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Doing Arts-Based Educational Research For The Public Good: An Impossible Possibility?

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Introduction

In a recent essay, written by Guy Nordenson on the occasion of the *Chris Burden Extreme Measures* retrospective exhibition at the New Museum New York City, Nordenson, a Princeton University professor of architecture and structural engineering, engaged in a playful discussion of Burden's 2002 sculpture, *Tyne Bridge*. He began by pointing out that this work is a precise replica of the actual Tyne Bridge in Newcastle upon Tyne in England, built to one-twentieth of the size of the actual bridge. He proceeded to say that Burden's *Tyne Bridge* "is not the kind of model that would be used to present the design to a client interested in funding such a bridge" (p. 86). Neither is it, he continued, "a working model of the kind used to test an engineering idea" (p. 86). But, said Nordenson, *Tyne Bridge* is doing work; it is doing work of a different kind. Like Burden's other Bridge sculptures, *Tyne Bridge*, explained Nordenson, "work[s] on us rather than for us" (p. 94). It provokes questions, activates curiosity, triggers the imagination, solicits responses, cultivates thought, and, specifically for Nordenson, "work[s] up an awareness of the awesome presence of the material reality we have made around ourselves - and the joy this can give us when as boys (and girls) we can lose ourselves in the details of their construction" (p. 94). In other words, the artwork provides

an infinite space of possibilities where questions can be asked, uses imagined, and scenarios played out. For me, Nordenson's reading of the work does two things: First, it demonstrates that there is no single or absolute meaning to be gleaned from the work; no one overarching or underpinning significance that hovers above, behind or beneath the work as it lives in the contexts in which it is placed, in the circumstances in which it is brought into visibility and made intelligible, and in the situations that it produces. Second, it points to how Burden's *Tyne Bridge* is available for many interpretations.

Reading Nordenson's interpretation of Burden's *Tyne Bridge*, and paying attention, in particular, to how he did his interpretative work reminded me a lot of the nature of arts-based educational research outputs and how they tend to do their work. They do their work in a way that makes it difficult to claim that arts-based educational research outputs address societal needs and contribute to the public good — the theme of this special issue. By this I mean the following: Arts-based educational research outputs, for the most part, are of limited value for understanding a whole host of problems and challenges facing education today. Specifically, they do not offer answers or point to solutions to educational problems, just as Burden's *Tyne Bridge*, according to Nordenson, would be of little help to the engineer keen on testing an engineering idea, or the client interested in funding its construction. But, yet, like Burden's *Tyne Bridge*, (specifically Nordenson's reading of it), arts-based educational research outputs do something. They do something important for education: To use Nordenson's words, "[they] work on us rather than for us" (p. 94), and, it seems to me, they operate in ways more akin to the work of the intellectual than to the work of the researcher, even though they often emerge from research situations. Consider the following example. At the 2013 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting symposium entitled, *What does it mean to have an N of 1? Art-making, education research and the public good*, which is the subject of this special issue, one of the panel members and co-organizer of the symposium, Monica Prendergast read an autobiographical poem to a packed room; to an audience of educational researchers sympathetic, we might say, to what the arts can offer for illuminating educational situations and conditions; an audience receptive to the promise offered by poetry (in and through its own specific way of telling) for knowing more and knowing differently about things that matter in teaching lives. The poem, entitled *fat cow*, spoke to the difficult work of education. Specifically, it focused on one teacher's will to live on as a teacher in the face of inhospitable experiences that refused to fully disappear no matter how far they receded into the background of her teaching life. Judging from the audience's reaction, *fat cow* created for many present what Peter deBolla (2001) calls a "somatic response" – a response, he explains that is characterized by a "sensation akin to tingling, a kind of spinal overexcitation, or curious shudder – that involuntary somatic spasm referred to in common speech by the phrase "someone walking on one's grave" (p. 2). In other words, it did something important.

