Are We Asking the Wrong Questions in Arts-Based Research?

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Arts-based researchers distinguish themselves from other qualitative researchers on the grounds that they use artistic processes and practices in their inquiries and in the communication of their research outcomes. Like artists, they operate out of a particular community of practice, with its own distinctive history of emergence, set of responsibilities, and criteria for evaluation. Given the epistemological roots of arts-based research, it is argued in this article that arts-based researchers cannot ignore the processes and practices of artists as they continue to develop and theorise a counter-hegemonic research discourse and practice to the logical rational scientific one so embedded in educational inquiry. Attending critically to artists’ practices, as this article demonstrates, raises many and difficult questions about doing research in, with, and through the arts. Given that arts-based research is a long-term project, these questions need to be addressed for what they might mean for the practice of arts-based research.

Arts-based educational research is founded on the belief that the arts have the ability to contribute particular insights into, and enhance understandings of phenomena that are of interest to educational researchers. As Elliot Eisner (2006), the first to articulate a place for the arts in educational research, claims, “The arts provide access to forms of experience that are either un-securable or much more difficult to secure through other representational forms” (p. 11). To him, the most distinguishing feature of arts-based research is that it employs aesthetic qualities to illuminate and reveal educational situations and experiences (Eisner, 2008). As a field of inquiry, arts-based educational research has grown significantly in recent years (Barone, 2006). To date, the literature in the field has been mainly concerned with describing the conditions of this research approach (see Barone, 2005a, 2006; Barone & Eisner, 2006; Eisner, 1995, 1997, 2006, 2008; Finley & Knowles, 1995; Piantanida, McMahon, & Garman, 2003). Different methodological approaches of engaging the arts in educational research have been advanced, including a/r/tography, arts informed research, and aesthetically based research to mention some (Bresler, 2006; Cole, Neilsen, Knowles & Luciani, 2004; Cole, 2002; Irwin, 2004; Irwin & deCosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind, 2005; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008). Philosophical understandings and rationales for researching in, with, and through the arts have been put forward. Questions about validity, reliability, transferability, and comparability all feature in this literature. And, in the past decade, we have witnessed an increase in the number of articles that deal with the visual in arts-based research (see Cole & McIntyre, 2004; Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong & Bickel, 2006; O’Donoghue, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Slattery, 2001; Springgay, 2008; Springgay, et al., 2008; Sullivan, 2005, 2006).

1 In the special issue of Studies in Art Education devoted to arts-based research, Tom Barone (2006) claims, it was in the 1970s in Stanford, when he was a doctoral student, that Elliot Eisner was imagining a place for the arts in educational research. As Eisner himself explains, in that same issue, the first Arts-Based Research Institute was offered at Stanford University to members of the American Educational Research Association in 1993.

2 The terms arts-based educational research and arts-based research are used interchangeably (continued)
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To date, many of the rationales advanced for considering the visual arts as a viable alternative to linguistic-based research approaches advocate philosophical understandings of the role and purpose of art. Due attention has not been given to emerging theories and philosophies of contemporary art (such as relational aesthetics, and the altermodern) to critical accounts of artists’ lives and practices, or to their auto/biographical writings. This is not to say that philosophers have not made significant contributions to our understanding of art, its purpose, and its educative dimension; it is to point out that we do not tend to draw on, or be influenced by, the positions and perspectives of cultural theorists, sociologists of art, and critical art historians. While it is difficult to argue against such philosophical understandings of art, I think it is important to ask to what extent does the proliferation and celebration of these theories/philosophies (at the expense of socially informed and radically contextualized understandings of art) limit the way art is imagined, understood, and practiced within arts-based research. The argument that I am advancing here is that as arts-based researchers address the epistemological, ontological, and existential tensions that reside at the core of arts-based research, they need to work more diligently, at a theoretical level at least, with the practices and theories of art from a wide variety of intellectual traditions. Structuring and shaping the field primarily and almost exclusively in relation to aesthetic theories of art denies the fact, as Elizabeth Chaplin (1994) put it, “[that] the production and reception of visual art works are social processes, and they cannot satisfactorily be explained by reference to internal aesthetic factors” (p. 161-162). For Bourdieu (1993), “the work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art” (p. 35). Attending to the social conditions that produce this belief is essential.

