



Situating an Art Intervention with People Living with Dementia in a public space

Lilli Mittner

Postdoctoral researcher, Member of Artful Dementia Research Lab, Centre for Women's and Gender Research, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

lilli.mittner@uit.no

Rikke Gürgens Gjørø

Professor in Applied Theatre, Member of Artful Dementia Research Lab, Leader of Arctic Center for Welfare- and Disability Research, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Scope

Based on experiences with three situated art interventions within residential care homes in Norway, Artful Dementia Research Lab (ADLab) searched for an opportunity to situate dementia research beyond a healthcare setting and within a public artistic space. In spring 2020 the organisers of the Trondenesdagene art festival invited ADLab to co-create a multi-sensory art session together with people living with dementia and their companions, as part of the general art festival program. The overall research questions we addressed were:

1. How to understand dementia beyond human individual loss?
2. How to relate to each other through the arts?
3. How to co-create art and knowledge based on a multisensorial art session?

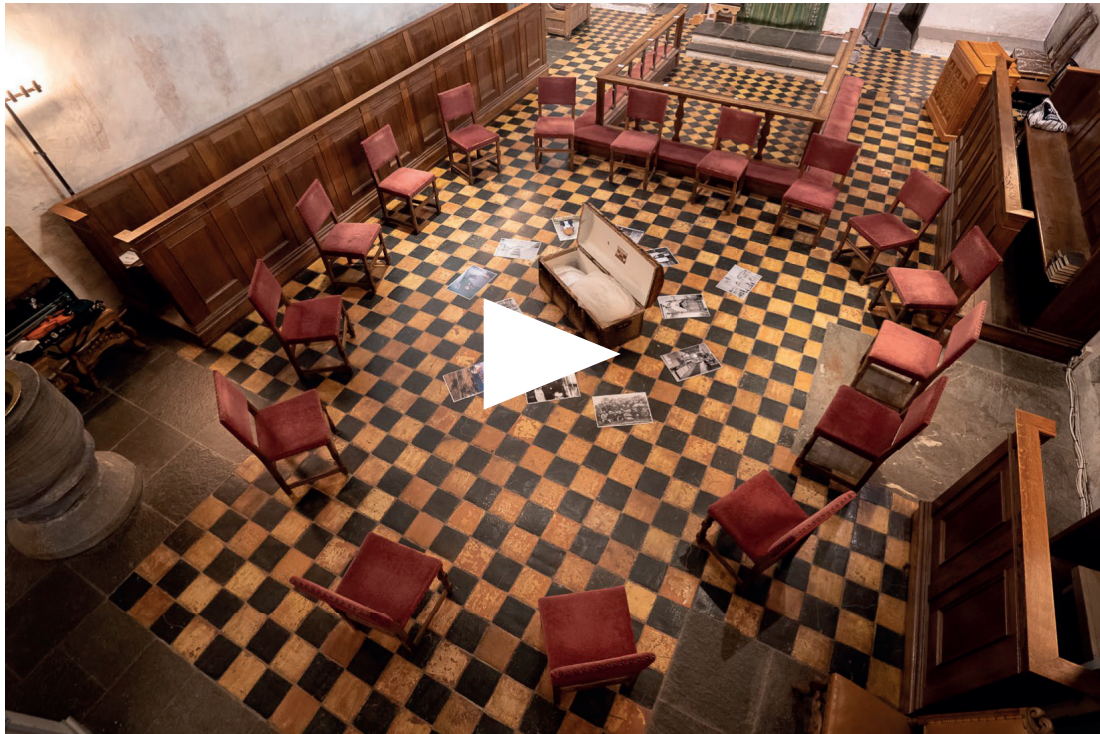
Research design

Preparation for the session included four meetings with artists-cum-researchers,¹ co-researchers and co-creators. Together we agreed on the elements that each of us would bring to the session and that the session should last for about 60 minutes. The group members engaged to varying degrees in preparing the intervention, creating data, processing data, and disseminating the results.

Group: The group was composed by the following overlapping categories: four researchers-cum-artists (2 performers and 2 musicians), six co-researchers (the local dementia coordinator, the cantor, the deacon, a museum pedagogue, a photographer, and a professional musician), and eight co-creators of art and knowledge (4 people living with dementia accompanied by a family member or a volunteer who were all members of a tour group that meet regularly at the church). The roles were changing depending on the level of engagement (Artful Dementia Research Lab, 2021a).

1. We use the term 'artists-cum-researchers' (cum = latin 'with') to describe practices in which artists and researchers collectively break with subject-object positions and other dichotomies related to art and research.

