

Article

Altered Inquiry: Discovering Arts-Based Research Through an Altered Book

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Abstract

I present altered book making and poetry as a process of imaginative inquiry into arts-based research. Through a personal narrative and a consideration of the literature on arts-based research, I reconstruct the artistic inquiry that traces my learning journey. Current issues in arts-based research are sketched through words and mixed media artwork, including issues of terminology, philosophy, ethics, and purpose in arts-based research practice. The beginnings of a transformation-through-the-arts paradigm, powered by an aesthetic epistemology, are referenced as part of a multimedia learning journey. As a strategy for pedagogical inquiry, the altered book construction and narrative writing served to express some of the transformative learning, beauty, energy, and complexities related to this topic.

Keywords: arts-based research, artistic inquiry, altered books, artistic pedagogy

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As a white American woman, artist, art therapist, and mother, I have often made sense of the world through creating visual art, which has occurred both alone and alongside children, adolescents, or other adults who have joined me in artful explorations in personal and professional settings. As part of my doctoral studies in a Creative Arts Therapies program, I designed an independent study course. I was interested in using an artistic process of inquiry and wanted to learn about arts-based research through a deep reading of the relevant literature. Over a period of 10 weeks, I created an annotated bibliography and an artist's book to capture my artistic reflections and emergent understandings. Through this process, I began to recognize the complexities and possibilities of arts-based research. I have chosen to write about the process and share the art imagery here because, for me, artful explorations mean little if not shared amongst us.

Arts-based researchers use visual, performing, and/or literary artistic practices in the systematic generation of new knowledge through aesthetic discoveries (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 1998). I wondered: what would I find if I embarked on my own artistic inquiry to explore the topic of arts-based research? This article presents what I created from this charge. In the following pages, I offer a number of forms of my inquiry as an artist, poet, storyteller, theorist, and academic. I synthesize the literature that I read during this time, and I present a narrative about my process of working, the imagery and poetry I created, and a discussion of how the process affected me. I have embedded many figures alongside the text, and I invite you to look deeply at the imagery.



For this artistic study, I chose as my primary method of inquiry a process of creating an altered book, an art form I know well. An altered book is a previously existing book that has been recycled into a new work of visual art (Brazelton, 2004). Any kind of book can be used, as well as many art processes to “alter” it, such as painting, drawing, collage, writing, assemblage, and embellishment with a variety of media (Harrison, 2002). In my art therapy practice, I have found altered books a helpful activity for some clients because the unwanted book, when re-purposed as a canvas, provides an inherent structure or framework for personal art making (Chilton, 2007).

Comfortably living in a major urban suburb in the United States, I have the privilege of having many unwanted books available, as well as abundant art supplies, access to technology with which to photograph my creations, and time to engage in artistic processes. As an artist in this context, I wanted to make the most of the structural properties of a book with numerous pages, while as a researcher I hoped the book would become a compact body of work that could encapsulate and present unspoken facets of my learning about arts-based research. I hoped to learn by activating expressive ways of knowing in a studio praxis of art inquiry.

The idea of one's life as a narrative is brought to life in altered books. When a published book is altered, it becomes a unique, one-of-a-kind art object, in contrast to the ordinary, replaceable, uniform copy of a text. In the altering process, the artist confronts the book as a symbol of authority, reality, or convention, and changes it to make their own story (Chilton, 2007). The book is (re)contextualized as art, which speaks uniquely to the viewer in a dialogue presupposed by the multiple symbolic and metaphorical meanings the object carries through the physical

features of the new art form. These aspects of altered book making suggest it is a particularly appropriate artistic method to use to explore postmodern arts-based research.

My process was to begin by choosing a suitable book from my collection and preparing it for alteration through removing some pages and painting over others. I chose an old hardcover volume of short stories, about a female Chicago detective named V.I. Warshawski (Partetsky, 1995). I liked the solid feel of the covers, and I had enjoyed Partetsky's work for years. She felt like an old friend. I hoped working in this book about her tough female detective would be a good metaphor for me as I journeyed into the land of arts-based research and attempted to decipher its mysteries.

In conjunction with this process, I developed an annotated bibliography on the important literature in the field. After summarizing and commenting upon select articles to construct the bibliography, I would then turn to a new two-page spread in my altered book and create art in response. Often I would return to the annotated bibliography document and write additional thoughts. This iterative process allowed me to capture in writing the new ideas generated by the art-making experience. After a few weeks of working in this manner, I photographed selected pages from the altered book. I chose to photograph the book in my studio to emplace (Pink, 2009) the book where I made it, instead of trying to nullify the background. The photographs were edited, using basic photo-editing software to enhance and communicate (what I thought of as) essential features, and then this narrative was written, in part, in the present tense, to document what I consider new meanings as I re-present the artwork, poetry, and literature.

