Opening the Picture: On the Political Responsibility of Arts-Based Research: A Review Essay

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Abstract

This article reviews *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, edited by J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole. Knowles and Cole effectively present a sound and solid approach to the field of arts-based research by putting together a wide horizon of practices and approaches through a comprehensive and effective discussion of the myriad diverse implications for all the arts. Furthermore, by inviting some of the best practitioners and researchers in the field to contribute to this project, Knowles and Coles optimize not only the innovative outcomes of arts-based research, but also open further possibilities within the discipline. Given this book's sheer volume and comprehensive nature, this review is selective and it elects to engage with the political responsibilities that emerge from the discourse and

practices of arts-based research. While commending this volume, this review is critical over Knowles' and Cole's choice to frame arts research within social scientific research. In this respect, this review proposes to run *in parallel* with this book's well-argued treatment of arts-based research in order to effect and suggest a further layer of discussion. By valorizing the exciting avenues opened by arts-based research, here it is argued that while holding relevance to all disciplines, including the social *and* natural sciences, the arts must claim their own autonomous grounds of legitimacy as a distinct and specific research paradigm—which is where the political pertinence of the arts must gain further attention and salience.

Introduction

A fire broke out backstage in a theatre. The clown came out to warn the public; they thought it was a joke and applauded. He repeated it; the acclaim was even greater. I think that's just how the world will come to an end: to general applause from wits who believe it's a joke.

— Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (1992, p. 49)

In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole present us with an invaluable collection of essays written by some of the most committed and enthusiastic practitioner-researchers in the arts and arts education. This book constructs a comprehensive picture of a collective endeavor moved by a forceful group of artists, researchers and educators whose work directly challenges the academic traditions of research within the dynamic and ever expanding fields of the literary, visual, performing and media arts. It is not only impressive by its sheer volume (all 719 pages of it, if one includes preface, biographies and index), but more so by the wide range of issues and approaches that its 54 chapters have to offer. Divided in six parts under the headings of *Knowing*, *Methodologies*, *Inquiry Processes*, *Issues and Challenges*, *Arts in Research across Disciplines*; with Part III, *Genres*, divided in five sections that cover *Literary Forms*, *Performance*, *Visual Art*, *New Media*, and *Folk Art and Popular Music*, there is hardly any aspect of arts-based research[1] that is left behind.

Knowles and Cole effectively alert us to a horizon of arts-based research that is solid and comprehensive. This is achieved through this book's diverse treatment of a wide range of practices that more often than not have been off the radar of academia. The editors were diligent and rigorous in optimizing the available expertise in the field. They took great care in

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[1] Although one could argue for a distinction between *arts research* and *arts-based research*, in this essay I take both terms to mean those forms of research that emerge from the practice of the arts. This also applies for other terms used in the field, like *practice-based*, *practice-informed* or *practice-led* arts research.

bringing together a number of contributions that broadly represent as many diverse angles and approaches that such a project could afford. Readers are regaled with a comprehensive and effective discussion of the myriad implications that the arts, in their diverse nature, have to offer in terms of presenting new takes on what academic research in the arts is and could be. This brings together a variety of constituencies of knowledge, creativity, discovery and learning by which the arts continue to grow and emerge in new forms and possibilities. These constituencies hold great promise and one would hope that in recognizing such potential, new challenges from within arts-based research itself would emerge.

It is with this possible criticality in mind that this review essay seeks to tease out an aspect of arts research which this and similar books have somehow left under-argued and under-researched. I therefore propose a review and an essay that run 'in parallel', where while making reference to a number of pertinent chapters and contributions, this review essay takes to task a wider aspect of arts-based research. Here, readers are invited to also take into account the larger context of the arts and the research that emerges as a consequence of their practices, and how this has been latched to the social scientific paradigm—which this review essay considers as problematic.

While I would make my argument, I also want to hold myself into account as a member of this ever-expanding and variegated community of artists, researchers and educators who deem arts-based research as being pivotal to the future of academic research within and beyond the field itself. Readers are respectfully invited to read this essay in the friendly, collegial and sympathetic spirit with which it is written and by which it fields several questions which are mostly aimed beyond the present volume. Invariably and as expected, some of the questions remain difficult to comprehensively address within the limits of one essay. This is also due to the complexity by which arts-based research has become increasingly engaged with a wide and complex horizon. Such complexity is more to do with the embarrassment of riches that marks the arts' ever-widening impact.