While it narrates a teaching event, Prendergast's poem is strictly not an analysis of a teacher's life, a teaching situation, or school life more generally. Yet, it reveals aspects of the school world, the experience of teaching and the nature of relations that can occur between various school actors under certain conditions. It could be read as an account of one teacher's becoming and what becomes of the teacher in that process (Britzman 2009). As the poem invites us to consider the systems of power within schooling – the powers of the institution and how it finds form in practices, rituals and exchanges; the power the student in the face of powerlessness (of being asked to moved to another seat); the power of the teacher to make determinations and demands on students; and the power that runs through these interactions and exchanges so beautifully attended to in the poem — in and through one teaching experience, it points to the fact that there are things to learn about school by paying attention to what has happened to others there. As it tells something of the experience of living in relation to others within a school context, while not necessarily living like them, it does not provide the types of contextual information (in an epilogue or prologue) that readers of research normally expect, nor does it make available to us “the logic of inquiry and activities that led from the development of the initial interest, topic, problem, or research question” (AERA 2006, p. 33). And, yet, it works on many levels without having a specific mandate.

While the poem has its own character and belongs to a tradition, nonetheless it opens a space for the author to recall vividly, to tell evocatively, and to invite others to connect or align their experiences with hers, as it reveals a quality of a schooling experience of educating and being educated. While it provides an account of an event, witnessed by others, and felt deeply by the writer, the content of the poem is not the event as experienced, observed, sensed, or felt, but rather an interpretation, construction, an organization of remembrances, feelings and reactions. The form of the poem imposes a particular reading practice and a listening experience as one is led from one sentence to another, image to image, through the poem's rhythm, sound, diction, word patterns. For that reason we might say that the production of the poem never ceases, that it is always being brought into existence, being produced again and again in the contexts in which it is shared, read, made sense of, connected to the experiences of others, remembered, and extended into and out of practice. It lives a life away from and in spite of the intentions of its author, as it becomes entangled in the lives of others, as it operates to cultivate thought, influence action, shape practice without ever insisting on a course of action. In other words, the poem is an assemblage of many factors that come together with the potential to create a response — affective, cognitive and otherwise. As receivers of the poem, we are always governed to a certain degree by its form, a form with its own history.

Reading Prendergast's poem, we realize that it does not offer answers or point to solutions to problems of school structure and power (the teacher's, the student's and the administrator's in

that moment). To exist as it does, it connects with things outside of itself (stories of teaching, experiences of being humiliated, feelings of powerlessness and embarrassment, hope and hopelessness), and it maintains relations with such things. Following Sartre, we might read the poem (and the writing of it) as an act of taking leave of the situation that it narrates. Or, perhaps we might view it (and the reciting of it) as an act of conquering that very situation, of coming out the other end, scarred but still standing. And yet, the act of thinking and writing the poem entails more than remembering, recalling, positioning and repositioning, taking leave or conquering the experience again, but differently; it involves imaginatively weaving past experiences with current situations within which past experiences come to life and light differently; for these experiences come into being in and through the manner in which they are called up, shaped and given form within an existing form that has a history and a tradition. In other words, the act of doing, of making within a form does something. It lends itself to coming to know.

As this example demonstrates, arts-based educational research outputs have the capacity to move us in ways that connect us with aspects of our lives as teachers and learners. Time and again, they create opportunities for us “to rediscover the world in which we live . . . which we are prone to forget” (Merleau-Ponty 2004, p. 31-32). They have the capacity to call into presence particular educational situations and conditions. It is for this reason that I cautiously considered the invitation to “address how ABER [Arts-Based Educational Research] work connects with and/or directly addresses society’s need/s and the public good”, which I was asked to address as a panel member on the aforementioned 2013 AERA symposium, *What does it mean to have an N of 1? Art-making, education research and the public good*. Undoubtedly, something is being brought into being in the process of attending to ABER’s capacity to contribute to the betterment of society. Inviting others to speculate on how ABER might function as a public good as it explicitly addresses social and political issues of importance to the current time opens a space for discussion and deliberation about what ABER does. While the invitation to “address how ABER work connects with and/or directly addresses society’s need/s and the public good”, seems, at first, straightforward, on reflection, it is complex and complicated in nature. This nature of this invitation, then, is the subject of this paper. The paper is speculative in nature. In it, I argue that this invitation should be both cautiously welcomed and keenly resisted.

