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Ceramic pebbles as sensory tools: exploring the quality of muteness in tactile experience

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Biography

Artist-researcher **Priska Falin** is currently working as a doctoral candidate at Aalto University. Her interest is the aesthetic nature of material experiences in ceramic practice. In her artistic research, she focuses on different processes and techniques from traditional hand-making to contemporary processes such as clay 3D printing from the perspective of the practitioner's experiences.

Pia Oksanen works as a private psychotherapist at Helsinki area. Her psychotherapeutic way of working is integrative, as she has studied both solution focused and cognitive approach, and her own long psychotherapy was a mix of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy. She graduated from Helsinki University in 2009, where she studied social psychology and cognitive science. In addition to her work as a therapist Oksanen is working for Amnesty International Finnish section as an advisor on gender and sexuality-based discrimination.

Abstract

In this paper, we examine the tactile experience from two different perspectives: through ceramic practice and as ceramic sensory tools in the context of psychotherapy. In order to gain insights into the tactile experiences, we use subjective experience of making and the professional experience of using the ceramic objects to frame the experiences. We focus on the shared qualities of tactile experiences within these approaches and propose the idea of muteness as a lens to view pre-verbal or non-verbal embodied dimensions within the context of our practices. The dialogue in this paper is between two different practitioners: an artist-researcher and a psychotherapist. We discuss the possibilities of a mute process in ceramic practice for embodied awareness and the use of this particular quality for engaging bodily in self-reflection within psychotherapy. The psychotherapeutic frameworks in this discussion are limited to cognitive behavioural psychotherapy, particularly schema therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), solution focused therapy and narrative therapy. Our findings suggest that the perceived muteness of the sensory tools enables discussion and explorative dialogue concerning the embodied dimension in tactile experiences providing access to a place of pre-verbal being and knowing.

Keywords

Tactile experience, Embodied awareness, Ceramic practice, Psychotherapy, Muteness

Introduction

In artistic and design research it is common for practitioners to draw from their own experiences, that is, from their personal knowledge, using their practice as a platform for knowledge production (Mäkelä, 2003, 2007, 2016; Nimkulrat, 2007; Groth, 2017; Valle-Noronha, 2019), although in these examples the research is often not understood as research on experiences as such (Tuovinen and Mäkikoskela, 2020). In artistic research, the experientiality of the creative practice is very much part of the research process through which the practitioner uses her embodied skills to understand the sensuous actions, goals, suggestions and openings that are part of the practice (Tuovinen and Mäkikoskela, 2018).

In this paper, we approach experiences from two different perspectives: firstly from the subjective point of view in which the researcher is conducting her own practice in ceramics and drawing on her personal knowledge, and secondly from the professional experience of a psychotherapist, where she reflects upon the therapy processes in which she has used ceramic pebbles within her practice. In the context of psychotherapy, the ceramic pebbles are used in different ways depending on the needs and goals of the psychotherapy for each individual patient.

For examining tactile experiences in a theoretical frame, we situate them within the discussions of aesthetic experiences. Tactile experiences can be part of having an aesthetic experience if "the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 36). However, we are not defining the tactile experiences in this paper as aesthetic experiences per se. Instead, we understand that the tactile experiences have an aesthetic quality in the process of touching. The aesthetics is connected to the sensorial perception. As philosopher Arnold Berleant states: "it [aesthetics] serves as a key to unlock a distinctive and important domain of experience" (Berleant, 2010, p. 4). Aesthetics offers a basis for understanding the experiential conditions in our lives and a setting for valuing it (Berleant, 2010). Touching, as examined in this paper,

can be understood as an example of an aesthetic process that expands the understanding of the experience in making (Falin and Falin, 2014). In art practices, the making often includes material processes that hold an aesthetic quality in them. These experiences become part of the professional knowledge of the maker, but they can also offer aesthetic processes that can be appreciated by a perceiver other than the maker herself. An example of that is Falin's discussion on the video (Falin and Falin, 2014). For the purpose of this paper, the process of touching has been discussed as part of the tactile experience that is aesthetic in nature.