Furthermore, academia has become more than an array of universities and colleges that continue to strive for excellence, exploration and scholarly adventure. It is an industry and therefore a polity that has implications within the larger picture of government and democracy. The arts are no less central to this political complex than the sciences, law or economics. Therefore I would argue that for the arts—and by implication for arts-based research—to assert this importance and necessity within the polity, arts researchers and practitioners must also affirm the autonomous and immanent nature by which their practices and disciplines lay claim on the specificity of their approach. So to say that arts research must enhance and be at the centre of social science research would be a retrograde step. This would second-guess the specificity of arts-based research and with it the ability of the arts to stand as a distinct research paradigm in its own right. Arts research does not need to gain further

legitimacy by being part of another research paradigm whose *raison d'être* is historically and politically distinct from that of the arts. As this and other books about arts-based research prove, arts research is a tangible force of creativity and inventiveness. More importantly, the arts are inherently aporetic and therefore give human beings the ability to engage laterally with the world—a world that needs to be continuously challenged as well as changed.

This is what prompts this review essay. My hope is that that by making reference to relevant parts of Knowles and Cole's robust contribution—in view and together with other texts in this ever growing field—this essay will introduce another layer to this much needed debate within arts-based research. I also think that arts-based research has now grown and matured enough to be able to take on such necessary forms of auto-critique. Here I would refer to Elliot Eisner's lead chapter in this book—a book that is rightly dedicated to him and his pioneering work in the field of arts and arts educational research. Eisner states: "Given the near revolutionary way in which the arts are being regarded as tools for research, I expect that there will be a variety of resistances to be encountered. These resistances need to be addressed by scholars committed to the idea and exploration of arts-informed research. Short-term enthusiasts are hardly going to be able to provide the kind of leadership, indeed the kind of courage, that such an enterprise will require" (HAQR,[2] p. 10). As Eisner argues for the need to find a sympathetic home for such a form of leadership and debate, I also hear his call for a resistance that comes from within those academic realms that may have already set up a home for arts-based research; and by this I mean the arts themselves. Which is why this essay seeks to provide a resistance, the form of which Eisner invites—that is, collegial, sympathetic, and in all intents and purposes, constructive.

At the Cost of Making 'It' Accountable

Art *practice* is, in and of itself, a specific and special form of *research*. In the arts the very idea of a qualitative-quantitative divide becomes irrelevant because by its distinct nature arts research calls for a different set of categories where the arts do not *search* for stuff or facts, but they *generate* it. If, for want of a better word, we call this generative stuff 'data', then unlike any form of empirical data, the data that the arts make never set out to prove anything. Rather, art's data set out to make a case by how the arts emerge *as such* in their acts of *doing* and *making*. This approach is central to those who see arts-based research as being forms of arts practice and vice-versa. Good examples are Sullivan's *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the visual arts* (2005) and Macleod's and Holdridge's *Thinking Through Art. Reflections on art as research* (2006). Both books reiterate the facticity of art making and draw inferred methods from within studio practices that become environments for further research and, sometimes though not always, for new pedagogical possibilities. The central approach in both

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[2] I will use the abbreviation HAQR (which stands for *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*) to indicate citations taken from the present volume.

books is that one must never lose sight of the fact that even when art practice is deemed as art research, the arts cannot lose track of their autonomy. In other words, the arts cannot become other than what they are; which means that they could never serve as instruments—of research or otherwise—for something else. Far from saying that art is there for art's sake, this means that for the arts to be effective they must assert its aesthetic speciality and specificity, without which there is neither art nor less arts research.

However, coming from within the same disciplinary provenance, there are those who would put a different slant and focus on arts-based research by insisting that one must assume an identifiably *qualitative* character to it. More so it is claimed that arts research must rightfully claim its place within the social scientific research paradigm. This is very clearly stated by Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund in their *Arts-Based Research in Education. Foundations for Practice* (2008) and also by Knowles and Cole in the present volume.

