

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Arts-Based Research Traditions and Orientations in Europe

## *Perspectives from Finland and Spain*

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This chapter presents two contextual perspectives and approaches to arts-based research (ABR) and artistic research (AR) in Europe: Finnish and Spanish. The two main sections are named after their respective countries; however, we present the particular contexts of our academic institutions and openly express our bias and preferences as individual scholars. Thus, rather than provide an overall understanding of all ABR and AR conducted in Spain and Finland, we present a specific ABR perspective and orientation. We write these geographically contextualized sections to explore the traditions and academic discourses that have led to the current perspectives and practices of ABR and AR. Each section also explores the differences between ABR and AR, and we discuss the traditions and disciplinary demands that have led to these definitions.

The research development presented here naturally evolved in conversation with international colleagues, as well as through active participation in the various international venues in which ABR and AR is debated, contested, and reformed. In 2013, an informal conference was established to form a platform for European students and colleagues to discuss their shared interests in ABR and AR. The University of Barcelona hosted the first conference, then, in 2014, the University of Granada hosted the second conference, followed by the third in Porto, Portugal, in 2015, and the fourth in Helsinki, Finland, in 2016. This annual gathering perhaps best describes the culture of ABR and AR, and scholarly interaction in Europe because it emphasizes open debate and dialogue, intends to avoid hierarchical thinking, and promotes inclusiveness of thoughts and orientations.

## Mapping ABR Traditions and Orientations in Finland

Conducting research utilizing art and visual practices is a relatively new approach within academic contexts in Finland. The kind of indefinite knowledge characteristic of the arts has been a focus of interest within the fields of art and art education since the beginning of the 21st century. AR as a method was first formally developed within the Academy of Fine Arts (Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, 2003; Kiljunen & Hannula, 2002). At the University of Art and Design Helsinki (called Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture since 2010), artistic research was initially developed by glass and ceramics artists (e.g., Mäkelä, 2003), and by art educators who also or primarily considered themselves artists (Nelimarkka-Seeck, 2000; Pullinen, 2003).

We (Suominen and Kallio-Tavin) have written this section on the developments of ABR and AR from the perspective of Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture, focusing especially on the research art education located in the Department of Art. However, much of the reflection and articulation presented has been formulated in dialogic relationships with faculty and doctoral students from the University of the Arts in Helsinki, Finland, and the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland. Both institutions and their respective departments hold a specific orientation for AR and/or ABR and maintain traditions specific to their primary disciplines and contexts.

Although there are many similarities between how Finnish views and practices of ABR and AR have taken shape and evolved compared to the developments of similar research in the United States and Canada, it should be noted that the roots of both AR and ABR practices in Finland are established within their local context and are not a result of the developments in other countries. Although the time frame is somewhat similar, and criteria and requirements mostly are alike, these developments evolved partially separately. While Finnish AR within the context of fine arts has been influenced by research from other parts of Europe, especially England and Scotland (Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, 2005), ABR within the context of art education has also been part of a parallel discussion in North America (Räsänen, 2007). In many ways, it is possible to see the methodological similarities between earlier Finnish ABR and AR research and ABR articulated by Eisner (2008), especially in the context of methodological pluralism or the emphasis on criticality as an essential research element. In both of these orientations, the argument for criticality arises from a similar need to problematize artistic interpretation, openness, and reflectivity (Hannula et al., 2003). Similarities and differences are discussed in detail in latter parts of this chapter.

