

## Arts-Based Research as an Uncertain Text

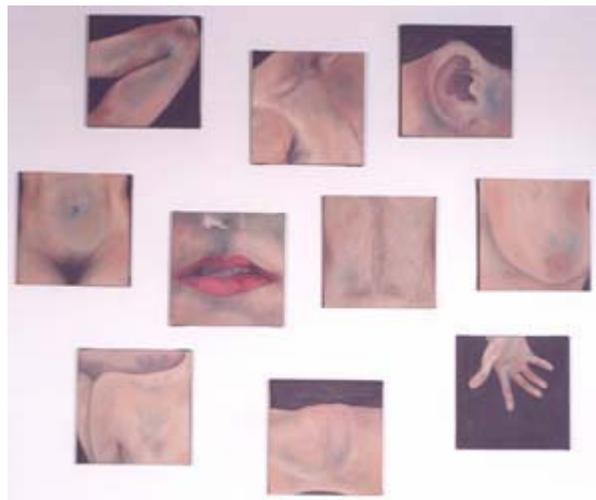
Stephanie Springgay  
University of British Columbia

Stephanie Springgay is a doctoral student. Her research and artistic interests include aesthetics, visual culture, the body, feminist theory, and social justice and the arts. As an artist and art educator she has taught art classes at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, and as a visiting artist in the schools funded by the Ontario Arts Council. At present she teaches in the Bachelor of Education program. She has exhibited her work throughout Canada and held an International Residency at the Kanoria Art Center in Ahmedabad, India. Her work has been published in *Mix; Visual Arts Ontario*; the *Journal for the Association for Research on Mothering* (in press); *Women Art Educators V* (in press); *Questioning Authority: Women in the Academy* (in press); *A/R/T as living practice* (in press); and *New Waves in Art Education* (in press). Her thesis *The Body Knowing* was represented as a visual art installation. To view this artwork or to read more about her scholarship please visit Springgay's web site [www.springgay.com](http://www.springgay.com).

*Vermillion is an artist's pigment. Visions of unruly bodies, blood, passion, and death. It is a colour that I use in my art selectively, allowing the vulnerability of the pigment to speak of the frailty of art making and the uncertainties of artistic ways of knowing and being. Sewing rose petals requires me to abandon neat ordered lines and symmetry. Rose petals bruise. I have to allow for red loopy and uneven stitches; rose petals falling and overlapping each other. Each rose petal flesh discolours and changes in new ways. They are always changing, the red deepening and fading. Someday they will be gone altogether. It is this temporality of art making, the uncertainties and ambiguities of which, create conditions that allow for the unexpected in teaching, researching, and in knowing. Red roses, red pigment, red texts in the academe, residues of mark making will begin to permeate boundaries, speak of impossibilities and ruptures. Red threads disrupting our dwelling in language, disrupting ourselves, our self-understanding. (Springgay, 2001, *The Body Knowing*)*

*In a democratic society art should be the location where everyone can witness the joy, pleasure, and power that emerges when there is freedom of expression, even when a work created evokes pain, outrage, sorrow, or shame. Art should be, then, a place where boundaries can be transgressed, where visionary insights can be revealed within the context of the everyday, the familiar, the mundane. Art is and remains such an uninhibited, unrestrained cultural terrain only if all artists see their work as inherently challenging to those institutionalized systems of domination (imperialism, racism, sexism, class elitism, etc.) that seek to limit, coopt, exploit, or shut down possibilities for individual creative self-actualization. Regardless of subject matter, form, or content, whether art is overtly political or not, artistic work that emerges from an unfettered imagination affirms the primacy of art as that space of cultural production where we can find the deepest, most intimate understanding of what it means to be free. (hooks, 1995, p. 138)*

There has been a considerable amount of scholarly writing on the rationale for arts-based educational research, which has created a demand for an exploration of artistic genres and their effects on and value in educational research. Arts-based educational research has been linked to such research methods as hermeneutics, phenomenology, action research, and autobiography (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Dunlop, 1999; Eisner, 1995; Irwin et al., 1997; Watrin, 1999; Wilson, 2000), and their interwoven relationships have provided extensive debates on issues of validity and value (Dunlop, 2001; Eisner, 2001). Most of such discussions disclose similarities between the *process* of artistic creation and research, and/or report research findings in an aesthetically informed manner. However, arts-based educational research needs also consider what possibilities the residual art product, for example an art installation, may reveal. Researchers need to examine the relationship between art and audience, research and reader (throughout the article I use the terms *art* and *audience* to include research and reader), as a relationship of reciprocity, of shared understanding, and one where uncertainty, ambiguity and fragment evoke possibilities of generativity and transformation.