Just What is Arts-Based Research?

Discovering a workable definition of arts-based research was a challenge. In my reading, I discovered a confusing plethora of terms used to describe what I thought of as arts-based research. Eisner began writing about *arts based education research* (ABER) in the 1970s; McNiff used *artistic inquiry* in the 1980s, and the term *arts based research* (ABR) began to be used more generally in the 1990s (Barone & Eisner, 2012; McNiff, 1986, 1998, 2011). Later that decade, McNiff (1998) wrote a book titled *Art-Based Research*; this term is now common and frequently shortened to the acronym, ABR. Researchers have used the term A/r/tography (from *artist/researcher/teacher*) for some forms of ABER as well (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). In their seminal 2008 handbook, Knowles and Cole used *arts-informed inquiry* to refer to research "influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived" (p. 59). The term *artistic inquiry* has been credited to Hervey (2000, 2004), who defines it as "a focused, systematic inquiry with the purpose of contributing to a useful body of knowledge," which includes use of creative "artistic methods in data collation, data analysis, and/or presentation of findings," (2004, p. 183) influenced by the culturally determined aesthetic sense of the researchers. McNiff (2011) champions a more specific definition; he has emphasized that ABR as the central mode of systematic inquiry always involves the art making on the part of the researcher(s).

The purpose of this research practice, then, is to produce something useful, although "usefulness" is broadly defined. Is it useful to feel empathy for others, think up a new idea, or learn in a soulful way? It might depend on the researcher's goals and the particular research questions (Leavy, 2009). Barone and Eisner (2012) wrote that the purpose of ABR is to provoke significant questions and conversations. But in a recent systematic review of ABR literature on health, Fraser and al Sayah (2011) found in their content and thematic analysis that studies served to generate or collect data to learn about a particular phenomenon or experience and, less frequently, to disseminate or translate it. New learning then seemed to be generated and translated powerfully, but in ABR this is an aporetic translation, shifting, emergent, "a moment of ontological

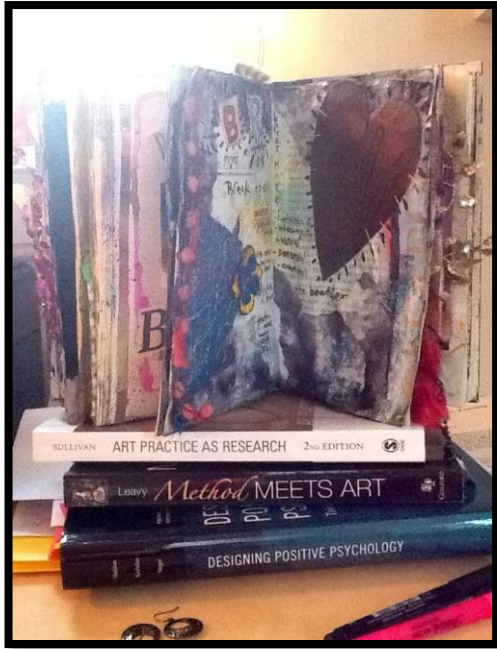
uncertainty” (Hogan & Pink, 2010, p. 160) with commiserate slippery semiotic meaning. My new learning and yours might be quite different for any particular presentation of ABR.

In an ABR worldview, then, warranted knowledge includes aesthetic, emergent meanings that trigger life (Kenny, 2002), movement, and openness (Nielsen, 2004), and multi-sensorial communication of this knowledge elicits change. In a philosophy such as this, we find reality made and re-discovered afresh by artistic experience of story, image, metaphor, and symbol, which have real, though multiple, meanings that increase human meaning, purpose, and capacity for positive transformation. Art-making practices and processes are trusted to lead from the intimate to the universal (Paul, 2005); invoke and provoke questions and new ideas; and use methods that are participative, communal, active, and experiential (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy 2009; McNiff, 2011).

Postmodern conceptions of truth are relative to ontological and epistemological assumptions. Kvale (1995) argued that justification of knowledge can be found in high quality craftsmanship that “results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they carry the validation with them, such as a strong piece of art” (p. 39). The expressive form of art presents directly its validation through sensorial communication, as the viewer recognizes authenticity through the aesthetic (Barone & Eisner, 2012, Hervey, 2004). Art “enables direct experiential understanding” (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007, p. 202), as mirror neuron research is beginning to reveal, empathic, emotional, and felt in the body. Imaginative thought can access the interiority of experience through the subversive, revealing, emergent communicative power of artistic knowing involving image and metaphor (Hogan & Pink, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Newbury & Hoskins, 2010a, 2010b; Pink, 2009, 2011; Pink, Hogan, & Bird, 2011). ABR evokes a philosophy rooted in an imaginative, aesthetic epistemology.