Although the above-cited literature establishes and plays a role in sustaining and reproducing dominant beliefs about the function and contribution of the arts as research processes (and it could be argued, generates a repressive form of power), it too offers a place from where new and additional questions about doing arts-based research can be posed. I contend that the following questions need to be asked and addressed as the field develops:

1. How do arts-based research processes, products, and theoretical orientations connect with those in the professional fields of the arts?

2. How might a close, critical, and deeply contextual analysis of the work and work practices of artists advance, develop, and enhance understandings, theories, and practices of arts-based research?

3. What types of questions, challenges, and concerns might such an analysis of artists’ work and their work practices raise for arts-based researchers?

Perhaps it is only now when the foundations of the field have been laid and the struggle to seek legitimacy and recognition is no longer all consuming that questions such as these can be asked and addressed meaningfully.3 The history of arts-based research suggests that arts-based researchers have not in any sustained manner considered the relationship between their practices and the practices of artists, or the different contexts in which they work. Nor have they engaged in throughout this article. For the purpose of this article, both denote the same meaning.

3 A primary purpose of earlier work was to disturb and trouble the prevailing consensus that educational research had to be scientific in orientation, and to demonstrate the potential of research approaches located in the arts for inquiring into educational phenomena. As a long-time advocate of arts-based educational research, Barone (2005b) describes candidly what he experienced as an audience member at Eisner’s 1993 American Educational Research Association (AERA) presidential address at which Eisner argued for methodological pluralism in educational research: “I sat excitedly in the audience sensing sweet victory, believing that a new age of educational inquiry had arrived. The coming era would be one in which we arts-based researchers could divert our energies from the arduous tasks of convincing our scientist brothers and sisters of the potential of our research approach, toward achieving our common goal—the improvement of educational policy and practice” (p. 123).
a process of mapping out their practices in an effort to find commonalities and resonances with the practice of artists.\(^4\) Rather, in the literature, we continue to find questions such as “How can a piece of research include poetry or sculpture and still be substantive and useful to academic and lay audiences in education?” (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p.1). Given that Eisner (1981, 1997) and others have raised and addressed questions such as these in the past, perhaps we are asking the wrong questions in arts-based educational research at this time.

In this article, I address these three questions by engaging the work of two contemporary artists: Huang Yong Ping and Clive Moloney. I examine their practices not only to address these questions but also to raise new ones. In addressing these questions, my approach is informed by Eisner’s ideas of educational criticism and educational connoisseurship and is situated in the traditions of art criticism. I am interested in what lingering in these works and work practices might offer. As Liora Bresler (2006) observes, “[lingering] invites discoveries, emergent issues, and ideas, mobilizes ways of seeing, and being” (p. 56). Following Latour (2004), who claims that the critic assembles rather than debunks, I want to find connections, parallels, and resonances between the work of contemporary artists and arts-based educational research theory and practice. I want to create an arena where ideas about doing art and doing arts-based research come together. To critically examine the work and work practices of both artists, I draw on practice theory as advanced by Reckwitz (2002), Schatzki (2001), and Schatzki, Knorr-Ketina & Von Savigny (2001). A ‘practice’ (praktik), Andreas Reckwitz (2002) explains, “is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (p. 249). The role of the individual, “as a bodily and mental agent,” Reckwitz explains, “acts as a carrier (Träger) of a practice” (p. 250) and indeed a carrier of several different practices simultaneously. Thinking about and mapping an artist’s practice in and through this theory is useful for several reasons. It gives a structure for making visible and articulating how and why artists operate as they do. And, it provides opportunities for identifying and advancing alternative rationales for engaging in research through art.

My selection, analysis, and readings of the work and work practices of both artists is deeply engrained in the histories and practices of the fields in which I operate—visual art, art education, and arts-based research—and the ‘routinized ways of understanding’ and knowing that are particular to each of these fields (Reckwitz, 2002). While there are limits to self-reflexivity, I am aware that as an artist and academic who prioritizes activist-informed, interventionist, and participative art practice, I seek out, interpret, understand, and write about visual phenomena in particular ways. For this article, I have selected the artwork of two artists who work through the medium of installation (a choice that reflects to some degree my preference and knowledge of this art form and art practice). To understand and make visible the practices of these two artists

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\(^4\) There are of course exceptions: In the visual arts there is the work of Graeme Sullivan (2005, 2006) and Rita Irwin and her research colleagues at the University of British Columbia (see Irwin et al., 2006). In the performing arts, Donald Blumenfeld-Jones has written on the processes of art-making and its relation to arts-based educational research (see Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002, 2008).
requires understanding the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions (Bourdieu, 1993).