The images that I present throughout this article are extracted from my Master's of Arts thesis *The Body Knowing: A Visual Art Installation as Educational Research* (2001). That research sought to challenge presumptions and methodological criteria that govern knowledges traditionally upheld in academe by examining the body and the role the body plays in the production and evaluation of knowledge. For the purposes of this article I draw from this exemplar of arts-based educational research *The Body Knowing installation* and examine *body* as a metaphor that posits *fragment* as an undetermined and uncertain condition. It is in the *seam*, a tenuous space with, in, and between the boundaries of artist, scholar, and audience, where the unknown is accessed, that we move beyond language, orienting ourselves to new meanings and understandings of art and research. To conclude I introduce and challenge criteria aimed at evaluating arts-based educational research and propose alternative considerations of value and validity for visual art as educational research.

The images that intervene throughout the article are not intended as backdrops or illustrations to the written text, but rather the art installation illuminates what could not be represented through the written form.



**Body as Fragment**

The series of artworks presented in this article are part of an installation entitled *The Body Knowing*. The installation consists of three series of artworks, each intended to be viewed in relation to the other. One series consists of 12 oil on canvas paintings of fractured body parts, juxtaposed with six sewn rose petal panels, each bearing gold embroidered body parts. Another series consists of larger oil on canvas paintings of bodies and garments in a paradoxical relationship of decay and emergence. In the midst of the exhibition space hang five fabricated dresses that the viewer must peer through, walk between, and brush aside in order to view other work in the installation. The works examine the body in relation to history, cultural production, nature, and identity as fragment. Fractured painted body parts are juxtaposed alongside panels of sewn rose petals, and speak of new composites in an exploration of both the ephemerality of the body and our desire to leave a mark: to create, organize, and understand. The works position the body between artifact and archive, as a region of uncertainty.

The fragmentation of the work alludes metaphorically and metonymically to gender, sexuality, and desire, and issues pertaining to the shifting identity of woman, artist, scholar in academe. The fragmentation in this sense is both literal and metonymic. The works emphasize representation as an effect of, and something embedded within, culture and ask questions regarding the limits and implications within which knowledge is produced and represented. The paintings, appendages of broken, splintered body parts, awkward in their square frames and poses, are placed before us for examination like specimens pinned to a wall. Motionless. Lifeless. Distant. Unreal. Juxtaposed are sewn rose petals, each piece embroidered with gold metallic thread, which



summon the slightly withered and shriveled memories of the whole. Skin. Decay. Change. Nature. Life.

While the paintings serve as historical references to a tradition of oil painting, and the rose petals negate traditional notions of permanence, together they create a museum both within and outside of boundaries. Artwork itself becomes an artifact, an archive of body memories, a container of processes and actions unfolded in the making of the work. Traces of the artist's body remain as part of the final product: a residue of bodily knowledge, artistic knowing, and understanding. The artworks exist as souvenirs of knowing and as objects that serve as traces of authentic experiences. Stewart (1993) suggests that the souvenir is always incomplete and partial. The souvenir sign functions not as object to object, but rather metonymically, as object to experience. The object cannot stand in for the memory, but exists as part of the whole in evocation and resonance to the experience. The souvenir's partiality, Stewart explains, is the source of its power: "The souvenir must remain impoverished and partial so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse, a narrative discourse which articulates the play of desire" (p. 136). Narrative is seen in this sense as a structure that both invents and distances the object, inscribing a gap between signified and signifier that is a place of uncertainty and generation. It is the very desire of part for whole that animates narrative, transforms and collapses distance into proximity, contracting the world in order to accentuate the personal.

