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Trois Chaises, ABER, and the Possibility of “Thinking Again”

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Abstract

These two pieces represent a new approach to the presentation of ABER inquiry projects. They are part ABER writing and presentation mixed with more conventionally scholarly voiced writing. *Trois Chaises* is all at once a theoretical examination of ABER practice, a presentation of one ABER practitioner’s practice and a presentation of the actual ABER work. Dr. Carlson’s work is a poetic, personal and scholarly response to both the manuscript and a public, live performance of the work. The accompanying video is an artistically rendered version of the ABER piece. This scholarship is meant to honor the humanness of inquiry and, yet, not give up the more formal voice of thinking through ideas and issues, both with method and, in our case, thinking through schools as places for the pursuit of a self.

Prologue

How did this project come to be? In this brief prologue we orient you to what you are about to encounter. We think it is important to situate this work, in part because of its non-standard approach to the presentation of inquiry projects. Also, however, we wish to set the mood for what you are about to encounter: it is part arts-based educational research (ABER) writing and presentation and part more conventionally scholarly voice, all mixed together in one place. We consider this to be the kind of scholarship that might honor the humanness of inquiry and, yet not give up the more formal voice of thinking through ideas and issues, both with method and, in our case, thinking through schools as places for the pursuit of a self.

This project began several years ago when I (Donald) met Nick Sousanis at the American Education Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting held in San Francisco that year. Nick was presenting on his Teacher's College (Columbia University) dissertation *Unflattening* (now published 2015) at a roundtable I attended. During the Q&A part, I brought up the idea that art was itself a form of inquiry and did not need justification in other terms. I asserted that artists inquire through an aesthetic mode that is its own valid form of inquiry, that what is "discovered" in such inquiry is discovered through the act of making art itself (rather than art representing what is already known). This idea struck Nick as a way he had not considered for justifying his work. Subsequently we decided to present the next year at AERA a session on the practice of ABER grounded in this idea. My contribution was the dance, poetry and theoretical musings you will find in this present work as well as an accompanying paper on the process (also the seed for what you have before you). I followed that presentation with fashioning a phenomenological account of doing ABER (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016) and with presentations of the work and forms of this paper at Arizona State University (ASU), Nanjing Normal University, and Chinese University of Hong Kong.

When I was asked to present this work at ASU, I requested David Carlson as a discussant for the presentation. I sent him a rough draft of this paper and invited him to a rehearsal of the dance piece. After he had seen the piece and read the rough draft, he crafted a discussant's response.

David's discussant response was anything but what I expected. He did not so much delve into the work I had shared with him as use the paper and performance to think again. I remember when he started his remarks, I was taken aback and wondered what he could be doing, where was this going? It was dismaying and intriguing as it seemed to have nothing to do with what I had presented. But I knew to trust him. Rather than use the paper (and in this case presentation) to think about ABER, he created a wholly new line of inquiry and thought prompted by the paper and presentation. That is, he used my work as a prompt for thinking

again. It was, and is, a surprising and beautiful work that stands on its own. In so doing we both assert that he has created a different discussant move of great import.

Both David and I agree that his move and these two papers together present a new way to think about collaboration and to think about how to respond to ABER work. It is a way that I have thought about for a long time. Why not have someone create her/his own dance in response to my dance? Why does it all have to be intellectualized? David did such a dance, even if he did it in words. In dancing to my dance he both honored the work and extended it in new ways. David and I see these works as companion pieces necessary to each other in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We offer these to you, the reader, as different ways of thinking together that do not abandon the intellectual for the aesthetic but meld them into a platform providing new possibilities for “thinking again.”

Paper 1: *Trois Chaises*: The Making of an ABER Piece (Donald)

Donald’s Approach to ABER

Tom Barone (2006) points to various “labels” the ABER field uses to identify different forms of ABER. These are “aesthetically-based research, a/r/tography, arts-inspired research, arts practice as research” (p. 5). I practice this last ABER form, “arts practice as research.” In this approach the focus is on making art rather than on performing research; the art-product actually equals the research agenda as the artist is the researcher. In this form art is not ancillary or secondary to the research but central to it. It does not enhance the outcome as it does in some work for there could be no outcome without the art-making. I have written extensively on this orientation (2015, 2014, 2012, 2004, 2002), arguing for this as the heart of ABER.

Let me be clearer here. In this “art-practice-as-research” form the ABER inquirer does not, first, discover whatever it is s/he discovers and, then, presents it in a particular art-form as an illustration of what has been discovered. Rather, from the outset the ABER practitioner is thinking about the art being made *and* how it is being presented and taken up as art—art as the act of research. Presenting the findings of the inquiry flows out of the art process from the beginning. This may contrast with the way Barone (2006) describes ABER as a two-pronged affair. He writes that ABER practitioners “. . . look to the arts for both a process of researching . . . phenomena and a means for disclosing what we find” (p. 4). It is not possible to say whether or not Barone would agree with my fusion of these two moves but, to be clear, the first prong (using the arts as “a process of researching”) is my notion that art is a form of social inquiry as making art affords particular ways of knowing that yield different knowledge from that known by conventional forms of inquiry. What is noticed and studied through art-making is learned through the particular ways of knowing and understanding embedded in the

specific art practice employed. The act of “disclosing” is not separate from the inquiry dimension. Rather it is synonymous with the art-practice, part of the process from the beginning. My worry with Barone’s possible separation of art as “process of researching” and as “a means of disclosing what we find” may be a move for illustration that is made after all conclusions are made. I assert that the social phenomenon being examined is inevitably disclosed through the particular sensibilities of the ABER practitioner in confluence with the demands of the art making throughout the process of making. The final “object” that discloses has been disclosing from the beginning and the artist is, from the beginning, fixed upon a concern with disclosure for the receiver of the art.