Knowles and Cole argue that one of the major goals of this book is that of "defining and exploring the role(s) of the arts in qualitative social science research" (p. xiii). They also claim that "all the authors proclaim the power of the arts for enhancing social science research" (p. xi). Although it is fair to say that Knowles and Cole take a wider context than Arts Based Educational Research (ABER), which generally informs Cahnmann-Taylor's and Siegesmund's work, the general tenor of this book is set by a good number of authors who broadly emerge from an art educational background. This might explain the emphasis on social scientific qualitative research.

Having said that, one finds some distinction between these two volumes and two other edited books of essays that directly approach art education. Bresler's *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (2007) and Hickman's *Research in Art & Design Education: Issues and Exemplars* (2008) may be seen as coming from different constituencies. However this is not simply a case of who comes from where. Rather, it touches on a wider question of what, in effect, is the role of the arts within the spheres of research in the arts per se, and how this would differ from the research that comes from the arts as they are *applied* to wider realms of practice—such as the educational and social spheres—that are related but which reside *outside* the arts. Indeed the use of words 'applied' and 'outside' may appear infelicitous. However it is safe to argue that the arts do not remain in the studio, the theatre, or the gallery, but are widely exercised within other realms such as education, the culture industry, museums, administration, social work, and so on. In other words, the very important issue of where to *locate* arts based research is more central than how the arts would claim academic legitimacy within academia.

Undoubtedly, in the recognition of 'practice as research' the specificity of arts practice as a different genre of research is more visible and commonplace in academia. But the very fact that the arts are located elsewhere from their actual making raises important questions. As they seek to locate the arts *somewhere* many arts researchers deem it necessary to characterize research by some emphasis on how the arts practice an activity whose facts are identified and could be studied by *other* than artists. This is very much the case in arts projects that took the strategy of specifically identifying a number of arts practices through the setting up of projects that would illustrate specific remits of discovery, creation and outcome. Once done, these practices are *applied* as identifiable methods that impact other than the arts. (Or at least, that's the theory). Though most, if not all, arts researchers would argue that such methods could not be equated with how outcomes articulate in the natural sciences, the assertion that these methods have become akin—and in turn must *enhance*—social scientific qualitative research remains many an arts researcher's strong claim.

This logic infers that arts-based research methods are effective tools by which art practitioners make their own specific claims on the world. Gray's and Malin's *Visualizing Research: A Guide To The Research Process In Art And Design* (2004) is a good example of this approach. Their aim is to make evident what is often impossibly *evidenced* in practice-based art and design research. The merits of such an approach is to gain a strong legitimate ground for those art and design practices, which, for all intents and purposes have long been established, but which must be claimed for everyone, and not simply for artists.

One can never deny the strategic importance of legitimizing arts-based research, particularly when, as in the case of British universities, research is directly linked to the funding of programs and colleges (see RAE, 2009). In fact Gray's and Malins' position is firmly rooted in the specific needs that emerge from historical whereabouts of art and design academic research such as these. However, in retrospect, an assessment of such strategies (even when they effectively *pay* and are extremely successful in terms of securing grants and funding) must not diminish the merits of how, in the first place, we have come to argue that art research is also a form of art practice. This highlights another quandary, because unless practice is objectified into a set of activities, art could never fit within any method—be it social scientific, empirical or even positivistic. There is nothing inappropriate with methods per se. But making art and design practices fit within the social sciences carries the risk of essentialism, where practices are reduced to identifiable methodological categories. This opens itself to the risk of standardization and the loss of the autonomy and immanence that characterize the arts in the first place.

Over the Abyss of Necessities

This presents arts-based research with a challenge that resembles walking a tightrope over what one could call an *abyss of necessities*. This abyss lies between two needs: one that pulls towards academic legitimacy and accountability and another pulling the opposite way, towards art's autonomy and the assertion of aesthetic immanence. As one walks over such an abyss, the prospects remain replete with assumptions which unsurprisingly are Janus-faced. While contradiction and paradox are celebrated as artistic practices, it appears that the very aporetic nature of the arts keeps being undermined by the need to a reconciled construction of knowledge—even, or perhaps *especially*, when knowledge is deemed multiple.

