Toward Connectedness: Aesthetically Based Research

Liora Bresler

Toward Connectedness:

Aesthetically Based Research

Liora Bresler

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author by e-mail: liora@uiuc.edu

[1] I discuss the obstacles to scholarly, empathetic research later in this article.

[2] My use of aesthetic orientation is specific to the Western philosophical tradition.

In this article, I suggest that aesthetics is at the heart of both artistic experience and qualitative research, and that artistic processes, in particular, the space surrounding art experiences, can illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research, including data collection, data analysis, and writing. Examining the ways in which the arts provide rich and powerful models for perception, conceptualization, and engagement for both makers and viewers, I highlight their potential to cultivate *habits of mind* that are directly relevant to the processes and products of qualitative research. I focus on the research goal of empathic understanding which is based on an *I-Thou* connection within an aesthetic, cognitive/affective space. These dialogical relationships are intensified by the expectation to communicate to an audience, creating a *tri-directional* relationship. I conclude with reflections on ethical implications for aesthetically based research.

When the qualitative paradigm assumed prominence in the '60s and '70s in the educational research scene, a major goal and rationale for its existence was *verstehen*—empathic understanding (e.g., von Wright, 1971). Qualitative research has aimed to portray multiple voices, representing with caring and insight voices that have not been part of the scholarly literature. Forty years later, with the accumulation of qualitative research studies and papers, we note a wide range of success. There are indeed studies that deeply exemplify scholarly, empathetic goals. (Compelling examples in the social sciences, include Barone, 2001a; Behar, 1996; and Myerhoff, 1978; to mention a few.) Many others fall short of achieving this goal.[1] In conceptualizing aesthetically based research as I do in this article, I aim to address this central aspect of qualitative research. Focusing on the space surrounding the art experience, I suggest that artistic processes can illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research and that aesthetics[2] is at the heart of both artistic experience and qualitative research. Examining the ways in which the arts provide rich and powerful models for perception, conceptualization, and engagement for both makers and viewers, I highlight their potential to cultivate *habits of mind* that are directly relevant to the processes and products of qualitative research. I conclude with reflections on the complexity of ethical issues involved in aesthetically based research. Specifically, I discuss the requirement that we simultaneously maintain two sets of considerations, often requiring an act of negotiation: caring for our participants, and caring about the message to the scholarly community.

The literature on research methodology of the past three decades has significantly expanded our knowledge and understanding of the philosophical and procedural bases of qualitative inquiry. Still, there are areas at the core of qualitative research that this literature does not address. These areas include the dialogic processes involved in making meaningful connections with what is studied.[3] We find indications of these connected processes of generating meaning in biographies and autobiographies of researchers in various scholarly areas, from molecular genetics (Watson, 1968) through anthropology (Gottlieb & Graham, 1994) to math (Aczel, 1996). These connections have not, however, been addressed as a methodological issue in their own right.[4] A related aspect of qualitative research that is not addressed in the literature is the presence of the potential audience as intensifying the process of meaning making, creating a three-dimensional connection. In this article, I draw from literature on art appreciation and artmaking to explore the spaces where these processes occur and to characterize what I regard as central qualities in the product of research.

Arts-based research has emerged within the late 20th century worldview of *soft boundaries* (Detels, 1999). Soft boundaries allow for flow of ideas among domains. Examples of flow between individual academic disciplines that function dialectically to generate new areas of inquiry and scholarship are the hybrid areas of biophysics, computational neuroscience, and psychological economics, among many others. It is in this spirit of *border crossing* (Giroux, 1992) that I discuss the important lessons that engagement with the arts can teach qualitative researchers.

Given that arts-based research is an umbrella term for a range of orientations and practices, as this volume will undoubtedly testify, I would like to explicate my use of the related term *aesthetically based research*. Some prominent thinkers within arts-based inquiry regard artistic practices as forms of scholarly inquiry (e.g., Finley & Knowles, 1995; Fox & Geichman, 2001; Sullivan, 2005). Rita Irwin's conceptualizations of a/r/tography, for example, merge research, teaching, and artmaking (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), regarding these three forms of thought as connected entities. In my work, I find it useful to maintain a (soft) distinction between works of art and qualitative research. I acknowledge the different purposes, expectations, and criteria held among the practitioners who constitute these two distinct communities of practice.

Both art and qualitative research in the search for empathic understanding involve mediating back and forth between the personal and the public. Dialogical relationships are then intensified by the expectation to communicate to an audience, creating a *tri-directional* relationship: (1) Connection to the phenomena or artwork, which

[3] The philosopher of science, Karl Popper (1958) has pointed out that scientific discourse has emphasized *refutations* and has marginalized discussion of *conjectures.* This paper centers on this neglected area of generation of a space for connection and perception.

[4] The lack of literature can be accounted for by Gadamer's (1988) notion of the *hermeneutic circle* and his compelling argument that finding meaning cannot ever be reduced to a method.

propels (2) a dialogic connection to oneself. This dialogue is enhanced by (3) connection to the audience. Artistic experiences, as well as the experiences of researchers engaging in research, include ways of *doing,* (which are inevitably also about *becoming)*: cultivating skills, sensibilities, and sensitivities. These ways of doing and becoming, I suggest, are characterized by dialogical processes that occur during aesthetic encounters.