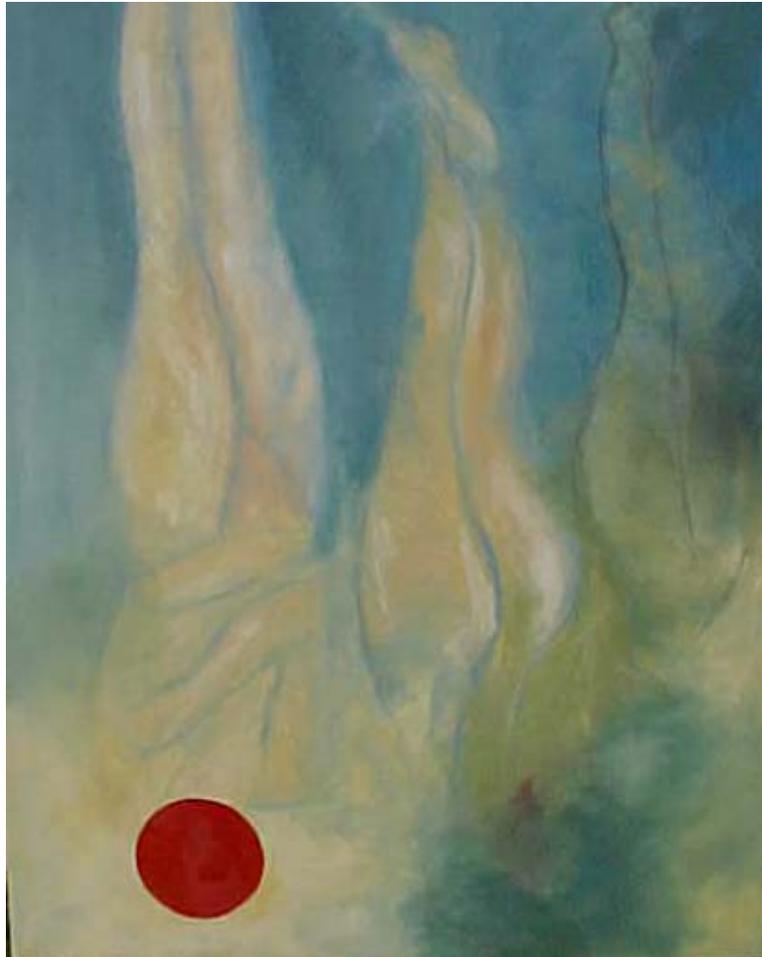
The art itself becomes an art of boundary: the painted body parts, 12 in number, mimicked by the rose petal panels; five dresses, a further series of five large oil paintings. Repetition. Duplication. Stewart (1993) points out the following:

To play with series is to play with the fire of infinity. In the collection the threat of infinity is always met with the articulation of boundary. Simultaneous sets are worked against each other in the same way that attention to the individual object and attention to the whole are worked against each other. The collection thus appears as a mode of control and containment insofar as it is a mode of generation and series ... The finite boundaries these objects afford are played against the infinite possibility of their collection. (p. 159)



It is this tension of repetition that is also called into question by a further abstraction of severed limbs. The body in pieces intimates completeness while simultaneously deconstructing notions of eternity, wholeness, and normity. Thus seen, the work is designed to educe systems of cataloguing, control, and linearity, which are simultaneously set into motion through a dialogical pull, opening up a space aimed at questioning nature, culture, archive—as a repository of different systems of knowledge and understanding. The fragment resists an attempt at being put together as a whole (the entire body is not depicted in the art installation) and thus is caught in an endless web of uncertainty. Further to this argument is the act of viewing, which cannot be controlled or

determined by the artwork or the artist. The artwork resists a singular interpretation. Subjectivity is indeterminable, bound within the body and discourse, which changes from moment to moment. Thus the questions Who do you think you are? How do you know? are always incomplete. I invite the viewer to an unanticipated eruption in the midst of



the familiar. According to Gadamer (Jardine, 1998), “understanding begins when something addresses us” (p. 40) and it is exactly this arousal of desire that my artwork elicits. *The Body Knowing* installation brings audience into the space physically as viewers are invited to walk between the garments, brush up against and touch the bodies

present and absent. Similarly, there is a metaphoric and metonymic relationship between the art and the audience, as viewers' own bodied subjectivities intermingle with the works on display. The boundary between art and reality begins to erode and shift, and audience is caught in the *seam*. Who is on display? Who is doing the looking; the "hanging"? Who or what is eroding with time?



*The installation was exhibited as part of a three-day open studio and cultural event. Sixteen warehouse buildings on the east side of Vancouver, which house hundreds of working artists' spaces, open their doors to the public. Artists are present throughout the exhibition to talk to members of the public, to connect to their work on a personal level in opposition to the empty, sterile, and depersonalized shows at traditional art galleries. Most curious to me was watching different viewers engage with my work. Young girls would be instantly drawn to the human hair, reaching out their hands to stroke the coarse darkness. Their mothers would recoil, moving physically away from the dress. Others examined the beaten dress closely, commenting on both the beauty and the horror of the images portrayed. The rose petals confused, astonished, and provoked most viewers. Many approached the panels trying to sniff and smell their aromatic presence long since dried and vanished. I busied myself sewing additional garments and rose petal panels. Sewing rose petals is tedious. It is a painful process, handstitching fragile shells; blood-pricked fingers; torn flesh-like edges; the passage of time. I became witness, moving with, in, and between bodies present and absent. My location was the seam, that space of uncertainty: but what did it all mean?*

to stand amidst

Art as research intends to disrupt previously held assumptions about what it means to know and to be. Contemporary art in particular challenges the master-genius narrative replacing the conceit that knowledge is contained within the work of art with a new understanding of what meanings audience brings to the work of art. In this sense

creativity is not an individual act distanced from viewer, but rather the locus of creativity moves from author to one that creates a presence with the audience.