As an art education professor in a Canadian university who recently moved from Western Europe where the discourse around arts-based research is framed somewhat differently and has a different history of emergence (with a greater emphasis on the practice of art as research) and, as a researcher who uses arts-based research methodologies that are deeply connected with the practices and processes of contemporary art, I operate out of particular paradigmatic allegiances. I also work within a set of domain assumptions (i.e. non-theoretical beliefs, assumptions, and value systems that have evolved and developed through my biographical, linguistic, and cultural experiences)\(^5\) that enable access to particular ways of knowing, representing, and evaluative structures. Given that I am keenly aware that position shapes dispositions, and dispositions have the ability to shape position, issues of my positionality are problematized further when they resurface at various points in this article.

For this article, I chose Yong Ping and Moloney because their work had a profound impact on me when I first encountered it. But that alone is not a good reason; the why and how they make art was a significant factor in making this choice. In his practice, Yong Ping never wages one system of knowledge or aesthetics against another, but rather, employs one to better understand the other and in the process identifies a third option (Vergne, 2005). This is precisely the grounds on which many advocates of arts-based research have made a case for the arts as a form of inquiry. They contend that the arts as well as the sciences (which have long been thought of as extreme opposites) have rich potential for generating and representing deep understandings of educational phenomena. Much like arts-based researchers, Yong Ping is devoted to pioneering a new genre of art that goes some way toward undoing conventional modes of artistic production, participation, and consumption. As with Yong Ping, Moloney's practice and artworks are full of ‘teachable moments.’ The materials he selects, the ways in which he uses them, combines them, and transforms them, the forms he creates in making the unfamiliar familiar and the familiar strange, and the associations he generates in and through his work teach us much about how ideas can be worked out and presented visually and spatially for the purpose of communication, critical reflection, and meaning making. While Yong Ping and Moloney operate out of different social, political, and cultural contexts, and are at different life stages in their careers, both are engaging visual forms to address and make sense of issues that, while private to each of them, are indeed public concerns. Their practices problematize the traditional relationship between the artist and the artwork. Both use processes and practices that emanate from the history of art, but challenge and push the boundaries of art practice in an effort to discover new possibilities of artmaking. Both borrow from their respective cultural heritage to inform and shape the work that they do. Their work provides opportunities to learn about the worlds in which we participate and, in particular, how we participate. First, I describe and engage with Moloney's installation Rural Monument.

\(^5\) See Gouldner (1970) and Lynch (1999) for a discussion on this.
Rural Monument

First shown at the Limerick School of Art and Design graduate show in Limerick, Ireland during the summer of 2007, Rural Monument is an installation comprising nine white 3-dimensional plaster casts lying scattered on a grey floor in a space enclosed by white walls. These plaster pieces are casts of both tangible and intangible forms. The tangible forms are rural artifacts (milk churns and pallets), while the intangible forms are evidence of movement and rural migration. Similar in some respects to the work of the British artist Rachel Whiteread, Moloney takes casts from cow tracks, the depressions cows leave behind in the mud as they move along mud pathways making their way from one place to another (see Figure 2). In the studio, he brings together and builds these plaster casts into cylindrical forms. He makes several of these forms. Following this transformation, these cylindrical forms resemble white crumbling chalk pillars, already in the process of falling away, similar to those that one might see in excavation sites of ancient civilizations. He arranges these cylindrical forms in what appears to be a haphazard manner alongside the casts of milk-churns and wooden pallets. This installation, he claims, is a monument to rural ways of life in Ireland. Is this installation, then, a materialization of thought? Or, is it as much a materialization of the engagement with working with materials and processes and being open to the possibilities that both offer for advancing ideas, for in making work, artists remain open to the possibilities that configurations...
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The work is an attempt to direct consciousness to the things we take for granted, to forms that for the most part go unseen. As viewers, we are confronted with our own “unseeingness” in being presented with forms that are out of context and transformed, yet retain their original characteristics. Moloney’s aim here is to raise awareness by cultivating the curiosity of the spectator. Curiosity in this instance is cultivated by ambiguity.