When we were students at the University of Arts and Design Helsinki in the 1990s, our studies in art and art education emphasized the breadth and width of artistic exploration. Systematic study and development of a student's artistic identity were seen as important and, to most students, more important than the development and growth of one's pedagogical identity. Curriculum for art education was constructed so that both of these aspects or sides of one's professional identity and knowledge base evolved simultaneously and throughout one's tenure at the institution. Most students were not, in fact, certain whether they would ever want to be (called) teachers, although most intended to maintain educational jobs in one capacity or another. This exploratory, rather accepting, and open atmosphere, which encouraged merging and inquiring about various ways

of knowing, engaging with practice, and researching, created the platform for our professional thinking. During the early to late 1990s, not much experience or good examples on how to combine or merge one's artistic identity with teacher and/or researcher identities existed. Finding ways to develop methods and research practices that would enfold artistic knowledge, and simultaneously include and be founded on sociocultural and educational theories, has played a central role in the development of our perceptions and perspectives, and has had a direct impact on our professional careers.

The first doctoral thesis in art education, in 1997, was defended by Marjo Räsänen at the University of Arts and Design (now Aalto University). At this time, no substantive bodies of research had explored notions of artistic knowing, knowledge, and AR in art education. Similar to classes conducted in U.S. institutions in late 1990s and early 2000, our research courses hardly touched on research methods and methodologies that utilized artistic, arts-based, visual, or multimodal ways of working, other than those derived from rather conservative use of images in anthropology and ethnography. Nowadays, doctoral research projects that are artistic and practiced-based are quite common in Finland, particularly in Aalto University's School of Art, Design and Architecture.

### **Artistic or Arts-Based Knowledge: Early Distinctions of the Method, Foundational Ideas, and Challenges**

Artistic, visual, multisensorial, and practice-based knowledge are difficult to articulate, especially in terms of what sort of knowledge they formulate or introduce to research. Traditionally, this kind of knowledge was excluded from scientific definitions of research as something too vague to pin down or unreachable for sufficient articulation, measurement, and validation. We believe that through art practice, and by embracing artistic orientations to research and knowledge, ABR and AR researchers can touch and gain access to their topic on a different level than just engaging in non-arts-related research and writing about it. While ABR and AR researchers face the challenge that artistic knowledge cannot be translated into numeric or cognitive language in totality, or ever be fully explained, this is also where the potential of ABR and AR lies because the process is rich, complex, often unpredictable, and mostly unspeakable, leading researchers to areas of knowledge that have not yet been classified and restricted by words and logic.

In the first decade of the 21st century, one of the main arguments defining the AR "method" promoted in Finland stated that knowledge based on experimental research data/material is *singular and particular*, similar to art and artistic experiences. Hence, the nature of AR (and ABR) was seen as singular (Hannula et al., 2005). However, the singular nature of ABR and AR was not out of other people's reach—quite the contrary. Rather than being inaccessible, it was conceptualized that something so deeply singular usually makes most sense to other people. The artistic and/or research knowledge was often discussed in the context of a singular event or experience and described through personal narration. Personal narration and reflection combined with conceptual and theoretical analysis was presumed to afford others access to the otherwise singular and particular knowledge.

The development of early research characterized more evidently as ABR rather than AR in the context of art education was based on these notions of singularity, critical

reflection, and narration (Kallio, 2008, 2010). Ideas were driven from artistic research in studio arts, from international ABR conversations, and combined with the traditions and research practices of Finnish art education. A notion derived from the concept of singularity of experience, an ABR project was seen as not intended to be repeated as such in another research context or by others, yet the information and knowledge gathered was seen to make sense and add value and understandings to others and support similar or related projects in the formation of new knowledge. Through ABR and the accompanying critical analysis, reflection, and narration, personal and subjective experiences become commonly shared experiences (at least partially) and a tool for understanding for others. Especially at the beginning stages and developments of Finnish ABR and AR, it was articulated that subjective knowledge that is constructed through individual and artistic experience transforms into research knowledge through critical reflective analysis. A researcher alters him- or herself as an instrument to the research process and project. A form of critical analysis combined with narrative writing maintains its strong position as a method for transferring particular and singular knowledge, so that it can become available to others in artistic research.