In addition to positioning itself in artistic research where the focus is on experiences, this paper also engages in a philosophical discussion within our practices that questions the primacy of vision (Pallasmaa, 2005) and language. In our Western culture, intellectuality is often tightly attached to these two aspects, subjecting the sensorial knowing body in our knowledge production.

The discussion in this paper examines the particular quality in the experiences related to ceramic pebbles that is shared from the two perspectives. By naming the mutually recognised experience 'muteness', we were able to discuss the similar notions in the context of two different processes and examine the quality of tactile experience on a deeper level. Furthermore, what the dialogue around muteness offers is the verbal examination of the embodied self and how being aware of our embodied mind can be of use in different contexts. However, as philosopher Mark Johnson reminds us: "We think that if we have succeeded in abstracting a form—conceptualizing some aspect of our experience—then we have captured the full meaning" (Johnson, 2007, p. 80). The purpose of discussing and using the idea of mute or muteness in this paper is to explore the embodied dimension in tactile experiences in greater depth, with muteness as a lens into bodily experiences.

In this research, we ask: How does the idea of muteness help to explore tactile experiences? To answer this question, we reflect on muteness mostly as a quality of tactile experience, but

also metaphorically and as an attribute of the sensory tool. The aim is not to define or fix our thinking on any single aspect of an experience but to reflect a non-verbal dimension in embodied experience. The circular nature of our discussion supports a wider understanding where the non-verbal forms an elemental part.

The use of muteness in this paper can be also considered as a metaphor for engaging the imagination in tactile experiences. From the metaphorical approach, there is a connection to therapist and educator Knut Omholt's writings in his paper Tying Knots: Creating Metaphors for Interpersonal Relationships (Omholt, 2019). Omholt explores knot-making for creating a metaphoric language to help understand engagement in relationships. He describes the explorative work of making knots as a source domain—the sensorimotor domain, transferring to subjective experience—the target domain. With this, he refers to Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) writings on conceptual metaphors that "are mappings across conceptual domains that structure our reasoning, our experience, and our everyday language" (p. 47).

With this cross-domain mapping over knot-making to enable understanding engagement in relationships, we can also understand muteness as a metaphor for the non-verbal dimension in tactile experience. In exploring the word 'mute' or 'muteness', it can be seen as our bodies' understanding of not being able to speak—having no mechanism for forming speech. This automatically shifts the focus onto our other capabilities; thus, the sensorial world is heightened and more valued. As Lakoff and Johnson write: "Metaphor allows conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains to be used for domains of subjective experience" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, p. 45). The mental conception for muteness that is very much based in sensorimotor domains is used in this paper to open the tactile experiences specific to ceramic pebbles.

Tactile sensations

Of all our senses, touching is the first sense that develops when we are born. Through the tactile sense, we start to build connections with the world we live in. Architect and philosopher Juhani Pallasmaa underlines the primacy of the tactile sense (Pallasmaa, 2005). He states, "All the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense; the senses are specializations of skin tissue, and all sensory experiences are modes of touching and thus related to tactility" (p. 10). Touching connects all other senses. In this view, the tactile experience becomes an organism-like event in our bodies allowing us to develop and dwell in the sensual.

In this paper, we concentrate on the tactile experience of clay and ceramics instead of the malleable medium that the clay material offers. The tactile experience opens up a more specific and novel way of looking into the use of clay in the context of therapy. Clay has been a familiar material in the use of art therapy and psychotherapy (Sholt and Gavron, 2006). In art therapy, where the actions and the materials are used in a way that aims to represent the inner, spiritual world, clay has been found to hold distinctive sensual qualities as Sholt and Gavron state: "Clay-work involves an intense and powerful tactile experience of touching and haptic involvement" (p. 67). The same foundation of touching with hands has been discussed by Elbrecht and Antcliff:

> Common to most modalities in the art therapies is the engagement of hands in creative expression. Art therapists encourage and support clients to experiment with and experience the paints, the pastels, the colour, the plasticine, the clay, the movement and the sensate qualities held within the materials and the experience. This forms the ways of knowing through which the unknown can become known, the unspeakable shared, and life experiences storied. (Elbrecht and Antcliff, 2014, p. 19)