In the performance you will witness you will see that I clearly practice making art as a mode of inquiry. You will see a reimagining of an already completed and published field study. Prior to discussing and presenting the actual work, I have some issues that require addressing.

First, I must deal with the place of words in ABER given that I use words as part of the work to be presented. Freeman and Vagle (2013), in the context of exploring phenomenological practice in social inquiry, argue that “there are no nonverbal experiences, only experiences not yet put into words” (p. 725). For them all phenomenology begins (and ends) in words and it is to words that we are always referring. It is but a short leap to think about ABER in terms of words. In particular, I am presenting a dance that is motion with sound accompaniment, some of which are words (poetry and theoretical musings). This ABER work is prompted by this previous study that whose data set and analytic concern was with words. For these reasons, it is legitimate and important to ask: what place do words have in the practice of ABER forms (dance, music, visual art, the plastic arts, photography being some non-verbal forms of ABER)?

I begin by agreeing, tentatively, that words may start us on our inquiry journey (certainly I have done so here). However this does not mean that we remain wholly in the universe of words. As you proceed to encounter this work, the words in this writing as well as the words in the dance piece (especially those words) are not meant to pin things down to explicitness but to be slippery and reveal the limitations of words (even as I use them). I offer words with hesitancy, especially as I discuss the non-verbal work. Where there are words in the piece itself (the poetry and theoretical musings as part of the sound accompaniment of the dance), these words are not meant for rational or verbal content alone (or even at all perhaps). Rather, they are music, sound, rhythm, something beyond the usual logos orientation of words. I say all of this because I want it clear that this dance is necessary and not simply an illustration of an already existing research practice. The words are subordinate to the motion. It is the motion that counts and that, as I shall discuss, revealed dimensions of this study unavailable to me prior to making this dance work. This is also the case with the fact that the dance piece is

performed. Performing is also a source of “learning about” the phenomena at hand – performing always reveals and is not simply a presentation of what already exists. Further, and especially for the performing arts, dance does not exist until it is performed and every time it is performed something new may emerge from within the midst of that particular performance. Not always, but always possible. Performing is never rote repetition. Lastly, as both Isadora Duncan and John Cage stated, “If I could have said it, I would have” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012a, p. 331).

Second, what is meant by “re-imagine?” I mean that I will take the original data and the original analysis and wonder what else is potentially “in” the data and analysis that I have missed.

Such re-imagining is not, in a general way, special to the artist. Several years ago I was asked to contribute a chapter to a book on new “lines of flight” in my specialization of curriculum studies (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2004a). I decided to rethink one of the chapters of my dissertation. My original dissertation was an examination of well-known dance curriculum scholars, trying to understand their work as cultural documents and what a cultural orientation might reveal about what the curriculum was able to provide educators. At the time of the dissertation I had a cool response to one of the dance scholars whose work I was examining. I took it that her contributions to our area might be actually harmful and un-dance oriented as she unknowingly was moved by cultural imperatives, this despite the fact she was a well-known dance educator for high school and college. While working on this book chapter in which I was using a new method I termed “critical hermeneutics,” I discovered a kind of “sympathy” for her as I saw her in the midst of three motivations for doing her work: the ostensive or explicit motivations she described in her writing, personal motivations found in asides in the text that showed some of her “real” feelings about dance (and that were at variance with the ostensive motivations she featured) and, lastly, socio-historical motivations, the original idea of my dissertation, that she was moved by unseen cultural and historical contexts and forces. Now her work could be understood as a negotiation between these three motives. In discovering this and reading her text in a more nuanced manner, I came to an understanding that she was not so much doing damage to the prospects of a good dance education as I understood it but, rather, was expressing the difficulty of negotiating the vexed terrain of the ostensive, personal, and socio-historical. In short, she needed to offer her dance ideas in the ways that she did and yet there was push-back to be found in her work. Through this inquiry I was reimagining my relationship to her approach to dance education. This sort of re-imagining, it seems to me, is possible in almost any research and is a desirable move to make. As we change and understand more, what we encounter changes for us as well and new well-springs of possibility arise.

Re-imagining through Arts-Based Research offers something like this and, simultaneously, something different. It offers re-casting the whole in new terms through encountering the original study through its potential for art. We can treat the “data” and the “analysis” as providing material for thinking through the situation of people’s lives, trying to understand them on different terms than the usual ways we analyze. Re-imagining means, in this case, for dance, finding motional possibilities in the data that can become the basis for making dance. Through the making of the dance we can be trying on the bodies of the participants to feel what that is like. It also means imagining the inner life. It means allowing connections in our own lives to arise. It means distilling all of this through an aesthetic awareness of art’s possibilities. We treat the whole world as a question mark and start with the idea that there is something bothering us. We allow the making of art to help us explore what is bothering us and through the agency of engaging with the “thing,” whatever it is, through bodily movement, poetic imagining, music making, painting, sculpture, or whatever other art interests us and which we understand as an artist might understand. As we explore we allow our imagination to run “wild,” putting things together that were not together before and see what aesthetically arises (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2018).