Particular differences in perspectives have separated AR and ABR from their early stages. As these have both continued to evolve, some distinguishing characteristics have come to separate them. First, distinguishing the idea of research *about self* and *using self as a tool, or as an instrument in the research process/project*, is significant in understanding the nature of ABR. We have noticed that many of our students have difficulty with these two ideas. Second, another disjunctive difference comes from the topics and interest areas of ABR and AR. AR, as it has become characterized in the context of the Arts University and more broadly conducted by many artist-researchers in Finland, is mainly interested *in researching artistic processes and artistic phenomena*, whether focused on one (often self) or a few artists' work and practices. The focus of arts-based research(er) differs from this type of artistic research, as the main interest rarely focuses on exploring particular artistic perceptions, awareness, orientations, or practice; rather, the researcher has a *wider interest in phenomena within its sociocultural context*. However, these two research approaches can and often do overlap, and surely the divide between the two is not simplistic. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that *ABR is not necessarily or typically solely interested in artistic matters*. Instead, and similar to contemporary art approaches and processes, *societal, cultural, political, philosophical, psychological, environmental, and educational phenomena are researched through and with art*.

Typically, the ontology of knowledge in ABR is similar to that in many other qualitative research approaches. Thus, the third distinguishing characteristic is that an *ABR methodology is often combined with many other methodologies*, such as ethnography, autoethnography, narrative methods, case studies, participatory action research, discourse analysis, or/and interview methods. Actually, it is often important for ABR practice not to try to stand alone as a method in a research project. The interdisciplinary nature and methodological pluralism of research seems to generate more complex and interesting research settings, methods, analysis, and knowledge.

When we begin working with our students, we build on their interest and passion for the topic. Each step and stage relies on the communication between a student researcher, his or her mentor, and the topic of research. Writing about living inquiry, Rita Irwin and her colleagues (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind,

2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2007) have articulated the organic, rhizomatic nature and the fluent relations between researcher and the process of research. Often, one needs to try things out, to explore a direction or possibility just to find out that what resulted was not helpful, meaningful, or informative. In a comparison of the named challenges, this fluency and creative flexibility that arts-based methodology and methods present is also where the beauty and appeal of ABR lies. One can learn to enjoy great freedom and exercise creativity with ABR. While both of us still engage in creative artwork to some extent, ABR has kind of become our “art” as it is founded in the artistic modes of knowing. Furthermore, the processes challenge us holistically and combine all the “elements” of our profession to engage us in ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical inquiries, and contemplations between theory and praxis.

Research strategies employed and adapted by arts-based researchers may be similar to the strategies of contemporary art, such as reconceptualization, juxtaposition, and projection. Even though choices that seem to have an intuitive base are difficult to explain, this aspect is not quite so mystical. In ABR, language has difficulty reaching some aspects of knowledge that are in use. What seems to be mystical and transcendental may be intuitive and sensorial knowledge, something that does not translate into the kind of spoken language we are used to when unpacking research information. Symbolic language works differently than sensorial, felt, aesthetic, and embodied knowledge. Very often, that kind of knowledge is embodied, founded on experience, and materializes in various forms throughout the research process. This becomes research, when arts-based or artistic researchers commit to reflexivity, continuous analyses, and pledge to find ways to give accessible form to the research experience and all the ethical and ontological choices that direct the process. The orientation of the researcher as self-critical and noncelebrative (specific artist status) help direct the articulation of knowledge and understandings in forms that are accessible to others, as well as guide the contemplation of what meaning and significance the gained knowledge might communicate.