A particular opportunity/challenge in ABR is in the area of dissemination. Leavy (2009) thought ABR had the potential to stimulate dialogue and reach a wider audience beyond academia, but she wondered if this potential was, as yet, unrealized. A potential practical challenge in this area could be surmounting the usual norms or conventions of presenting research. The norms are codified in cultural rituals of poster sessions at professional conferences, journal requirements, or the so-called “mechanics of style” (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 87) found in academic manuals that set standards which privilege one kind of writing over others (Lahman et al., 2010; Lahman et al., 2011). This very challenge is evident in this article, as I have found it difficult to bound gracefully from artistic, poetic, narrative, and academic writing styles.

Presenting this kind of research also involves particularly complex ethical challenges: “When research results are presented as art, and public access to the work is both enabled and deliberately arranged, our recontextualization of research participants’ stories and lives become audible, visible, felt by them, in visceral and potentially lasting ways” (Sinding, Gray, & Nisker, 2008, p. 465). This meaning making is no longer “academic” or numeric, but felt, changing and significant to actual people, who may be confidential in name only, and (over)exposed in other personally risky ways. While ABR has potential applications for transformative learning (Clover, 2010), many issues remain in the ethical realization of this potential, precisely because of the power of these aesthetic forms.



Lahman and colleagues (2011) celebrated the capacity of art—of poetry—to act as a compressed form of data representation to increase accessibility, which is also an ethical concern. They also note some skill is needed in both the writing and the reading of such work. Does this limit research access as well as expand it? Just as a certain (high) level of education is required to understand quantitative research outcomes, might also a different (high) level of education be required to grasp “artistic truth”? At what point do complex themes presented in art just result in confusion for the viewer? Viewers’ skill in the construction of aesthetic meaning becomes particularly relevant when art’s mission is to provide “useful” knowledge to them.

The potential challenges and opportunities in ABR dissemination are ethically complex and practically demanding. Nevertheless, if ABR can transform

standard methods of dissemination, this could increase access for non-traditional consumers of research, though resolving situated ethical issues successfully will remain a pivotal challenge. If we choose to use research for the purpose of positive social transformation, the capacity of ABR to uncover authentic and surprising beauty will be essential. According to Denzin and Giardina (2009), “the purpose of research is not to produce new knowledge, per se, but to ‘uncover’ and construct truths that can be used for the pursuit of peace and social justice” (p. 29). What if the purpose of ABR is to uncover and enliven significant questions and conversations, to shift hearts and minds and enable new possibilities and opportunities ahead?

Altered Book as Inquiry

Chapter 1: Flying into the Unknown

The first spread I created in my altered book was inspired by Neilsen's (2004), "Aesthetics and Knowing: Ephemeral Principles for a Groundless Theory," in the co-edited book, *Provoked by Art: Theorizing Arts-Informed Research* (Cole, Neilsen, Knowles, & Luciani, 2004). In her essay,



she briefly sketches five principles of artistic inquiry, using the metaphor of looking out an airplane's window at the clouds—thus a “groundless” theory, using a play on words that implies a contrast to the well-known qualitative research approach, grounded theory. Grounded theory is a method in which researchers develop theory from the data, thus “grounded” in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Neilsen (2004) wrote that in contrast, ABR researchers “work in

media and with ideas that cannot easily be fixed, determined, cannot be foundational in the ways that our controlling selves have come to need in education and the social sciences” (pp. 45–46). This inquiry exists in liminal space, is whole, alive and embodied, becoming “expansive, difficult, passionate, catalytic” (p. 47). There is no grounding here. “Aesthetic work,” Neilsen (2004) wrote, “opens us up, opens up a space that interrupts the ordinary. It forces change” (p. 47) and is a form of witness that may allow for transcendence.

I illustrate the scene I envision as I read her words: I find an airplane stencil, an old map of Canada, and cut out a paper airplane to fly across her cloudy sky. Presupposing our joint capacity for metaphor and meaning, maybe you will see with me: the plane “flies” across the page toward an envelope, through a transcendent sky, towards hidden meaning.