Place: The artists-cum-researchers and co-researchers arranged a circle of sixteen red velour chairs in the choir of the Trondenes Church. The chairs were kept at least one metre apart due to COVID-19 restrictions. The baptismal font, the medieval floor, the altar, the organ, the pulpit, the walls made of stone, and general surroundings all became part of the aesthetic experiences.



Film 1.

Research film as means of open arts-based and qualitative data archiving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCNM8lkqtsw>

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Materials: A sealskin box containing props such as a veil, a christening robe and small, coloured, paper flowers with verses from the Bible made up the centre of the circle. Laminated A3 reproductions of photographs from the museum's collection surrounded the box. Various rhythmic instruments (triangle, guiro, pentatonic xylophone) were sent around the circle.

Soundscape: The soundscape was composed by gentle and soft-spoken words, moving chairs and bodies. We heard instruments such as organ, piano, buckhorn, violin and singing voices. The walls and the interior of the medieval church diffracted all sounds.



Picture 1.

Laminated photos from the collection of Trondenes Museum initiated conversations about collective experiences people have had in the past at the church, such as concerts, marriage, or other public ceremonies.

Photo: ©ADLab/UiT CC BY 4.0



Picture 2.

The veil invites people to touch and dance and triggers conversations about getting married at Trondenes Church.

Photo: ©ADLab/UiT CC BY 4.0

Ethics & consent

Co-researchers and co-creators were recruited via self-selecting processes by either organising or participating in the festival program. During the intervention an increasingly mutual understanding emerged that we were all equality important for what was created during the session. The artists-cum-researchers provided verbal and written information about the project at four points in time: (1) one week before the festival during a regular gathering of the tour group (2) when the co-creators were entering Trondenes Church (3) during the session and (4) after the session by means of conversations, which was important because it opened for withdrawal from the project. Next of kin gave legal consent for those who were not able to do so on their own behalf. The artists-cum-researchers and co-researchers collected further consent by editing (Capstick, 2021) and relational consent for the broad outline of the research project in the sense of mutual agreement during the aesthetic encounters. This was crucial for the possibility to use photo and video recordings from the sessions for research communication, dissemination and exploitation of art and knowledge created collectively during the session.



Picture 3.

A laminated photo collage enabled consent by editing after the co-creative session.

Photo: ©ADLab/UiT CC BY 4.0

Arts-based datasets

The data sets that derived from this research design was compiled by a variety of different embodied, materialised, and digitalised data such as artistic experiences, logbook writings, fieldnotes, café dialogue notes, video recordings, photographs, artworks (radio theatre), recorded group discussions and journalistic pieces. The digital data was handled with regard to the practices developed within ADLab (Artful Dementia Research Lab, 2021b).

A micro moment is a specific situation in which socio-materiality leads to a mutual experience. Those who took part in the aesthetic analysis dive into small micro moments instead of observing or analysing a whole situation. Those micro moments emerge from the materials by means of

- bodily experiences of all group members
- collective analytical processes (reviewing and talking about the arts-based dataset)
- and creative writing processes.

Major findings

After a storytelling warm-up session, initiated by the photos from the museum archive, the group co-created a short piece of radio theatre about love and kinship. People living with and without dementia engaged equally in art-viewing and art-making. Initial roles and subject positions increasingly dissolved as the session proceeded. During co-creative processes it was neither obvious nor significant who was acting as researcher, as artist, as living with or living without dementia. We further learned from the session that the place contributed significantly to the relations that emerged during the co-creative session. Being invited into a place, people living with dementia, who rarely have a voice in public, were heard and seen and could contribute, participate in, and enjoy the improvisatory auditory artwork that the group created. None of the co-researchers and co-creators used the possibility to withdraw. All group members reported after the session that they became more confident and trusted in the space of possibilities created by the co-creative group as the aesthetic activities evolved.



Picture 4.

Storytelling became one major element during the co-creative session at Trondenes.

Photo: ©ADLab/UiT CC BY 4.0

Implication for future research

On the basis of our experiences with the co-creative sessions we see the need to develop situated art interventions together with people living with dementia and their companions in public spaces, such as festivals, museums, or libraries. Situating art interventions within the community creates better understandings of what it means to live with dementia in an everyday context and how to connect aesthetically with people, materials, and places. Further questions that need to be discussed are:

- How to build a common understanding of what we are becoming part of through the arts?
- How do public spaces impact development of trust and confidence?
- Where do initiatives for co-creation derive from?
- Who is responsible for what happens during the session?
- How do roles emerge and transform?
- How to handle disruption and discomfort and use them as input to the research and artistic process?

References and further reading

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