Addressing empathic understanding within research requires that we examine the traditional distinction between the aesthetic and the rational. Crossing borders between arts and research involves the deconstruction of the dichotomization of affect/cognition. Kant's—indeed Plato's—association of the arts with emotions in contrast to science's (or philosophy's) association with cognition prevailed until the mid 20th century. Cognition has been regarded as more "distant," lending itself to objectivity, whereas emotions are typically regarded as "inside" us, lacking such distance. The affect/cognition dichotomy in relation to the arts has been deconstructed as part of the cognitive revolution (e.g., Broudy, 1972; Eisner, 1982; Langer, 1957). At the same time, the role of emotions in research is emerging as a vital theme (e.g., Behar, 1996, 2003; Bresler, 2002; Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Peshkin, 1988). However, the ways in which affect relates to cognition within a scholarly distance have not been addressed as a methodological issue.

It is the quest of qualitative research for what Max Weber and others have referred to as *verstehen,* empathic understanding (e.g., Bresler & Stake, 1992; Kvale, 1996; von Wright, 1971) that distinguishes the aims and processes of qualitative inquiry from other forms of research (van Manen, 1990). To accomplish empathic understanding, the researcher must achieve a state of mind that is explicitly rational, and at the same time, highly affective. The experiences of art where caring propels a dialogical relationship with the artwork, a relationship that is both affective and cognitive, provides, I suggest, an important model for research. The unique juxtaposition of affect and cognition, caring and distance, that renders making and the viewing of art dialogic and transformative are mobilized towards empathic understanding.

A word of caution: Scholarship, (and this article is no exception) like art, aims to generate new knowledge.[5] However, commitment to the old, to traditions, is an equally pivotal force in the history of both art and of science. In times when new ideas are sometimes presented as better, improved truths, I am reminded of George Steiner's (1989) caution that novelty is the enemy of originality. This article addresses themes that are both original and ancient, ancient as human nature. These themes revolve around the dialogical relationship of *I and Thou* (Buber, 1971) and the dialogical relationship with artwork (Gadamer, 1988).

[5] In the arts, names of artistic movements and manifestos, from the *Ars Nova* of the Renaissance through the Modern and Postmodern movements, reflect this quest for innovation.

Perception and Connection Through Aesthetic Distance

Perception is at the root of both art and research. In contrast to *recognition,* which takes place at the beginning of perception and refers to a relatively passive sensing of the world, *perception* explores meaning and therefore involves *re-seeing.* Dewey points out that "recognition is too easy to arouse vivid consciousness. There is not enough resistance between new and old to secure consciousness of the experience that is had" (Dewey, 1934, p. 52). Through the rearrangement of sensory elements, perception creates a form. The perceptive process of reshaping the world necessarily involves the modification of the self. Perception, then, has a transformative (and therefore an educational) significance.

Perception is at the root of an intensified affective/cognitive stance. The discipline of art appreciation offers relevant insights to the process of research. In his book *Move Closer: An Intimate Philosophy of Art,* John Armstrong (2000) identifies five aspects of the process of perceptual contemplation of an object: (1) Animadversion: noticing detail, (2) Concursus: seeing relations between parts, (3) Hololepsis: seizing the whole as the whole, (4) The lingering caress, and (5) Catalepsis: mutual absorption.

The processes of animadversion, concursus, and hololepsis are also present in Broudy's (1987) method of *scanning* and Feldman's (1981) perception of visual elements. The first aspect involves becoming aware of detail which our habitual and rapid looking tends to gloss over. This process requires a conscious effort, where we feel that we are literally turning our attention on to different parts of the canvas. In the second aspect, that of noting relations, we trace how every element performs with respect to the "good of the whole" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 86). The third aspect, seizing a work as a single complete entity, yields complete-ness and coherence in the face of many details. This aspect links the experience of art to the wider demands of reflective life and suggests how the experience of art could be of prime personal importance (Armstrong, 2000).

The aspects of experiencing visual art that Armstrong has called lingering caress and mutual absorption intensify the dialogue between viewer and artwork. Characterized by the lack of instrumental purpose associated with aesthetics, lingering caress allows deepening open-ended relationship. When we linger, Armstrong (2000) notes "Nothing gets achieved, nothing gets finished—on the contrary, satisfaction is taken in spinning out our engagement with the object" (p. 98). It is the intentional detachment of the artist from the pursuit of predefined results that allows artistic and aesthetic discoveries. What Armstrong has called mutual absorption refers to the transformative aspects of empathic, *I-Thou* relationship. Armstrong writes, "when we keep our

Liora Bresler

6 Related ways of conceptualizing aesthetic experience include perceptual response; emotional response; an intellectual response, referring to theoretical and art historical questions; and the communicative response, the desire to relate to the artist, or to his culture, through the mediation of the work of art (e.g., Czikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). While beyond the scope of this article, audience responses to artwork on these various levels and their counterparts, researchers' response to settings and data, are a fascinating area to be explored further.

attention fixed upon an object which attracts us, two things tend to happen: we get absorbed in the object and the object gets absorbed into us" (p. 99). The aspects of animadversion, concursus, hololepsis, lingering caress, and catalepsies are conceptualized as interactive and cyclical, rather than linear.[6]

I suggest that these five aspects are central to the conduct of qualitative research. Involving "the private history of perception" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 38), they infuse fieldwork, as well as analysis and writing. The first three aspects require a conscious effort as we are becoming aware of detail, note relations and patterns, and grasp for a coherent whole (examples of these processes in data collection and analysis can be found in basic methodological texts, see, for example, Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Miles and Huberman, 1984; van Manen, 1990). As in the art experience, these aspects in a research context involve interplay between detail and whole, description and interpretation, tightening one's focus and widening it.