There is, then, this third dimension of my approach to ABER: “wild imagination” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2018) When I write of “wild” I do not mean incendiary, crazy energy (whirling and spinning out of control). I mean, by “wild,” that which is found in a wild natural setting when you suddenly come upon something surprising that belongs “there” but not “here,” that is wild because it is uncontrolled by any human intervention. It may be quiet, even sedate. But the coming upon is tinged with an energy emanating from the surprise. One cannot control for such moments, such “wildness.” That is the whole point: the “it” is outside our control and this is its strength and value. Wildness of this kind appears in this work in the two spoken portions of the dance. I will mention them now but discuss them more fully after the suggested viewing of the performance. The first is a section of the performance called “The Arc of the Palo Verde.” This poem focuses on a palo verde tree on my home’s property that has grown very, very large. Sitting one day, looking at it from out my living room, I suddenly heard the words of a poem about it and I proceeded to write that poem. At the same time I thought of the two women who were part of the original study that is the prompt for this ABER work. The women and the particulars of their lives as teachers, and outside their teaching lives as well, have nothing to do with my palo verde tree and yet I felt there was a connection and proceeded to write this poem. A second example comes from another part of the ABER piece, a poem called “The Stick of the Master.” This poem deals with the man, also a teacher, who was part of my study. I do not know why but I suddenly thought of him with a stick and as a stick. I also thought of my father’s slide rule. And, I thought of how old-fashioned teachers in the USA from a different era would carry a stick in case they needed to discipline a student. The man in my study was not any of this. But, again, I felt a sudden

connection as the image of the Master's Stick in all these guises leapt to my mind and the poem leapt to my mind. I did not know the connection but, again, I felt it.

These are two examples of what I call "wild imagination" in which a person allows anything to go with anything to see what happens, allows random images to become the basis for art. You will read more of this after viewing the performance.

Bringing up the idea of the artist wielding her or his imagination as an independent self and imagining outside of her or his boundaries leads to the potential problem of solipsism. Solipsism as a focus only on yourself continually points back to you. It is what I call "radical individuality." Two important points come to mind which I play out as I turn, briefly, to a very different tradition that does not have the problem, historically, of solipsism: Chinese aesthetics. This exploration can highlight the problems we have in the West.

In Professor Li Zehou's work, *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (2010), he asserts that, historically, self-referring art was not part of the Chinese tradition. In the West, art has long been associated with the lone genius seeing the world through unique eyes. This kind of position for who is the artist was not part of what Chinese culture valued in their artists. Rather, historically, the artist created art that contributed to the feeling states that brought harmony to life within society. There was beautiful and sad poetry as people, for instance, dealt with the idea that life is short but even such poetry was a way of accessing common understandings of the difficulty of the human condition, rather than a lone artist bemoaning something specific that refers to her or him. In a sense it is this spirit that suffuses the present work. I am not seeking to bring harmony to society but I am attempting to discover the complex balance of conflicting motives in the lives of these teachers, thus featuring for each of us how we negotiate our own lives within the social boundaries of our possibilities.

The Chinese, of course, were not immune to Western modernity and its focus on the individual. Professor Li deals with the individual artist as individual coming into Chinese consciousness, a development especially accelerated by the influx of Western ideas. He writes that beginning in the middle of the Ming Dynasty "traditional mores began to break down . . . deliberately appealing to the senses and tantalizing . . . fleshly desires" (2010, p. 196) as "rationality (the Dao) and sensuousness become identified" (p. 197). Further, "moral conscience and the intelligence are to greater or lesser degree penetrated by elements of the sensuous nature" (p. 198). As the move is made away from the traditional values of community and morality the needs and desires of the individual become increasingly featured. Whereas prior to this, emotions were of the refined kind for seeing to the cultivation of the harmonious society, now they became identified with the individual's emotional state and, especially, the emotions between the sexes. This was accompanied with a focus upon the technique of the

artist and the form of art rather than what it brought about in the person for the development of moral life. As Li sees it, this led to an “unprecedented emphasis on and pursuit of the rules and principles of art and aesthetics [as] another indicator of the movement toward modernism . . . techniques and principles have significance in and of themselves” (p. 207)

In my own work, as I will discuss later, I focus upon techniques, forms, structures as well as feeling states. While Li critiques this move, counting it as a loss for the cultivation of the moral society because the focus is on the work not on society, I believe he is incorrect in this assertion. First, all artists must have a focus upon craft and skill if there is to be credible art. So, too, with Arts-Based Research, there must be some systematic exploration if the work is not simply to be the creation, sometimes incoherent, of one person for her or himself. Second, this focus upon craft is a hedge against solipsism about which both Li and I worry. Even though it is the individual artist who cultivates the art, I also assert (2014, 2015) that if ABER work focuses upon the person doing the work, that focus must, in the end, be a springboard back into the common world, re-illuminating it in new ways as the artist discovers through the distillery of her/his experience.

How does this play out in my approach to ABER? I do not function purely out of my imagination in a solipsistic fashion. I gather data and information in the world, responding to possible prompts in the environment that seem to me to provide materials for making art. For instance, you will see, in this piece, that I do a chair dance. As a choreographer I felt the potential for dance using a chair based on the references all three teachers made to chairs in their discussions of their lives. I felt that the chair, as object and idea, spoke to motional possibilities and feeling states as each person used a chair in different ways. It was this detail to which I gravitated as an ABER researcher. Could I explore the whole study through this lens? That was the question and challenge. I felt I could do so, but what would I do? After you see the performance you will find a more detailed discussion of this. In these dances, I sought what is held in common with others through distilling their relationships to chairs through my own life and understanding but always in service of something common about all of us. When I was once asked, by a student, what it was like to write or dance about myself I responded that I did not write or dance about myself. It was never about me. When I choose details from my own life to use, I treat those details as data. I distance myself from my own story and I seek what transcends that specific story and might be more or less true for many.

