Critical Approaches to Arts-based Research

Volume 5
Issue 1
2015

UNESCO
Observatory
Multi-disciplinary
Journal in
the Arts

UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2015

ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by
The UNESCO Observatory Melbourne
http://unescomelb.org

In conjunction with
The University of Melbourne,
Parkville, Victoria 3010.

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Multi-Disciplinary
Journal in the Arts

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

Guest Editors Anne Harris
Mary Ann Hunter
Clare Hall

THEME

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its 'validity', and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This 'coming of age' is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific 'versus' arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based 'outputs' or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a 'reduction' back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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Bodies in the Desert: A Narration of Two Lives and Four Deaths

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ABSTRACT

This article represents one aspect of arts-based, narrative, and auto/archeological narrative inquiry into two individuals' negotiations with and performances of activism amid otherwise stifling normativity. During the four-month study, elements of activism emerged as ontogenetically tied to past experiences of trauma. Taking up death's traumatic character, this chapter includes prose poetry that attempts to describe four deaths that have affected multiple individuals within the overall plot of this research. Thus, the ultimate purpose of this article is to illustrate how past traumas might have pedagogically engendered transformative, critical engagements with sociological phenomenon and activist ethical approaches towards structural injustices.

BIOGRAPHY

Jake Burdick is an Assistant Professor of Curriculum Studies at Purdue University. Jake is the co-editor of the Handbook of Public Pedagogy (Routledge), Complicated Conversations and Confirmed Commitments: Revitalizing Education for Democracy (Educators International Press), and Problematizing Public Pedagogy (Routledge). He has published work in Qualitative Inquiry, Curriculum Inquiry, Review of Research in Education, Review of Educational Research, and the Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy. Jake can be contacted at burdics@purdue.edu

The research from which this chapter is derived consisted of a sustained arts-based, narrative, and auto/archeological inquiry (Burdick 2012) into two individuals' negotiations with, and performances of, critical dispositions amid otherwise stifling normativity. What guided this research was a question of how resistant ideological dispositions could be possible, let alone prevalent, given the weight of dominant culture, a weight that manifests in both scholarship and the experience of daily contemporary life. Thus, my work sought to explore the very *desire* that brought my informants to a point of disassociation with the seemingly enveloping confluences of normalized inequity. In essence, I questioned how these people had gained both the capacity to perceive, however fleetingly, an outside to the doxic (Bourdieu 1977) narrative and, more difficult yet, to sacrifice the psychic *comfort* (Marcuse 1992) this story promises for the risky work of writing a more just social order. I frame this work as educational research via conceptualizations of education, pedagogy, and curriculum that extend beyond the correlation of these terms with schools and schooling. Rather, situated within the context of projects like public pedagogy (Sandlin, O'Malley & Burdick 2011) and historical theorizations of all forms of experience as potentially educative (Dewey 1997/1938; Schubert 2010), my questions around the development of identities disposed towards cultural resistance took up any form or site of learning that my participants discussed, including familial relationships, media experiences, and formal schooling.

In particular, I was interested in how the confluence of these pedagogies produced an identity wholly driven by the *desire* to resist dominant social narratives.

To better articulate this notion of desire as well as the desirous machinations that impel identity narratives, I developed a methodological and theoretical approach situated at the intersection of arts-based/narrative inquiry [1] and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The colocation of these approaches opened space for a discussion of resistance that located critical dispositions as a performed element of one's historical and ongoing narrative of self. My intent here was to move past the potentially mythologizing notion of *consciousness raising* as an event, a singular moment in time when a person departs from dominant ideologies and becomes *enlightened* to the existence of structural social injustice. Instead, informed by the application of Lacan's work to sociological and educational theorizing by Bracher (1993), Cho (2009), and jagodzinski (2004), I wanted to explore how critical dispositions might manifest across the time and place of selfhood, as well as how these disparate moments and events are sutured together via the story-craft of identity. As such, my project entailed conversing, working, and even standing with activists who had taken on tremendous, time- and identity-consuming commitments to fighting for a cause. From these experiences, I developed a set of stories – what I am calling a critical novella – that centered on how these individuals have produced and maintain their identification with and desire for their respective causes in spite of the overwhelming centrifuge of dominant culture. As a key element of my emphasis on psychoanalytic understandings of identity and desire, I wanted these stories to explore and represent the primordial learning, experiences, and traumas that guided my informants to resist or reject dominant ontological narratives and normative cultural scripts in order to explore and maintain space – albeit exilic (Said 1993, 1994) – for their own axiological and ethical development and, ultimately, to take up positions of active, potentially educative resistance.