In his doctoral research, ceramic artist and academic Arild Berg (2014) discusses how nurses in mental health care were part of the ideation of the ceramic art production in their collaborative project. The same is discussed in Berg and Sirowy-Estkowska (2012). During the project, Berg produced a bigger stone-like porcelain object for the mental health-care ward. The porcelain piece had a visual and tactile seam in the middle of it (Berg, 2014). The nurses assumed that a tactile line enabled "the patients to connect their thoughts to a border, to a break in a structure" (Berg and Sirowy-Estkowska, 2012, p. 8). It was thought to be useful to have the possibility to make a break in patients' thinking and to make contact with patients with depression, isolation or paranoia . In this case, the tactile line was clearly intended for touching, or rather feeling the line, and not as much as a visual element in the object.

It was premised that feeling the line or border would cause a reaction in the patient's thinking process. Yet in their research, there is no indication of whether the tactile line functioned in the way they imagined. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the nurses immediately assumed that the border in the material form would similarly function as a mental border. This corresponds to embodied cognition theory, in which metaphors are discussed as an example of how embodied knowledge is reflected in our language and in our lives (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; Johnson, 2007). Recently the Embodied Cognition theory has been put into practice through the research of haptic experiences in the context of consumer research (Ackerman, Nocera and Bargh, 2010). Utilizing different examples, this research shows how material qualities, mainly through touching, influence our thinking even if the haptic experience and the 'target' of the thinking are in no way connected. One example showed how sitting on a hard or soft chair influenced actions that the research participants were asked to do:

> Thus, hardness produces perceptions of strictness, rigidity, and stability, reducing change from one's initial decisions, even when the touch experience is passive in nature. These findings highlight the metaphorical specificity of haptic priming ef-

> fects: Instead of changing the overall valence of evaluations, hard objects made others seem both more negative (strict and rigid) and more positive (stable), with corresponding effects on decision-making. (Ackerman, Nocera and Bargh, 2010, p. 1714)

Ackerman et al. "propose that experiences with specific object-related tactile qualities elicit a "haptic mindset", such that touching objects triggers the application of associated concepts (and only associated concepts, not more general feelings or unrelated preferences), even to unrelated people and situations" (Ackerman, Nocera and Bargh, 2010, p. 1713). They ask "Why might our sense of touch direct our impressions about untouched or even untouchable things?" and refer to the idea that "sensorimotor experiences in early life form a scaffold for the development of conceptual knowledge" (Ackerman, Nocera and Bargh, 2010, p. 1713). A similar idea is present in Williams et al. (2009).

Artist-researcher Kirsi Heimonen writes about the experience of silence in somatic practice (Heimonen, 2020). Heimonen circles around the notion of silence as a felt experience, recognizing that it may never be thoroughly understood through written text. However, she states that "writing is a method of inquiry, in which attuning to the spatiality of corporeality happens through language" (p. 57). This is recognized in this paper, as we approach parts of the experience that may never be fully opened up via verbal reflection. These kinds of experiences are personal and fully understood within our bodies. Nevertheless, the dialogue that has been the material for this paper has been a means for sharing and deepening our understanding of how non-verbal embodied experiences can be of value in different practices.

Exploring the mute practice in ceramics

Ceramic pebbles are made through rotating a piece of clay between two palms. It can be said that the method of making in this case is touching or feeling the clay (Figure 2). The tactility of

Figure 1. Ceramic pebble made by rotating / feeling the clay in the hands. Photo: Priska Falin, 2018.

the clay comes through in the motion of rolling the clay continuously in the hands. Repetition in the making process becomes a gradual transformation process of shifting the focus between the clay in the hands and the embodied experience. The rhythm of the making is connected to the softness and smoothness of the clay. There are very subtle nuances in information in the tactile response of how the clay reacts to the rolling and being in contact with the skin. The material's drying process begins in the hands and it informs the nature and the quality of that clay: whether the clay is smooth or coarse, for example. The process does not require vision, as the amount of clay is so small that it fits perfectly inside the palms.