Conditions for Participation in the 2013 AERA Symposium

When invited to participate in this symposium, I was curious about what this turn to the public good in ABER was in aid of, and what it might produce. I still am. Perhaps, I thought, a good place to begin to work out this curiosity is by engaging in some question-work and speculative thinking. Might, for example, we say, that this turn to the public good is an effort establish new visibilities for ABER in the field of educational research, while retaining and

strengthening existing ones? Might this turn to the public good establish new hierarchies and new inclusion and exclusion criteria as it idealizes certain purposes and outcomes of, and for ABER? Does it mean that some arts-based education research outputs will be considered more valuable and more relevant than other arts-based educational research outputs, some more desirable and useful than others? And what might be the fate of ABER inquiries and outputs that do not adhere to this new found purpose for ABER? Does it mean that the potential of the work that doesn't seem to fit within the desired outputs and outcomes of ABER is lost? Most radically, might this turn to the public good give arts-based educational researchers an entirely different purpose for doing and disseminating their work, and thus lead to its eradication, as we know it? Is it another example of arts-based educational researchers trying to find a purpose for their methodology, a purpose that aligns more closely with justifications for conducting educational research than reasons for pursuing research-based art? Is so, we might say that this could have the effect of normalizing ABER within the family of educational research methodologies and, one might suggest, participates in the eradication of arts-based education research as we know it, and the possibilities it offers for knowing differently and differently knowing (Lather, 2007). Surely, searching for ways to be recognized by other educational research methodologies, or to align closely with them, especially dominant methodologies, is not going to minimize the dominance of these dominant methodologies, is it? Might this turn be read as an effort to stabilize the identity of ABER in a particular way, thereby assigning arts-based education research a certain character; a character that could possibly immobilize it and forecloses possibilities for it to be otherwise, which ultimately makes it vulnerable to manipulation. In many respects, the language of ABER as a public good connects with discourses of the 'free-market', 'market economies' and neoliberalism. To be able to clearly identify arts-based educational research outputs as public good makes them more amenable to being goods that can be exchanged, and accrue value in the process. On the other hand, might this turn be viewed as an opportunity to invigorate the field of ABER?

As I thought about the nature of what I would offer in the symposium, I first wanted to understand what is meant when we speak of the public good; do we have shared understandings of what that term and concept implies and demands of us as researchers and scholars? For one could claim that all research, no matter how large or small in size and scope, is conducted in the interests of the public good, but, of course, that does not mean that it is automatically a public good, or that it serves all groups in the public sphere in the same way or in equal measure. Further, one could say there is widespread public trust that academics will undertake research and teach for the public good; as Kathleen Lynch (2006) says, "there is a hope and expectation that those who are given the freedom to think, research and write will work for the good of humanity in its entirety" (p. 11), although the questions then becomes, 'which public' and 'whose good', both of which are very contested terms?