It is in the forms that he creates; the processes he uses to create them; the materials he has chosen; and the manner in which he places these forms in the gallery space, that Moloney works out and works through these ideas. The forms are not cast in lasting and irreversible materials such as bronze or concrete. Neither are they made from their original materials. They are made with plaster. Plaster is a material that remains somewhat soft even when dry, a material that is prone to erosion depending on environmental conditions, and a material that can crumble easily, but a material that always leaves a trace. The material embodies the fragility of preservation. The selection of material alone, notwithstanding the form and symbolic associations of these pieces, plays a significant role in what, and how, ideas are presented, represented, and interpreted. Meaning resides in the production of the work, in the work itself, as well as in the interpretation of the work.

For arts-based researchers, what types of questions do Moloney’s work and work practices invite? First, they open up a space for us to think about arts-based research as a process (coming to know), and as a product (representation of knowing and providing opportunities for others to come to know). Both conceptualizations present different opportunities for engagement, and different possibilities for meaning making. They also demand different criteria for evaluation. Moloney’s installation (a product), serves as a site of knowledge and meaning making—as a place from which we can engage in a series of reflective, reflexive, and relational acts. While it triggers curiosity and opens up a space for engagement, it too creates conditions for engagement. The artistic processes employed by the artist in making the work also act as a site for meaning making, for the maker and the knowing viewer. Moloney has clearly engaged in a sophisticated process of searching for innovative ways to make visible practical concerns. He has worked through his ideas from raw data on one site, transferred it to another where he continues to research and make meaning, and finally places it in a site that requires the viewer to continue this process of meaning making. He engages as much in the process of finding and making (giving form) as he does with the intentionality of the work. The result is that his artmaking is both a site for research as much as a representation of research involvement in a given topic.

Second, his work and work practices generate questions about interpretation. In addressing, in a visual, spatial, and narrative manner, the problem that he has identified, Moloney attends to the relationships in and between the conceptual,
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theoretical, and practical, and he finds ways of generating and conveying ideas that are not actually physically present in the work itself. The work suggests a certain degree of productive ambiguity. In *Rural Monument*, Moloney trusts the readers to tease out, unravel, and make connections among and across the

6 For Eisner (2005) productive ambiguity occurs when “the material presented is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity” (p. 180).

Figure 2. *Rural Monument*, preparatory work. Courtesy of the artist Clive Moloney. Photograph, Dónal O’Donoghue.
artifacts they see, experience, and interpret. This is a necessary condition of the work. Meaning is open, unfixed, and fluid.

I grew up in rural Ireland and I am very familiar not only with the purposes and uses of the installation's artifacts, but also with the changing nature of rural society to which Moloney refers. I have worked with plaster, casting, and mould-making. Therefore, my experiences give form and meaning to this installation. I know the potential as well as the limitations offered by the chosen material and its associated artmaking processes. For me, this knowledge provides an entry point to interpreting the work. I am not required to move outside of what I know; rather I am required to make connections between the mode of representation and the object of representation. Familiarity with the objects in the installation and with the processes of production itself, allows for a comprehension that is deep and meaningful. But perhaps, too, this familiarity has resulted in an identification of an intention that may not have been present in the making of the work. And, to what extent is the intentionality of the artist mediated or altered in my written rendering of his work, for, as Bourdieu (1993) claims, "the production of discourse (critical, historical, etc.) about the work of art is one of the conditions of production of the work" (p. 35).

Ambiguity, then, can be productive given certain conditions, but perhaps unproductive given others. What degree of ambiguity can arts-based researchers employ in presenting their work without running the risk of their work losing its communicative value? When is there a sufficient degree of referential clarity so that the work makes sense to a broad educational community? Given that artworks have significance only for those who have the means of appropriating them (Bourdieu, 1993), will the products of arts-based researchers be comprehensible only to those who have the means to access them? Can re/presenting research outcomes in, with, and through an art form serve as an effective way of reaching multiple and diverse audiences?