1. Polkinghorne's (1995) foundational work within narrative inquiry established two general methodological forms: analysis of narrative and narrative analysis. The former describes inquiry projects in which a researcher collects informants' stories and utilizes various theoretical and/or methodological tools as heuristics for deeper understanding. The latter, alternatively, represents projects in which the researcher actively shapes data into emplotted, narrative constructs: stories, in most cases. Although my approach to research overwhelmingly falls into the latter category, I have found that narrative inquiry,

My initial searches for participants were less than fruitful: most of my emails and phone messages went unanswered, and when I did get a response, I was directed to community relations managers, rather than activists, or I was given the number of people who had recently been jailed (largely as part of the then-ongoing protests in Northern Arizona regarding sacred land usage by private firms). However, when attending a film screening and discussion on prisoners' rights and privatized prisons at the Ironwood Infoshop (a small, anarchist-run bookshop and meeting space in Tempe, AZ), I met Jeanie – the organizer of the session and a committed prison abolitionist. She interspersed the presentation with her own story, her life and her work, and as I listened, I realized that she both met and productively complicated my criteria for a potential participant. I approached her to participate in the study, and she agreed.

In our conversations, my observations, and her writings, I began to understand what I feel is a powerful and frequently surprising account, not only of the ways in which critical dispositions are formed, but also how they are maintained *and* how they are shattered. From this point, I decided that my study of activist being and becoming beyond my experiences would focus exclusively on Jeanie, as her stories provided a rich, complicated space for theorizing the potentially naïve ways we view critical education and romanticize the performative space of the activist and the Saidian exile (Said 1993, 1994). Thus, over the course of a four-month study, Jeanie and I discussed our personal histories of, present experiences within, and overarching understandings and enactments of politically committed social action. I collected participant observations, interviews, blog posts, personal narratives, and other sources and used these pieces to compose a series of thematically interbraided short stories that chronicled the ways in which Jeanie and I had employed, performed, and inhabited critical dispositions throughout our lives and within our pedagogical practice.

particularly within the field of education, has become largely synonymous with Polkinghorne's narrative analysis, particularly within more mainstream research organizations, like AERA. Furthermore, in light of the psychoanalytic episteme that inflects this work, the process of representing research "findings" as an ambiguous, rather than definitive, text owes more to Eisner (Barone & Eisner, 2011) and conceptualizat –ions of arts– based educational research than it does many formulations of narrative inquiry. For these reasons, I find a much stronger affiliation with arts–based inquiry in the majority of my work, including this piece, as the writing I produce seeks to create

an aesthetic experience in my readers, albeit prosaically.

THE ACTIVISM OF FINITUDE

This chapter documents six *interruptions* in the novella that diverge from the construction of two separate, discrete individuals: an emerging, anomalous, and shared story of identity. In essence, as I looked over my wealth of notes, I circumscribed a fundamental cause of our desires for a different social world, one incapable of the pedagogies of neglect, indifference, hatred, and sorrow that we had learned and experienced within and outside of our-selves. Comprised of prose poems that are neither entirely Jeanie's nor entirely mine, these pieces describe four deaths that have affected multiple individuals within the overall narrative and that, in many ways, impelled that narrative along desirous lines. I separated these pieces out, both stylistically and structurally, as a way to call attention to the kinds of "oceanic" (Freud 1961; Silverman 2009) relationships that intertwine and intersect the stories in the overall piece. In Silverman's *Flesh of My Flesh*, she describes the oceanic [2] as return to a sort of analogic thinking, as opposed to the radical forms of differentiation that mark Western subjectivity, as well as many critical pedagogical and multicultural projects. In her work, she locates finitude, death – both as a symbolic and material event – as something that must be brought into consciousness in order to engage in ethical, analogic relations. In short, "death is not the enemy of form but rather what animates it . . . all vital subjects are constantly emerging out of the ashes of their own extinction – the same, but different" (Silverman, p. 166). And, it is to these deaths, and the narrative poems I used to describe them, that I now turn.