Eisner (2008) wrote about tensions that are a part of the arts-based method. One of these tensions arises from diverse interpretations of research materials, which often have no distinct references and might not make purposefully straightforward connections. Eisner asks, “Will the images made through arts-based research possess a sufficient referential clarity to engender a common understanding of the situation being addressed, or is a common understanding of the situation through arts-based research an inappropriate expectation?” (pp. 19–20). This aspect of ABR appears to create tension in any arts-practice-based research method. We see this not as a question of quality or anything that may be easily solved via academic decisions but as a more eternal question of the arts and interpreting the arts, and how well one artwork or body of art is able to represent larger phenomena. In the early stages of Finnish artistic research, proponents of the methodology spoke about the transparency of the research process and the importance of identifying researchers’ intentions, whereas we promote *honesty* and *ethical responsibility*. For us this means clear devotion to and deep respect for the topic or phenomenon being studied, and a constant critical and ethical conversation concerning the choices one makes at all stages of the study. This “conversation” might not always be verbalized in detail but we believe it to be the responsibility of the researcher to materialize or make visible the process, related choices, and the reasoning behind it.

## Theoretical Traditions of Finnish ABR and AR

The theoretical perspective of the early AR in Finland was founded in phenomenology and hermeneutics (Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, 2005, 2014), and the attitude or purpose for the research methodology was to confront that of the natural sciences. The divide into arts and science was challenged by using two notions: the *democracy of experience* and *methodological pluralism*. These two notions were also suggested to serve as a methodological basis for AR. By democracy of experience, Hannula and colleagues (2005, 2014) proposed that no area of experience is beyond the reach of evaluating and critiquing another person's area of experience. Often, democracy of experience and transparency have been critically embraced for bringing singular experience for others to appraise. Reiterating what we have already stated, this idea of democracy of experience indicates that even though other researchers may not be able to repeat an artistic or otherwise singular research experience, other researchers can still comprehend or evaluate and critique the project. *Criticality*, *openness*, and *self-reflectivity* have also been considered foundational elements to AR (even though they do not always come to fruition). The idea is that subjective knowledge constructed through individual and artistic experiences can be transformed into research knowledge through critical and transparent reflective analysis and in this way be accessible for others. Strong philosophical foundations in phenomenology and hermeneutics, and using the hermeneutic circle for structural guidance, are often utilized to organize and analyse the process of the presented research. Discussion embedded in philosophy, narrated art practice, and continuously evolving knowledge and critical self-reflection are seen as tools for (re)arranging and altering research knowledge that is hermeneutic, presented as a cyclical research circle (in which an experience examines an experience that produces new experiences).

Combined with the preceding topics, Finnish ABR and AR also have a theoretical emphasis in embodied phenomenology and sensorial knowledge. Most of the research processes look at experience through questions related to embodiment and founded on phenomenology. Leena Valkeapää's (2011) doctoral thesis, for example, focused on the Sami reindeer herding culture as an artistically oriented experience and living contextualized by nature. Taneli Tuominen's (2013) doctoral study explored art as ritual behavior. Mira Kallio-Tavin's (2013) collaborative ABR process studied pedagogical dialogue with a person with autism. Jan van Boeckel's (2013) doctoral thesis focused on arts-based environmental education. Jaana Erkkilä (2012) inquired about artistic encounters through artworks between artist-teacher and students.

Students' inclination to focus their artistic thesis and dissertation work on artistic knowledge, processes, and identity is not solely a result of studies that value artistic exploration. Finnish doctoral research within art education has strongly emphasized artistic thinking and knowledge in professional artists' practices. Many master's theses, and more elaborately, several doctoral theses (Erkkilä, 2012; Houessou, 2010; Nelimarkka-Seeck, 2000; Pullinen, 2003; Tuominen, 2013) have utilized researchers' art making to find answers for understanding how artistic or visual processes and interventions happen. Artistic researchers, by focusing on artistic knowledge, processes, and orientations, contribute to knowledge in art education in its own right, even if not directly bound to the field of education. This core is professed to be the substance upon

which the field of art education draws, and that is why this research knowledge is seen as so valuable. Since these students/researchers typically identify themselves primarily as artists rather than art educators, the educational focus is seldom included in or central to these artistic practices. Among those writing master's theses, some have focused on understanding how one perceives his or her identity or what embodiment entails; what social processes or other phenomena emerge through the student researcher's art making; and how, through artistic practices embedded within the research process, one can find different perspectives on how one sees and interprets the world.