Art brings us face to face with our emotional vulnerability, our lack of control over our bodies, our intense longing for nurturance. Art restores the primacy of our bond with flesh. It is about exposure and revelation. It indicts the audience. We are witnesses unable to escape the traces of what we have seen. (hooks, 1995, pp. 49-50)



When we research using art forms, the art becomes the tools of analysis. Subsequently, the art product, the research, and theoretical considerations are all entwined with each other. They are separate in the sense that each component achieves individual strength and merit, but they stand *amidst* each other as

fragments of an uncertain whole. Remove one part and the entire process and product collapses. Thus one cannot separate out the art from the research and the theory, but rather they are joined collectively.

Similarly, arts-based educational research is a particular perspective that includes diverse methods of investigating, inquiring, probing, and interacting with participants and other research texts. Arts-based educational research is both process and product. As Wilson (2000) describes in her thesis,

Art is a human construction, a tool that human beings use to make sense of their existence, of themselves as human beings, as people. It is not a medium for transporting meaning or beauty or truth. It is a tool for constructing meaning. Art is a way that we tell ... stories about ourselves to ourselves and others. (p. 22)

Art as research unveils more than just stories. It also allows audience to construct their own questions, to examine the research such that it will be meaningful and evocative.

hooks (1999) captures this moment of transparency:

We write to find secrets in experiences that are obscured from ordinary sight: to uncover hidden coherences in what seems to be a mere jumble of unrelated events and details, and incoherences in what appears to be strictly ordered; to make transparent what is opaque, and to expose opacity in what seems transparent. (p. 40)

Barone (2001) suggests that art renders the world more visible: “Good art, is capable of lay[ing] bare questions that have been hidden by the answers” (p. 25). Illuminating the rationale behind his own research endeavors in *Touching Eternity*, Barone (2001) contends that arts-based educational research provides a “polyphony” of voices, which in turn invites the reader into the research phenomena as participant.

Because these voices speak to a range of experiences from within often disparate worldviews, because they arise out of and express alternative realities, the reader may be enticed into vicariously experiencing educational events and confronting

educational issues from vantage points previously unavailable to him or her. Imaginatory participation in some of these alternative realities may mean perceiving educational phenomena in a strange new way” (p. 25).

Evocation becomes central in understanding the merits of arts-based educational research. It is not the scholar who analyzes “data” and interprets them for the reader, but rather art establishes conditions where audience brings their own meanings to the work. In the visual art context, the art product is important for how it disrupts past patterns of viewing, collapsing the distance between art and audience, accentuating participation and shared understanding.

### **Research as Reciprocity**

The dresses that compose part of the art installation suspended in the midst of the exhibition space exist as both static metaphors and breathing representations of self and other. Four of the dresses are fabricated from transparent sewing pattern paper. Further embellishments of pins, human hair, toy teacups, and metal scissors—marks of desire, fetishism, and the souvenir—are stitched onto the bodice of the dress. The body is implicated by its absence, an abject body that disturbs identity, system, and order. Abjection attests to the impossibility of clear borders, demarcations, or divisions (Grosz, 1989, 1995). The dresses on display are constructed from unusual material, not equated with a particular wearer, and lack appropriate zippers and other fastening devices. Thus the dresses themselves become an abject body, unsettled and uncertain. Dress punctuates the notion of a shifting boundary emphasizing not only that spaces of habitation are in transit and incomplete, but that the exterior surface and interior cavity also transgress and reallocate one into the other.



The fifth dress is constructed from cotton hand-made paper dyed and stained as if to evoke bruises, traces of memories, and bodies. Beaten onto the surface of the dress are rose petals, which also stain and seep into the skin of the paper. Some of the rose petals are left as crusts and scabs, along with small hammer marks that can be seen imprisoned on the surface of the cotton fibres. The body is implicated through its absence and further imbued through reference to the time-consuming nature of collecting, pressing, and sewing.

My practice is planting, picking, touching, pressing, pinning, and sewing rose petals and garments as a performative gesture midway between appearance and what is suggested, between what is perceived and what is known. I embrace the flower, dress, and the body as both material and metaphor. The fragments evoke auras of reflection, presence, absence, and pattern. What unites my artistic process and the visual imagery is an engagement with the transformative processes of time, unfolding, never static, and sensual. The labor-intensive process of pressing and sewing suggests activities such as needlework and dressmaking that forefront such “women’s work” with artistry, value,

and integrity. Similarly, bringing the body and provocation into research redefines sensuousness as a valid form of scholarship. The process of creation, slow and meditative, is further pursued through the images, aging rose petals that refuse to stand still, the slow passage of time: a reminder that beauty and corporeality will inevitably decay.



