

'The Everyday Marvellous':

Collaborative Surrealist Methods for Creative Therapy

Abstract:

This paper provides an account of *The Everyday Marvellous* a recently completed research project into the efficacy of surrealist creative techniques in helping to improve mental health and wellbeing. The project sought answers to two key questions: 1) How does 'experimental' creative writing therapy using surrealist methods facilitate therapeutic address of systemic violence and traumatic damage without amplifying self-destructive frames of mind and behaviour? 2) How does a group therapy using these methods reach beyond the temporary constellation of individuals to provide something of lasting and ongoing usefulness to the individual? The project entailed the delivery of a six-week programme of creative sessions to a self-selecting group of participants at Loaves and Fishes, a mental health charity serving the city of Salford. Individual and group creativity led to the production of a collaborative novel, *Alsdorf*, its subsequent publication and a public reading. The project was externally evaluated by Challenge Multimedia by means of qualitatively focused depth interviews and its findings published. The paper provides a rationale for the project, embedded within contemporary discourse around creative therapies, a detailed discussion of its selected creative methods (and their deployment) along with an evaluation of the product in dialogue with the qualitative responses of its writer-makers. The paper concludes by reflecting on the potential of surrealist methods of creativity in future therapeutic contexts and considers a refinement of its target audience and development of a scalable approach for these methods.

[KEY WORDS: Group Therapy/ Mental Health / Surrealism/ Assemblage/ Autoethnography/ Master Narratives/ Collage/ Collaborative Novel/ Group Object Relations/ Multi-Modality/ Desiring Production]