There is no disputing that as scholars, we work with intent; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) reminds us of this, when she wrote, “I think many adults (and I among them) are trying, in our work, to keep faith with vividly remembered promises made to ourselves in childhood: promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible: to make the tacit thing explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and, with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queer-eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged” (p. 3). Therefore, to suggest that arts-based educational researchers pay attention to how their work contributes to the public good, to the advancement of knowledge and understandings that benefit the public at large is, one might suggest, not an unreasonable suggestion. Yet, given the nature of the arts and how they operate, isn’t it a difficult imposition to place on ABER, which is a methodology closely aligned to art and its discourses. The arts have provided ABER not only with an identity but also with a purpose, and it is for that reason that art’s (my concern in this essay is primarily visual art) indeterminate, unknowable, elusive, and unpredictable nature cannot be ignored in any discussion of how ABER can, cannot, or ought to contribute to the public good. Given that the above-mentioned examples (Prendergast’s poem, *fat cow* and Nordenson’s reading of Burden’s *Tyne Bridge*) show it is impossible to predict in advance, and with any great accuracy, the manner in which an artwork, or an ABER output, might impact its audience, or contribute insights of a positive and productive nature for issues of concern in today’s world, educational or otherwise. And, further, given that ABER outputs, like artworks, need to be engaged with for them to mean something, we ought to consider what it means to bring the concept of the public good into our conversation about doing ABER and to posit it as a primary purpose for the work that we do. But, first, to an examination of some understandings of the concept of ‘the public good’.

Understanding the Public Good in the Context of Research

What does it mean to do educational research for the public good when ‘a public good’ is defined in the following way? A public good, says Per Pinstrup–Anderson (2000), has two characteristics. One, it is “non-rivalrous” (Suber, 2009) which means “the consumption of the good by an individual does not detract from that of another” (n.p.); and, two, it is “non-excludable” (Suber, 2009), meaning, “that it is impossible or at least very difficult to exclude anybody from consuming the good” (n.p.). Pinstrup–Anderson (2000) suggests that knowledge derived from research is, for the most part, non-rivalrous; but, of course, for knowledge to be non-rivalrous it needs to be disseminated and made available, which in some cases means that it needs to be translated so that it is available without restriction, and reaches into and across different “discourse communities” (Provencal, 2011). And, as we know, the distribution of knowledge is a more complicated affair: Pinstrup–Anderson (2000) reminds us, “generators of knowledge . . . or distributors of knowledge attempt to limit access to specific knowledge to those who are willing to pay” (n.p.) Oftentimes, it is those with access to

appropriate resources that are best-positioned to access such knowledge, initially at least. Further, not all knowledge produced by research is disseminated. As we know, journal editors and editorial review boards play a crucial gatekeeping role in determining what gets published in particular forums at particular times. Through editorials, invited submissions and special issues, they also play a key role in creating conditions whereby knowledge is assessed in a certain way, through which it accrues value and usefulness. Kathryn Borman, Arnold Danzig, and David Garcia (2012), in a special issue of *Review of Educational Research*, suggest that to engage in educational research that “serve greater public purposes” the researcher needs to do work that is beyond individual self-interest. This builds on the epigraph that they introduce at the beginning of their editorial, a maxim by George H. Mead: “To be interested in the public good we must be disinterested, that is, not interested in goods in which our personal selves are wrapped up”. I will return to this idea in a moment. Similarly, Jon Nixon (2011) sees the public good as “a good that, being more than the aggregate of individual interests, denotes a common commitment to social justice and equality” (p. 1), although he goes further to suggest that the public good “involves complex moral and political judgments regarding what constitutes the good for the polity as a whole” (p. x).

It seems to me that for research outputs to be a public good, they need to directly contribute to the solution of existing problems by offering ‘relevant’ and ‘useful’ knowledge for the purpose of solving such problems. This would mean that to do research explicitly for the public good, to address societal needs, and ultimately contribute to the betterment of society is to inquire into a problem that already exists, one that has been identified as a problem, and one that holds the possibility of being solved. No small order! But as researcher, Leah Bassel (2013) says, “more information and better understanding would not simply make the problem go away when research is disseminated and goes public” (n.p). Similarly, and from a different disciplinary perspective and context, Tim Ingold (2013) reminds us, “The mere provision of information holds no guarantee of knowledge, let alone understanding” (p. 1). As a researcher who engages diverse communities in community-based research, Bassel, like several other researchers, is most interested in how these terms ‘public’ and ‘good’ get constituted and deployed in the service of research. For her, it is a matter of whose public and whose good ultimately informs research. And, for Jenson (2006), some of the most significant major challenges of conducting research in the interest of the public good are, he says, “designing and implementing investigations that are compatible with the goals of public service; applying rigorous research designs in real-world settings; creating university–community partnerships; and disseminating the results of investigations.” (p. 195).