Art is about revealing what is hidden. It is a way into other realities and other personalities. It is a way of looking at something differently, a form of intervention. Art is living. It is breathtaking—it stops us—moving from past to future while disrupting the present. Sewing rose petals is a sensual experience: it speaks of embodiment, vulnerability, and essence. In a powerful exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum (Huska & Reddy, 2001) six artists celebrated the experience of cloth. Wendy Hanson, whose work informs and inspires my own rose petal creations, sews and photographs rose petals and stitches discarded fabrics and clothing into monuments that mark the passing of time. In the exhibition catalogue Hanson describes her process:

In my work I also like to reference the body. The way we go through various transitions in our lives, the ways we age, and how our identities shift during these processes. The materials I use are also very important. I like to use materials and

methods that will add additional layers of meaning to the work and create a personal connection between viewers and the artwork.  
(Hushka & Reddy, 2001, n.p.)



Rose petals are substances that wither and decay; skins: aging memories of time. They defy value and permanence and simultaneously evoke metaphors of expensive gifts, sensuality, and love, gestures that hint at eternity. It is essential that all meanings are evoked simultaneously, that the multi-logic of symbols not be reduced to singularity. Thus art as theory is theory as fragment. Pieces. Portions. Parts. Splinters. Remnants. Blood drops. Bits of flesh. Art as theory as fragment demands that we seek illumination not through linear sequences, but rather allow for pieces and splinters to erode into a metamorphosis of new beginnings. Fragments are juxtaposed; they collide and they shift in an endless web of uncertainty, creating assemblages that may not have been witnessed

before. From these assemblages new theories are proposed and alternative ways of knowing are possible.

### Gaze

Traditional modernist modes of art criticism suggest a master narrative explanation of an artwork that implies a singular interpretation, truth, and posits that the art product is finite and complete (Lyotard, 1984). A critical theory approach to art interpretation suggests fragmentation of the subject. In many contemporary art installations and artworks, including my thesis installation *The Body Knowing*, the exhibition posits a reversed gaze on the viewer, who in turn becomes the subject-in-process in the exhibition space.

Viewers “look” at my artworks and immediately “see” a body, a female body. However, the fragmented and distorted imagery returns the gaze to the viewer, where the subject now under consideration is not the artwork per se, but the viewers-as-subject themselves. Thus gaze is a peripheral or obscure state of looking, one that repositions the artistic process as a shared challenge. As hooks (1995) explains,

We are not innocent onlookers asked to escape into a world of the artistic imaginary. Here, in this moment of testimony, art returns the gaze of the onlooker, demanding an interrogation of our individual subjectivity-our locations. Who were we, where were we, how did we experience these events. (p. 50)

Moving away from universal knowing we begin to unravel our own epistemological and ontological locations and see that these positions are shifting and changing. Instead of singular interpretations, new ways of seeing that illuminate, reveal, and simultaneously hide are uncovered and explored (Collins, 1999). It is no longer *art* that audience is *looking at*, but rather viewers become part of the art process and construction. Viewers

are not abstractly *gazing at art*, but rather *they are art*, a part of the sensory experience and meaning making. hooks (1995) continues:

As counter-hegemonic art, [contemporary] work requires not that we identify with the artist as iconic figure or with the beautiful art object but, rather, that we identify ourselves as subjects in history through our interaction with the work. This is not art that subliminally subjugates, coercively enthralls or enraptures. It welcomes our presence, our participation.

That presence is made more manifest by the spaces left vacant in the work that leave room for us ... Each individual looking into that vacant space must come to terms with what is not there. It is not art that is meant to stand in for, usurp, or replace experience. It is experience. (p. 50)

Art then becomes *witness*, a countervision by manipulating elements of abjection, narrative, fragmentation, and fluctuation toward a dismantling of borders and by providing openings within an otherwise closed arena. By presenting the viewer with new methods of looking, notions of resonance, contextualization, and interactivity are formed (Becker, 1996; hooks, 1995). This interconnectedness works toward fusing inner and outer realities. It is located in the *seam*, where ephemeral experiences acknowledge a luminous, transformative connection between art and audience, between bodies present and bodies absent.

The images in my artworks are intimate objects, dresses, fabrics, rose petals, and toy teacups. Their details are read not in the sense that text is read, but in a way that evokes and suggests the unknown, the unknowable. In this sense every mark is important, not because each mark has a specific attached meaning, but rather meaning is constructed through a larger set of relationships that surround the work. It is a metonymic weaving of fragmented visual imagery: new composites, new beginnings.

