



RESEARCH ARTICLE

DO I ONLY EXIST IN THE EYES OF THE OTHER? A VISUAL ESSAY ON THE USE OF SOULCOLLAGE AS AN ART-BASED THERAPEUTIC PROCESS FOR SELF-RECOVERY.

L. S. F da S. Oliveira

1. Teacher and Reasearcher, Department of Visual Arts, State University of Londrina, Londrina, Brazil.

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Abstract

Soul Collage arose in and spread through society from an artistic idealization developed by Seena Frost (2001). In short, the process can be interpreted, according to Epp (2016), as an artistic methodology which, if used therapeutically, has the scientific and subjective capacity to treat the psyche of a human being. This, considering the processes of selecting images, cutting them up and pasting them onto a predefined support. However, this whole process would be guided by a therapeutic trigger theme, previously designed by the workshop facilitator. As a result, it is hoped that the individual will perhaps be able to describe the process of creating the card that brings a cut-out and a collage of his soul, in order to make him feel the process, be crossed, as a possibility, by words, and suddenly re-signify his place of belonging. This article, in the form of a visual essay, presents a sequence of five therapeutic cards created in weekly SoulCollage sessions, carried out by the author of this essay in a mental health care facility located in the city of Recife, state of Pernambuco, Brazil. The meetings were held between March 25 and April 15, 2025. It's also worth noting that the themes were interconnected, seeking to take the patient through the process of purging an Other (Hall, 1997) that didnt pertain to him, in search of an encounter with a Self that was rightfully his.

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1 Introduction and Methodology:

As this is a scientific production located in the field of the arts and supported by art-based methodologies (Irwin, 2013), this visual essay does not aim to go into thousands of words to introduce what is proposed and justify the methodology used. Nor is it in its interest to create a topic called 'Results and Discussions', which is commonly used in more traditional scientific articles. For this communication of science, which can also be read as a communication of human expression, of the human capacity to think and to read its own subjectivity, ruminating on questions such as "do I only exist from the other person's view of me?"; "is it the other person who validates me?"

Am I an Other in the other's life? Or do I deserve to see myself as a subject with rights and duties, of which the purging of pain and honesty with oneself are presented, respectively, as such rights and duties?

In this manuscript, we will present elucidations written in five therapeutic meetings (**Figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5**) that used SoulCollage (Frost, 2001) as an artistic methodology capable of making the subject move to the place of observation, choice, action, reflexionalization and confrontation with their own soul production, guided by a facilitator of the art therapy workshop (one of the SoulCollage frameworks) (Epp, 2016). After all, we agree with Kapitain (2010) when we think about the necessary inclusion of SoulCollage as a therapeutic modality that needs to be energized by professionals qualified for such a proposal, since it is not a process of cutting and pasting images and/or texts.

According to Mozur (2022), this way of working with art makes the subject feel what they are producing, regardless of the theme, resonate with them. This, in turn, echoes in their psyche and, in one way or another, shifts their thinking about themselves, their surroundings and others. Katz-Mazilu (2025) concludes, in her discussions on the resonance and responsibility of art during art therapy (which includes SoulCollage), that it is necessary to correctly position the role of ethics and aesthetics in the patient's creation, since it is above all a treatment process. This means that the subject's imaginary, conscious and unconscious views of the world are on the table. And this is not an object of play.

We will therefore present the five productions (cards) followed by their written reflections and group discussions, *in tempore*. It is to be expected, in this sense, that the meditations on the productions will be presented in the first person, which is why we will evoke the theoretical-methodological bases of *escrevivências* (Evaristo, 2020) and of *a/r/tography* (Irwin, 2013), which create new epistemological ways of narrating the experience, production and, above all, communication of science.

According to Evaristo (2020), *escrevivências* were the unintended result of her life's work to give voice to marginalized populations, essentially groups made up of black women. Without foreseeing the ramifications that this term would have, especially in the field of literary research, *escrevivências* became a theoretical-methodological model that challenges existing traditional scientific epistemologies. For writing, *escrever* is about going beyond seeking citizens' rights and using one's voice to make a demand. It is about expressing an experience in written form and, in contrast to subjects who experience the same, the need for change; the revolt against the systemic silence that dictates what must be done within the established norms. Validating only the actions of some, due to the delegitimization and dehumanization of the Other (Hall, 1997).