While much transformation of idea(l)s and institutional emphasis has taken place since we were art education students in the 1990s, one tendency remains as most art education students who conduct their master's theses through/with ABR or AR practices see the thesis process as an opportunity to concentrate on studio art practice and desire to explore mainly artistic issues. At the same time, a slowly growing number of students are interested in adding more critical and theoretical perspectives to their artistic research practices and see their orientation more as novice arts-based researchers.

ABR and AR master's theses in art education have also been focused on questions of identity, dialogue, site and place, and embodiment. The most typical media for research engagement have been quite traditional: painting, photography, sculpture, or installation art. Few students have conducted their research with/through performance or video (Koivisto, 2016). Elina Mäntylä (2012) studied a sense of place in the context of deserted houses in old Nicosia. She used journal texts, memories, reflections, visions, narratives, photographs, and videos taken in deserted houses as research materials. She used the houses as a long-term gallery space for her research photographs. Employing site-specific theories, the deserted houses became internal and metaphoric landscapes, as the objects inside the houses and people who visited the houses formed meanings that helped Mäntylä to explore conceptions of these deserted houses as a third space in which her personal and shared space merged.

Nevertheless, not many ABR and AR doctoral or master's theses at our home institution (Aalto University) have had a clear focus on both arts and education. Thus far, only three doctoral dissertations in art education have identified a combined focus and methodology of ABR and educational research (Erkkilä, 2012; Kallio-Tavin, 2013; van Boeckel, 2013).

### **Current Emerging Perspectives and Principles**

- *ABR is foundationally and essentially interdisciplinary in its methodological orientation.* Our perception is that ABR, while also delving into and exploring artistic knowing, understanding, concepts, and practices, needs to be contrasted and paired up with cultural, social, humanistic, philosophical, educational, and/or critical theory, as well as traditions modified and partially adapted from other school(s) of research to gain its full potential and cultural/educational significance. To clarify, while ABR is always based on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives derived from and related to the arts, aiming at cultural, political, and educational impact, there is a need for ABR projects' interdisciplinary foundations in thought and practice to reach the objectives.

- *Openness and intentional rejection of fixed definitions.* The paradigm that defines Finnish ABR has mostly evolved within the field of art education and in close connection to similar research conducted in other countries in Europe, the United States, and Canada. There are many similarities and overlaps in ABR and AR research, and making clear distinctions between the two does not seem that relevant. Rather, we believe in fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and curiosity for pushing ABR toward what is not yet known, included, or defined as such. We believe that methodology, methods, acceptable foci or interest, interpretation, and analysis, as well as modes for understanding and learning, need to be defined, specific to each project.

In her dissertation research, Finnish scholar Jaana Erkkilä (2012) challenges the idea of using and repeating models, such as the hermeneutic circle that has been very influential in Finnish ABR and AR research studies. Erkkilä claims that “nothing new and valuable can be accomplished by forcing research interests into already existing models” (p. 13). We have departed from the strong theoretical and procedural influence of phenomenology and hermeneutics, although, clearly, these still influence us and much of ABR and AR research in Finland. We perceive the research process as evolving in diverse forms rather than being particularly cyclical. Describing the structure and “evolution” of research as each researcher comprehends it seems to take quite broad formations and shapes, and is often linked to the researcher’s overall preference on how to relate to inquiry and knowledge. It is notable, however, that as art education or art students process and articulate the research at its various stages, spatially based, three-dimensional, and/or multilayered thinking and organization seems to be rather natural. Often students do not realize this before it is brought to their attention, but, regardless, they might discuss research as if they are staging an installation or working between a graphic layout and its imaginary offshoots. To us, their training in the arts and artistic thinking is very evident in this tendency to process knowing and data in a manner not constrained to tables and “flat” coding of themes.