Making and viewing an altered book is a visual, tactile, and physical experience. The book has weight in my hands, the textured pages falling open of their own accord. For this page, I engineered an envelope and tucked a note within it. This altered book technique invites interaction with the art object. As an artist, I want the viewer to open the envelope, unfold the paper, read and experience the contents, and then refold and tuck back away the note. The artwork, as an object, opens up, and in turn opens up the viewer, who is no longer a viewer but a co-traveler, a participant in the performance of the artwork, an artistic co-researcher in the quest for understanding. The poem reads:

Jan 9th, 2012
Just wrote about Neilsen and
I am provoked by visions of
flying in the clouds.
Not being grounded (fear)
What do we find in the
clouds?
We are broken open (fear)
broken free to witness and to
transform (joy)
We are not safe but disrupt
order,
disrupt what is already
known.
ABR teaches her:
"I didn't know what I didn't
know"



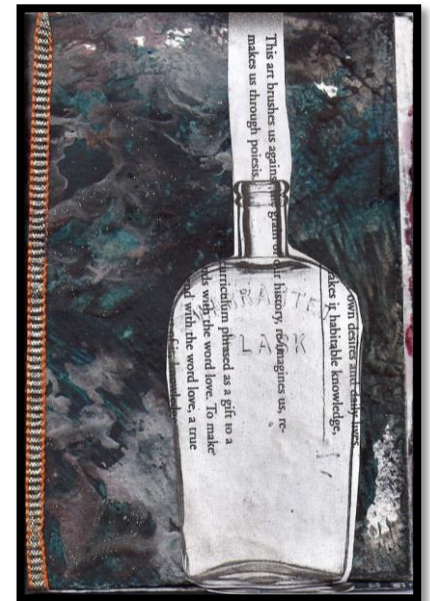
This art and poetry helped me express my sense that I would be going somewhere, emotionally as well as intellectually, on this journey into ABR, and I was fearful as well as excited about the flight. What was this fear, what could be this joy? Not knowing itself can be a place of terror, sometimes requiring elaborate defensive reactions—including extremes of hyper-positivist certainty or postmodern devastation (Lear, 1998). My goal was to allow this aesthetic and emotional knowing to unfold, to be in the void of uncertainty, vulnerable, in the hope of new learning (Dusen, 1958/1999, p. 56). The meaning(s) we make of art are multiple, changing, and uncertain knowings, yet provide us with unique access to unfolding deeper truths (Hogan & Pink, 2010; Levine, 1997). The meaning(s) of art are here symbolized and re-symbolized, which is not for those who desire one certain truth, grounded, and instead may be for those of us who wish to trouble the taken-for-granted ways we understand truth and risk flight from the ground (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Pink et al., 2011; Walsh, 2006). What if I could stay open to the uncertain? What if I could hold back from having one true account of my art's meaning, and race through clouds, unmoored? How can I stay open to the uncertain, to new learning, and be groundless and free?

Chapter 2: Beauty Confronts Terror

I read on, exploring Rita Dunlop's (2004) essay wherein she mixes art, story, and philosophy, using the metaphor of the "1000 Cranes" story to explore the nature of beauty in ABR. She found this beauty

often difficult, falling just short of fear. The beauty of the work is found edged with the scar tissues of history, a cicatrix that knows the borderlines of terror. Yet, amidst the dark fields of history, the embrace of beauty can be education. This beauty is found in our constant revision and interrogation of our own positions in relation to others, so that our minds and hearts and empathies are opened to others. This is what poetry proposes: love, beauty, knowledge, faith, testaments for living alongside terror. (p. 95)

Aesthetic experience can engage us in transformational healing processes: I am an art therapist; I can also tell you these stories, how art broke us all open, held us and healed us. Here my art helped me further know how giving voice to darkness was important, and beauty could provide containment of our unknown terror, and terror of the unknown. I copy Dunlop's manifesto on paper that has images of bottles on it to contain the dark words. I make a pocket and a smaller book within. I look up the word, *cicatrix*, in the dictionary; I look up the word, *beauty*, I rorschach black ink on the pages, and cut out the image of the bottle, filled with strong Dunlop words, bits of which escape from the glass: "This art brushes us against," it whispers—and, "poetry confronts terror." These words move me to write another poem here, to breathe and to think:



*(pause; breathe; be)
(let these words swirl out there;
on the dark background I made)
(let it be OK that you can't touch the book, or gently tuck the manifesto
back into the pocket—though it bothers me that you don't get to; and my
skills of telling, showing, re-presenting are so limited—
Words and photographs are not enough to capture the sensory, embodied
experience of this art!—
—and it does not matter so much for me, for this art, for my voice, but
how will I convey others—?!)
Though maybe this is not about my skills—
Maybe this is bigger
Maybe there are ways we have all been silenced
That need to be changed*