To explicitly conduct research for the public good means, as alluded to earlier, to align one’s research program with issues of social and political importance of the day. This involves building partnerships with groups other than and in addition to research participants in

advance of conducting research, and requires a strong sense of the conditions of the nature of the research to be conducted and its methodologies (Jenson, 2006). To conduct research for the public good is to engage in research that is expected to do something, something that is recognizable and intelligible through current systems of recognition and reward. It is, one might say, problem and solution driven research. It is an orientation to research that casts the research in a particular light. To some degree it suggests that the researcher and intellectual are not one of the same being. For if we have to make an explicit commitment to doing research for the public good (and make public this commitment) as opposed to doing research to contribute to bodies of knowledge in scholarly and intellectual fields that are part of the public world at any rate, then we are not living the life of the intellectual as theorized by Edward Said. Despite some of the criticisms leveled against Said's conceptualization of the intellectual (see Walzer, 1994), his belief that the intellectual "is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public . . . [an individual] whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug" (Said 1994, p. 11) is useful for my argument here. Further, for Said, the intellectual "is neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do" (p. 23).

So, we might say that the intellectual is always working for, on behalf of, and in the interests of the public, and therefore this invitation to "address how ABER work connects with and/or directly addresses society's need/s and the public good" somehow separates the researcher from the intellectual. An implied separation is assumed in the invitation because if the arts-based educational researcher is an intellectual, then it would mean that s/he is already committed to acting in the public interest and for the public, driven by the understanding that "all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously" (Said 1994, 11-12); to which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's purpose for doing intellectual work, cited earlier, was committed.

To return to Borman et al's (2006) idea that to conduct research that "serve[s] greater public purposes" and by default, the public good, the researcher needs to do work that is beyond individual self interest, let us consider the implications of this commitment for arts-based educational researchers. Because arts-based educational researchers, for the most part, are

committed to inquiring into educational issues using art practices and processes, and draw heavily on the inquiry and representational practices of artists, a brief discussion of how artists connect with the demands of producing work for the public good is warranted.

Producing Art as a Public Good

There are several examples of artworks that take on problems of the world in order to think differently about them and present them in a manner not previously presented. Carol Becker (2002) provided an account of several such examples, which, she said, “expose society’s inherent contradictions” in their refusal to uphold or maintain the status quo (p. 17). A more current example is the Chicago-based artist, Theaster Gates, who, similar to the Houston-based artist Rick Lowe's work *Project Row Houses*, has taken on the project of restoring and renovating abandoned buildings in the Southside of Chicago. He transforms them into cultural spaces that also act as meeting spaces for those who live in the neighborhood.. There is no doubt that Gates’ work contributes to the public good given that it provides individuals from vulnerable populations and communities with access to worlds and resources that would not otherwise be easily available. Gates, we might say, is creating in and for the public, while simultaneously pursuing and attending to his own capacity to appear in the art world (see Colapinto, 2013). But, is the work a public good measured against the criteria presented earlier. Is it that we need different criteria for establishing art’s capacity to contribute to the public good and to be a public good? Similarly, an explicit purpose of socially engaged design practice — an approach to design which has in recent years gained much attention and prominence — is to create more equitable, inclusive and enabling ways of being in the world for everybody, especially those who are most vulnerable in our society. For example, from October 2010 to January 2011, the Museum of Modern Art, New York staged an exhibition called *Small Scale Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement* which documented the work of several architects who researched, designed and supervised the building of schools, museums and residential units in various underserved communities across five continents. These architects engaged in participatory design practices, advanced a model of architectural practice that was in line with socially engaged and transformative politics and pursued ecological and socially sustainable building practices (see author forthcoming). While just one example of several that I could draw upon, this one appears to clearly constitute a public good, as the works produced in it are socially informed and promote civic engagement and participation. That said, the extent to which these research-based designed structures are non rivalrous and made available without restriction is not easy to determine.