Prolonged engagement and immersion in both fieldwork and analysis, allows us to "move closer": to linger, connect, perceive, re-see, and grasp a perspective different from our own perspective. Lingering, a "caressing with a succession of thoughts" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 74), invites discoveries, emergent issues, and ideas, mobilizes ways of seeing, and being. In this dialogical space for creation of meanings, ideas and issues are processed and become internalized. Propelled by a commitment to communication, the researcher takes it to the next level—making something new for others to interact with. I elaborate on this theme in the communication section.

The artist Ann Truitt talks about artists as intrinsically involved in a difficult balance not so blatantly precarious in other professions. The lawyer and the doctor, she writes, practice their callings. The plumber and the carpenter know what they will be called upon to do. They do not have to spin their work out of themselves, discover its laws, and then "present themselves turned inside out to the public gaze" (Truitt, 1982, p. 24). Qualitative researchers, I argue, undergo similar introspective processes. Manuscripts that afford the space to discuss these processes of spinning, discovering, and presenting oneself turned inside out to the public gaze include Behar, 1996; Gottlieb & Graham, 1994; Myerhoff, 1978; and Villenas, 1996.

In this contemplative, concentrated state, thinking and feeling support each other, occurring in accord. Indeed, this process requires intellectual and emotional investment in the experience. Armstrong tells how, when interviewing for an Oxford Fellowship, one of the panel members who was surprised by the candidate's numerous artistic interests, inquired what he got out of art. "I'm not sure what exactly I get out of art," came the reply, "but I know that I can put a great deal

into it" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 120). Investing in rich artistic works and research settings and issues increases the likelihood that our investment will be rewarded.

Qualitative research shares with art a focus on the particular. Artistic experiences can nurture character that is adept at responding to contingency and particularity (e.g., Bowman, 2000; Eisner, 2005). Whereas statistical significance looks for commonalities across large numbers that are measurable and quantifiable, for the researcher as well as the reader, connections are facilitated by the unique. The story of Anne Frank reaches us in ways that the number "six million" does not. A focus on the individual allows a noticing, a perception, and a connection. This dialogic, affective/cognitive connection encourages us to go beyond our preconceptions and ready-made categories, expanding conventional responses.

Martin Buber articulated the concept of dialogue in relation to people and things as "I-Thou" compared with "I-I," "It-It," "We-We," and "Us-Them" relationship. "It-It" people, for example,

> ... are apt to be great scholars of extraordinary erudition, with no time to have a self. They are devoted to their subject, but it does not speak to them. It is a subject one has chosen to study, and there may be others working on the same subject, and one respects them insofar as they, too, have no selves and are objective." (in Kaufmann, 1971, p. 12)

In contrast, the process of a dialogue means that the "I" is changed by the "Thou," much as the artist is changed by his/her creation and the viewer by the artwork. Buber suggests that "We must learn to feel addressed by a book, by the human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us. A good book or essay or poem is not primarily an object to be put to use, or an object of experience: it is the voice of YOU speaking to me, requiring a response" (p. 39).[7] This dialogue involves a change of self where the shaping of meaning involved in a "re-seeing," implies in turn being reshaped by the encounter.

The theme of dialogic interaction is developed by Gadamer (1988) who refers to *horizons of understanding*, the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particularly vantage point. In seeking to expand our horizon, Gadamer suggests, we have to open ourselves to the full power of what the other is saying. "Such an opening does not entail agreement but rather the to-and-fro play of dialogue" writes Gadamer (Smith, 2001, p. 2). By discovering others' horizons, [we find that] their ideas become intelligible, without our necessarily having to agree with them. The interactive, open-ended aspect of dialogue for both self and other enables the expansion of self in interaction with the environment.[8]

[7] Indeed, Buber is said to have exemplified in his personal life what he advocated. In his introduction to Buber's *I and Thou*, Kaufmann comments about Buber that he was not a man of formulas but one who tried to meet each person, each situation, and each subject in its own way, bridging differences in age, cultural background, and languages, listening, and communicating.

[8] From a different perspective and set of disciplines, the function of the arts as connecting the inside and the outside in creating mutuality and belonging is at the core of Ellen Dissanayake's (2000) work. I see inquiry, applied and basic, as filling a similar communal need.

Dialogic interactions of the type that Buber and Gadamer discuss involve the deconstruction of dichotomization of inside and outside. John Dewey (1934) has pointed out the falsity and futility of this dichotomy, arguing that making and experiencing art involve a dialectic process between the outside and the inside. Following Dewey, Maxine Greene highlighted the role of imagination in this dialectic interaction: "Once we do away with habitual separations of the subjective from the objective, the inside from the outside, we might be able to give imagination its proper importance and grasp what it means to place imagination at the core of understanding" (Greene, 1995, pp. 115-116). Greene quotes the poet Hart Crane who speaks of imagination as a reasonable connective agent toward fresh concepts. The use of imagination as part of these dialectic processes is key in qualitative research.