2
Freud originally used this term in reference to (and in dismissal of) a colleague's thinking around spirituality. However, Silverman (2009) suggests that from the point at which this term appears in Freud's work, he begins, however subtly, to incorporate similar conceptualizati –ons into his own work. As such, Silverman works to reclaim the term within a psychoanalytic episteme.

ON A DESERT FLOOR

The first poems in the novella, titled *5.19.2009* and *5.20.2009*, are plotted as a couplet. Both focus on the death of Marcia Powell, an inmate in Perryvale prison, who, in the heat of an Arizona

summer, was left to die in an outdoor holding facility. Her death made national headlines, raised questions around the treatment and rights of Arizona prisoners, and resulted in a trial that ultimately did little in terms of institutional change. However, Marcia Powell's life and death had an "enduring outcome" (Barone 2001) in Jeanie's life, ultimately becoming a sort of touchstone around which all of her activist work began and eventually returned.

•••

5.19.2009

There's a body in the desert. Still breathing, she's been here four hours. Her fingers stretch out into the dust, errant, looking for a cool under the sun-scabbed crust. Where her legs touch together under her orange jumpsuit, there used to be a trickle of sweat, running from the overlap of skin down to the back of her knee. It dried, flesh stacked like cord to rub and chafe. Her tongue occupies her mouth, as if it isn't hers, as if this entire body was purchased by the sun, by the baked ground, the stasis of a high noon. Nearby, inside, under the hum of fluorescent lights and air conditioning, men in uniforms listened to her pleading to come in, to use the bathroom – there's testimony to that, people testified. Men in uniforms walk by her outside, telling her to shut the fuck up, to quit her whining. Her body was in transit, being moved from one prison to the next, and so on. She'd given her body for drugs, and she'd been caught, given 27 months. Now that body lies at the bottom of a cage, put there after she said she felt suicidal. A psychiatrist thought the (en plein) air would do her some good. Although she's not dead, she will be soon. Some one hundred and eight degrees in Arizona May. A dry heat.

5.20.2009

Even after the body was moved to a table, under fluorescents and air conditioning, where a man she'd never met asked to turn off her life support; even after the only relative they could find refused to claim the body; even after a morgue finished the heat's work and turned her to ash – her body remains on the desert floor, surrounded by a lattice of chain link, eyes dried to parchment, framed by her own waste. Hers is not the only body still in this desert. Hers is an alidade, a way of putting the other bodies into reference, relief. A chain of blanched bones and slovenly lives, stretching for a cool under the sun-scabbed crust.

•••

After Marcia Powell, for Jeanie, it seemed critical – *frantic*, her word – to get help in sending some sort of message on the behalf of prisoners. The story had left Jeanie tired; she'd had headaches and weight loss. Her doctor suggested she get tested for Leukemia. This left her wondering how she might live her life if she only had a few years to go. Marcia Powell wouldn't leave her mind: a woman diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, a drug user who'd offered her body at times for those drugs. A person Jeanie could have been. A person Jeanie had been, now dead, and in death, threatening to eclipse all of Jeanie's life. The images would not stop: Dead, left alone, without water, a toilet, or reprieve from the sun. Loaded with behavioral meds that dried her skin on a normal day. When she read the story in the paper, Jeanie thought everybody should be as distressed as she was and feel the same urgency in doing something about it. This was the story she told at the Infoshop on the night we first met.

ON A CEMENT SIDEWALK

The first time I met Jeanie at her home, I also met Maylie, her roommate and, as I came to know, her *client*. Maylie's son had been murdered in prison, victim of a gang-related *beat down*. After his death, Maylie – already chronically ill – had been unable to maintain her job. And, as Jeanie explained, on the week after she filed a wrongful death suit, she had lost her disability benefits, earning too much to qualify, but still not enough to keep her home. Either by conspiracy or by simple bureaucracy, Jeanie wondered if the reason even mattered. Dana, Maylie's son, had died in part because he was a young black man caught in a criminal justice system characterized for its efficacy in destroying that very population. He also died because he had broken a rule – he had dated someone of the wrong race and, I interpreted, the wrong gender as well. Maylie's lawsuit did not mention either of these causes. Instead, she focused on a third reason – the evidence-supported knowledge that Dana had intentionally been left unguarded with his killers for 34 minutes.