How to Watch the “Trois Chaises” ABER piece

Before viewing this piece I want to help you understand how I would like you to look at it. In terms of “dance” I need for you to understand my definition of dancing. Dancing is paying attention to your motion. It is as simple as that: “paying attention to your motion.” However,

as it turns out, this “paying attention” is very difficult. It means knowing at every moment where are all the parts of your body, how are they moving separately and together, the actual motion itself, the shape of your body at every moment, and the way you are occupying time and space. In other words, to dance means to pay attention to all of you physically but, also, to pay attention to yourself as a moving being who disappears into the motion. If you can do this kind of “paying attention” then any human motion is “dance.” However, because this is also a performance art, the dancer must also be aware of the “audience” and make sure s/he is bringing the audience into what s/he is dancing, not for personal adornment in which you see the person and you see the dance but one in which you only see the dance. And, lastly, there is the art of choreography which composes the dance that is danced. That must also be understood to exist. No matter what you might think, what you are seeing is not random, even when the choreographic method is randomness. That would be choreography thematized through randomness and would be as much about the idea of randomness as it would be about whatever “theme” or “topic” was being explored.

I must tell you the above in order to help situate your viewing appropriately and help you not to import into your viewing your definition of dance which might be at variance with this definition. It is not that your definition is wrong and mine is right but if you are to “see” this work appropriately it is important to see it on its own terms. That is the point of the above description of dance.

There are two last points to make pertaining to the art-making side of this work. First, what you are about to see does not illustrate what I had already discovered. It cannot be read as you would read a story or a report. It is an experience to be had and it is abstract, rather than literally what these people did. It is a vehicle through which I discovered and an immediate experience of what being in a chair is through thinking/feeling what I felt I knew about them. I transcended myself to occupy that chair in new ways to me, ways that “felt” right for what I began with in thinking about this study.

Second, how can you “see” this dance on its terms? I answer this by addressing how I begin choreographing. I begin with trying to get to the essence of something, in this case how each of them felt about their chairs. Once I think I have a sense of that feeling state, I use the feeling of that essence to invent movement vocabulary that is fit for this particular dance. While I will discuss this in more detail once you have seen the dance, for now what I am saying is: do not try to “read” the dance as if it is sentences meant to convey specific content or ideas. Just as I choreograph from a feeling state that is immediately “in the body” so I ask you to “feel” the dance, not “think” the dance. In dance we speak of the kinesthetic response. As we watch a dance, we can feel the dancers’ movement in ourselves. It is that movement and the feelings we have as we experience the movement inside ourselves that constitutes

being with the dance. It is trying to be with the dance rather than interpret the dance. You can, afterwards, interpret the dance and speak of the dance. This interpretation and speaking is based in trying to be with the dance kinesthetically while it is unfolding. There are no correct or incorrect interpretations. There are, for each of you, your interpretation that tells you something about yourselves as well as about these people. It is what you experience about yourself that is, in my estimation, as important as what you come to know about these teachers. I ask you to be open kinesthetically and allow what you come to understand to be of value as you watch this performance.

I should say something about the sound environment in which the performance occurs. There are several sections to this piece. Some are set to music, others to poetry, and still others to what I term “theoretical musings.” When I choreograph I rarely pay much attention to the music in making the movement part of the work. I wish for the movement to stand on its own without sound accompaniment. Once I have made a piece of choreography, I then seek some music which feels right to me. In this case I chose, for music a short children’s piece by Dimitri Kabalevsky, “Waltz,” which I felt had the delicacy and quiet I sought. Once I made the dance I began to hear that music and I just knew it was right for what I was seeking. The music by Bela Bartok is music I felt had the character and quality (some sharpness and percussion) that was what I was seeking for the man’s dance. I could have chosen other music and it would have also been correct but only if it echoed and supported what I was seeking. Once the music was chosen my task was to see how the dance would synchronize with it. By synchronize I mean that I could find some “natural” meeting points in the music for the choreography, not that the choreography is fit to every note of the music.

All of this constitutes some provisos necessary to situate my approach to ABER. I now turn to the work itself.

The Study that Prompted this ABER Work

This present piece is based on a teacher beliefs study using interviews about thinking and life histories, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews as the “data” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1996). I was interested in teachers’ beliefs about the relationship between pleasure and education. My participants were: a female 8th Grade Honors English teacher, a male 8th Grade English teacher, and a female second grade teacher. What I was studying were their “cultural models.” Cultural models theory combines psychology’s schema and mental models theory with anthropology, claiming that we know and make sense of our experience through our culturally based mental models which act as filters and interpreters of reality. We do this (make sense of both new experiences and thinking about old experiences) by fitting the data

into already existing culturally formed schemes that tell us what counts as reality and how reality works. The models are revealed in the language we use to articulate our thinking.

In the process of the study, I “discovered” several dimensions of the teachers and their thinking. First, there seemed a clear gender divide between the women and the man. Both women were unable to connect pleasure and education; the man easily made this connection. Through the cultural models analysis, I found that the women understood pleasure as a private, sensuous, quiet affair focused on connections with others. For the man pleasure was a public mind/intellectual affair, especially focused through a “wrangle of ideas” (whether in his classroom or on the radio show that he hosted earlier in his life). Small wonder the women were unable to connect pleasure and education: education is usually a public and mind affair with no concern for connections between people or bodies. Their model of pleasure was opposed to their model of education. This was not only a gender divide but it also revealed the patriarchal structure of schools as the school environment well-suited the male teacher’s dispositions toward pleasure but was inhospitable to the female teachers’ dispositions.