Those steeped in Eisner's theories of knowledge would find his words conciliatory, if not a solution for this dilemma. In his critique of logical positivism's tendency "to dismiss poetic and metaphorical language as meaningless utterances" he rightly dismisses the positivistic trends that have historically limited the social sciences. (Eisner, HAQR p. 9) When he rightly suggests that the conditions for arts-informed research needs the "vigor of those committed to the exploration of the arts and the means through which they help enlarge human understanding", citing the need for a more meaningful and effective interdisciplinarity (p. 10), Eisner feels the need to frame this in terms of the "contributions of the arts to knowledge" citing qualitative nuances of situations, empathic feeling, understanding experience, the provision of a fresh perspective, and how the arts "tell us something about our own capacities to experience the affective responses to life that the arts evoke" (pp. 10-11). *Prima facie* this would suggest that the arts' contribution would guarantee their way into the established collaborative desirability of research. However what this could also imply is that the arts are being urged to *provide* applicable forms of knowing in order to gain a position of legitimacy against the old logical positivist skepticism towards the arts.

While this seems plausible enough—and indeed, that is what arts researchers claim to have achieved—this could well invalidate arts-based research and take us back to square one. I would argue that to state that art research is validated by how it *applies* or *contributes* to an identified ground and methodological construction, would directly invalidate the very notion of why the arts should be practiced in the first place. I would further argue that this happens even when this contributive applicability is of a lateral, divergent, or even paradoxical and iconoclastic nature. The reason for this invalidation has nothing to do with the merits of what the arts could contribute. Rather it has to do with the very assumption that to dismiss the positivist denunciation of the sort that Eisner cites, one must invest the arts in a form of legitimation that ultimately reduces the arts into surrogate forms of essentialism. In this case, the arts become partial contributors to what is assumed to be a holistic world, but without effectively critiquing or challenging the very ground of holism. In other words they are essentialized into units of contribution to a totality with which they remain teleologically bound. An even more fundamental objection to this kind of surrogate essentialism comes from

the fact that arts practices are far more immanent than conceptual. While a number of theoretical practices tend to take more of a conceptual method of arguing and doing, the arts afford their autonomy through their immanent character and not their conceptual *exterior*. By dint of art's immanence—its *interiority*—the conceptual practices that externally articulate the arts could never be equivalent to a number of 'facts' or 'deeds', especially when these are framed within the empirical-practical tenets of psychology, sociology or anthropology.

Here I do not want to diminish in any way Eisner's fundamental contribution to arts educational research, however it seems to me that even when we assume that knowledge is multiple, the constructed grounds on which these epistemological assumptions are made tend to remain unquestioned. Which is why while artistic forms of rendition that characterize a good number of this book's contributions confirm that literary, poetic, artful and a/r/tographic forms are indeed highly effective and viable ways of doing research (King, Chambers et al., Springgay et al., Saldaña, de Cosson, Cole & McIntytre, Rahn and others), one must also remain vigilant against falling into a kind of formalism where arts-based research becomes too reassured by an aesthetic that remains bereft of criticality. Indeed, one must be reassured by the fact that, as this book also shows, many arts researchers are aware of the dilemma that comes with this choice. To take a/r/tography as one example, Springgay et al. argue that to engage with such research practices, is to engage with a "slippage in 'time'" (HAQR, p. 87). The idea is to disrupt linear forms of doing and reasoning, and replace it with a relational aesthetic—which must imply that the form itself becomes disrupted and in turn disruptive of itself. Tom Barone's beautiful characterization of reading is equally reassuring:

> The prevailing binary of truth and fiction (or fantasy) is thereby replaced with a complex conception of the act of reading as one in which a delicious dialectic tension between actuality and imagination may be experienced. Indeed, a boundary between fact and fiction has never been, itself, an objective, strictly "factual" entity. Rather it is a human (social) construction, an artifact of convention, one born out of a general need for an unambiguous classification of otherwise indeterminate entities (HAQR, p. 109)

Barone's essay opens the third part of this book, appropriately entitled *Genres*. This is by far the most comprehensive of the six parts that make this book, in that researchers and practitioners from literature, performance, the visual arts, new media and folk and popular arts present a tapestry of practice-based possibilities. This diversity of possibilities leaves nothing to be desired and in this respect, one cannot remain passive to what is on offer as a wide horizon of practices which the jargon sums up as *artistry*.