•••

7.7.2010 (1)

He was supposed to be there for 12 years, but they found him in his cell, stabbed, alone. He was taken to a hospital, put on life support. When they eventually turned the life support off, they told his mother that, if it was any comfort, the men who did this never meant to kill him, just scare him. This kid was in a gang, and these things happen. When he was alive and in prison, he was caught with another man, of another color, and this was unacceptable. He was asked to show loyalty, to kill one of these other men, and he said he would. But he never went though with it. There are legal documents that detail what happened

next. They use the words “beat down” in quotations to describe his last conscious moments. They note that the prison guards left him alone with gang members for 34 minutes. When they found him, blood was coming from all sides of his body, pooling beneath him on his bed, trickling down to the cement below. Still convulsing. Vomit mixed in the blood. Thirty-four minutes. His mother is being told that there was nothing left to do, that these things happen. They only meant to scare him. We know that much. If it’s any comfort.

7.7.10 (2)

He was loved.

Blue dust scratched into cement, caked on hard in the middle of the night. For a mother, by a daughter. While a city sleeps, the ground growing cool, losing its heat to the nighttime sky.

He was loved.

Broken because of what he did. What he would not do. All of the reports say he was “beat down” - always in quotes - his blood dripping into the sheets, through the mattress, and into the tiny pores of concrete below. Some of it still there, seeped into tiny pockets. No matter the water, no matter the bleach. This is where the body lay.

He was loved.

There was a rationale for what happened to his body. For why his people had beaten the body to death. For no one looking in on him, no one saying stop. He knew there was risk. Loving and being loved is always also being at risk.

•••

As part of her work, Jeanie memorializes the people killed in prisons and police custody by chalking their names onto the sidewalks in front of State and Federal buildings. She repeats these chalkings again and again, on the same plots of cement, in the same faded pastels. Jeanie's symptom, the psychoanalytic name for repeated behaviors, calls attention to the symptoms and the repressions that hold a social order together. When she talks about Maylie, she tells me that they are surviving together – one is strong when the other needs to be weak. Jeanie cries in front of me once, when she talks about Maylie. While she cries, I begin to question the differences between activism and love.

IN A BROKE-DOWN TRUCK

The third death is one that Jeanie does not experience directly, but it is one that animates my own desires and narrations and my conversations with her. When I was 18 years old, my uncle Eddie died of an overdose alone, in his truck, in the middle of the desert. He was the youngest of thirteen children in my mother's family, a birth order that all but assures a life free of parental guidance. Eddie had been a chronic drug addict, a thief, a plumber, a father, and a brother.

•••

8.2.94

The land on which he dies becomes a subdivision someday later. A gated community with a school and a park. But, when he dies, it's a dirt road where teenagers drink and fuck. These type of roads are all over the desert, etching capillary tracks out from

the streets of a growing city. When they find him, the kids think it's just a stolen truck. An empty truck in the desert. Happens all the time. Until they realize there's a body inside. A three-day-gone body in the August heat. They call the police.

He pretended to be clean, so he left the house to get high. Now he has kids. An honest job. A house downtown. He came to this road, too, when he was younger. Drinking beer, shooting lizards and getting high, loud in the vacancy of the night. The things kids do. He's alone now, a Tuesday night. He shoots up. It's faster. He has to get home.

He dies with the car still running. Lights off. He can't be seen from the highway. It hurts as it starts, but then there's slowness and the engine rattle of a decade-old truck. He's gone before the gas chokes out. Before the battery gives and the warning bell for the ignition stops. For three days of sunrises and sunsets. His body ebbing and falling, evaporating with the heat.