What characterizes the lingering spaces where these dialectic, dialogic interactions happen? The concept of aesthetic distance is highly relevant to both art and research. Edward Bullough (1953/1912) was the first to define the concept of *aesthetic distance*[9], the distance between our own self and our perceptual, emotional state. In the arts, aesthetic distance describes the point from which the artwork in its evocation of emotions and ideas is viewed. Aesthetic distance ensures deeper understanding of the aesthetic object: It is located at a midpoint between excessive distance—that is, not having an active interest in the object—and insufficient distance: being too close to the object where the work of art ceases to function as a symbol and is perceived as part of reality. Just as the right aesthetic distance is essential in both the making and appreciating of art, it is necessary, I argue, for the conduct of qualitative research. In research, as I elaborate in a later section, both insufficient distance and over distance hinder empathic understanding.

The postmodern research paradigm's attention to researcher interactions in the process of inquiry has prepared the stage for the discussion of dialogue and what Gadamer calls the *fusion of horizons*. Traditionally, social science has emphasized detachment from "subjects" and from the phenomena under study in ways that excluded dialogue. While most glaring in psychology, it also operated in disciplines that required prolonged engagement in social settings and extensive interaction with the research participants. Anthropologists, for example, started out "here" and then went "there" to study "them," returning to write about "them" in descriptive studies (Geertz, 1988). These studies were shaped into narratives that provided little information about the researcher's dialogical processes: the ways that their understanding and interpretation were shaped by the interactive experience of fieldwork.

Contemporary interpretive ethnography takes a more reflexive stance, incorporating critical examination of the anthropologist's presence and actions and explication of the ways that self and others have been

[9] This definition is part of what Bullough called a *psychical distance*, the degree of personal involvement of a viewer in a work of art.

mutually shaped in the process of fieldwork. Interpretive anthropology attends to the recursive nature of fieldwork: that is, the relationship between the ways fieldwork unfolds and the tools/texts that the ethnographer employs, a relationship that has significance for the process of interpretation (Bresler, Wasser, Hertzog, & Lemons, 1996; Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

Indeed, examining the self's interaction with the data has been acknowledged in the past twenty years as essential to interpretations (e.g., Peshkin, 1988). Interpretive research begins with the biography and the self of the researcher (Denzin, 1989). Subjectivity, "the quality of an investigator that affects the results of observational investigation" (Webster, 1993), is an umbrella term, referring to allegiances, professional commitments, values, and passions of the self. Peshkin (1988) described subjectivity as an amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one's class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one's object of investigation. These persuasions vary across time and in intensity. Subjectivity operates during the entire research process (Peshkin, 1982): it pervades the processes of conducting the research as well as the processes of analysis and writing. The researchers' presence in the setting and their interactions not only indicate but also shape their subjectivity. The dialogical nature of subjectivity, together with explicit attention to unfolding subjectivity, leads us into the process of change, a fusion of horizons.

Once created and communicated, personal understanding becomes part of cultural knowledge. To invoke Merton's well-known image, it serves as a shoulder for the next batch of researchers and artists to stand upon, enabling perceptions and conceptions to progress in a coherent way across generations of work. Writing from the perspective of art history, Ernst Gombrich (1960) provides an astute account of the history of perception and communication that explain how artists have shaped cultural "ways of seeing". More recently, Graeme Sullivan (2005) has pointed out that insights into the psychology of vision and the psychology of perception indicate that the science of sight and the creativity of the eye are related, as are the practices of the scientist and the artist.

These reflexive processes and the changes they engender extend to child art as well as to established artists. The distinction Marilyn Zurmuehlen (1990) makes between doing and making is relevant here. Making art, writes Zurmuehlen, produces a record of its existence, involving a change in our visual world. When a child draws a straight line or conceives of an arrangement of tangible elements all his/her own, s/he imposes order on matter. S/he actualizes this order, rendering it accessible to his/her senses. This *originator instinct* of making (named by Martin Buber, 1965) is not to be confused with *doing*, meaning

mere busyness or activity. Making art involves making something which did not exist before, including interacting with it. (For vivid examples of these processes in their social contexts, see Thompson, 2002; Thompson & Bales, 1991). An added dimension to making is naming, with its focus on articulated meaning and explicit representation. In research, dialogue with the data is crucial to expanding perception and conceptualization, combining making (intimate) and naming (involving distance). In experience as teacher of qualitative research methods, this works powerfully for novice as well as for expert researchers.

Obstacles to Dialogical Connection

Urging the virtues of dialogue as the raison d'etre of qualitative social research is only a starting point. As I pointed out in the introduction of this article, a systematic examination of research journals in art education, as well as in the broader discipline of education (including science, math, music and literacy), reveals that the practice of dialogue and achieving empathic understanding are not consistently highlighted as central to educational qualitative research. Assessment of obstacles to dialogue therefore follows.

One set of obstacles referred to earlier is ideological, having to do with the fundamental distinction between knowing *about* versus knowing *it*. The distance involved in "knowing about" is central to the mission of academic endeavor. Associated with objectivity and criticality, this distance emerged as a useful response to dogma and indoctrination (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It enables conceptualizations and categorization. Initially a model for the physical sciences, it was adopted by the social sciences including educational research.