Second, as I noted earlier, all three teachers focused their thinking through chairs. The female 2nd grade teacher noted her most pleasurable experiences as, for instance: sitting with her two daughters in an oversized easy chair on a rainy afternoon, or reading quietly hours on end in that self-same chair. The female 8th Grade honors English teacher envisioned pleasure as driving in a convertible on a highway in the mountains with the top down and her hair blowing in the wind or preparing food for friends invited into her home, sitting and eating/chatting. The male 8th Grade English teacher pictured pleasure as sitting on his stool at the head of the class and engaging in his idea wrangle, pointing from one person to another to speak and he speaking back, orchestrating the whole in a commanding manner.

It is the chairs and their connections to pleasure that struck me as presenting the possibility of making art, exploring further the teachers and their models. Additionally, there is a tradition in modern choreography of doing chair dances. This was my opportunity to do such a dance and to see what I could find.

It is at this time that I ask you to watch the accompanying video of the dance:

**Trois Chaises en la Paix et en la Guerre, Deux Libraires,
la feminine et le masculine, L'Enseignement de Ranciere?**

The Process of Making this Piece

Now I want to give you a sense of what it is like to make such work. You will hear the word “I” many times. I must make it clear again: ABER work is distilled through the artist’s

subjectivity BUT it is not meant to be solipsistic. It is not about “me” alone but about what may be hidden in what I am investigating that is revealed through my art encounters with it. The artist’s task is to take the specificity of what is revealed and place it back into our common world through presenting a symbol that is directly experienced by the artist and the viewers.

Susanne Langer (1970) helps us understand this as she compares science and art, especially what each means by the concept of *abstraction*. She asserts: “Scientific concepts are abstracted from concretely described facts by a sequence of widening generalizations; progressive generalizations systematically pursued can yield all the powerful and rarified abstractions of physics, mathematics, logic” (p. 153). Langer calls such abstraction: “generalizing abstraction.” In contrast to science she notes that art deals with what she terms “presentational abstraction” in which “[t]he artist's most elementary problem is *the symbolic transformation of subjectively known realities into objective semblances that are immediately recognized as their expression in sensory appearances*” (emphasis added, p. 157). Abstraction in science is the exclusion of particularities and the sensory for the purposes of prediction and regularity. Abstraction in art, on the other hand, is the inclusion of particularized sensory experience which achieves the status of symbol.

Both scientists and artists move toward objective knowledge of something. In science the objective knowledge is toward the establishment of general principles. In art the objective knowledge is toward an inner life of the presented symbol or form. Langer discusses how artists achieve a life-likeness, conveying to the perceiver a certainty of the reality of the experience, a life-likeness she terms “physiognomic self-expression” (p. 176). That is, the art symbol appears to be actually feeling the emotion of which the form speaks.

I have focused on the practice of artists rather than the practice of ABER because, as I have already asserted, the artist *is* a researcher as s/he attempts to make sense of the world and our experience in it through the crafting of art. E. L. Doctorow, the late US novelist said, “The ideal way to get involved in [writing] is to write in order to find out what you're writing.” (2014, NPR Interview). This is, in my estimation, what all researchers do: they do research in order to know what they think that they did not know they were thinking because there was no evidence for it until they did research which refined what they thought they knew or confirmed it but, in any event, brought to light something of which they had an inkling it was there although they did not know it. I write this run-on-sentence because I want to give you the experience of that process of uncovering.

This brings me to provide some images of what it is like to work in this way. I rely upon “feeling-states,” a “sense of things,” and an ability to “notice” in the most minute moments

and simple states. I think that many researchers actually function in this way as they enter a study site but do not notice it.

In my process I do not draw from an established movement vocabulary that I manipulate. I come from a dance tradition in which we seek inner states that feel to be the essence of what we are interested in exploring. Then, being in that inner state, we invent movement vocabulary. It is not necessarily the case that what emanates from the inner state into movement “looks like” what one might think is suggested by the original prompt that started the whole process. It might mimic or it might not. The point is to find what Alwin Nikolais (n.d.) called the “authentic gesture.” Each dance requires the invention/finding of an authentic movement vocabulary for that dance. Certainly there may be some likeness across dances because the choreographer is who s/he is. But the only requirement is that the gesture feels “true” to the essence of what is prompting this particular dance. So, the standing dance in which I point, from my journal of process (see below). You will see that I mention walking my dog at the outset. It seems that, for me, one of the best places for me to think aesthetically is outside, alone except for my dog, just walking, contemplating, trying something out without anyone watching me, just alone, quiet, not in a dance studio. I am working but without the pressure of having to make something yet. I have found, for my purposes and who I am, this is a good process. Each person must discover her/his process and develop it. There is no one correct way.

I was walking my dog and thinking of this teacher sitting on a stool perched before his class. He loved, as he put it, the fight around ideas and pointing to students in order to call on them. I began to point as an experiment and then to point and point and then I arced my arm up and over, right to left and suddenly I knew something, perhaps not about him but about myself. I felt myself above the students, not seeing anyone and I knew that this fight around ideas was not about people. As I guided my arm through an arc encompassing the scope of those before me (in my imagination because they were not really there), I saw nothing. As I gazed at the upward sweep of my arm I was not thinking of all those who could be there before me. Rather I felt the sweep of ideas and I POINTED AT SOMEONE and I pointed at another and another and another. Their ideas, it is that with which I wrangled and fought and how I loved. I was perched above and over.