In relation to *A/r/tography*, we use the postulates of Irwin (2013) to endorse a new way of narrating communication in science. Through this device, which also functions as a theoretical-methodological apparatus (Dias, 2013), it is possible to flit between the roles of subject, artist, teacher, and researcher, with regard to the process of weaving the scientific text that communicates the work. In our case, we are interested in the role of artistry [in relation to art therapy (Reis, 2014)] and research, combined with the legitimacy of the first-person narrative of the process, since these are simply SoulCollage productions that started from a trigger theme and prompted the participants in the art therapy process (Epp, 2016) to develop linguistic expressions to discuss the production before the group, especially through the instrument of writing.

It will be through the writing device, per se, proposed by the facilitator of the SoulCollage workshops, which had interconnected but also powerful themes in each of the five sessions worked on here, that the patient-artist will express themselves (Andrade, 2000). This, in turn, will lead to self-knowledge, self-disclosure, and self-criticism, which often occur during the treatment process, when patients face depersonalization or depersonification (Perls, 1988). In this sense, writing soul collages helps to reconstruct images of the world. It allows us to question whether we only exist through the eyes of others, but also to begin to see ourselves through the reflections of a self-possessed 'I'.

2 SoulCollage Sessions:

2.1.1st Session (March 18, 2025)

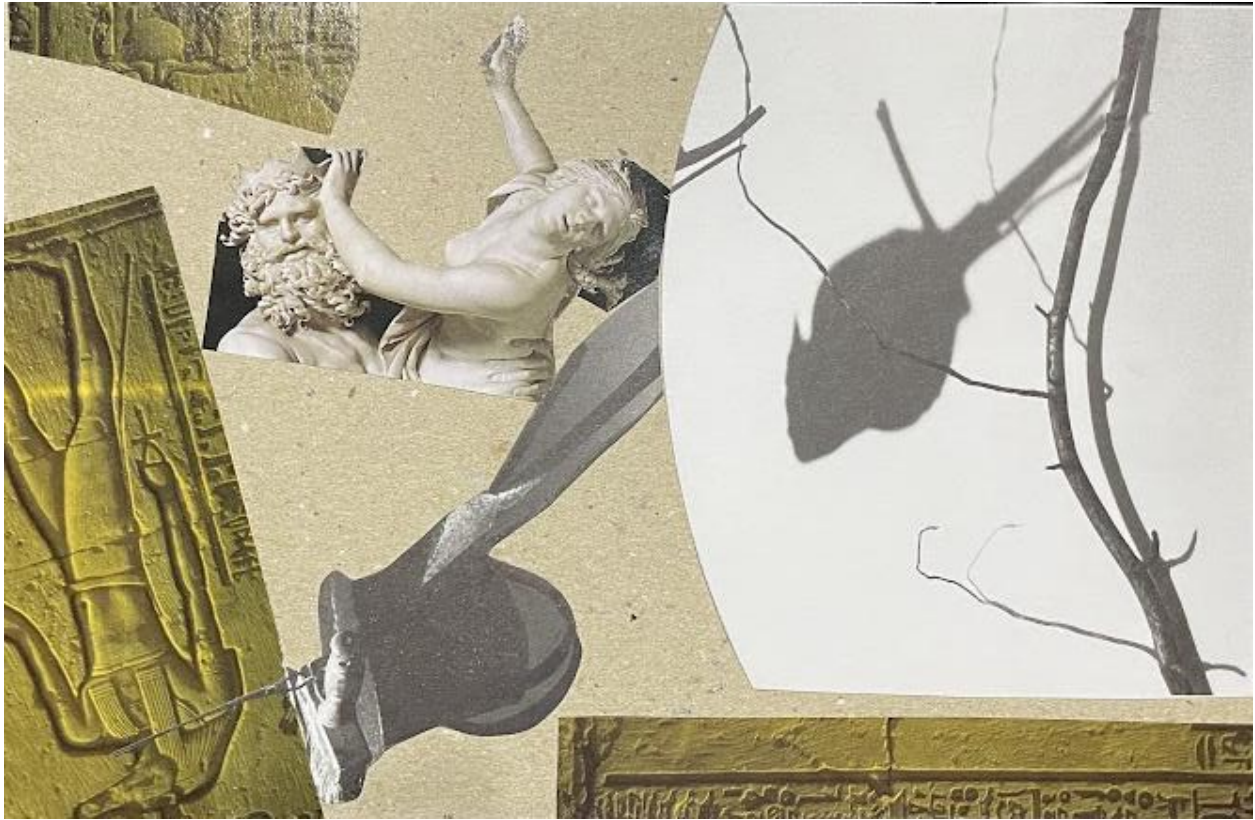


Figure 1: 1st card – *neter* card - what calls by voice and wants to introduce itself | what I don't see | credits: author of the article.