Indeed, as an attribute of the scientific aim to question and refute, it is the examination of phenomenon from a critical distance that makes research credible.[10] Even in the realm of qualitative research, Eisner's (1991) notion of connoisseurship, for example, is primarily a detached expert's discernment. In contrast, empathy involves emotional connection, putting oneself in another's place. Emotional connection has been perceived as endangering scientific processes. It is important to emphasize that in the context of research, emotional connection relates to the *process* rather than to the outcome of inquiry. Caring becomes a key element of educational research when it seeks to achieve and render empathic understanding. Empathic understanding requires the combination of knowledge about and knowledge of, essentially juxtaposing aesthetic distance and connectedness.

A second, practical obstacle to research that engages in dialogic, empathic relationship lies in the *rhythm* of academic life. Connection and empathy have a pace of their own, which arises from the rhythm of

[10] These scientific procedures are now acknowledged to be not as inviolable as they were previously thought to be (Kuhn, 1968).

building relationship, responsive to others. In the increasingly rushed pace of academia, empathy can be perceived as a luxury that is difficult to maintain.

If the first two obstacles are extrinsic, the third enemy is the habitual within us. Re-seeing requires a redefinition of looking, as intensity, attentiveness, curiosity, and interest, suspending quick closure. Seeing in a fresh way takes training (Bresler, 2004). Here, the "far enemy" (to use a Buddhist term) of empathic observation and listening is literal, prompt, readymade judgment, before it has absorbed what is.[11] This is the *over-distancing* that Bullough (1953) describes. In contrast, empathic listening during interviews is open, present, attentive to nuanced qualities, interpretive rather than evaluative. The "near enemy" or *under-distancing* that undermines empathic listening is sentimentality. Both over-distancing and under-distancing carry ethical implications, as I discuss later in this article.

[11] This is a form of disinterest, a lack of connection.

Enabling Empathy

What promotes dialogic, empathic engagement and aesthetic connection? The arts provide the structure for a metaphor describing a commodious, rich space where caring, connection of self to other, occurs. The arts cultivate empathy, or, as Stout calls it "a disposition for sympathetic awareness" (Stout, 1999, p. 33). In *The Art of Opening Dialogues*, Stout (2003) suggests that of all the disciplines in the curriculum, the arts have the capacity to evoke sympathetic awareness, awakening a dialogue.

Inherent in each painting, poem and piano sonata, there is what Rader calls a *"living presence"* (1973) that calls to the beholder: Welcome to my world. When we attend to this artwork, we reach out to this living presence, and they to us, and we enter a dialogue about life. (Stout, 1999, p. 33)

The living presence inherent in a work of art intensifies perceptions and heightens experience.

Following Stout, I suggest that qualitative research is, or needs to be, characterized by this living presence, a presence that involves researchers in a dynamic, intimate dialogue that the research's audience can consequently also experience. Living presence, then, provides the kernel of the public-directed act of communication through researchers' reach toward their audience.

While empathic connections are essential to all the arts, they are achieved differently in each. For example, because most instrumental music is not mimetic, empathy or resonance are not based on a story (as it is in literature and drama) but on an emotional quality. The literal is irrelevant. Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) notions of *efferent* and *aesthetic* transactions, not distinct but interdependent, originated in

the discipline of literature but are useful in qualitative research as well as in art. A practical, efferent transaction—reading for cognitive and utilitarian understanding—is inarguably at the forefront of observations and interviews, just as it is essential in analyzing literature and art. However, an aesthetic and empathic transaction is equally important at the interview and observation stage as well as the communication stage.[12]

Communication to Audience

Whether it occurs between two people, a person and artwork, or a person and data, a dialogue has an intimacy and privacy. I suggest that the social milieu of an anticipated audience heightens the aesthetic distance and intensifies the dialogue. The audience provides a third force, making the act of creation three dimensional: (1) reaching towards the phenomena under study to interact with it accurately and fully; (2) reaching into oneself, to unravel subjectivities and values as shaping perception, resonance and interpretation, with an openness to these being reshaped in this process; and (3) communicating in a broader, expansive gesture to the audience. These stances, operating simultaneously, involve different gestures: "zooming out," "taking in," and "broadening out."

Note that my focus here on the *social* dimension of aesthetics differs from the original construction of aesthetics. The concept of distance within the aesthetic realm emerged as something *individual*, self-oriented, inward, and autonomous, defined in part by its separation from social matters (Bowman, 2000).[13] This paper highlights the aesthetic exigencies that are part of a social interaction, and specifically, how an *I-Thou* empathy operates within a commodious, private/public, three-dimensional aesthetic space.

Awareness of the audience is present at various stages of research, long before the actual rendering of a public report of procedures and results. The process of research involves a discovery and shaping of meaning for oneself as well as for others. In the early stages of fieldwork, observations are shaped by the prospect of their communication to others. The intellectual-emotional engagement is intensified by this social commitment. Losing one's sense of audience is akin to losing one's raison d'etre as ethnographer, or "going native." It is the act of communication that often gives both artmaking and research intensified meaning, rendering what would otherwise be a lone (and often lonely) act into a social one, part of belonging.[14]

Among the various qualitative genres, arts-based inquiry places value on a heightened involvement of the audience (e.g., Barone, 2001b, 2001c). Through new experimental venues like readers' theatre (Schonmann, 2001) and performance inquiry (Denzin, 2003; Stinson

& Dillon, 1993) readers and viewers of research are invited to linger, to invest themselves. This investment is similar to the investment involved in art appreciation as articulated by Gombrich, Armstrong, and Stout. It is the result of participatory reception, noting connections (similarities and differences) among apparently diverse items, drawing on imagination to bridge the concrete (the setting, the specific image) and the abstract (issues, ideas, feelings), all through an open, investigated, aesthetic frame of mind.