When stopping to look at the result inside the palms, it is a process of discovery: the tactile 'image' of the pebble is often different to what is seen when observing it. Camilla Groth has pursued this kind of 'seeing' without her eyesight in the context of her doctoral research (Groth et al., 2014). Groth also experienced this "gap" of feeling the clay form in her hands compared to seeing it while throwing blindfolded on a potter's wheel (p. 6). Although 'tactile seeing' is a very interesting way of heightening the sensory experience, it can be also critiqued for imposing visual concepts over tactile experience.

While we are focused on material processes and the processes of making from the aesthetic perspective, neither the result nor the form that the material ultimately takes are decisive. The making is not directed by seeking to shape the material into a particular form or outcome. The making does not seek for an expression, it becomes mute in nature. In the mute process, the making is about embodied awareness and familiarizing oneself with the material in the hands. The mute process turns the focus towards the tactile sense and builds awareness of the embodied dimension. In this process, experiencing muteness can create a body-mind space that enables a new understanding, where one is bodily (body) aware and focusing (mind) on the embodied connectedness during making.

The process that has produced the ceramic pebbles has influenced the size, form and surfaces, and the pebbles are formed within the hands, holding and touching-feeling. In mute practice, the stones remain open and active. The muteness or the formlessness provides space for adapting the stones to different narratives other than the form itself. The process of making ceramic pebbles is a part of ceramic practice in which the overall process of making is time consuming and proceeds through different phases of making, drying and firing. The slow drying of clay, carrying a lot of distinctness that is elemental to ceramics, provides a transformation for the process. After the mute process of feeling the clay, the process can take different paths dur-