2.1.1. *The Neter Card - Is there a voice calling?*

Discussion: I am someone who has never had a voice, and if I did, that voice would not be mine. I am trapped in what we call time. My life is not human: it is a shadow. The shadow of what you would like to be, the image of what you would like to be. I am the being of non-being. I invite you to be friends with me, but unlike me, don't live waiting for the sun to shape or dictate your form. Perhaps the virtue of being lies in the attempt and carefreeness of not being. **Why is everything like me?** I don't know how to answer that. There was no rational light that prevailed beyond the idea and ideal of beauty. As a result, you suffered from looking like, rather than trying to approach, a unique becoming, a power that would not petrify you into production, exhaustion, and the displeasure of living fully.

2.1. 2nd Session (March 25, 2025)



Figure 2: 2nd card – protection card | credits: author of the article

2.2.1. *The Protection Card - Body tears*

Discussion: I am a person who does not like to be seen completely. Lately, this feeling was threatening the realm of the physical exterior. And it broke through. With force. Breaking non-existent emotional ties from the time before I had self-esteem. Everything I am and everything I was, inside, I considered mediocre. Now, I also hate myself on the outside. Because I swell and dry up like the tide. And I can't stabilize like the Mediterranean. Perhaps the body-home I seek in this life does not exist. **Why did you appear to me today (card)?** Because I believe you make me think about the bodily issues that have been finishing the work of self-destruction that began at your birth.

2.3. 3rd Session (April 01, 2025)