Chapter 3: A Sensory Knowing

I press my hand down on the book pages and use a dark marker to outline it, smelling the scent of the permanent ink, as I feel the tactile knowing so important to this work. Scrawling words over the text:

touched
moved
embodied
embraced

I write in the hand, by hand. It speaks of touch, who we are as we touch and are touched, moved in ways beyond our conscious knowing, embodied in artistic form. I give myself a prissy long sleeve of scrap fabric with a too-feminine flower cuff, recalling the covered-up tone of what I've known of as research, science, data, lab coats,

and disembodied third-person voices full of “fact”-based knowledge. But my sensory knowledge cannot be discovered by proxy (Hogan & Pink, 2010; Pink, 2007, 2009; Pink et al., 2011). You have to feel it. Like my page here, textured and layered with fabric and chinks. Later, this image with its feminized lab coat will remind me of Jaggar’s (1989) ideas about the importance of emotion to feminist epistemology. Emotions—not traditionally honored by the academy—yet crucial to me, to my learning, and to who I am. How could I be a researcher, I wonder, with my gendered hands, my fears, my ridiculous glittered lab coat?



Chapter 4: Awakening

I read on, finding Leavy's (2009) clear voice, and a focus on methods. She defined "arts-based research practices" as a "set of methodological tools" which "adapt the tenets of the creative arts" for "data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation" (Leavy, 2009, pp. 2–3). I notice her definition differs from McNiff's (2011) in that it does not require the primary researcher be involved in art-making. Leavy (2009) identified ABR as useful for research which aims to describe, explore, or discover. As she described the strengths of ABR, I notice these are the same powerful qualities art therapists use for healing purposes. Art grants us a powerful tool for communicating emotional aspects of life, for exploring and supporting identity, for empowering those traditionally oppressed, and for consciousness raising (Leavy, 2009). Leavy also noted art's ability to evoke meanings, not denote them, and to access multiple meanings. As in art therapy practice (Malchiodi, 2011), in ABR, art is utilized for its transformational capacity because "using the language, practices and forms of the arts allows us to think and therefore see in new ways" (Leavy, 2009, p. 258).

I drink my coffee. I mull over the use of text in art, and the use of an altered book full of text for this project. I decide to use the day's newspaper to snip out words and phrases that strike me. Words I collage into an altered book spread: *mixing things up in the studio and beyond, use academic data, rare chance for study; study finds: work of heart.*

As an art therapy researcher, I am interested in art as a route to the interiorities of people (Hogan & Pink, 2010), our artistic intersubjectivity (Skaife, 2001), our relational knowings, and the emotional knowledge between us. Newbury and Hoskins (2010a, 2010b) used a relational, arts-based approach in which images and metaphors awakened explication of context and complexity. Images allow access to nuanced and less conscious aspects of experience; metaphors help link the personal to the social, cultural, and environmental (Newbury & Hoskins, 2010a). Their work inspired me, as did Clover's (2011) use of feminist arts-based participatory methodologies where issues of trust, building community, identity as an artist, and collective empowerment arose. Clover (2011) stated that "feminist approaches to ABR are not neutral but seek to identify and disrupt inequitable knowledge/power patterns and enable criticism to be appreciated as a creative act (pp. 14–15). Really? Smearing paint and collage I find myself

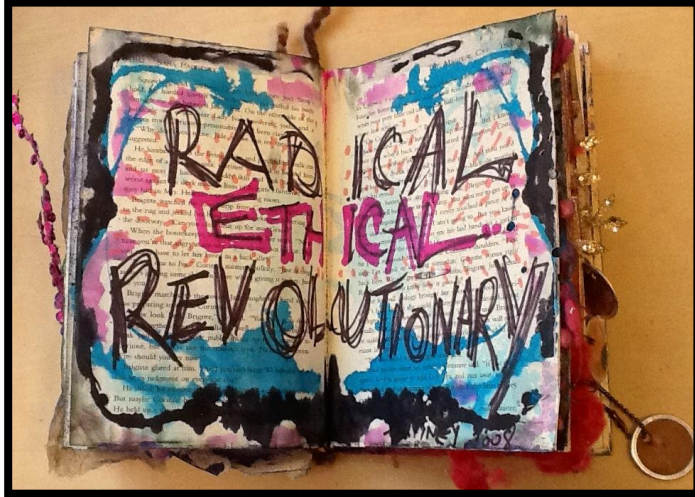
Clover (2011) stated that "feminist approaches to ABR are not neutral but seek to identify and disrupt inequitable knowledge/power patterns and enable criticism to be appreciated as a creative act (pp. 14–15). Really? Smearing paint and collage I find myself