What are the implications of the different aspects of the research process in terms of the skills, sensitivities, and personalities required of qualitative researchers? Each of the three dimensions discussed earlier entails different skills and sensitivities. Noticing details, seeing relationships among parts and apprehending the whole require discernment and accuracy. Entering a dialogue and mutual absorption require depth, introspectiveness, and openness to change. Communication to a wider audience, beyond the intimate, traversing personal and spatial boundaries, requires an expanded focus. These three distinct qualities co-exist, building on and supporting one another.

Ethical Issues

Any discussion of the human sciences and empathic understanding needs to address issues of ethics. The traditional guidelines for ethical conduct during educational inquiry are derived from the goals of prediction and control of behavior based on large numbers of participants in research (Kompf, 1993). Accordingly, traditional ethical concerns reflect a positivist orientation to the study of human behavior that can be characterized by the dominance of the scientist over the conditions and circumstances of the study. The emphasis on connected ways of knowing in qualitative methods obviously implies a different set of ethical criteria (Bresler, 1996). In this section, I reflect on the ethical implications of connectedness among researcher, participants, and audience, noting where an aesthetic based approach can contribute to ethical considerations, as well as when the art metaphor does not parallel methodological issues.

The same characteristics that lead to empathic understanding—immersion in the field; close observation of others' behavior in private and semiprivate settings; uncovering personal beliefs, thoughts, and feelings—can also cause pain and harm (Bresler, 1996). Here, traditional procedures (consent forms) and requirements (anonymity) are no longer sufficient. While these are necessary bureaucratic technicalities, they do not address the issue of connections and empathy.

The juxtaposition of private and public, empathy suffusing aesthetic distance, requires a different way of thinking about ethics. The focus of qualitative research on empathic understanding of the individual

case calls for additional qualifications on the part of the researcher. These qualifications include the abilities to develop and maintain close and trusting relationships with participants (no longer subjugated "subjects"). In searching for connected ethics, the contemporary feminist scholarship of the past 30 years offers important insights about caring morality (e.g., Addelson, 1991; Gilligan, 1977; Noddings, 1984, 2003; Stout, 2005). While caring is often regarded as desirable in the private realm, it has traditionally been seen as less desirable in the public sphere (Linn & Gilligan, 1990). Contextualized care and sensitivity to particular differences and qualities are essential for an ethical inquiry that aims to mediate between private and public and seeks empathic understanding in the context of research.

Interestingly, a contextual view of ethics that involves a dialectic between the personal and the communal is centuries-old, dating back to Aristotle. Wayne Bowman (2000) points out that for Aristotle ethics concerned the realization of basic human potential, such that acting ethically benefits both the individual and the society. The *good* for Aristotle is not abstract, universal, and unconditional. Instead, it is always contextualized, grounded in and relative to particular circumstances. To be an ethical agent according to Aristotle, is to give up the kind of attachments to generalized knowledge that prevail legitimately in theoretical and technical fields (Bowman, 2000). It is to act rightly in realms of specifically human endeavors, where right action is always contingent, where circumstances are highly complex and variable, and where the ends of the action are never self-evident and thus can never be outside one's purview. Crucial to ethical behavior is an experientially and character-driven sense of what is salient and appropriate in particular situations, such that one does the right thing, at the right time, toward the right person, in the right company, the right way, and with right intent. Bowman (2000, p. 7) comments: "Aristotle adds in typical understatement [that this undertaking] is not for every person, nor is it easy." Indeed, Aristotle's caution seems to be as relevant now as it was then.

From a contemporary philosophical perspective Steven Toulmin argues that "a morality based entirely on general rules and principles is tyrannical," and that "only those who make equitable allowances for subtle individual differences have a proper feeling for the deeper demands of ethics" (quoted in Ben-Zeev, 1992, p. 228). Toulmin distinguishes between two ethical stances: those for strangers and those for intimates and associates. For strangers, we apply general principles, similar to the principles of right and wrong. It is towards those people and artwork to whom we become close, that we apply a sensitivity grounded in knowledge and understanding of these particular people.

What makes the quest of qualitative research towards empathic understanding possible is the extraordinary intensification of relationship of researcher and participants during fieldwork in a space of mutual involvement that shifts strangers to being close associates. A major ethical trap of qualitative research is the reversal of this relationship during the stage of in-depth analysis and writing (Bresler, 1997). Away from the field and from the direct relationship with the participants, the directionality towards the audience (the readership) can override the connection to participants. The power of the audience should not be minimized. On one level, the readership of the scholarly community is decontextualized, distant and abstract. On another level, the readership community is the "water" of the fish (that is, we researchers), the intimate milieu in which we function and that impels our thinking, doing, and communicating. It is this readership that creates the responsibility for portraying the studied phenomena with sophistication and care.