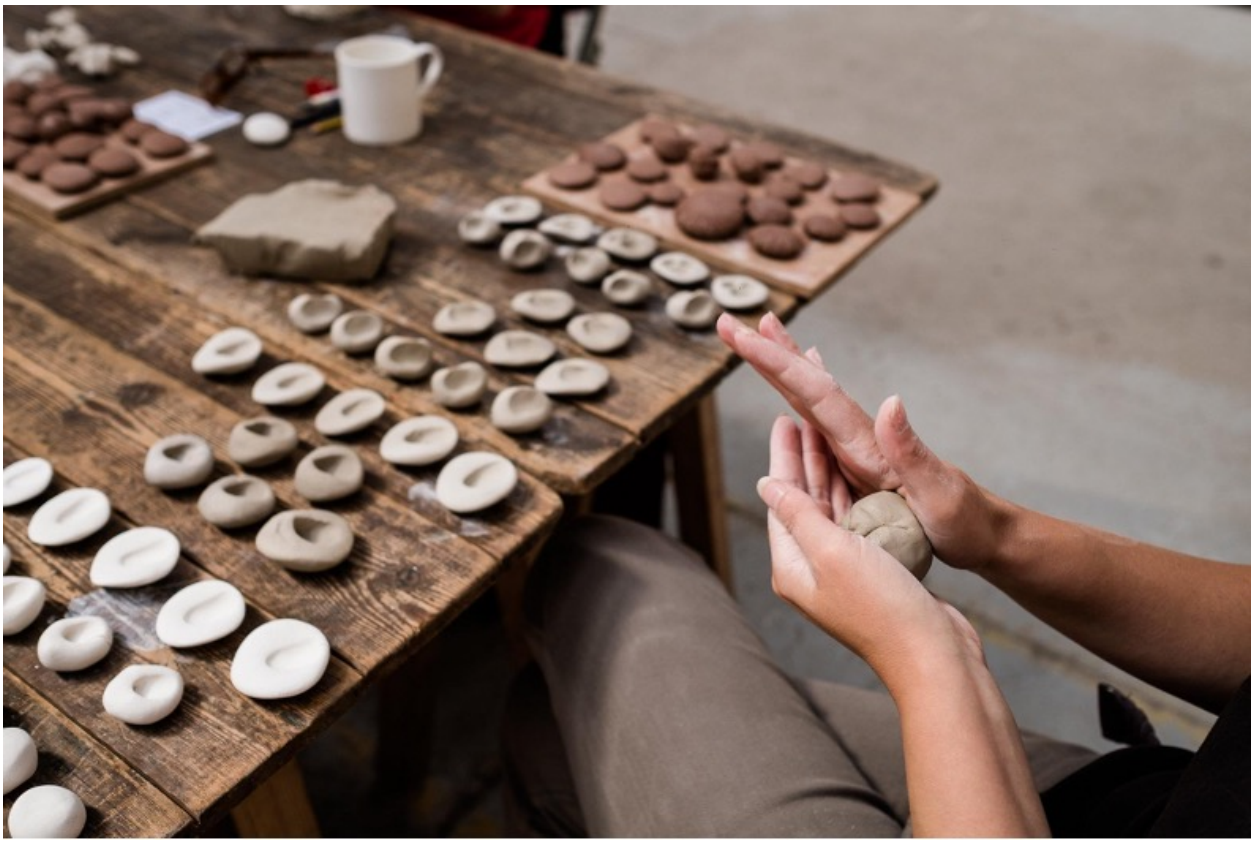

Figure 2. Rolling of the clay between the palms. The maker has left her mark in the pebble after rolling it by pressing her finger into the clay. Image: Jenny Harper for BCB/Embodied Clay workshop 2018.

ing the drying, firing and finishing of the stones. Towards the end, a more expressive character in making can take a hold in the overall process.

From the maker's point of view, muteness also entails a void in authorship. The maker's relationship with the object might carry feelings of caring and affection but far less feelings of ownership or claims of authorship. The stronger feeling of belonging is in the felt experiences that are connected to the processes of making, and the objects become reminders of those tactile and embodied experiences rather than the pursued end results that engender feelings of authorship over them.

Figure 3. Fired and unfired ceramic pebbles. Photo: Priska Falin, 2020.

It is only after the mute process, when the maker continues to care for the pebble's drying process and to finish it for firing, that further attachment evolves. She can polish the surface, carve different features on the clay surface or, for example, use glazes on the pebbles. She can decide whether to biscuit fire or high fire or to leave the pebbles unfired. These decisions carry authorship as traces of the maker (Figure 2 and 3).

It is easy to make a connection between stones and these small, round ceramic objects (Figure 3). As one might find a perfect and intriguing pebble while walking on the shore, there is the similar felt experience of wanting to pick up a ceramic pebble and touch it. It is there for us to engage with, touch, feel and make our individual connections with that help us to reflect our being in the world. The pebble lying on the shore has gone through a unique process that has produced this particular stone and is so intriguing because of this process. Pallasmaa writes about how we can connect to time through the tactile sense: "A pebble polished by waves is

pleasurable to the hand, not only because of its soothing shape, but because it expresses the slow process of its formation; a perfect pebble on the palm materializes duration, it is time turned into shape" (Pallasmaa, 2005, pp. 57-58).

In making these ceramic pebbles this 'time turned into shape' also relates to caring. Making becomes caring. As a ceramic pebble carries the process that it has gone through, there is an affectionate relationship that builds over time between the maker and the pebble. In addition, the particular nature of the material supports this process as the clay material continues to dry; it requires looking after so that it does not dry too rapidly and start cracking. After firing, the clay becomes ceramic and continues to remind one of the process that produced it.

In this respect, the authorship or ownership of the ceramic pebbles becomes irrelevant. More than that, an attachment towards the pebbles gradually grows along with the making by feeling (Figure 1). The repetitive nature that is strongly part of this mute practice builds a relationship with the pebbles that is connected to the tactile experience.

Ceramic pebbles in psychotherapy

The inspiration for utilising ceramic pebbles as tools for psychotherapeutic practice lies in the theory of Merleau-Ponty: the body is a lived, experiential structure and a milieu of cognitive mechanisms (Merleau-Ponty, 1992). Thus, the psychotherapeutic methods also lean on the haptic, sensorial 'selfless' self and the cognitive mechanisms of mind—where emotions, thoughts and reactions are information-material, and which can be moulded. Often the main goal of psychotherapy can be described as the client/patient gaining thoughtful, meditative muteness of mind. It means that the ruminating, overly critical and dominating word-flood of consciousness is muted in an open, receptive way that enables psychological flexibility and resilience.