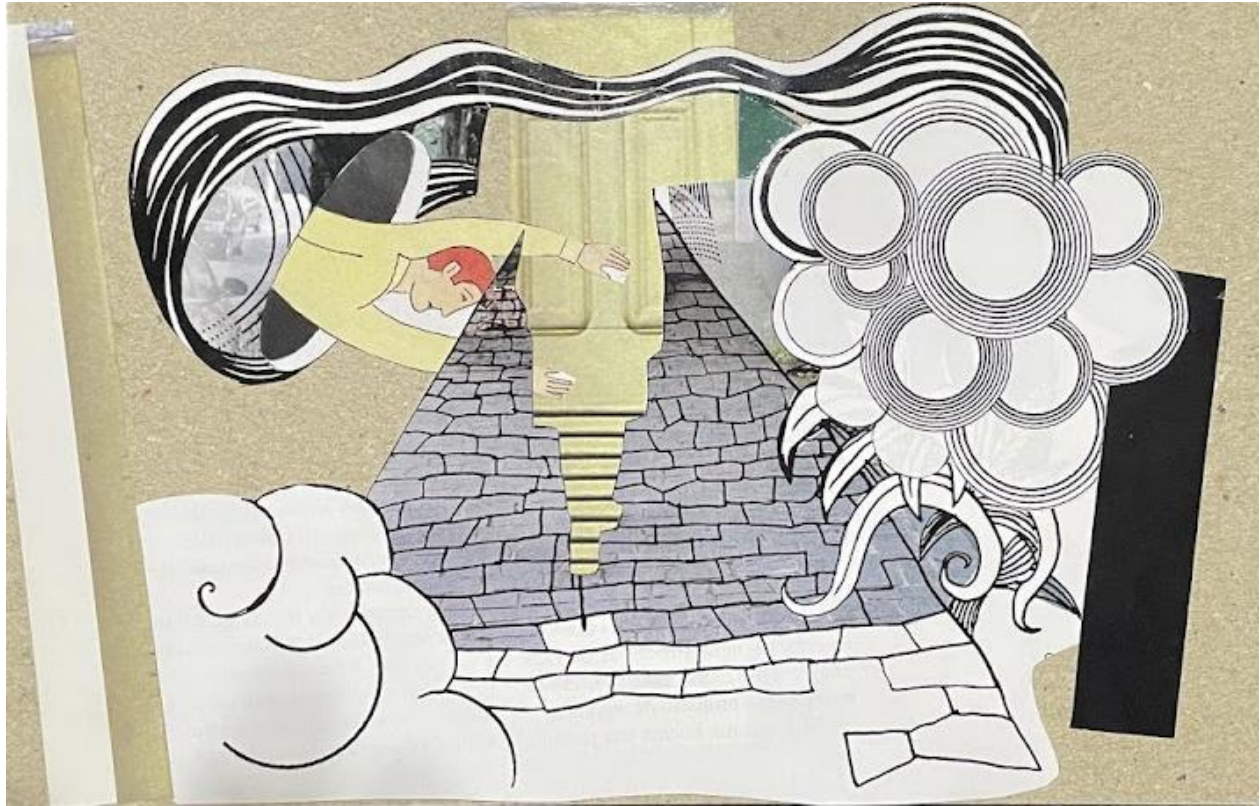


Figure 3: 3rd card – the future of the self: uncertainties, shadows and (un)realizations. i am the other| credits: author of the article

2.3.1. The card of shadows

Discussion I am someone who does not know if I came from the past, does not know if I inhabit the present, and is not sure if I will enter the future. The past, because I try to convince myself that those disturbances in my psyche are just implanted frames, not mine. The present, automatic car, no longer knowing my reason for being an automatic car, but unfortunately knowing my usefulness. The future? *Neter*. **Why is *Neter* my future?** Why couldn't it be?

2.4. 4th Session (April 08, 2025)



Figure 4: 4th card: the dark side of the protection card| credits: author of the article

2.4.1. *The dark side of the protection card*

Discussion: I am someone who, as an escape from traumatic events, hyperfocused on building a projection of myself that would distract people from reminders or reinforcements of the pain of those memories. I apologize for not having had the courage to introduce myself until now. Perhaps it is because I am aware that I possess a body that casts a shadow that needs to be confronted - or a shadow that reveals a hidden body that prefers not to be observed. This antithetical paradox arises because I, *Neter*, do not wish to see any projection of myself: body-shadow or shadow-body. At 24, I think I am discovering, or beginning to discover, why. This diagnosed giftedness, which I don't know if it is linked to something else, in ways that are no longer rational to me, forces me out of the shadows, pushing me into the superficial public gaze. Why don't I like what I think? Did I ever like it? Why don't the escapism I've built no longer comfort me? Did I make the wrong choices? Why can't I like myself, and especially my body? Why are my attempts to subvert this situation not positive?

2.5. 5th Session (April 15, 2025)