So What Is at Stake?

As a number of contributors in Part VI of this book clearly attest in their diverse, often lateral, and sometimes iconoclastic, ways (I draw attention to Behar's, Higgs' and specifically Halen-Faber & Diamond's fascinating contributions), the huge significance of human development, anthropology and sociology to arts-based research can never be belittled. However in the same lateral vein one must emphasize that these disciplines must remain distinct from arts-based research, even when arts research use methods borrowed from these disciplines. This has nothing to do with disciplinary purism, but with the recognition of arts research as primarily characterized by *immanent*, *critical* and *discursive* forms. It is because of these characters of specificity that art research's responsibilities are not simply located in academic accountability or empirical measure, but within the political sphere. To my mind, this sphere seems to be underrepresented in the overall assumptions made in this and other books on arts-based research, especially when one takes serious notice of what Sinding et al. have to say about the ethical consequences of arts research, particularly with regards to what they see as the three constituencies of "the people who create the representation, audiences, and research participants" (HAQR, p. 459). In the same vein I would draw attention to the case that Chambon makes about the criticality that social work attains (and retains) from its engagement with specific art forms (HAQR, p. 592). This is equally compelling, and here we come across a degree of argument which goes to the direction that I am suggesting, where the significance of arts research takes a *critical* character. Indeed Chambon's attention to Zygmunt Bauman's critique of instrumental rationality (HAQR, p. 599) is not only apt, but also necessary.

Bearing in mind that the arts are not there to please, but to critique the numbness by which the merely pleasant made us insensitive to human suffering, it is neither inappropriate nor shocking to argue that arts-based research must transcend practice as that which initiates it, and instead what matters is the autonomy by which arts practice would radicalize and transform research into a political act. We do this to assert and afford art in its autonomy—*autonomy* being that political essence by which women and men claim the spheres of freedom, of truth, of ethics and aesthetics. In other words, we need to assert the same autonomy by which we could afford and in turn claim a normative—rather than simply analytical—understanding of the world.

This is where, as Cancienne puts it, one takes a radical leap from process to critique where "I critique my creative process by making suggestions based on what I currently think about this performance" (HAQR, p. 402). Reading this from a political context, Cancienne presents a "participatory critical action research and the performance of that research [which seeks] to disrupt traditional power relationships by showing the complexity of the relationship" (HAQR, p. 403). Thus the question is how such leaps from within these kinds of relationality take effect through art's *exit* (Baldacchino, forthcoming), but without externalizing the

practice as an operational category that is simply taken, applied or transplanted elsewhere. As I see it, it is this kind of inconciliable form which sustains criticality. And one must not forget that the arts gain their autonomous essence from being such inconciliable forms. In this way the arts empower human beings to retain the right to remain *outside* without abdicating from the right to remain at the heart of complex power relations (Baldacchino, 2009). This is an aporetic relationship that must be sustained. And it is here that any assumption of a straight-laced constructivism becomes untenable.

Though Cancienne does not put it this way, the complex relationships that she presents confirm the need for a clarification of what is at stake in a state of affairs where the arts emerge in their lateral possibilities. My objection to the framing of arts-based research within the social sciences is not an objection to some falsification of the arts, or to how they should or not contribute to the world. Neither is it a call for methodological secession. Rather, an objection to potential forms of essentialism in arts-based research is moved by the objection to instrumental reason, which remains latent in the social sciences and where the consequent implications of arts research are reduced to that of the arts becoming effective tools for social outcomes.