Being able to focus on senses—instead of focusing on continuous inner debate—is an essential skill for reducing anxiety, depression and self-destructive behaviour. For example, in

cognitive psychotherapy one core element is to teach the mind of the client to become aware and focus on different senses, especially the 'neglected' tactile senses, as vision is often overpowering. The experienced muteness of the ceramic pebbles, either used in psychotherapy as tools for reflection, sensory stimulus or chosen transitional objects, enhances the process of silencing the ruminating mind. The muteness of ceramic pebbles changes psychotherapy patients' dominant mood from (obsessive) doing to (sentient) being and opening awareness.

The other method of working with ceramic pebbles triggers embodied cognition in another way: they can be used in identifying schemas that have been embodied by the patient/client, and how these schemas are present in the inner child, inner parent and the compassionate, caregiving and value driven functional adult, who is strengthening during psychotherapy. A transitional object (TO), was first described by Winnicot (1953), as an item—typically a favourite toy or dear cloth—that becomes crucially important for a child. The TO exists, but is also created by the child.

Different objects are commonly used in psychotherapeutic sessions. Psychotherapists can ask the patient to bring symbolic objects to sessions, which, for example, signify patients' adulthood, resilience, and overcoming of past traumas. Some patients might portray these objects as invaluable, as of embodiments of their present identity. In the context of the therapy, such objects have also been described as transitional objects of their adulthood. The affection and the psychological value of the chosen object are clearly connected to the narrative that the object enables. Often the story is about recovery, overcoming, growth and security brought by strengthened autonomy.

In narrative therapy, these stories are not approached as mirrors of one's life, but rather as shaping forces of the self and the world. The truth of experience is not discovered, it is created. The goal is not to reveal the archaeological truth of a patient's life but instead to create a life story that lessens the suffering and which the patient can accept (Clarkin and Glick, 2006).

Two basic assumption narratives that therapists have about human beings is that people are profoundly influenced by the discourses around them and that they can develop alternative, empowering stories once separated from their problems and from the common explanations they have internalized about themselves and their experiences (Clarkin and Glick, 2006). Narrative therapy works by helping clients deconstruct stories that uphold the suffering of an individual and reconstruct new narratives that expand psychological freedom and flexibility (Clarkin and Glick, 2006). Externalization is a therapeutic technique that is essential in freeing the patient from the hold of the internalized narratives that have a negative impact on the patients' lives.

In the psychotherapeutic process, touching carries different meanings depending on the aim, what the instruction is, and what significance the patient connects with and bestows upon the ceramic pebbles. The pebbles have been used as a non-verbal method in ACT to stop rumination and to direct the consciousness and attention of the patient to the mute weight / structure / surface of the stone, while holding the chosen pebble in the hand (Figure 4). Another way is to ask patients to attach identity qualities or traumatic experiences to the chosen stones. Here, the muteness of the pebbles enables the patient to give the pebble individual unique dimensions.

Ceramic pebbles could be used in psychotherapy as 'transitional objects', also other than in their traditional, psychoanalytic framework. Usually, when transitional objects are introduced in a psychotherapeutic framework, they are usually offered to children, and the objects bring, for example, safety in situations where they are not with their significant caretakers (Winnicot, 1953). Here, the meaning of the transitional object refers to situations where a person is in defining herself or her past in a new, restoring way. The ceramic pebbles can be used to enhance that process.

The quality of the pebble and the tactile experience is of value in finding new definitions of self: the pebbles themselves have history: the maker has made decisions in choosing its qualities, which she has used in the making. The history of the pebbles goes even beyond this:

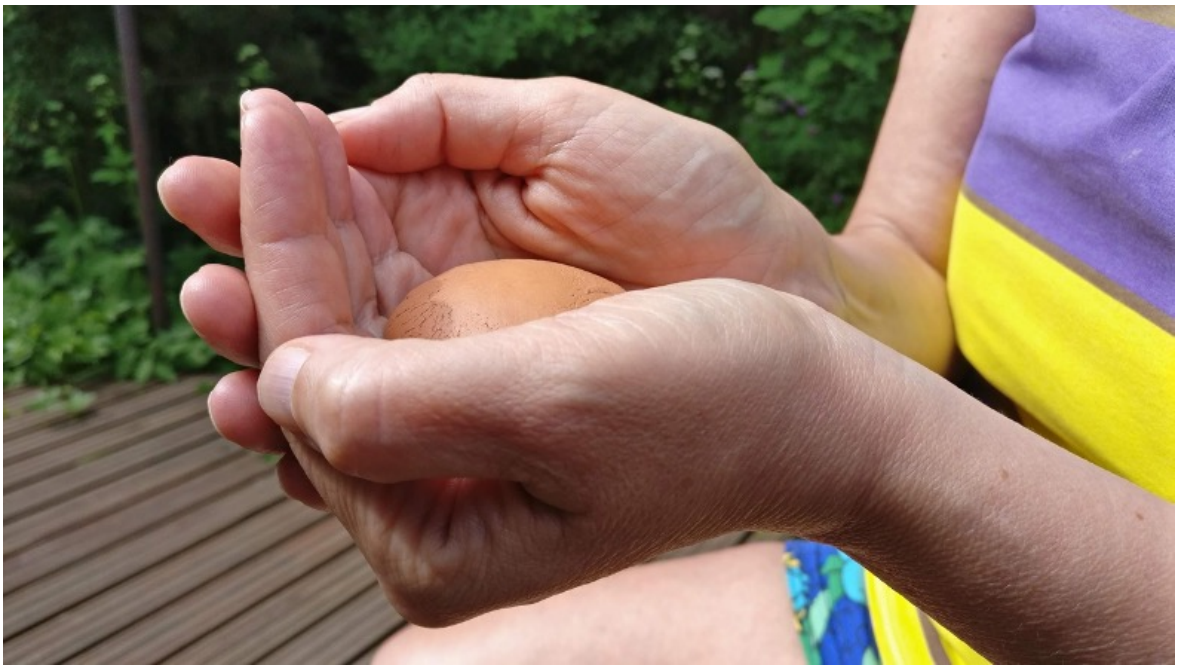

Figure 4. How a patient might hold the ceramic pebble protectively in her hands during therapy. Photo: Priska Falin, 2020.

the material of the ceramic pebbles is common and close in our daily lives as cups, plates, bricks or tiles. It also has the quality of grounding; it is from clay, soil, earth and part of our material world in which we live.

The experience of muteness in two different practices

Drawing from these two different practices, for us, muteness refers to being silent, but more than that, not being able to speak. If something is set to 'mute', there is no sound even if you try to speak. During making, the referential features are turned off, so to speak. In form, muteness implies that there is no specificity that speaks out. When a practice is described as mute, it implies that there is no aiming at expression. On the contrary, the aim is to direct the focus away from the outcomes of the making.

Muteness points to tacit knowledge; 'tacit' meaning that it opens up a space that is non-linguistic. The knowing is embodied and becomes embodied. Mute practice implies a mode of being with the making and the material that concentrates on embodied awareness.

Muteness as a quality is not in the material or the object itself; it describes the experience of a certain kind of making and the nature of an object that allows the experiencing of muteness. In an object, muteness creates a void around it, allowing other voices to surface. It directs the focus inwards rather than outwards. For the maker, the focus is on the haptic experience and, in this case, understanding and connecting to material. For the psychotherapy client, it is on memories of felt experiences that have become embodied.

When experiencing the mute in material encounters with objects or in practice, the initial reaction comes from the body, from embodied knowing and feelings. As Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1996) stated in The Embodied Mind, cognitive representations depend upon our cognitive system, which is dependent on the world—however, the world in itself is independent. Knowledge depends on being in the world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language and our social history—in short, from our embodiment. The authors state that cognition is an "embodied action" (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1996, pp. 147-184). In relation to muteness, this approach means that muteness can also be discussed as an attribute of ceramic stones, which cannot be explained in a simple manner since there is such a rich diversity of perceived worlds of muteness. The muteness of the ceramic pebbles is not perceived in isolation from their other attributes, such as shape, size, texture, context, the given meaning, tasks given in relation to the ceramic objects etc.

