artwork, and I became inspired by the x-ray and CT scans of my body, that I was able to attain from hospital. So my current work is heavily inspired by the idea of what a body means after traumatic injury and expanded definitions of bodies that encompass ourselves, our sense of Self, and the world around us working as one. There's also the mental health side to this podcast mini-series. I was deeply depressed when I made this attempt on my life. Unable to reach out and talk to others about how I was feeling. So in some of these episodes, there will be discussion about the wider discourse on mental health and suicide, and questions about how we can keep those at risk safe from death by suicide.

I'll be using terms to discuss suicide that some people who have some experiences with this might not agree with, and that's very understandable. While language is highly important to the discourse around mental health and suicide, each and every person will have their own preferences that reflect their real-life

experience. My intention is never to deny this experience or invalidate anyone's feelings in choosing language that I myself feel comfortable using.

According to a statistic published in 2018, 135 people will know someone who dies by suicide (O'Connor, 2021, pp. 15). There are fantastic resources available to support those bereaved or affected by this, and yet stigma around suicide continues to stifle conversations around a pervasive global issue that affects more than the immediate family.

It's my sincere hope that people will share this podcast with others, advocating for a change in the way in which suicide is portrayed and perceived by society. And that anyone struggling with suicidal thoughts, or how to help someone going through this, to access the support they need through signposting, shared experiences and art's ability to help and reflect

EP 2: Jumper Fossil with Lewis

Opening

Intro: Welcome, to the Armchair Artist, I'm Oliver Kirkham. Today I'm joined by a very special person; someone very close to my heart and whose opinion I value very much. My bestest ever friend and companion, Lewis.

Main Part

[Oli] Set the scene: talk about Lewis and Oli's relationship/friendship - how long we've known each other etc. You know me really well, which I think makes you well placed to talk with me about my suicide attempt and how things played out thereafter.

[Oli] To Lewis: what do you think of the show? Does the work connect to people

Discuss how your art can connect to people who have been indirectly affected by suicide, for example, a friend, a parent, a school, a workplace...

[Lewis and Oli] Discuss the importance of a support network (family, friends, colleagues, orgs et al.) is to keeping vulnerable people safe.

'So although our lives may well be our own, they are deeply interwoven with others, which might make us wonder whether those people, too, have a stake in us continuing to live' (Martin, 2023, pp. 143-144). So our lives may not be the only thing we have total control over...

Plugs: Papyrus UK, Samaritans, Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), Suicide Prevention UK
What can people do to keep loved ones safe or themselves safe? Ref when it is darkest book

Wrap Up

Thank you to you, the listener, for doing just that. You can find me on social media, @olikirkham, where I post about my art practice and such as. I will eventually set up an insta for the pod, when I have the time. - And you can email me at armchairartistpod@gmail.com, thats armchair artist p-o-d@gmail.com. See description for links and contact infos

I need to think of a catch phrase or ear worm or something.

BYE

EP 4: Potentials for Change and the Temporal Non-Place with Susan Matthews

Opening

[Oli] Intro: Welcome and to the Armchair Artist, my name is Oliver.

[Oli] INTRO SUSAN: This episode's guest is a sound artist with a breadth of experience in musical composition. She's a current PhD candidate, operates a successful independent record label and is nurturing her art practice through constant collaborations with peers and organisations. (Talk briefly about first meeting Susan) ...Welcome!

Main part

What is Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs (BwO)?

The BwO is (also) about reconfiguration, about a dismantling. To empty the body of organs of preconceived, even idealised function; to analyse from an objective point of view the real, factual meanings of these parts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 151), in order to rebuild a whole or an assemblage of parts that work to produce affect greater than before.

Deleuze and Guattari use a great analogy to describe this: 'Is it really so sad and dangerous to be fed up with seeing with your eyes, breathing with your lungs, swallowing with your mouth [...] Why not walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin,...'. I think a question the BwO asks is how do you build a new kind of knowledge system, that gives a unique perspective?

Relational Ontologies and the BwO

Temporal non-place of waiting (i.e. for test results) - non place within the body and a temporal non place, a position of non-knowing...