Similar to Moloney, in conceptualizing, doing, and representing educational research outcomes, researchers attend to form, to the organization and arrangement of parts to whole, and to the relation of one form to another. In addition, researchers attend to the expressive as well as to the aesthetic dimensions of their form. They carefully consider the communicative potential of their materials, their words, and grammatical structures, and they draw on associations as ways of creating empathy and understanding in readers of their work. As researchers, they attend to types of understandings that are made possible through different representational forms. But, in the presentation of their findings and research outcomes, is it enough for arts-based researchers to do what Moloney does? That is, present open-ended data so that readers can arrive at multiple and perhaps contradictory interpretations? If we subscribe to the idea of research as public intellectual work, and, by extension, the arts-based researcher as a public intellectual, who critiques and communicates as well as creates ideas that are disseminated not to disciplinary colleagues alone, but also to the broader world, it follows that we have a responsibility to think critically about and address issues of interpretation in arts-based research. This leads to my second example, Huang Yong Ping's *Theater of the World*.
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*Theater of the World*

Shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery Canada as part of Huang Yong Ping’s retrospective exhibition (House of Oracles) during the summer of 2007, *Theater of the World* was a sculptural installation that contained tarantulas, scorpions, crickets, millipedes, and lizards (none of which cohabit in the wild) housed together in an wooden oval-shaped plywood mesh-covered cage in the shape of a turtle. It was positioned under a suspended wooden python that stretched almost the entire length of the gallery’s second floor. As an artwork, it spoke to questions about life, mortality, coexistence, relations, and power. Core to this artwork were elements of chance, uncertainty, and uncontrollability. In assembling the piece and in placing the insects, reptiles, and arachnids in it, Yong Ping did not know how this would all play out. Even though he created a very controlled and artificial situation (somewhat like an experiment), he didn’t know if these insects, reptiles, and arachnids would devour each other or coexist harmoniously. Neither did he know what the public reaction to the piece might be, nor how the piece would evolve and become something else, something unrelated to the artist’s intention. A certain ambiguity concerning the purpose of the work is evident in the description of the piece in the exhibition catalogue. In many respects this work was no different from other work he has produced in the past insofar as it relied on chance, and disrupted, undermined, and partly erased the traditional relationship between the artist and the artwork. The degree of uncertainty and chance which was present in assembling the work extended into the viewing and interpretation of it. In looking at the piece, nobody was ever quite sure what exactly was going to happen, but waited in anticipation: looking, watching, conjecturing, speculating. Interested in how the work would transform over time, viewers wondered if the insects, reptiles, and arachnids would kill each other, and if so what would happen to those victims—would they disappear, be left in the theater-like structure to decay, or be removed.

In housing these creatures together, it would be expected that from time to time they would practise the natural law of survival of the fittest and consume one another, and this, along with the fact that these creatures were placed in an ‘unnatural environment’ designed to foster conflict for the viewing of onlookers, provoked and outraged many individuals (some of whom never saw the exhibit). Shortly after the Yong Ping exhibition opened, a sign at *Theater of the World*, read:

On Friday April 13 the BC SPCA [British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] issued legally binding Orders to the Vancouver Art Gallery and Huang Yong Ping. It was deemed by the artist that these orders would compromise the integrity of the artwork, *Theater of the World*. The artist, supported by the Vancouver Art Gallery, was regrettably forced to close *Theater of the World* … on Sunday April 15, 2007.

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7 In the exhibition catalogue, Huang Yong Ping asks, “Is *Theater of the World* an insect zoo? A test site where various species of the natural world devour one another? A space for observing the activity of ‘insects’? An architectural form as a closed system? A cross between a panopticon and a shamanistic practice of keeping insects? A metaphor for the conflicts among different peoples and cultures? Or, rather, a modern representation of the ancient Chinese character gu?” (p. 34).

8 It was reported that one lizard, one tarantula, one scorpion, and one cockroach died over the course of the exhibit, although, according to the gallery director none of the four had fallen victim to predation.
The gallery text accompanying the exhibit stated, “The work functions as a metaphor for the conflicts among different people and culture—in short, human existence itself”.