Similarly, research as reciprocity is about standing *amidst*. Arts-based educational research is in the *seam*, where the distance between art, research, and theory is collapsed into close proximity, mingling and weaving together. Smith (1999) articulates this process: “what should be embodied in our actions such that we are working on the side of true generativity even while in the midst of what we do not fully understand?” (p. 131).



It is also important to not limit our notions of research and to allow for a multiplicity of texts to be inquiry and to be research. One of the reviewers for this paper, although supportive of my work, wanted more direct connections made between the artwork and research. Notes provided indicated that the terms *art* and *audience* needed to include research and reader. I draw attention to this in this final draft because **the art in my installation was research**. It was not illustrative of the written text, nor was art a metaphorical backdrop to shape arguments about research. In addition, using the word

*reader* is problematic in that it privileges the written word, restricting research to traditional paradigms and modes of expression. Thus uncertainty may also need to be extended to accepting nontext-based forms of educational research. Further to this I would add that arts-based educational research disrupts past patterns implied in the research “text.” These patterns portrayed *reader* as someone who was “told a narrative” or “given information,” whereas *researcher* shaped and created the text. Visual art as research demands an understanding of incompleteness and uncertainty. The research “text” is always in the process of creation, as audience becomes part of the construction.

### **Merits of Arts-Based Educational Research**

In addition to a considerable amount of published and presented literature on the possibilities of arts-based educational research, a number of scholars have attempted to define and limit how we can determine what constitutes arts-based educational research and propose methods and criteria for evaluating this burgeoning new field of research. Eisner (2001) states that artistically rendered research can be defined as arts-based educational research if:

- The research is about an educational phenomenon;
- Expressive forms are used to convey meaning;
- The research displays both in its language and level of conceptualization a familiarity with theoretical and conceptual resources including other research relevant to the problem or issue being addressed;

- Illuminating effects are used to reveal what had not been noticed before;
- It is generative, promoting new questions;
- Incisiveness is used, penetrating to the core of the research question or problem;
- It is generalizable and bears relevance to other educational research;
- It yields new concepts through conceptual fruitfulness.

Barone (2001) delimits the aesthetic design elements employed in literary-style arts-based research texts:

- Contextualized and vernacular “everyday” forms of language, as opposed to speech that is abstract, technical, or removed from the primary qualities of experience. This is language that represents what Bakhtin (Barone, 2001) calls a “primary” as opposed to a “secondary speech genre.”
- Expressive rhetorical strategies and devices that, as Dewey (1934) would have it, suggest rather than state meaning. In particular, arts-based researchers employ metaphor in order to re-create experiences indirectly, through the form taken by the metaphor (Eisner, 1991).
- The capacity of the text to entice the reader or percipient through the particular physical realities it evokes into an alternative reality, an analogous, as-if world.
- The presence of a heightened degree of ambiguity.

Richardson (2000) labels arts-based educational research as Creative Analytic Practices: CAP Ethnography of which her five criteria are:

- *Substantive contribution*: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded social scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?
- *Aesthetic merit*: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
- *Reflexivity*: Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism? How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold him- or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?
- *Impact*: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?
- *Expression of a reality*: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true"—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?