Start with explaining the Marc Augé's non-place. How that marries with personal experience to become non-place of the body.

Optional: hauntology parallels?

Proposition: extending the notion of the non-place of the body, to one that is not only physical but mental, as relating to the breaking from the self and reality that happens within the depths of a depressive episode or times of intense psychological distress. If a place is defined by the confluence of interpersonal relationship occurring within a given period in time, the non-place of the mind exists only within the individual and within the smooth Deleuzian space of infinite time (in relation to the body).

Sound and sound therapies as tools for mental recovery

Art experiences are salient (how important something is in the context of NeuroArts) experiences that measurably rewire the brain. They're also special because they're physiological as well as neurobiological, causing the release of neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine. Somatic therapists use tools like tuning forks to stimulate the vagus nerve to help treat things like anxiety (cite, Your Brain On Art).

Wrap Up

Thank you to you the listener. You can find me on social media, @olikirkham, where I post about my art practice. You can email me at armchairartistpod@gmail.com, that's armchair artist p-o-d@gmail.com. See description for links and contact infos.

[Oli] Susan, where can the good people find you? (Website? Instagram)

BYE

EP 3: At First, Gradually, and then Suddenly with Rob Jones

Opening

[Oli] Intro: Welcome to the Armchair Artist, my name is Oliver, join me as I kick off my slippers and recline into a casual conversation with esteemed friends and guests, as we chat about art, life and the in-between.

[Oli] introduce Rob: This episode's guest is a prolific academic within the University of Wales Trinity Saint Davids, where he is an MA pathway leader for Moving Image, and a senior film and TV and contextual practices lecturer. He has a plethora of academic interests, not to mention those within his formal training in mathematics, music and photography. Please give a warm welcome through your phone screens, to the most well-read man in the room, Robert Jones.

Main Part

[Rob and Oli] Discussion about Rob post his intro, getting comfortable in the podcast setting etc

[Oli] Series being about suicide; this podcast is about art - so I want to talk about art and recovery in suicide; (my) a body of work that examines what it means to have an embodied art practice through the personal experience of a suicide attempt. How the collapse theory is working to illustrate this; what it is etc

[Rob and Oli] Discussion about Collapse theory, its feasibility, its potentialities

Physicist John Archibald Wheeler, who coined the term 'black hole', also coined the more colloquial term 'wormhole' to describe the Einstein-Rosen bridge. Wheeler proved that Einstein and Rosen's bridges would be highly unstable, vanishing moments after forming (Enander, 2025, pp. 292-3.) Which given the mental landscape which inspired my Collapse theory, this makes its geometric analogy pretty fitting. There's a kind of irony there too.

[Oli] A key part of the collapse is that the entire multiplicity (after Deleuze and Guattari) falls beyond this metaphorical event horizon. In other words, the various dimensions that make up the multiplicity - from concepts, ideas to physical materials and works of art - are all able to be pulled into the collapse. So this makes the collapse both a theory (in that a 'damage' to ideas produces novel improvements of itself) and a method (it literally means that the materiality of artworks in their current states are broken to be rebuilt after the storm) - and this is a concurrent process because it's embodied.

As Deleuze and Guattari talk about in *A Thousand Plateaus*, multiplicities are defined by the parts that connect to form it, which they call 'dimensions'. It's important to collapse theory because by removing or adding a dimension, the nature of the multiplicity changes, thus the multiplicity is inherently a form of conceptual collapse as a heterogeneous chain of ever-shifting parts (1987, pp. 249).

Collapse is about an 'anxiety of objects' - when they collapse, they enter a state of the unknown? What pulls us into the centre of the black hole of collapse? Is this Humanities instinct to self-destruct, the death drive and annihilation. Cells themselves are programmed to die, revealing something potentially fundamental about humanities' predisposition for collapse. This process is called Apoptosis (Alberts B, Johnson A, Lewis J, et al., 2001)