•••

The detective assigned to my uncle's investigation called my mother once to tell her something wasn't right with the case. When he did, my mother told him a story. She had only been in trouble with the law once, and it was when she was young. She took a baby's bottle from Sears because her little brother didn't have one. Her parents were furious. Not because she took it, but because they had to come down, to admit that they were the parents of a girl who would do such things. I heard her tell him that she didn't know why she explained all of this – just that she felt responsible somehow for what had happened. Like she was supposed to be taking better care of him. The detective tells her that they found high levels of battery acid in Eddie's system. It wasn't unusual to find this in an overdose, but he's never really seen this much. He isn't willing to call it a murder, but he does

want more time to look at everything. But, the case is closed in the meantime. My uncle had already been arrested for the drugs that were in his body when it was found. *A bad batch. A pothead's mistake.* These deaths got less suspicious when you thought about them. As the detective would tell my mother, after months of her calls going unreturned, *this is just what happens to drug people.*

IN THE CARE OF OTHERS

As the research project entered into its last days, Jeanie's mother died, albeit quite expectedly. I was driving to pick her up on our way to a town hall meeting regarding CCA's (a large private prison operator) proposal for the town of Eloy. She called and told me she was on her way to Fountain Hills, where her mother had passed earlier that day. Jeanie and I had talked about her mother's illness frequently: how her mother had funded her activism until she transferred power of attorney to Jeanie's brother, how her mother had stopped calling her, and how she felt it was her mother's way of protecting her from seeing the degeneration that brain cancer can cause. But, despite the intimacy of those conversations, in that phone call, I felt my intrusion, my self-serving role in our relationship. This final prose poem draws from an email she sent later that night. At the end of that message, Jeanie gave her eulogy for her mother, one she worried she wouldn't be allowed to give at the actual funeral.

•••

10.24.2011

She was moved to palliative, but they never told her daughter. The rooms there are identical to the other parts of the clinic:

same beige wallpaper interrupted by turquoise diamonds, same paintings of brown women and woven baskets, same discrete curtains and wall units to hide medical machinery. There are visits from volunteers with books and social workers with animals. There's her son and best friend, both of whom requested that the daughter not be told that she'd been moved. Now they're saying they should call her. That she should be able to drive out down the long desert freeway to Fountain Hills and see the body before the arrangements are complete. They call, and she drives towards this pinpoint on a map, this place where she lived so long ago. Under the air-conditioned breeze, the subtle southwestern carpeting, the network of plumbing and cement, there's packed cool desert earth. The cold of rest, an ocean cold, deep and still.

Her daughter writes, *And thanks for joining me so wholeheartedly on this journey Mom; you are such a beautiful soul, and have been a dear friend. Thank you for believing in us all. Have a safe trip home...*

•••

In our last interview, Jeanie called me her comrade, a term that, in her lexicon, is at once self-effacing and unerringly sincere. As I drove home to transcribe that interview, I thought about the fact that I would soon be submitting my dissertation, applying for jobs, and, with luck, leaving Arizona. We had shared pieces of a summer and a fall in her ever-broken down car, our histories and beliefs, the loss of her mother – our own sort of brief life. And, after long conversations about why a person would sacrifice her life for another person's welfare, I was leaving. It was always the plan.

BODIES IN THE OCEAN

Silverman (2009) describes an arrival at finitude through Gerhard Richter's troubles in re/presenting images of the Holocaust and the bodies of members of the Red Army Faction. Richter, an artist who works in the medium of repainted photographs, had struggled with utilizing these images in his work for years and finally found his approach when producing a series of photo paintings of his daughter posed in positions analogous to those found in the harrowing images – the narrowing of the division between his *flesh*, and that of the bodies he sought to represent. In Silverman's (2009, p. 180) terms, the connection to mortality found through Richter's art is nothing short of the "basis of human existence," an element of our lives that resides below identity and self. In contrast, she posits the inability or resistance to imagining our own relation to death as constitutive of an ignorance of history and of the material effects of our current ways of living.

For Western audiences in particular, however, death is antithesis. We hide and depersonalize it, sometimes via covert means, sometimes via the banality of spectacle. As Silverman (2009, p. 185) puts it, death becomes Othered, "something that happens elsewhere, and only to those who are not fully human." In terms of education, to engage in critical conversations around finitude would likely exact powerful traumas on our students, traumas that exceed ideology and cut to the Being of ontological existence. What Silverman hopes to inform, then, is a means for relating to Others at one site of common human juncture, the inevitable experience of being finite, and at this site, to look for a means of ethical engagement beyond the psychoanalytically suspect constructs of identity and identity politics.