During the time of the exhibit and afterwards when it was closed down, conversations and heated discussions about art, artists, animal rights, and ethics occurred in the gallery space, as well as in cyberspace. Individuals posted comments on blog-pages, wrote and sent e-mails and letters of complaint to the gallery and to the local and national press. Visitors to the gallery posted their responses to the piece on a comment board provided by the gallery. Two TV monitors that showed footage of the event as it unfolded in the media stood to the right of the exhibit. Posted close by were e-mails received from the public, along with newspaper cuttings. In and across these fora, questions about the purpose and role of art were raised and debated, as were questions about the ethical implications of this work. Some argued that the piece ought to be dismantled because of its inherent cruelty, while others claimed that any attempt to alter it or remove it would violate the artist’s right to free speech and compromise the integrity of the artwork. That the gallery had already altered the work in the beginning days of the exhibition by providing more

Figure 4. Theater of the World, Huang Yong Ping (1993), installation photograph. House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, April 5 to September 16, 2007 (organized by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis). Used with permission from the Vancouver Art Gallery.
lighting, water, and hiding spaces for the insects, reptiles, and arachnids (at the
request of the BC SPCA) raises important questions about authorship, and the
retention of authorship. That the animal-rights concerns eventually took pre-
cedence over the artistic integrity of the work raises important questions about
artistic freedom and about the right and role of a major visual arts institution to
show work of a contemporary artist. For me, it raises the question, who is the
producer of this work?

When the exhibit closed on April 15, 2007, the collection of writings,
visuals, and sound pieces from the print and broadcast media became another
exhibit—an off-shoot of the original work. The director of the gallery claimed
that in doing this, the gallery was encouraging discussions about freedom of
expression, power, and censorship. New questions were generated in taking this
step and old ones imagined anew. The work was now being contextualized and
understood differently. Different evaluative and analytical frameworks were
being deployed to make sense of the work.

This entire process and set of unfolding events invite several questions not
only about the work, but, for the purpose of this article, about art as research.
First, what does it say about where a work begins and ends, how and where
data is generated, or where such research might be disseminated? I argue that
the sensationalist manner in which this work was taken up in the public press
and broadcast media (with an almost exclusive emphasis on animal cruelty),
along with the involvement of animal protection and humanitarian organiza-
tions, overshadowed and obfuscated the fact that the opportunities for meaning
making that this work presented were not the same for all viewers or partici-
pants. Yong Ping's work would have been unthinkable without the history of art
practice that preceded it. He was not the first artist to involve living animals in
an artwork. Before him, Zhang Huan and Joseph Beuys, for example, exhibited
artworks that involved live animals. The opportunities for meaning making
that this work provided for those who, because of their educational level, their
position in the artworld, their ability to reference other works by Yong Ping
and similar forms of representations involving animals, were very different to
the opportunities it provided for those who did not bring the same artistic
knowledge and competence to the work and to the process of deciphering its
meaning. As Bourdieu (1993) argues, whenever the conditions that make it
possible to experience an artwork in a deep, meaningful, and contextual manner
are not fulfilled, misunderstanding is unavoidable. And this is precisely what
Yong Ping claimed following the closure of the exhibit. Bourdieu (1993) holds
that “in the absence of the perception that the works are coded, and coded in
another code, one unconsciously applies the code which is good for everyday
perception, for the deciphering of familiar objects, to works in a foreign
tradition” (p. 217). And, he argues further, “uninitiated perception, reduced
to the grasping of primary significations, is a mutilated perception (Bourdieu
1993, p. 219). This is precisely what occurred in the reception of Theater of the
World. Second, writing in the Vancouver Sun on April 12, 2007 (4 days after
the exhibition opened), Nicholas Read claimed that the American Zoological
Association stated that any zoo that exhibited these creatures in one display area
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would risk losing its accreditation. But this was not a zoo. The idea here was not to preserve or present these creatures in a habitat that resembled their natural one. The concept and ideology behind this work was different. In most cases the intention of the exhibit was missed. Does this matter? Third, the majority of viewers engaged with Yong Ping’s work at a very surface level. Does arts-based research that is expressed in non-comprehensible ways run that same risk? What is lost in simplifying complex ideas and practices for the purposes of interpretation? And, finally, what of the question of chance, of doing research that involves a significant degree of chance offerings, as the insects and reptiles did in this sculptural installation?