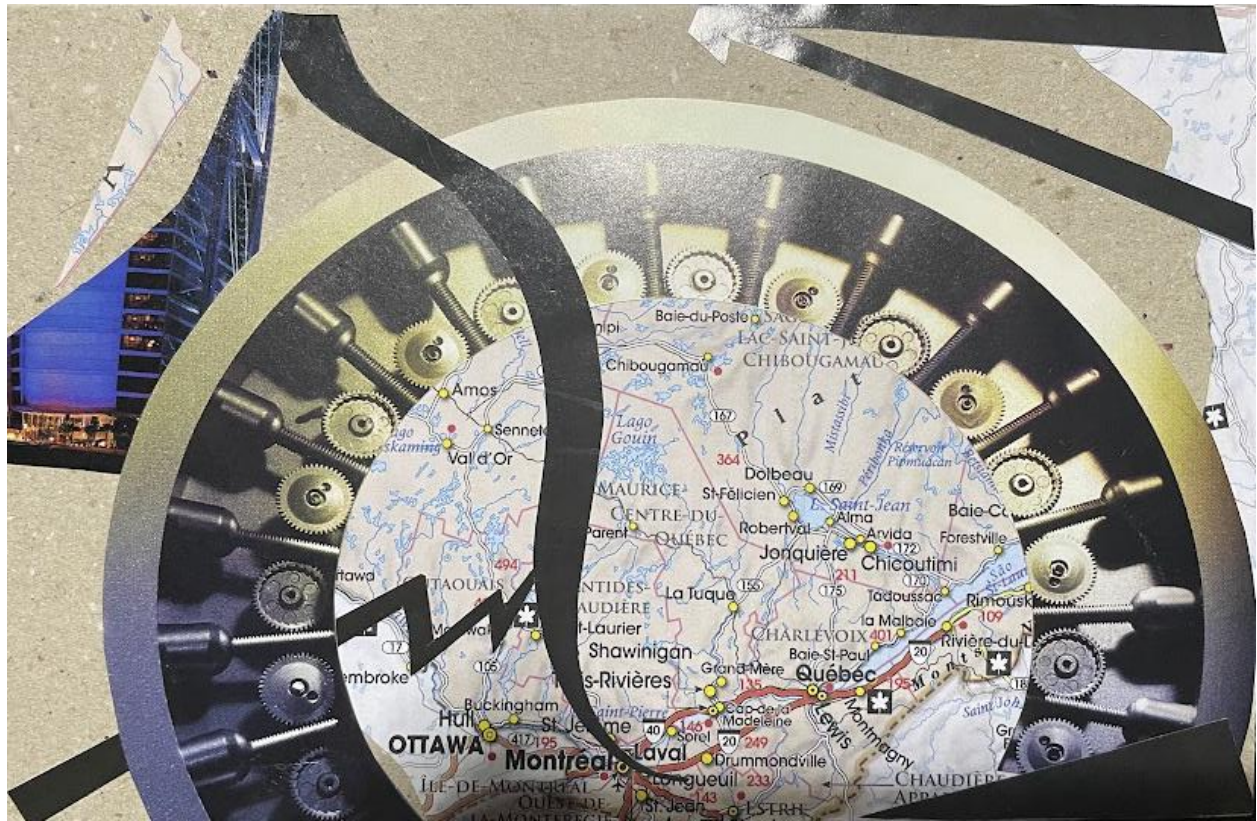


Figure 5: 5th card: among all the collages of your soul, where is home? | credits: author of the article

2.5.1. lonely card: among all the collages of your soul, where is home?

Discussion: I am someone who left home, tried to move on, explore and build dreams, but I doubt, vaguely, whether returning enriched and with so much experience was or is of any value other than suffering. Summary: perhaps I have fragments, unstitched, of a home that, perhaps even more so, I don't even know what it is; what it is about. Perhaps because I am miserable, or feel more, as if I were a machine in transit. Every place is a place. No place, however, will ever be home. I miss what I have never felt and metaphorize this ideal and idea of home, which my self, which I do not feel is human, desires immensely.

3 Conclusions and Contemplations

Dorothy said in The Wizard of Oz that there's no place like home. We share this view when we think that there is no place like gluing together the parts of yourself; of your soul. There's no place worth more than finding yourself, even if that means losing yourself from the other. However, it's important to note that getting lost is also a journey, full of tears from the rain, but also full of tornadoes that turn dreams upside down and make us turn our imaginations around and return home. In these visual essays, we were only interested in contemplating (as an essential act, according to Hannah Arendt) the productions that emanate from the self, without the need for words. The image in itself says a lot. Not just about us. The image says a lot because it alone is already the world, and SoulCollage, bringing together so many of them, constructs realities that only we can dictate if we only really exist in the eyes of others.

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