*Awakening
to the juicy bits of our discourse
art enlivens us to speak new truths
reconstruct meanings that make
more mysteries
keep our eyes open.
This is what my art tells me, this is
how I know*



Chapter 5: Radical, Ethical, Revolutionary

Finley (2003) challenged that “if we engage in hegemonic control of the beautiful in research, then we run the risk of missing the opportunity” (p. 292) of the arts to inform and transform. Citing Lincoln, she called for an ethical focus on “dialogical, nurturing, caring, and democratic relationships between researchers and participants” through “visionary critical discourses”

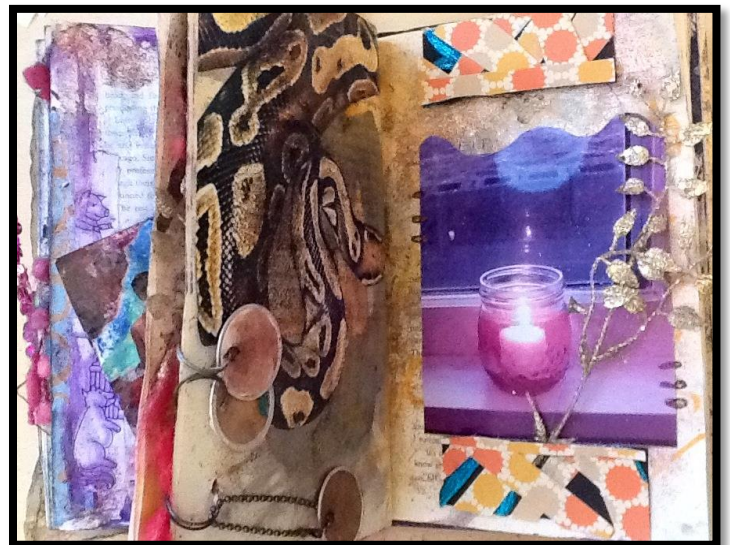


(Finley, 2003, p. 293). She later proclaimed ABR “a methodology for radical, ethical, and revolutionary research that is futuristic, socially responsible, and useful in addressing social inequities” (Finley, 2008, p. 71). Like art therapists (Allen, 2011; Kapitan, Litell, & Torres, 2011), she called for the possibility and production of social justice through a democratization of the arts.

The strong thread of feminist, critical, and transformative praxis was not lost on me. As I read studies by Clover (2011), La Jevic and Springgay (2008), Newbury and Hoskins (2010a, 2010b),

and Walsh (2006), I grew excited to see an ethical, relational, participatory arts-based mode of inquiry in action, one in which I wanted to participate. I began to wonder if what was emerging was a new kind of worldview, a transformation-through-the-arts paradigm. In step with Noddings (2003), I found the ethical stance of these researchers to have a caring and positive energy that might contribute to a politics of hope (Denzin & Giardina, 2009). Calls for an “empowerment code of ethics that cross-cuts disciplines, honors indigenous voices, implements the values of love, care, compassion, community, spirituality, praxis and social justice” (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, p. 36) struck home, as I began to see where an artistic process of inquiry could fit with the vital relational axiology of art therapy.

In my art, images of a snake and a candle in a window suddenly appear. Wait, I must have glued them there. But deep in flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), the art just seems to make itself. I’ve hardly noticed what my artist’s hands are doing, instead musing on how I could add my tea-dyed tags to adorn the page’s edge. When the snake and candle materialize, as if by themselves, I step back, startled, thinking of danger, transformation, and hope.



Chapter 6: An Ethics of an Aesthetic, Embodied Research

I dive back into the literature, reading deeply of McIntyre's (2004) research into her experience with her mother's Alzheimer disease. McIntyre noted the importance of the ethics of caring in the shifting relationships in communities and found the goodness of arts-informed research involved bringing qualities of imagination and creativity to caring relationships in research sites.

Researchers can use the aesthetic to expand their moral framework, McIntyre (2004) identified. Like McIntyre, La Jevic and Springgay (2008) found boundaries between researcher and the researched in ABR "become complicated, responsive, and undone" (p. 67). They understood a similar ethics of embodiment as "being with," and cited Merleau-Ponty's (1964) concept of intersubjectivity. Art therapists are also interested in intersubjectivity as "being-with another" as the nature of art therapy pushes back against notions of dualism (Pink et al., 2011; Skaife, 2001). "Being-with opens self to the vulnerability of the other, a with that is always affected by and touched by the other ... it entangles us, implicating self and other simultaneously creating a network of relations" (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 70).