- *Artistry and art knowledge—understanding, processes, and communication—are essentially and meaningfully present in all aspects and stages of the research process.* This is where we typically begin the explanation to anyone who wishes to understand what ABR means to us. We explain that in order for something to be ABR, as we define the methodology, artistry and art will necessarily have a strong presence at every stage and element of the research process. While this does not necessarily mean that artistry dominates other elements or that each stage and/or method is art, or even appears artistic, the researcher maintains awareness of the possibilities and/or inclination to process knowledge and experiences through/as art, as well as to maintain intentional openness to the possibility for art to emerge as new knowledge of the research. Art and artistic knowing or knowledge are therefore not unrelated methods or a supplemental gimmick that supports otherwise nonartistic research but are instead a profound inclination to think through and “be with” art, and artistic means are considered and made possible throughout.

- *Interplay between insights/closeness and distancing.* The relationship the researcher(s) has/have with the research project, as well as the kind of knowledge and understanding toward which ABR aims, is best defined through the simultaneous

presence of being-insight, in-close proximity, or within the process paired up with intentional distancing and adaption of external perspectives. These perspectives are not dualities or polarities but a simultaneous and living intentional balancing of closeness (at least partial insight) and distance (partially externalized perspective).

- *Immediacy and retrospect.* Similar to the balance described earlier, the process and knowledge that ABR aspired to formulate is founded on the skillful balance of perspectives adopted and adapted throughout by the researcher. It is essential that the researcher has the ability and introspect to maintain heightened and multimodal presence and respond accordingly when appropriate or required by the process (similar to an artist emerging with the process of their work); however, it is equally important that the researcher can move between immediacy and retrospect to reflect on the process and its objectives (if known).

- *There is a strong presence of the researcher's professional and personal inclinations, preferences, orientations, and practices in defining what the research process, methods, and presentation of knowledge look and feel like and communicate.* As we mentor students or plan and process our own projects, we always begin with what feels natural to us, for the process, and for the person(s) involved or engaged. The evolution of the research process values and emphasizes creativity and thorough reflexivity, and it is for this reason we believe research should begin with, be defined by, and emerge from the natural collision of these elements (personal, topic, and “participants”). While we see this process as essentially holistic and in many ways similar to the work created and conducted by a/r/tographers (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay et al., 2007, 2008), we do not promote or underline these categories (or any other classifications) but encourage each researcher to define his or her presence, positions, and orientation for the purposes of the project. For example, one can be a theologian, a youth worker, and an art educator conducting theological and cultural research, but utilizing one's inclination to think and relate to people and knowledge with and through art processes. Or as an art educator, one can adapt the role of a reporter, documentarian, and cultural anthropologist while also acknowledging that one's family has intergenerational ties to the topic that also direct the research.

- *Institutional production and presentation of artwork is not the goal for ABR.* While ABR can intentionally be art and the research or participant art can be presented in the contexts of a professional art venue, including a theatre screening or gallery-type presentation of work, producing artwork (culturally and institutionally defined category) is not the goal, or the main goal, for ABR. This is an issue that many find complex because assessing and evaluating work produced for ABR or for the purposes of these research projects can be hard to determine. Our mutual consensus is that art and artistic expression as part of ABR need to be evaluated within the context of the research and based on the overall goals set for the particular project.

- *ABR is “born” out of deep interest and passion for an encounter, relationality, sensation, phenomenon, or issue rather than a quest to answer a question or address a problem.* We often begin our research seminars or methodology courses with mapping of personal (professional) interests that deeply intrigue or arouse passion in each of us.

Research, especially ABR, is demanding and requires commitment, even sacrifices, to complete. Therefore, and in obvious tandem with our argument that ABR is and should acknowledge and accept the personal, we have come to realize that only those projects in which the researcher has formed a deeply passionate and caring connection with the topic are carried out to successful and fulfilling completion.