Optional: Relational ontologies and collapse; Thoughts etc? ontologies: the study of how things exist in the world, relational: the relationships between these things, including people and artwork. And it's that part specifically which make this term applicable when I talk about this work I'm making about suicide, because I believe that art-objects/artwork can directly affect our perception of the world. As Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross have said, art measurably rewires neural pathways (2023, pp. 32) - art objects are in some ways active participants - as argued by Graham Harman in his 1999 essay *Towards Speculative Realism*. All things are considered agentive 'objects', able to position their existence in the world with their own inherent phenomenology (Jackson, 2020, pp.). So Object Orientated Ontology and Speculative Realism are types of relational ontologies as they describe the conditions of existence for objects and people. Another type of relational ontology could be

Optional [2]: Entropy and negentropy; cycles of order and chaos and its parallels to collapse theory; if we are, as collections of quantum particles, subject to the same entropy and negentropy as these building blocks of matter, is there an in-built predisposition to destroy ourselves (like Freud's death drive) - but also to rebuild or make newer and better?

Wrap Up

Thank you, Rob, for joining me. You can find me on social media, @olikirkham, where I post about my art practice and such as. And you can email me at armchairartistpod@gmail.com, thats armchair artist p-o-d@gmail.com. See description for links and contact infos.

Rob do you have any contact info etc, plugs for upcoming projects?

BYE

Epilogue: Thoughts on a Suicide

It's been an intense time working on this project, having only four months or so to work on this turning point within my practice. If one were to compare my previous body of work to what's presented here, I'd hope you'd see a great improvement in confidence and outcome.

To abandon the written format of the report component of the brief is a novel approach, and a significant risk in terms of communicating effectively, the research and reasoning behind my display in ADNABOD last year. I've wanted to create a podcast for many years, and in the vein of deterritorialising, of pushing the way I do things to make more directly impactful work, it felt right to use the podcast format to disseminate my current thinking. Podcasts can be casual, yet informative; approachable yet intense. An appropriate vehicle to broadcast a personal story about trauma, recovery and art (and art philosophy) beyond the confines of academia. Logistical issues have stymied efforts to produce podcast episodes, and editing recordings has been a sharp learning curve, though I feel what I've produced is of a quality that can be enjoyed (or endured) by many.

One of the aims of this project is that it exists beyond me as the artist and helps others reflect on their own mental health experiences. Whether they have attempted suicide themselves, or know somebody who has done so, listening to another point of view can show them that they are not alone in their struggle. As captured in the episodes with Lewis Ward and Susan Matthews, being a part of a community - a group of friends, a sports club, a regular at a busy pub - anything that can give someone a sense of connection to something greater than themselves, is vital for survival against suicidal ideation and poor mental health.

Bodies is a continuous theme in my work and featured in conversations with all of the guests of the podcast. To work as an artist is to live through your work, and this was proved in my conversation with Susan Matthews, whose auto ethnographic works map her experience with bodily trauma in physical and mental spaces. Viewer of our artworks travel through us - they embody our bodies as they experience the phenomenological affects of the artworks.

The symbiosis between our practices is also evident in the comparison of Susan's theories of Non-places within time and the body, and in my looped projection of my CT and MRI imagery in December's showcase. The Bone LUT filter that coloured the looped film in vibrant hues showed the bones themselves as absences of colour. Present in the body but permanently changed, these images exist in a limbo state documenting the past within the present; eternally looped, never aging. Like the singularity of a black hole, as discussed in my episode with Rob Jones, these black bones are infinitely part of my future. In art and in life.

The podcast episode with Rob Jones left me with many questions about the philosophy of my practice. To work using my Collapse methodology see means my practice in all its material and immaterial forms are subject to a deconstructive process that unpicks current configurations, in order to visualise and produce novel iterations of art objects and ideas. Rob and I explored Collapse's relationship with astrophysics and the internal cosmos of the mind: the conditions of being human within the world. The subject of entropy and the desire for self-destruction make for interesting retorts to Collapse as an agentive productive force - an avenue of research I shall pursue moving forward with this body of work.

This podcast is like collapse. Iterative, ongoing and somewhere between theory and practice. I aim to continue investigating the confluence of art and mental health, using this as research to inform new outcomes within my art practice. I feel profoundly lucky to be alive; to have had the chance to return and finish this chapter of my life, and to begin writing the next.

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