For example, as in art therapy when a client's artwork is shown in public art exhibits, research participants need choices as to what art can be displayed and how it is attributed and presented. Because art's meaning can change over time, what was permissible at one point may feel like a violation at another. Close and trusting relationships are necessary to consider these options and possibilities. I ponder the pages of my altered book that I chose not to show here, pages that felt unfinished, too personal, or not "beautiful" enough for display. Privileged with dual roles as both researcher and artist, I can present my work as I want it to be viewed. I wonder of years from now, will I still be comfortable with having made this artwork so public? Or, will a day come when I look back on this work and wish I had kept it to myself? Once it is "out there," once you are reading this, my choices are limited. And while I am empowered to make informed choices in this project, what of more vulnerable participants who might consent to similar research? I found ethics in ABR, like my work as an art therapist, complex and fraught with quandaries, calling for deeply situated, contextualized approaches (Gerber et al., 2012; Newbury & Hoskins, 2010a). Yet the possibility of hearing research participants' voices more directly creates exciting opportunities to expand our emphatic sense of each other.

Chapter 7: Break Open

I want these collage materials to have deep, complex texture. I grab old paper towels I'd used to mop up ink, which dried to a mottled gray. After pressing torn paper bits over the text with a soft brush filled with creamy glue and water, I splatter blue watercolor on top to deepen the stormy background. Here my artistic definition of ABR celebrates its hand-made potential to challenge the conventional, the already known, the taken-for granted ways we think, the invisible popular thought, the way it has always been, covering the old text with my own.



The original text peeks through the water-thinned gesso. After Finley (2008, 2011), I want ABR to break open structures that hold us still, liberate us from dominate paradigms of power, open our hearts and minds. In this artwork, I am coming to a knowing: ABR might break open what is called beautiful; it might use beauty to change what we think is tolerable, what we are fed as consumers of imagery, what we think we already know and what we can be open to know. This poetry, art, dance, and drama is a kind of soul work which cannot be commoditized: it alters us, and thus the world.

Discussion

The ethics of love, care, and compassion and a relational understanding of meaning making provide a unique knowledge of how things are, and how things could be, between us intersubjectively, visually, sensorially, emotionally—and *this* is what powers the beautiful. This is the beautiful, that lights the forest. Langer (1957) knew: “the ways we are moved are as various as the lights in a forest; and they may intersect, sometimes without canceling each other, take shape and dissolve, conflict, explode into passion, or be transfigured” (p. 22). To the extent that I am successful as an artist, I translate this embodied knowledge through creation of expressive form that communicates life’s inchoate feelings (Langer, 1957). Our human ability to form art creates a re-presentation, a semiotic abstraction of felt insight that creates and re-creates knowledge through metaphor and symbols not otherwise accessible (Innis, 2010). Artistic, expressive forms bring inner experience into consciousness and encapsulates and transforms complex experience and ideas (Yorks & Kasl, 2006). This is how beauty answers terror, transforming the wounds of our history (Dunlop, 2004).

I come to a place of new beginnings, wondering if ABR may be more than just a “new methodological genre within the ever-evolving qualitative paradigm” (Leavy, 2009, p. 4)—or could be more, for me. What is ABR?—a catalytic and aporetic philosophy for a world in need of challenge and change, as Baldacchino (2009) proclaims? We know the arts have been used throughout history as an essential purveyor of knowledge about self and other (Gerber et al., 2012). Could this be a way forward, to see larger forms of interconnection? Music therapist and indigenous arts-based researcher Carolyn Kenny reminded me that artistic inquiry is not a new approach to generating knowledge, not a new methodological genre at all, but old, predating logic as a way of knowing. “Beauty,” she said, “was the first church” (Carolyn Kenny, personal communication, July 26, 2011). Might we need to visit it, to search and search again for first-hand numinous revelations?

Embedded in care, beauty comes to us, sometimes wordlessly. Hard-to-describe preverbal and intersubjective experience can be discovered through artistic inquiry but in order to further inquiry also needs to be translated in some form to be communicated to others and ourselves (Gerber et al., 2012). This is the basis of the arts-based therapies, and the difference between studio art practices and art therapy: in art therapy, a skilled therapist is present as a witness. Arts-based therapies and arts-based research are linked in that both use art as a wondrous instrument to access and transform our interior life (Kossak, 2012). And both arts-based therapies and arts-based research seem to struggle with issues of translation and interpretation. Art therapist Moon (2004) goes as far as warn therapists of imagicide—the possibility of sticking the pin in the butterfly and effectively killing the image—when we go too far with intellectual translations of what we might see into what we already know (p. 78). An open dance of interpretation involving imagination is best, counsels Moon (2004). A tentative process of mediated translation between the visual and spoken can take place, as Bird found in art therapy research (cited in Pink et al., 2011). Sullivan (2009) termed this process of coming to know cognitively through art creation, “transcognition,” which linked or bridged multiple ways of knowing influenced by media, languages, situations, and cultural contexts (p. 133). Arts-based researchers might need strategies to discern this alchemy, as it is not a simple process to dance between the meaning and the art, dancing with ontological uncertainty (Manders & Chilton, in press). In my art-making and art therapy practice, I have learned at times there appear phenomenological soul-knowings that just will not be put into words, butterflies of meaning dancing away from being pinned down.