I FELT this knowing, not cognitively but through my body and the way my heart felt. It was upon me without my working my way toward it. I felt the nobleness of the gesture, the expansion of my chest, a kind of almost puffing up but not feeling puffed up so much as larger, more knowing, a kind of, well nobility might be the right word.

In this passage I'm describing how I came upon one gesture that "felt right." For me that is an essential part of the process: feeling right. I may make many gestures and they may not feel connected to what I am cultivating on the inside. They may be dancey and thus conscious more of dancing than the motional being of the moment. They may be too much "me," too familiar, too easy, and that, also, makes me suspicious that I am doing something that is not connected with what I am seeking/feeling. I can not tell you exactly how I know what I know. I studied choreography for many years with the masters of my craft. As they helped me come to see and to know I also consciously cultivated my own sensitivity to motion. I think this is akin to developing the instincts of a researcher encountering her/his study site.

From the journal:

I try to stay true to what I perceive to be his being which is filled up with himself but now with the possibility of being filled in a noble way. I'm not saying he is entirely noble. He likes the down and dirty of an argument. He's very sure of himself. But I am saying that my experience of this pointing provided the possibility of this as an element not previously visible to me.

I don't know if this choreography is "true" to what I'm thinking about him. I'm pointing with fingers and whole body. There's a gunslinger moment a couple of times and each time it transforms into something "large" and flowing. I'm moving slowly rather than in my usual way of quick and little movements. I'm staying extended. This stems from my initial work with the arcing gesture. I don't know whether or not this is true to him.

I do think he wants to be seen (he communicates this in his discussions about wanting to be upheld in his classroom discipline decisions by his school administration, wants to be seen for the fine teacher he is and doesn't feel he is properly seen). So, while this movement might not be "true" to him and does not mimic his actual movements, it is true to the dimension of demanding people pay attention to him. No, he's not about majesty but I suspect that he wants to command the kind of obedience a king would command. The great kings aren't bullies. They command allegiance because they care and show that care, not about themselves, but about those who give their allegiance. I've just realized that may be what I'm doing and it gives me a hook for choreographing, staying within the vocabulary. Perhaps the point is to command without dominating space and extension. Maybe the last twisty movement isn't right if it doesn't command without being quirky.

I fool around with movement, observing the feeling, simply having experiences. In the end it is not about accuracy. However, I seek something more in common than just about me. This

commonness may be experienced differently and manifested differently by different people but that does not change the possibility that I am getting at something that is meaningful beyond my personal experience.

The Women's Dance

Here I had a different “problem.” This dance is in a chair and I did not want to do the usual chair dance in which the chair is the hero of the dance, manipulated in interesting ways. I wanted to do a dance in what it was like to occupy a chair in the ways these women described. How did I begin this dance? I sat. I found myself sitting not straight on but at an angle. Something felt right about that. I could imagine the female second grade teacher sitting that way in the chair as she read, curled up or even curled up with her daughters. But I was not feeling curled up. At the time, however, I did not have such concrete thoughts. It just felt as if there was motional potential, potential that was not there when I experimented with sitting squarely in the chair. It was the crossing of energies: the chair in one direction and I diagonally across it – a dynamic feeling. Then, I leaned back with my head toward my right shoulder. I noticed, out of the corner of my eyes, my hands on my hips. I was intrigued by this feeling of relaxation and, yet, a formality as well, how my body draped on the chair. I breathed and my hands rose. “Yes,” I said to myself. This feels like the dreaming these women do. And so, I began. I kept the sense of dreaming inside as I felt movement emanate from that opening feeling of the diagonal, the draped back feeling, the hands breathing. At the same time I sought a formality that seemed right. Here I was influenced by the choreography of the U.S. choreographer, José Limon—his passionate formality. And this felt right as well.

But, I am not a woman and so wasn't sure if I was feeling in their way. Then the poem came, “The Arc of the Palo Verde.” That poem is not about the women and, yet I knew, as I wrote it that it connected me to them. And this led to the through theme of dreaming. I felt the connections with reading, dreaming, lounging, and the connection to nature (the female 8th grade honors English teacher driving in the mountains, the sitting on an easy chair with the soft gray day outside, all images of nature connecting to pleasure). None of this was clear during the making of the piece. I felt the possibilities but “followed my instincts” and allowed for my aesthetic sense to guide me, not my intellectual sense.

Part of my aesthetic relies upon formal structures (theme and variation, repetition, ABA and so forth) as ways to explore emotion without getting so caught up in emotion that I can not “think aesthetically.” Form and content together, informing one another simultaneously.

Most importantly I discovered, after making the dance, that the women, despite their dreaming, were tethered to their chairs. I had never seen them that way, limited by their conceptions of pleasure. And the man, while seemingly limited by his aggressiveness was

given a dance in which he moves through space, seemingly free. And yet his movements have some constraint as well. Perhaps the women and the man also share something about how each of them occupies the world.

The Writing of the Poetry

I will speak of the “Master’s Stick.” Of this poem, I knew I wanted to write a poem for the man, just as I was writing a poem of repose for the women. The first line came to me, just came to me as these things do. After thinking about this teacher perched on his stool, pointing at students to speak and wrangling with them argumentatively, I just heard this line (“The master was a stick”) and I knew it was right even though it has nothing to do with pointing but is actually reminiscent of what I have been told nuns would do in Catholic school with their rulers (rap students across the knuckles) and the image of I have of a school master requiring attention through rapping on his desk with a stick, a pointer. From there the poem developed. The master makes the student, brings the student into being. That is what all this seems to me to be.