Good qualitative research, like art, presents us with complex reality. Bad research and art, I suggest, distort in the process of oversimplification, creating stereotypes and distancing us from the world. Said differently, the context of research requires a three directional ethics that, it needs to be noted, is not paralleled in the engagement with art. Still, works of art can serve important ethical purposes that also extend in different directions. Stout (1999) points out the multiplicity of directions involved in caring, "caring not only for oneself, but for others and community" as well as "caring to know and to make sense of the world" (p. 23). She proposes that through encounters with paintings, poems, and musical works, "students can enter a world of ongoing dialogue that can move them from narrow interests... to an unfolding curiosity, and a growing concern for the world in which they live" (Stout, 1999, p. 23). Following Stout, I suggest that qualitative research should aspire, indeed, to initiate that same ethically based dialogue in the reader, to move readers towards the ability to attend and perceive through an unfolding curiosity, into a growing concern for the world in which we live.

Research ethics, then, has two sets of standards that, I believe, support each other. One set of standards involves caring for individual participants and for the setting, portraying them with complexity and dignity. A related set of standards reflecting caring to the readership involves the investigation of what is humanly important and the cultivation of caring in the readers, engaging them in a dialogue on multiple levels—intellectual, affective, and ethical. Ethical concerns require that we simultaneously maintain these two sets of consideration (requiring an act of negotiation at times): caring for what we study and for our participants, and caring about the ethics of the message to the scholarly community.

Epilogue: Habits of Mind

In discussing the lessons that engagement with art can teach qualitative researchers, the concept of *habits of mind* comes to mind. In their study of the impact of learning opportunities in the art curriculum on students' academic learning and general attitudes, Burton et al. (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999) found a variety of skills and dispositions. These included the ability to imagine different vantage points of an idea or problem and to work toward a solution; or the ability to focus perception on particular aspects of experience and to sustain this focus over a period of time. The appearances of arts competencies in other disciplines was found in contexts when there was a need to structure and organize thinking in light of different kinds of experiences; or where learning involved task persistence, ownership, empathy, and collaboration with others. Burton and her colleagues conceptualized the competencies developed through engagement with the arts as habits of mind, the interweaving of intuitive, practical and logical modes of thought that characterize arts learning. My own discussion of aesthetically based research centering on arts experiences is conceptualized in the same spirit. It is not about a simple transfer, but rather focuses on the cultivation of habits of mind, affective and cognitive, engaging in three dimensional connections within aesthetic distance.

References

Aczel, A. (1996). *Fermat's last theorem: Unlocking the secret of an ancient mathematical problem.* New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Addelson, K. (1991). *Impure thoughts.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple Press.

Armstrong, J. (2000). *Move closer: An intimate philosophy of art.* New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

Barone, T. (2001a). *Touching eternity.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Barone, T. (2001b). Pragmatizing the imaginary: On the fictionalization of case studies of teaching. *Harvard Educational Review, 7*(4), 735-742.

Barone, T. (2001c). Science, art, and the predispositions of educational researchers. *Educational Researcher, 30*(7), 24-28.

Beardsley, M. (1983). Aesthetic definition of art. In Hugh Curtler (Ed.), *What is art education?* pp.15-29. New York: Haven Publishing.

Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Behar, R. (2003). Ethnography and the book that was lost. *Ethnography, 4*(1), 15-39.

Ben-Zeev, A. (1992). Emotional and moral evaluation. *Metaphilosophy, 23,* 214-229.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods.* New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Bowman, W. (2000). Music as ethical encounter? The Charles Leonhard Lecture School of Music: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign April 17, 2000.

Bresler, L. (1996). Ethical issues in the conduct and communication of qualitative classroom research. *Studies in Art Education, 37*(2) 133-144.

Bresler, L. (1997). Towards the creation of a new code of ethics in qualitative research. *Council of Research in Music Education, 130,* 17-29.

Bresler, L. (2002). The transformative zone in international qualitative research. In L. Bresler & A. Ardichvili (Eds.), *Multiple paradigms for international research in education: Experience, theory and practice* (pp. 39-81). New York: Peter Lang.

Bresler, L. (2004). Researcher education: Cultivation of sensitivities and ways of doing and becoming. A keynote presented in CIC, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. (To be published in the *Council of Research in Music Education*).

Bresler, L. (2005). What musicianship can teach educational research. *Music Education Research, 7*(2), 169-183.

Bresler, L., & Stake, R. (1992). Qualitative research methodology in music education. In R. Colwell (Ed.), *The handbook on research in music teaching and learning* (pp. 75-90). New York: Macmillan.

Bresler, L., Wasser, J., Hertzog N., & Lemons, M. (1996). Beyond the Lone Ranger researcher: Teamwork in qualitative research. *Research Studies in Music Education, 7,* 15-30.

Broudy, H. (1972). *Enlightened cherishing: An essay on aesthetic education.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Broudy, H. (1987). *The role of imagination in learning.* Los Angeles, CA: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Buber, M. (1965). *Between man and Man.* New York: MacMillan.

Buber, M. (1971). *I and Thou.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Bullough, E. (1953/1912). Psychical distance as a factor in art and an aesthetic principle. In E. Vivas & M. Krieger (Eds.), *The problems of aesthetics* (pp. 396-405). New York: Rinehart & Company.