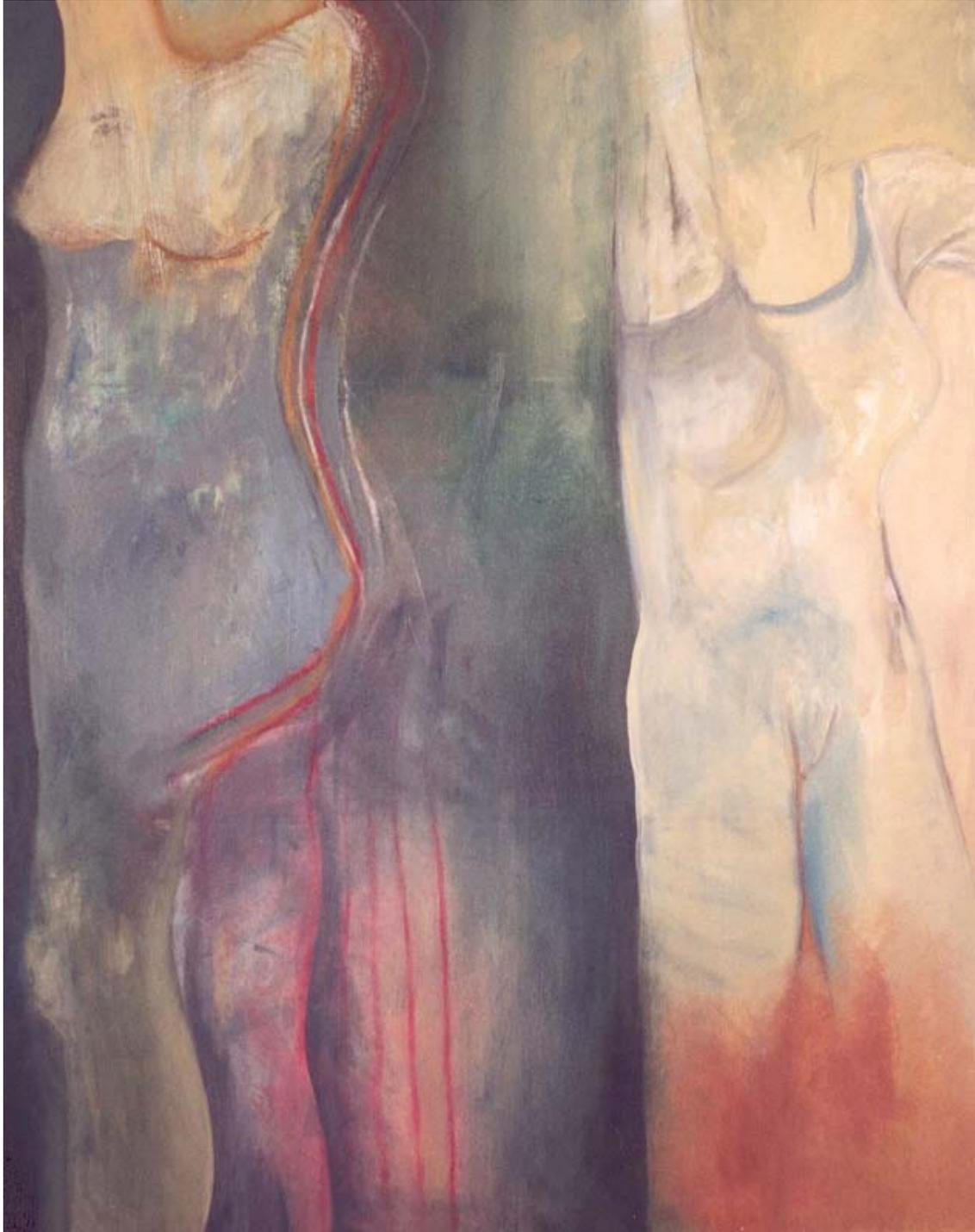
Embedded in each of the valuable conditions above is a subtext that privileges the written word. Both Eisner and Barone state that their qualifications are most suited to literary style genres of art, and Richardson's criteria can be found in a book chapter on alternative writing strategies for researchers. There is also a further argument addressed by all three researchers, that of the merit of arts-based research being "full fledged art" (Barone, 2001, p. 25). Although there may be instances where arts-based educational research borrows aesthetic elements from the arts, there needs to be space for **art as research**. In fact I would argue that this is paramount in understanding the validity of arts-based educational research. In order for the art to reveal new understandings, for fragmented and fractured beings to generate new conditions of knowing and learning, the art must be able to communicate: it must *be* a work of art.

When preparing my own research for evaluation I was struck by the difficulty of inserting visual art into criteria established for the written genre. I needed to ask alternative questions about my visual art installation as educational research, some of which I indicate below.

- Does a different set of criteria need to be established in order to evaluate visual art as arts-based educational research?
- What conditions of merit and quality are to be placed on the final art product?
- What might the art reveal?
- What is the connection between the art, research, and theory?
- Is there a difference between *art* and *arts-based educational research*?

Additional arguments need to be made around the distinction between art employed as “decorative fringes” to a research text and an inquiry that is arts-based. This is central to understanding the rationale behind arts-based research as methodology and it establishes a more substantial argument about issues of value and validity. For example, adding poetry and/or photographs to a research text, I would argue, does not make a research endeavor arts-based. In fact were these decorative elements removed, our understanding of the research would not be altered in any way. For research to be arts-based the mode of inquiry needs to be through the art form such that new insights and new meanings are generated that might not have been revealed through a traditional written format.

Subsequently, if the art or the research or the theory were to be removed, there would be a gap in the structure. It would be apparent that something was missing. In order for one or all fragments to make meaning, the fragments must weave together; they must stand *amidst*.



In addition to Eisner, Barone, and Richardson's criteria, I offer additional points of reference to distinguish and evaluate research that is visual arts-based.