But poetry and dance are more than “meanings” I can articulate. This reduces the poetry and dance to mere illustration, nice but not necessary. The “meaning” is the actual sonority, the motion that is not translated into ideas. These expressions are their own reality. They are not reducible to singular meanings outside of the sensory character of the poem and dance. The “master” poem feels to be not about being the master but it is the master. It feels immediate to me; it is an act not a reflection, a present moment, not a memory found in repose and considered. This is true of his dance as well. I do not know what it means either but that does not mean I do not know what it means, only that what it means is in the dance, not outside the dance to be described or explained. For my process an act of explanation would interfere with what I do. I do not talk; I feel.

Feeling, however, is not arbitrary or obvious. Feeling is cultivated over a long time of work, of error, of tutelage by artists who could scold me and prod me and dislike what I was doing but for all that waiting patiently for the moment when they could say, “Now yes, that’s it, that’s what I’ve been waiting for you to do.” Feeling is not inborn genetically. It is cultivated as I tried and was critiqued and critiqued myself and could notice the fleeting moment when something felt so right I just knew it was right and I could build from there and also know what it meant to “feel right.” For me “feel right” means feels organic, feels connected to the originating impulse for the dance of which I come to know more than I knew initially.

To work like this means to play: play with whatever, play until you begin to notice and let go of pre-given ideas and become available to the image that was emerging that did not really come from you but came from dwelling long enough until you could let go and be available.

Letting go of what you think it should be. Did I know the pointing would not be commanding? I tried that and it just did not feel right. It did not resonate, ping something. Did I know I would make these motions? No. And I just knew, afterwards only, that in the case of both women and the man there was a struggle between their insides (their dreams and dreaming) and the outside (how they lived in their various places). That struggle might have been intellectually present in the original study but it became thematic in the art-work and became more important as the work emerged. I knew this tension between inside and outside was what I sought but I did not know why. I just trusted it.

What has been Afforded in this Research/Inquiry?

This provides a flavor for how I worked on this piece. But you may well ask: what is the purpose of such a research/inquiry? What can be gained? And why ABER for this?

I see two “outcomes” here. First, having uncovered the theme of “dreaming,” a theme which was not apparent during the original analysis, it occurs to me to consider what it would be for a classroom to be a space for dreaming. I do not mean the conventional notion we have of dreaming in education settings (dreaming of being a doctor or pilot or scientist) nor the dream of equity. I mean the act of dreaming itself as an act with value and connected to a radical conception of imagination putting anything with anything just to see what might happen. These acts of dreaming and imagining are not random but studied. The classroom becomes a space for learning to dream and imagine. This connects with the calls for education for creativity. What I have discovered in this inquiry is the centrality to the teachers of their dreaming. They may not have noticed it as such (especially the male teacher) but this does not mean there is not dreaming as part of their pedagogical apparatus. Only without this inquiry I certainly never noticed it.

Second, there is the greater understanding of who these teachers are. This is not insignificant. All of the teacher thinking literature emphasizes the need to see how teacher thinking connects to how they move their educational programs forward. To understand them better is to be able to provide the opportunities for them to see their own thinking and how they might use it for their and their students benefit.

This work, also, continues to be an inquiry into culture/society, especially the idea of the patriarchy. While I found something new in my understanding of the male teacher (a kind of dignity and love not previously apparent) and in the women (partially trapped by their unwillingness to connect pleasure and education and bring dreaming directly into their teaching work) it also provides the possibility of exploding what Julia Kristeva (1986) terms “the metaphysics of the man/woman war.” That is, she argues that what appears, in the

patriarchy to be a material conflict turns out to be metaphysical and lodged not only in our bodies but in each of us as well, as we feature differing selections of the constellation of possibilities for ourselves. She calls, in “Women’s Time,” for acts of imagination to begin to speak back to the patriarchy’s dominance within and without each of us. What I have pursued in this work is, I submit, one such act.

Paper 2: Within the Visible: Medicine, Aesthetics, and Making Sense of Education

I (David) want to thank Donald for asking me to be the discussant on his presentation. It is always an honor to offer my thoughts on his work. I want you to know that I support arts-based educational research as a viable, important, and critical aspect of doing research in educational contexts (broadly defined).

The other night I found myself sitting in a doctor’s office surrounded by three medical students. One was typing away on a computer seemingly taking copious and detailed notes about my responses, one looked exhausted, the other peppered me with questions about the nature of my malady, about my medical history, and about my lifestyle, such as my eating habits, sleeping patterns, exercise routines, work habits, stress, anxiety, hobbies, leisure time, etc. After informing me about the basic principles of naturopathic medicine and its various treatment modalities, the resident intern, the person who supervises all of the medical students, entered the room. Suddenly one of the students said, “I will now need you to move from the chair to the examiner’s table.” She asked in her gentle way to straighten my back—sit straight up and look ahead—and then asked me to look at her finger so she could check my eyes, and then to open my mouth to look at the inside of my tongue and throat—and then she looked into each ear. After each body part, she gave a description of what she saw, which seemed as if medical standards were making these descriptions. For example, she would use words like, “the eyes are normal, symmetrical, cloudy, round, bulging.” However, a strange thing happened when she looked into my left ear. After piercing into it, she stopped and looked dumbfounded, which as a patient can be quite concerning, and she said, “I’m not sure what to say, it’s white, or there’s a whiteness...um, it’s not asymmetrical.” The resident intern, her supervisor responded, “just describe it,” and the student said, “I’m not sure how to do it,” So the student gave the light to the Intern, who then looked into my left ear for herself, and the student asked the supervisor, “How would you describe it” to which the Intern replied, “I’m not sure, I guess I would say ‘opaque’ but I will find a more scientific term when I get back to my office. I don’t see anything to worry about, you can move on to reflexes.” The intern’s response did precious little to comfort me in my wanting to know about the condition of my ear, but we moved on. However, more germane to this talk is the students and the interns inability to use description, which was so essential to their practice in this moment. Foucault (1980) reminds us in *The Order of Things* that the crisis of representation begins and ends with the sign, and here was a classic example.