Burton, J., Horowitz, R., & Abeles, H. (1999). Learning in and through the arts: Curriculum implications. In E. Fisk (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning* (pp. 35-46). Washington, DC: The Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee on the arts and the Humanities.

Czikszentmihalyi, M., & Robinson, R. (1990). *The art of seeing: An interpretation of the aesthetic encounter.* Malibu, CA: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Denzin, N. (1989). *Interpretive interaction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. (2003). *Performance ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Detels, C. (1999). *Soft boundaries: Re-visioning the arts and aesthetics in American education.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience.* New York: Perigee Books.

Dissanayake, E. (2000). *Art and intimacy.* Seattle: Washington Press University.

Eisner, E. (1982). *Cognition and curriculum.* New York: Macmillan.

Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* New York: Macmillan.

Eisner, E. (2005). *Reimagining schools.* London: Routledge.

Feldman, E. B. (1981). *Varieties of visual experiences* (2nd ed). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Finley, S., & Knowles, J. G. (1995). Researcher as artist/artist as researcher. *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*(1), 110-142.

Fox, T. G., & Geichman, J. (2001). Creating research questions from strategies and perspectives of contemporary art. *Curriculum Inquiry, 31*(1), 33-49.

Gadamer, H. (1988). *Truth and method.* (G. Barden & J. Cumming, Translators and Eds.). New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Geertz, C. (1988). *Works and lives: The anthropologist as author.* CA: Stanford University Press.

Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and of morality. *Harvard Educational Review, 47,* 481-517.

Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossings.* New York: Perigee Books.

Gombrich, E. (1960). *Art and illusion.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gottlieb, A., & Graham, P. (1994). *Parallel worlds.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Greene, M. (1995). Texts and margins. In R.W. Neperud (Ed.), *Context, content and community in art education* (pp. 111-127). New York: Teachers College Press.

Irwin, R., & de Cosson, A. (2004). *A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based/Living inquiry.* Vancouver, Canada: Pacific Educational Press.

Kaufmann, W. (1971). "I and Thou": A prologue. In M. Buber (Ed.), *I and Thou* (pp. 9-48). New York: Simon and Schuster.

Kleinman, S., & Copp, M. (1993). *Emotions and fieldwork.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kompf, M. (1993). Ethical considerations in teacher disclosure: Construing persons and methods. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 9*(5/6), 519-528.

Kuhn, T. (1968). *The structure of scientific revolution.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Langer, S. K. (1957). *Problems of art.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic evaluation.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Linn, R., & Gilligan, C. (1990). One action, two moral orientations-The tension between justice and care: Voices in Israeli selective conscientious objectors. *New Ideas in Psychology, 8*(2), 189-203.

McDonagh, D. (in press). Empathic research approaches: the support the designer: a supra-qualitative research for designing model. *Design Issues.*

McDonagh, D., Bruseberg, A., & Haslam, C. (2002). Visual evaluation: exploring users' emotional relationships with products. *Applied ergonomics: Human factors in technology and society, 33*(3), 221-240.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Myerhoff, B. (1978). *Number our days.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and education.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Peshkin, A. (1982). The researcher and subjectivity: Reflection on an ethnography of school and community. In G. Spindler (Ed.), *Doing the ethnography of schooling* (pp. 48-67). San Francisco: CA: Stanford University Press.

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—one's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-21.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Schonmann, S. (2001). Beyond the readers theatre: A perspective on research on aesthetic inquiry. *Arts and Learning Research Journal, 17*(1), 132-154.

Smith, M. K. (2001). Dialogue and conversation. *The encyclopedia of informal education.* Retrieved January, 3, 2006, from www.infed.org/bibio/b-dialog.htm

Steiner, G. (1989). *Real presences.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stinson, S. W., & Dillon, K. (1993). *Position and relationship: The art and science of education.* Scholarly/performance piece presented at annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Atlanta.

Stout, C. J. (1999). The art of empathy: Teaching students to care. *Art Education, 52*(2), 21-34.

Stout, C. J. (2003). The art of opening dialogues. *The Journal of Thought, 38*(2), 13-20.

Stout, C. J. (2005). A researcher's responsibility and reciprocity: The feminist ethic of care. A presentation for the National Art Education Association. Boston, MA.

Sullivan, G. (2005). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Thompson, C. M. (2002). Drawing together. In L. Bresler & C. M. Thomson (Eds.), *The arts in children's lives: Context, culture, and curriculum* (pp. 129-138). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Thompson, C. M., & Bales, S. (1991). "Michael doesn't like my dinosaurs:" Conversations in a preschool art class. *Studies in Art Education, 33*(1), 43-55.

Truitt, A. (1982). *Daybook: The journal of an artist.* New York: Penguin.

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience.* The State University of New York.

Villenas, S. (1996). The colonizer/colonized Chicano ethnographer: Identity, marginalization, and co-optation in the field. *Harvard Educational Review, 66*(4), 711–731.

von Wright, G. H. (1971). *Explanation and understanding.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wasser, J., & Bresler, L. (1996). Working in the interpretive zone: Conceptualizing collaboration in qualitative research teams. *Educational Researcher, 25*(5), 5-15.

Watson, J. (1968). *The double helix.* New York: New American Library.

Webster (1993). *Webster's new world college dictionary.* New York: Simon Schuster.

Zurmuehlen, M. (1990). *Studio art: Praxis, symbol, presence.* Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.