Notwithstanding the significant contributions that artists have made to raise awareness of social and political inequalities and injustices and to go some way in changing them through artistic interventions, the structure of the art world and the manner in which careers and names are made require artists to have a keen self interest in the work they produce, where it is

exhibited, how it is situated with the broader realm of art practice, how it is received, and written into being, even though they (artists) can never predict with any great accuracy how work will be interpreted, positioned and accrue value; and this is the world from where arts-based educational researchers draw inspiration and guidance. A similar scenario could be sketched to describe the conditions in which academics work, especially working within the tenure and promotion process in North American universities. As a result of art world expectations and systems of reward and recognition, many artists produce work that is of individual self-interest and gain. For the reason that artists' reputations are built on the work that they do, can we ever say that they pursue art making without individual self-interest? As Giorgio Agamben (1999), drawing on the self-reported experiences of Hölderlin, Van Gogh and Rilke, says, "For the one who creates . . . what is at stake seems to be not in any way the production of a beautiful work but instead the life and death of the author, or at least his or her spiritual health" (p. 5). And while, as Carol Becker (2002) points out, we have several and varying images of what an artist is and does, we do not tend to view "artists as socially concerned citizens of the world", although this might be changing with the growth of socially engaged art practice. We might say, then, that to take up a disinterested position in relation to the outcomes of one's work is not something that many contemporary artists can do easily. Further, while an artist's role is a public one (Becker 2002), few artists will adjust readily to the hopes that others have of, or for them. Neither are many artists prone to work in ways that will satisfy public expectations. As is the case with art, we can point to examples of ABER that has contributed to the public good, but to explicitly make visible how it has, how it can, or how ABER research yet to be done will contribute to addressing societal needs is a step in a different direction. Earlier, I suggested that the invitation to "address how ABER work connects with and/or directly addresses society's need/s and the public good", should be both cautiously welcomed and keenly resisted. It is for the reasons that follow that I make such a suggestion.

Implications of Considering Arts-Based Educational Research as a Public Good

ABER's focus at this time on the public good might be seen as an attempt to cultivate a deeper level of thoughtfulness and critical reflection about this practice of inquiry and mode of representation. This focus on doing research for the betterment of society might be understood as an attempt to foster a more deliberative engagement with ABER practices, practitioners, modes of assessment and evaluation that, in turn, might result in a shift in small ways in the terms by which we engage ABER as a concept or practice, hence the reason why we ought to cautiously welcome it. In some respects, the invitation to "address how ABER work connects with and/or directly addresses society's need/s and the public good" recognizes the role that art has played in society at various times in the past, times in which "the artist was seen as a shaper of our cultural world, setting it's limits and giving it form" (de la Durantaye (2009, p. 37). Agamben (1999) provides several examples of when art in the past