Conclusion

Arguably, research practices and modes of representation based in the arts can disclose particular insights and generate particular understandings about educational settings and situations in addition to, and in ways, that linguistic-based research methods cannot. A critical examination of the work and work practices of contemporary artists for the purpose of identifying how their work

Figure 5. Photograph of the space created for showing blog entries, e-mail correspondence, and media coverage of Theater of the World, Huang Yong Ping (1993). House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective, exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, April 5 to September 16, 2007 (organized by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis). Used with permission from the Vancouver Art Gallery.
and practices operate to secure particular opportunities for meaning making is essential for the development and advancement of arts-based research. A number of important questions come from this process.

First, there is the question of how do arts-based researchers create the conditions for others to interpret and understand their research findings/outcomes? Moloney trusts the viewer to make connections among and across the artifacts in his installation as a way of interpreting. Is it enough for arts-based researchers to do what Moloney did? That is, present open-ended data so that readers can arrive at multiple and perhaps contradictory interpretations? Yong Ping’s *Theater of the World* is conceptualized and executed around elements of chance and impermanence. In allowing nature to take its course in shaping and forming *Theater of the World*, the artwork took on a whole range of unexpected twists and turns. While a commitment to chance occurrences and unexpected turns are key requirements of the creative process, what degree of chance and uncertainty is productive in educational research? What are the implications of introducing a significant number of chance elements in research and dissemination?

Second, there is the question of access. Who is in a position to access the outcomes of research inquiries conducted in and through art in ways that are meaningful and generative? As Bourdieu (1993) argues, and as I have demonstrated in this article, there are different degrees of access, some which provide richer possibilities for meaning making and understanding than others. Based on the number of visitors to the Huang Yong Ping exhibit (more than 5,000 individuals were reported to have visited it), the sheer quantity of e-mail and blog postings that the exhibit generated, and the amount of airtime it got in the media, it could be argued that as an artwork *Theater of the World* was accessed by many, and was therefore accessible. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth, as the artist’s statement at the closing of the exhibit so eloquently captures. At this end, what are the implications of misinterpretation for educational research conducted in or through the arts? Is this not a key question that ought to be of concern to arts-based researchers?

Third, there is the question of ethics. From a traditional research ethics standpoint, some art practices are perceived to breach codes of practice, and Huang Yong Ping’s *Theater of the World* is no exception in this regard. The perceived abuse of innocent insects, arachnids, and reptiles led to the closure of this piece. In the exhibition catalogue, Philippe Vernge (2005), the senior curator of the exhibition, asks, “Why should an artist demonstrate any kind of respect for anything? Since when should an artist be well behaved?” and he goes on to argue that the artist’s “subversiveness lies in his indifference to conventional wisdom or knowledge” (p. 24). What kinds of ethical questions does this understanding of the artist and artistic practice raise for those doing research in, with, and through art? Are the ethical principles underpinning contemporary art practice applicable to arts-based research practice? Does researching in and with art require different ways of thinking about ethics? I believe it does. It requires a different relationship with the practices and procedures that have
come to define appropriate ethical behavior in educational research (see Bresler, 2006).

While it is impossible to argue against Graeme Sullivan’s (2006) claim that “art practice is a profound form of human engagement that offers important ways to inquire into issues and ideas of personal, social and cultural importance” (p. 32-33), neither must we forget the social conditions underlying the production of art, art practice, and the classificatory schemas that are activated in artistic perception (Bourdieu, 1993). As Bourdieu (1993) holds, and as referred to earlier, the work of art, and by extension the practice of art, exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as such. Not all individuals have the same access to artistic experiences, artistic knowing, and the objects of art. While the internal logic of arts-based research differs from that of art practice, identifying what is different and similar in, between, and across art and educational research can suggest ways forward as we articulate what we understand as art, as research, and as arts-based research, and continue to imagine the possibilities that arts-based research offers for inquiring into the educational worlds we care about.

A commitment to the arts as an approach to educational research brings many challenges, but equally it brings responsibilities. It requires us to think deeply about how we understand, articulate, and engage in educational research; how we ask and hope to answer questions, as well as the types of questions we might ask. Moreover, a commitment to the arts as an approach to educational research requires us to locate and develop our practices firmly in the professional fields of the arts, as much as it does in the field of educational research.

References
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