With these theoretical elements in mind as I wrote, I sought to highlight the lasting effect of these four particular deaths within the conversations I had with Jeanie, as well as in re-readings of my own prior creative work. These *bodies in the*

desert emerged, in some sense, as pedagogical hinges (Ellsworth 2005) in the development of Jeanie and Jake as characters/subjects and in the sort of assemblage that sprung to life in our interactions. Each prose poem/couplet was titled after the date when the individual represented died, yet this naming is meant to serve both a instructive and an ironic function. These dates, these moments of death, are the sort of markers that make up a chronological schema – a narrative – by which we orient ourselves in time, and the same is largely true of their function in Jeanie and my relationship. Each death, each moment, served as an intersection of chronologies, a point at which our timelines intersected and at which they intersected with the lives of other people, an opening to the oceanic, for Silverman (2009), and a such an opening to other people as *fully human*, altogether capable of "eclipsing" our narrow binary of self/Other (Silverman 1995). However, calling back to my original purposes in conducting this work, the commonsensical notion that pedagogy *happens* in a particular moment – a turning point, a narrative climax – ignores the proleptic (Slattery 2006) and experiential nature of education. Any moment, including those marked by events as traumatic and transgressive as death, is produced within a complex interplay of past, present, and future – an ecology of moments, akin to the ecological nature of *analogy* in Silverman's (2009) theorizing. Western narratives of education, historically bound to linear chronologies and an individualized sense of telos, tend to elide what psychoanalysis calls the "strange time of deferred action" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 758) – the notion that learning is not a simple, direct effect of teaching. The moment, the date and time captured on legal record, of any of these deaths is not the moment of their *pedagogy*, as that moment exists outside and between any simple considerations of time.

For these reasons, I elected not to write these particular elements of my work in the fashion of a story, as that genre tends to carry a much stronger nod to sequencing and causality. Poetry,

even in prosaic form, relies on image, word play, and resonance for the production of meaning, concepts that also find life in clinical psychoanalytic practice (e.g. Fink 1997). Contemporary psychoanalytic work even locates art and aesthetic texts as means by which to call attention to and –possibly begin the transgression of—problematic ontological fantasies and the social structures they support. In discussing the intersection of psychoanalysis and aesthetics, Pitt (2003, p. 80) writes,

imaginative works may play a more important role that we are accustomed to believing in creating the conditions for learning about social hatreds and discriminations. Art that works at the level of fantasy encourages the elaboration and enlargement of the Ego's libidinal attachments. Indeed, the political value of such works may lie more in the their structures of fantasy than in their capacity to "tell the truth" or maintain the fiction of "realistic" representation.

Similarly, Silverman's (2009) recent meditation on the role of art in destabilizing dominating signifying chains valorizes the aesthetic's capacity to engage us in the radical act of analogy – of finding our connectedness with the Other as an ethical act of re-discovering a fundamental humanness, marked by finitude.

It is my hope that at least three aesthetic processes are evident in this work: the encounter with death as an analogic, ethical act; the encounter between Jeanie and myself as mediated/facilitated by these deaths and our resulting desires for increased relations of equity; and the encounter between reader and aesthetic text as a sort of mimetic enactment of the kinds of pedagogies I am describing. Particularly in the case of this final point, the aesthetic text might be said serve in the role Lacan ascribes to the analyst: a space to be occupied by a reader's unconscious desire in the process of working though the demands that his desire makes on/of us. Thus, the goals of critical, socially focused art and psychoanalytic therapy are coterminous to some extent – they both attempt to incite our return to a

more primal state of being beneath identity, and in this state, to pose critical questions about the signifiers we have used to organize ourselves and our social arrangements (Lacan 2006). And, it is from this point that I pose questions regarding how individuals become socially engaged activists and pedagogues – and, perhaps more importantly, how we might work as critical educators to invite the occasion for these becomings in our practices. This is a practice less concerned with the introduction of interventionist, critical content, but rather one that situates learning as an invitation to the process of unmaking – of self, social, and the confluences between.

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