Instrumentalist rationalism emerged around the social sciences at the turn of the 20th century, and the ensuing polemics that emerged within the social sciences are well known (Adorno, et al, 1976). Ultimately this is a *political* matter and to that effect it pertains to a discussion of what defines a discipline and how it emerges as a form of being and understanding. This has a strong import on how and whether the arts are, or should be perceived, as *political* practices, where more often than not they are seen to 'function' within the social and economic contexts that we inhabit (with the risk of the paradox of contribution, raised earlier in this essay). This also means that the responsibility which tasks the arts practitioner and researcher remains rooted in the struggle that first emerged with critical theory and which remains ensconced in many related forms of argument. As in the case of critical theory, the key to the specificity of arts-based research must not be sought in some grammar or doctrine, but in the normative paradox that informs our need to sustain arts practices and discourses as critical and therefore political acts. In this respect the arts are in no way an integrative activity that assumes the whole for the sake of everything else. There is something perverse in the insistence on art's holistic nature—perverse, because what the practices of the arts do is operate in other than a holistic way, even when the outcomes appears to be universal. But then again the notion of universality is not necessarily sustained on the rejection of—or compensation for—contingency. To the contrary, it is because we are contingent beings that we can assume or aspire to a universal notion, even when this is all but a severely frustrated aspiration.

This is best expressed by Adorno (1984) when he states that "art becomes human only when it gives notice that it will not play a serving role" (p. 281). Art's relevance thus moves in the

opposite way from how the conciliatory idea of its expected 'contribution' works. Indeed if we speak of the polity, and therefore we assume that humanity is to be done a *service*, this is rendered a disservice by art in the unexpected ways by which it *exits* and leaves behind what an instrumental rationality expects. "The opposite ideology of art's service to humanity is incompatible with real humanity", says Adorno. "It is art's inhumanity alone that bespeaks its faith in mankind' (ibid.). As this relational character emerges in its most uncomfortable forms, the true aspect of responsibility becomes more evident. History confirms that the arts have no place within the positive sciences—be they social, natural or otherwise. Even when artists are seen to have facilitated the onset of natural science—Leonardo da Vinci being such an archetypal figure—the dynamic was neither complementary nor felicitous, but truly disturbing and antagonistic. The aporetic nature of the arts leaves no choice for arts-based research than to engage with what the Italian composer Luigi Nono does in his *Il Canto Sospeso*: sustain lyricism by suspending anything that mildly sounds lyrical (Baldacchino, 1996, p. 133). Or what Garcia Lorca does when he celebrates love through its proscription: where "Love, wet to the bone with tears of snow, warms himself among the highland herds" (Lorca, 2001, p. 270-1).

Concluding by a Manner of 'Opening'

A case for the political responsibility of arts research comes down to reconsidering the strategies that so often precluded the arts from being properly assessed in terms of matters that have to do with the *polity*. In this case the polity denotes (a) the arts as a community within which artists do work and make meaning, albeit by an approach that often comes across as negative and often meaningless; and (b) the community that grounds the politics that we nurture as a society. By working from within this two-sided notion of the polity, it has also been the business of the arts to determine how their political horizon comes into effect with regards to the rest of the other human activities that take place in the world. There is a further backdrop to this dual meaning of community (*qua* polity), and that is how in their propensity to openness and by valuing the accident and the commonplace, the arts prompt us to continuously revisit the politics by which we enact our day-to-day lives. Here, I would like to direct the latter notion of art's politics to that of art's formative context—but understood laterally, in reverse, as it were, where art gives form by its rejection (read *slippage*) of form(ing). I would frame this within the *special* space by which the arts and politics become an *agôn*—a place of dispute—that enacts a *formative aesthetic* that may or may not become immediately apparent, and which could never become a datum for measurability, but which remains an essential part of how we arrive at understanding the constructions of our own aesthetic realities.

Arts-based research must seek, by the default of the specificity of the arts, to seriously question the social scientific paradigms that have, for so many years, dominated humanistic research. It is an *historical* and more so an *artistic* fact that before researchers started to take

note of arts research, modern and contemporary art already witnessed the mismatch between (a) the arts' discursive practices and philosophies; and (b) the social scientific methodologies that have been all too earnestly volunteered as *the* way to legitimize research in the arts in their applied domains. This still seems to be a case taken in the larger domain of arts research, particularly in areas where art finds itself subsumed under professionalized domains. And this notwithstanding the fact that on all accounts—but especially the philosophical, artistic and political ones—the arts and social sciences continue to present us with a permanent case of incompatibility.