was seen as dangerous and its power to impact the social and moral well being of citizens was feared. Citing a passage from Plato's Republic, which he says is "often invoked when speaking of art", Agamben (1999) explains, "The power of art over the soul seemed to [Plato] so great that he thought it could by itself destroy the very foundations of his city" (p. 4). For that reason, it could perhaps be suggested that this invitation to consider how ABER might function as a public good provides a chance to articulate differently the nature and reach of ABER as well as its potential. It offers a chance to consider how changing definitions and practices of art can inform the continuing development of ABER, especially such practices as socially engaged art, participatory art practice, and collaborative art practice, all of which connect, in varying ways, to the social while promoting the virtues of collective action and deliberative decision-making and civic engagement. When ABER was first imagined and articulated as a possibility for doing educational research, such art practices were not as prevalent, advanced or well theorized as they are today, hence the reason why it might be time to turn toward the social. Emphasizing how ABER operates for the betterment of society, how it can or ought to address societal needs and problems prompts us to consider more carefully the relationship between doing, representing, disseminating and creating conditions for understanding and action. Perhaps this invitation to consider how ABER might function as a public good is borne out of a desire to increase arts-based education research's visibility within and outside the field of education research. Of course, greater visibility leads to opportunities for greater policing. While identifying some of the possibilities offered by the invitation to consider and "address how ABER work connects with and/or directly addresses society's need/s and the public good", we should also ask what are some of the less productive implications of this invitation for how we do our work as arts-based education researchers; how we talk about that work; and how we and others evaluate it.

The emphasis, then, on creating and pursuing ABER for the public good might also be perceived as a "forgetting of art" (Agamben, p. 43); and, to a large extent, a forgetting of the nature and actuality of conducting research with and about art. By attending to how the work of inquiry and its representation meets certain criteria (such as public good or the betterment of society) already established in advance of the research endeavor itself, rather than focusing on what methods, processes, materials (the material specificities of art, we might say) suggest and where they lead us is an approach to conducting ABER with a different emphasis; different from the one we have grown into and grown used of. With a firm focus on identifying and conveying (in advance of, and following the research process) how the research outputs will contribute to the act of solving social or political concerns at hand, there does not seem to be much space available for surrendering to the making process itself, and paying attention to the act of thinking through making. The latter has been one of the most treasured qualities and affordances of ABER. As Tim Ingold (2013) reminds us, "materials think in us as we think through them" (p. 6). They lead us places, show us possibilities, and

alter their own nature when they come into contact with or become absorbed by other materials. This attentive way of being with and in the company of materials and inquiry practices, where one is never fully separate from the other is a disposition that Ingold, drawing from the work of Hirokazu Miyazaki especially his “method of hope”, might call “correspondence”. As he describes it, “to practice this method [Miyazaki’s method of hope] is not to describe the world, or to represent it, but to open up our perception to what is going on there so that we, in turn, can respond” (p. 7). Further, as Becker (2002) reminds us, quality of execution matters for the extent to which a work can be “emotionally, intellectually, and aesthetically available to a more heterogeneous audience” (p. 18).

The expectation that ABER could and would contribute to, and directly address societal problems could easily be co-opted as a criterion by which arts-based educational researchers and others can make judgments regarding the efficacy of ABER outputs and outcomes. Further, it could become a dominant means by which to identify ABER’s value, and articulate its usefulness. For that reason, one might suggest that the invitation to consider how ABER directly contributes to the betterment of society is not so much an invitation to consider what ABER does in the situations in which it is produced, in which it finds form, and in which it interacts with other knowledge systems and traditions (as we saw with Prendergast’s poem, *fat cow*), but rather one that invites us to consider how ABER impacts situations outside of itself. Might this even suggest that we will be obliged to see value in arts-based education and research practice only on the bases of what it can contribute to some notion of the public good, regardless of its capacity to move those who encounter it? So in other words, this focus on the public good at this time might be perceived as a mechanism to monitor and judge the quality of ABER, and the contribution that it can make to the larger field of educational research. The work practices and the outcomes of arts-based educational researchers (and its critics and supporters) might end up becoming more concerned with the extent to which it meets this expectation.

To engage in further speculation, we might wonder what types of evaluative processes will be established to identify and distinguish arts-based educational research that contributes to the public good from that which does not? Will it be the case that the determination of value and the evaluation of quality will be arrived at solely by looking for evidence outside of the nature of arts-based educational research itself (its capacity to awaken and sustain interest in issues of concern in education)? What kinds of communities of inquirers might this commitment to arts-based educational research enable, support, house, protect, defend?