This interpretation of the concept of muteness carries a sense of disability with it, immanence instead of transference. This can be seen as an ableist reading of the quality: a negative interpretation that limits the representational and sensory quality of muteness. Here, however, the view is the opposite: muteness is about openness, clarity of attention, welcoming non-verbal

sensorial observations. Muteness in objects opens up a space that allows other aspects to surface, revealing their connectedness to the world and to ourselves.

Discussion

In the previous, tactile experiences were opened up individually within the two practices: in an artistic research concentrating on ceramics and psychotherapy. The approach of the two practices towards understanding the tactile experience differs, and the act of touching comes from a different origin.

In the artist-researcher's practice, the clay in her hands became an aesthetic process and a means for exploring the embodied dimension within the context of her research. The act, the touching and the material, are familiar and part of her artistic practice. In the use of psychotherapy, muteness as such has value, since in third wave cognitive therapies and solution-focused therapies different methods are used to silence the constant flow of inner discussion that one is used to. Muteness of the mind allows patients to be present in the now, and to use other, attentive ways of experiencing presence than verbal or visual classification. In schema therapy, muting the overly critical voice of the parent can be a goal that a patient may want to achieve. Ceramic pebbles carry muteness; they have no history for the patient, and they are abstract as objects. The muteness of the transitional object allows more freedom for the individual to attach elements to it.

From the perspective of embodied awareness, the focus in this paper has been limited to exploring muteness in a specific way of making within ceramic practice. Exploring mute processes within different practices will reveal possible limitations and potentials that help further understanding of tactile experiences in making. In this paper, we have opened up the discussion towards becoming aware of the bodily dimension in tactile experience that usually remains in

the unconscious level. It is clear, that further research should focus more in the implications of this act alone.

In this paper, we have explored the possible dimensions of using the ceramic pebbles as tools in psychotherapy. In search of how ceramic pebbles can be used in psychotherapy we are not reducing the psychotherapeutic process to meditation practices. As J. Arthern and A. Madill (2002) argue, the use of transition objects with adult clients is broader than was D.W. Winnicot's (1953) conception. It is clear that there are important fields of psychotherapeutic approaches that we were not able to include here—for example, the sensorimotor psychotherapeutic framework, as well as psychoanalytic transference processes, both of which are highly engaged with sensory issues and transition objects. In the scope of this paper, it was impossible to include all the theoretical and therapeutic knowledge that is relevant in exploring all the possibilities of ceramic pebbles in psychotherapy. In the future, it will be crucial to fill this gap and include more of the rich field of psychotherapy in this exploration and discussion.

In the context of psychotherapy, the focus has been on the professional experiences of the psychotherapist. The discussion is based on the introspection of the psychotherapist herself and the artist-researcher. Ethical principles for psychotherapists are present in external regulations, such as national legislation and ethical codes (that differ slightly depending on the frame of reference). The most important principle is to maintain confidentiality. In this paper, the professional experience of a psychotherapist is in focus, and ethical principles are complied with.

Conclusions

This paper has opened up a dialogue of shared experiences between two different practitioners who work in two different fields but share a similar approach to their practices in that they both recognize the embodied nature of being and acting in this world.

We have approached muteness from different perspectives: as a quality of tactile experiences, as a metaphor and as an attribute of ceramic pebbles. Mute practice in making pebbles enabled embodied awareness and reflecting on the embodied dimension. Combining the muteness in practice that enables the heightening of our embodied awareness with this reflective dialogue helps to understand the non-verbal experience and the embodied self. Being 'mute' when making promotes the gaining of awareness of the embodied self.

It is evident that the muteness of ceramic pebbles opens up possibilities for enhancing individual psychotherapeutic processes. The pebbles as sensory tools can be used to focus concentration, calm the mind in meditation, tame the verbal rumination and keep the mind on a single object. Pebbles are also useful in developing insights. The latter can be described as gaining insights into one's mind's own nature and functioning: they can signify what the difference is between being present and not being present.

The mutually recognized quality of muteness has enabled us to discuss and explore the embodied dimension in tactile experiences. Combining these two perspectives with the use of ceramic pebbles has facilitated the exploration of the non-verbal experience that has value in artistic research and within psychotherapy.

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