I think about Mark Doty's (2010) comments about language when he questions,

What lies beneath the visible? Is it possible to look beneath the green of the maple leaf to the blazing carmine sugars below, or beneath the slippery signature of the passing snake to the s curve of the elegant little bones? Beneath the bones? The poem, of course, has that freedom to move, as in that moment in 'the Fish' when the speaker's eyes seem to probe beneath the scaled surface to entrails and swim-bladder, or that stanza from Robert Hass's 'That Music' when the consciousness of the poem seems to dive down beneath the soil to be present with the snowmelt 'percolating through the roots of mountain grasses.' Is Shelley looking down, beneath the gorgeous flesh of autumn—which in his ode is rotting, pestilent—to some dynamic principle at work in things, a kind of logarithm of decay and rekindling? (p. 133)

Doty makes me think of the constricted language of description in research but also in educational settings—what language could the student have used to describe the condition of my ear that would have offered not necessarily a representation of it, but one that was “present” with it, or one that “dove down beneath the soil” of the ear—how might the student learn to stir the structural aspects of language and formal features to explore the ways in which description might work for her in that place—how might the instructor live with her inability to describe it beyond the “I’ll find a more scientific term when I return to my office” to look beneath the bones of the ear? How might the “opacity” of the moment permit us to explore other ways of knowing and other ways of performing our roles as students and teachers? How might curriculum and pedagogy move with and through the opacity of language and ethics in education? It is Judith Butler (2005) who reminds us that it is our opacity with each other that compels us to act responsibly and compassionately to those who we recognize and acknowledge as different from ourselves. We are always already in a state of unknowability with each other—we are both mutable teacher and student simultaneously. This is where art-based educational research comes in.

As Blumenfeld-Jones argues in his piece, ABER aligns artistic practices and modalities with research endeavors. It is the intersectionality with composing and crafting art that the researcher and researched coalesce and where language as an alternative sign system to linguistic ones form and move in rhizomatic ways with multiple lines of flight and dangling modifiers (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Dramatic readings of emotional experiences prove to be vital components of the research endeavor than to the struggle to mediate constricted descriptions. It is, as he contends, an interaction, a negotiation, an agonistic relationship with and through the world that ABER garners its power to shift perception of what research can do and what the research can become. As Blumenfeld-Jones indicates above, “It is the chairs and feelings about pleasure that could be located in how the chairs were occupied that struck

him as presenting the possibility of making art, exploring further the teachers and their models.” The purpose, of course, is not necessarily to offer prediction, which is a privileged outcome of research.

Here, I’m reminded of my experiences last evening as I was watching the pregame show for the National League Wildcard game of MLB. Experts try to dissect every aspect of the game with numbers, explaining how Jake Arrieta is a 22 game winner with a .44 ERA over the last ten games, and how the Pirates hit lefthanders really well and are the hottest team in baseball, and if Garrett Cole throws his slider 30% of the time against right-handed hitters, the Pirates will win, but if the Cub hitters can swing at first pitch strikes, they have a better chance of winning *ad infinitum*. The culmination of the pre-game show is the prediction from each commentator—three of the four pick the Pirates due to their bullpen and hitting percentages, only one predicted the Cubs to win due to the starting pitching—all of them predicted a close game. Well, as it turned out, no one could predict that the lead off hitter for the cubs would go 3-4 with three runs and a HR and that Jake Arrieta would pitch all nine-innings, or that Pirate Hitters can’t hit the off-speed pitch and the Cubs would win 4-0 in a snoozer. The purpose of ABER is not necessarily to predict or generalize, but as he surmises, is for the artist to interact with the world in new ways. As Blumenfeld-Jones notes above, “This is, in my estimation, what all researchers do: They do research in order to know what they think that they didn’t know they were thinking because there was no evidence for it until they did research which refined what they thought they knew or confirmed it, but in any event, brought to light something of which they had an inkling it was there although they didn’t know it.”

As researchers in ABER, we prepare research about notions or phenomenon that we “didn’t know” so that we remain wide-awake for the possibility for new experiences and new understandings and new ways of being in the world (see Greene, 2000). I believe the student who looked into my ear began with a certain way of knowing the ear, a standardized way of looking and became perplexed at unfamiliar data. The artist, the amateur, maintains a critical and open stance to the opacity within the research endeavor. As Blumenfeld-Jones exclaims above, “Each dance requires the invention/finding of a vocabulary for that dance.” Ultimately, ABER offer scholars and students and teachers an opportunity of an embodied understanding that teeters between an expanding and constricting continuum of affect and feeling that often gets left out of the hidden features of research. Much like the student in the initial scenario, it offers us the opportunity to pause how we think we know and to live in the unknown, to question the ways in which we seek to “represent” knowledge and how knowledge production happens; to focus on the “sonality” of the process of doing research; to stir language and move the stick between the body and the mind; and finally, to, as Blumenfeld-Jones writes above, “play with whatever, play until you begin to notice and let go of pre-given ideas and

become available to the image that didn't really come from you but came from dwelling long enough until you could let go and be available" as much as possible and as much as you can.

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