- *Artistic inquiry*: The mode of inquiry, the *researching* must be through the art(s). The art cannot simply be employed after the research has been completed as a decorative or design element to the research text.
- *Arts-based research as art*: Art must have the potential and power to evoke and speak for itself in ways that may otherwise not be articulated. Arts-based educational research must recognize the theory and research that is a condition of most forms of contemporary art, and as such arts-based educational research must be considered "full fledged art" (Barone, 2001, p. 25).
- *Responsibility of the artist*: There is a responsibility on the part of the researcher (artist) to use particular artistic devices as appropriate to the research inquiry and to recognize that although arts-based educational research may be a somewhat newer field of study, the arts have a deep historical tradition. Thus the social, political, and historical context of images, symbols, and processes employed needs to be considered.

We cannot simply rebrand or label alternative research practices to include artistic genres without a deconstruction of what new understandings these aesthetic texts bring to research. Arts-based research is a destabilizing dissonance. It is a way of disrupting traditionally upheld beliefs about epistemology, ontology, and research. It is a form of representation that allows for the ambiguous place between presence and absence and the permeability of boundaries. Arts-based educational research allows audience into the

*seam*, into the space of the unknown, where tensions collide and generative possibilities take shape.

### Roses

*Amaranth red, cardinal red, carmine, crimson, garnet, and ruby.* Blood red names.

*Amalia, Dark Mirage, Erotica, Lavaglut, Magnum, Raven, Scarlet Sensation, Velvet*

*Hour:* roses from my grandmother's garden evoking essences of memories, bodies, and

time. In ancient mythology, rosewater was used in gourmet dishes and in love potions.

Petals were used in healing incense and sachets and burned to provide a restful night's

sleep. The essential oil was used in ritual baths to provide peace, love, and harmony

within the self. The hips were strung like beads and worn to attract love. Rose petals

sprinkled around the home calmed personal stress and upheavals in the home. Ancient

literature abounds with references to roses used for medicinal, botanical, and cosmetic

purposes and speaks of their use for feeding the body, the soul, and the spirit.



Roses embody a vicissitude of meanings. Pressed, pinned, and stitched they begin to disrupt, awaken, and alter the senses. Like arts-based research, roses evoke auras of plentitude: they unfurl their edges in a generative act that transforms, permeates boundaries, and discloses possibilities of new meanings and new understandings for art-making, research, and theory.

**Note**

1. I would like to thank the ARTS research group at UBC who helped me articulate and find language to describe this sense of being amidst.

## References

- Barone, T. (2001). Science, art, and the predispositions of educational researchers. *Educational Researcher*, 30(7), 24-28.
- Becker, C. (1996). *Zones of contention: Essays on art, institutions, gender, and anxiety*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Cole, A.L., & Knowles, J.G. (2000) *Researching teaching: Exploring teacher development through reflective inquiry*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Collins, P.H. (1999). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. In M. Fonow & J. Cook (Eds.), *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research* (pp. 35-59). Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Dunlop, R. (1999). *Boundary Bay: A novel as educational research*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia.
- Dunlop, R. (2001, January). *Flying off the edge: With the lights on, blazing*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Arts-Based Research Winter Institute, Palo Alto.
- Eisner, E. (1995). What artistically crafted research can help us understand about schools. *Educational Theory*, 45(1), 1-6.
- Eisner, E. (2001). *The educated imagination: Fiction and knowledge*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Seattle.
- Grosz, E. (1989). *Sexual subversions: Three French feminists*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Grosz, E. (1999). *Space, time and perversion*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1995). *Art on my mind: Visual politics*. New York: New Press.
- hooks, b. (1999). *Remembered rapture*. New York: Holt.
- Huska, R., & Reddy, T. (2001). *Sewn*. Exhibition Catalogue: Seattle Art Museum.

- Irwin, R., Crawford, N., Mostin, R., Aileen, N., Robertson, H., & Stephenson, W. (1997). Collaborative action research: A journey of six women artist-pedagogues. *Collaborative Inquiry in a Postmodern Era: A Cat's Cradle*, 2(2), 21-40.
- Jardine, D. (1998). *To dwell with a boundless heart: Essays in curriculum theory, hermeneutics, and the ecological imagination*. New York: Lang.
- Liotard, J. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith, D. (1999). *Interdisciplinary essays in the pedagon: Human sciences, pedagogy and culture*. New York: Lang.
- Springgay, S. (2001). *The body knowing: A visual art installation as educational research*. Master's thesis, University of British Columbia.
- Stewart, S. (1993). *On longing: Narrative of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*. Durham and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Watrin, R. (1999). Art as research. *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 26(2), 92-100.
- Wilson, S. (2000). *Fragments: A narrative approach to arts-based research*. Master's thesis, University of British Columbia.