The justification for arts' compatibility with identifiable and established methods of research has always been one of presumed communication with those 'other' forces that seem more politically powerful than the arts will ever be—in terms of both recognition of art as an academic discipline and more so in terms of the (rather defeatist) argument that the arts need to be seen as benign and non-partisan enough to enter the realms of epistemological acceptability. Thus the traditions of studies on art as experience, as practice, and as cognition have for better or worse come to their fruition within this context of acceptability. For better because indeed there has always been a need for recognition. For worse because the prevailing outlook in art research does not seem inclined to break out of the social scientific paradigm — notwithstanding the very strong arguments that have been made by exemplification of the arts themselves, not to mention those philosophical grounds by which art must be inevitably valued. This is rather curious, given than in effect many contributions in this book, in essence, go the other direction (see for example Springgay et al. and Nielsen in Part II and Barone, Bresler, Sullivan, Butler-Kisber, and de Cosson in Part III).

By way of concluding this essay, I would sum up the main issues as follows:

If there is an argument for arts-based research and the advancement of its legitimate struggle against the foreclosed structures of other forms and methods of research and action, this has to recognize itself as an argument that is based first and foremost in *action*. This form of action is *political* and attends to an *immanence* that is neither metaphysical (in terms of a superfluous aesthetic) nor a fetish of practice (in terms of viewing art as some transcendental machine). As an act of political *immanence* art is a horizon of plural peculiarities where while it is not simply an act without cause or end, it is also a form that upholds its difference from other forms of human knowledge or action. This difference is not simply cognitive or metaphysical. Rather it pertains to the narratives of what Agnes Heller (1992) identifies as 'historical contingency'

Arts-based research is neither pragmatic nor a reaffirmation of some sort of Liberal-Progressivism against Conservatism. The diarchy of this displaced form of argument is now over, and from the void that Liberalism (or better, its insufficiency) has left behind, as artists

and researchers, and educators we must make it a matter of urgency, to safeguard this space from being taken over by more sinister and expedient practices by which the arts and by consequence arts education, would be happy to remain humanist tools for human growth or development. Indeed, this is a prospect that cannot be accepted, as many contributors to this and other books on arts-based research would confirm.

If, indeed, the social scientific paradigm has served the arts for many decades and pulled arts-based research into the legitimate sphere of scholarship—and there is a case to argue for the fact that for better and worse the arts have managed to 'beat the system' into accepting arts-based research as a legitimate force in academia and beyond—this would not last. The contemporary arts have pulled down the curtain on this episode in arts research and have for some decades made it evident to artists, researchers and arts educators that the models that may have served us for almost five decades, are deficient and even turning out to be detrimental for the arts in the various areas where the arts are studied, argued and practiced.

Lastly I would refer to the quote from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, which opens this essay. Maybe we might want to remind ourselves that in the externalized contexts by which the arts are reviewed—in terms of *quality* or *quantity*—the litanies that may still appear legitimate to arts scholarship only lend the arts the same 'wit' by which the audience have lent the clown's cry that the house is on fire. Indeed, far from a form of benign patronage, the social scientific approach has become as alien to the philosophies and practices of the arts, as an audience that mistakes art's declaration of Truth for a joke. On this I would not bet money that I haven't got, but I would be keen to see the debate furthered—which is why *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* must be read as an occasion to continuous debate.

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John Baldacchino is Associate Professor of Art and Art Education at Columbia University's Teachers College, New York, where he teaches philosophy of art and education, radical philosophy, critical theory, studio and pedagogy of art in higher education. Prior to his current post, he held academic posts in the United Kingdom as Reader in Critical Theory at Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University in Scotland (2000-2004) and as Lecturer of Art Education and Cultural Theory at the University of Warwick in England (1993-2000). His publications include academic papers on the visual arts and music, aesthetics, critical and cultural theory, as well as art and book reviews. He is the author of *Post-Marxist Marxism: Questioning the Answer* (Avebury, 1996), *Easels of Utopia: Art's Fact Returned* (Ashgate, 1998), *Avant-Nostalgia: An Excuse to pause* (USOPIA, 2002) and *Education Beyond*

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