Epilogue: The Cover of Altered Inquiry

I am not done, I am not done, I am not done, so I am closing here with the cover, the beginning, of the book. I find one of the appealing features of altered books is that—like art’s meaning—they often have room for more: more pages unfolded, more notes attached, more adornment and embellishment. I work on the cover and spine, frustrated by my initial attempt to write words on the cover. I pour a silver and blue mixture of inks on the cover; obliterating the words. This definitely improves it. I emboss a shiny glaze, and debate adding ... what do I have around here, in the studio, paper flowers? Yes, but these store bought petals are too stiff, so I drench them in inks and water, and watch with my hopes up: will the paper absorb the inks to add interesting variation in shading? Yes! I dry the petals, adding clear glaze and glitter. As I attach the flowers, using a powerful tool to punch holes in the book board and bending back the arms of the metallic paper fasteners that double as the flower’s center, I now see I have made a frame of these flowers for an image—but of what? What artistic theme from the handmade inner pages can I emphasize? Hands!—I stamp and I cut a hand image out of paper, and then see two sheets of paper have stuck together, and I’ve cut two by mistake. Now I have two hands. Hem, that’s ... serendipitous. I play with them until I see I can flip one over, and weave their fingers together. A walnut stain and another layer of glaze secures my work, and links the hands together.



“Art practice is, in and of itself, a specific and special form of *research*” in which data is not searched for, but generated (Baldacchino, 2009, p. 4; Sullivan, 2009). My artistic practice of adorning the book’s cover protects the art within, while highlighting the tactile power of beauty and the relational connections the arts engender. What is beatific is the human connection, my art tells me. What does it tell you?

This artistic inquiry has been a way of knowing that triggered my creativity, evoked wonder, and generated meaning. I did not intend to make fine art, but wanted to get close enough to beauty to hold my interest (and yours). As a strategy for inquiry, I found my poetry and altered book expressed some of the beauty, energy, and complexities of this topic. It helped me to integrate ideas new to me and express my thoughts and feelings—to learn.

I invite you to make your own meaning of the artwork presented; meaning that is multiple, shifting, and contingent, requiring our fluid understanding (Hogan & Pink, 2010; Sinner, 2010; Sinner et al., 2006). Hervey (2000) and McNiff (2011) both found that artistic inquiry was successful if it was useful to the perceiver, while Brown (2008) intended her work to inspire and educate. Was my inquiry useful to you? Did it inspire you, or prompt creativity? Do you now want to make artworks or poems about your own encounters with ABR, to deepen your understanding? Did you learn something? Was my reflexivity and subjective position clear? Barone and Eisner (2012) recommend avoiding



static criteria for assessment, but did outline the following questions for ABR evaluation: Did you think the work had aesthetic merit? Was it incisive, concise, and coherent? Did it generate new ideas, or evoke and illuminate new thoughts or feelings? If this research is valid, might it somehow deepen the conversation, complexify the discourse, have social significance, ring true? (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

Each of you might (must?) have different answers to these questions, and that is just fine. For me, as I altered the book and (re)contextualized the story, I shifted. As I constructed this narrative and created this artwork, building from a base of stories of mysteries, I raised more questions. I learned about people and ideas in the process, and do feel uncovered, changed: energized and excited by the possibilities for future work, hopeful for a more just and peaceful future, radicalized in a positive way. Motivated by reading, writing, and art making, I shifted and transformed, sensing connection to the authors and co-researchers. Stories and images touched me. The writing felt alive, embodied in first-person, which moved me, increased my empathy, and made me want—badly—to write so engagingly as well. As I enacted the female detective role, I discovered instead of disentangling the clues, I want to champion the presence of many mysteries. As in altered books, arts-based research alters and enlivens old tomes of knowledge, dry and dusty. Can we alter ourselves as well—to resist stabilized truths and welcome aporetic, open meanings through such lively inquiry?

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