In our efforts to think about how arts-based educational research might contribute to the betterment of society, we, too, should think about whether it is even possible for ABER to contribute in this way. In other words, can we rely on research-based artworks to convey

information of importance that directly serves the public good? While acknowledging that ABER outputs are different from artworks, even though they might closely resemble them (and like artworks they have the capacity to contribute to and shape the nature of the lives that we lead), ABER outputs, like artworks, on their own, can never fully or adequately reveal or convey much information or understandings that would be directly instructive to the formation of educational policy. Moreover, like artworks, ABER outputs, as we saw with Prendergast's poem, come into presence again and again, and differently each time as they are accessed, interpreted or placed in relation to other works. For that reason, they may make rather unreliable sources for making decisions and creating policy that impact the lives of others.

Conclusion

This invitation to participate in a discussion about doing arts-based educational research for the public good suggests to me that ABER, while continually expanding, diversifying, coming into being again and again and differently each time, could be more than it actually is; that it could extend its reach further, and participate in arenas in which it has previously not participated. This might come at a cost. More specifically, for me, the nature of the invitation to consider how ABER might function as a public good and the conditions for participation in the 2013 AERA symposium amplify the inherent contradiction in much of the conceptual work underpinning the notion of arts-based educational research. On the one hand, there is a belief that the arts can contribute important and necessary insights about education, its practice and its conditions, and that these outcomes are agents of change. For instance, a recurring theme in much of the ABER literature (including the rationales advanced for this methodology) is that art opens the world to us in good and productive ways. Further it is assumed that art has the capacity to extend what we know and deepen our current understanding in ways that are good for our well-being, and our capacity to live ethically with one another in the world as we strive for a more equal and just world. But, of course, art, too, as the recent riots in Tunisia (June 2012) demonstrate, can be read as offensive and insulting, cause outrage and anger, lead to the public unrest, public protest and public condemnation. On the other hand, there is a belief that arts' aesthetic qualities, their separateness from everyday life, their capacity to activate the sensory involvement of others (educators, policy makers, etc.) makes them a productive means for representing educational situations, conditions, concerns and insights. Herein lies the contraction: ABER stands with and in opposition to the traditional aesthetic paradigm.

It is difficult to argue against the fact that for ABER to contribute new insights or different understandings of education and its conditions, it has to engage with the problems and possibilities of education in a way that is relevant and important to the field at any given time. However, an emphasis on the public good might (which is emerging at this time), will likely

force a restructuring of ABER in ways that run contrary to the practice of this approach to inquiry in the first place. While building alliances with other research and artistic communities and genres is always to be welcomed, it cannot be done at the expense of losing ABER's potency. To put ABER in the service of something else means that we believe that its value lies outside of itself, in its capacity to address something that is not related to it. Attempts to figure out "how ABER work connects with and/or directly addresses society's need/s and the public good" might be viewed as a project of assimilation (assimilating ABER with other methodological approaches in the field of educational research), rather than as a project of amplification. Of course the argument has been made that art practice is a form of research (Sullivan 2010), but that doesn't mean that it is equivalent or corresponds closely, in its form and purpose, to the types of research practices commonly used by educational and social science researchers. The push for an examination of how ABER corresponds with and resembles other educational research methodologies might not be the most productive path to take on the road to establishing a stronger, more credible visible presence in the field of educational research. ABER cultivates particular ways of doing and thinking, as well as promoting particular practices of organization and representation. Arts-based educational research involves a commitment to figuring things out in as well as by working with and through art making practices and processes and artistic modes of inquiry. Like artworks, ABER outputs (or their impacts), for the most part, can neither be predicted nor understood in advance. Two questions of importance that this invitation to consider how ABER might function as a public good raised for me are: (i) *How do we prepare arts-based educational researchers to do ABER work*; and (ii) *How do we create conditions for diverse audiences to access the work of ABER and build meaningful relations with it*. Perhaps the pursuit of both questions is our next step.

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