- *ABR is analytical and critically/holistically reflexive throughout.* Unlike much of qualitative research or mixed methods research, we propose and argue that an isolated analysis stage, separate from the flow of research and artistry, is not meaningful. Rather, we propose that analysis occurs throughout the research process, and although there are often stages of research that are more clearly analysis-oriented or focused on systematic analysis, the analysis methods and processes ought not to be seen as separate or otherwise stagnant pauses but rather an organic and constant flow and interactivity between other research activities.

- *ABR utilizes many “languages” and modes of communication.* ABR can utilize many forms of writing and visual presentation, and the possibilities for these combinations are undefined. Narration or dialogue among theory (philosophy), practice, and self-reflection are no longer the guiding elements for engagement with knowledge. As each ABR project builds its unique structure, framework, orientation, and focus, we encourage the inclusion of some sort of “code” to make obtained knowledge and the conveyed message accessible to spectators or readers. Because approaching ABR projects requires an investment from the reader or spectator, we also encourage the inclusion of “hooks” that appeal, seduce with intrigue to ensure that one is willing to invest time and effort in the project.

## **A Cartography of ABR in Spain**

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The current situation of ABR in Spain is quite active and lively. A collaboration among the universities of Barcelona, Granada, Girona, and La Complutense–Madrid has resulted in an interuniversity doctoral program on arts and education, in which ABR has a significant role. A similar emphasis on ABR is present in the graduate-level programs on visual arts and education, as well as art therapy and art education for social inclusion. During the past 10 years, several doctoral dissertations (Calderón García, 2015; Caminha, 2016; Fendler, 2015; Genaro García, 2013; Mena de Torres, 2014; Ucker Perotto, 2015) have presented the foundations and methodology as ABR, AR, images in educational research. Following the “Bologna Declaration,” which promoted research in the arts, the University of Barcelona introduced changes to the curriculum of fine arts undergraduate programs. Additionally, an optional course on ABR was implemented in 2011.

Established in 2013 as a platform for European students and colleagues to discuss their shared interests in ABR and AR, an informal conference was established in 2013. The University of Barcelona hosted the first conference, then in 2014 the University of Granada hosted the second. The aim of this gathering is to create and make visible/tangible a critical debate on the possibilities and contributions arising from the

intersections of art and research. Reviewing the proceedings from these conferences (Hernández-Hernández & Fendler, 2013; Marín Viadel, Roldán, & Mena de Torres, 2014), it is possible to identify a rather comprehensive overview of the Spanish professors' and graduate students' understanding of ABR and AR, and the various theoretical and methodological approaches taken to develop research projects founded on these perspectives. While I (Hernández-Hernández) write this chapter from my own personal and professional perspective, it is essential to mention that many of my fellow academics, through publications and participations in conferences, are actively disseminating their positions concerning the roles of the arts in research (Agra Pardiñas, 2005; Fendler & Hernández-Hernández, 2013; Fendler, Onses, & Hernández-Hernández, 2013; Hernández-Hernández, 2006, 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Hernández-Hernández & Fendler, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Madrid-Manrique, 2014; Marín Viadel, 2005, 2008, 2009; Marín Viadel & Roldán Ramírez, 2008, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Moreno Montoro, Callejón Chinchilla, Tirado de la Chica, & Aznárez López, 2014; Roldán & Marín Viadel, 2012).

In light of this active landscape, I devote my portion of this chapter to exploring some of the major orientations underlying ABR in Spain to answer the following questions: Which conceptions of ABR are circulating in the productions of Spanish academics? To what extent do they contribute to increasing the value of the role of the arts in research, in and outside of art education? Which theoretical and methodological debates are currently driving and promoting these productions and actions? In the following, while many of the issues I discussed here have impacted universities and academic fields (in Europe) beyond my institution or my personal practice, it is essential to keep in mind that I consider all these questions from my particular perspective, and the ideas presented here do not necessarily represent the views of my colleagues.

### **Mapping a Territory: From Professional Artistic Practice to Academic Research**

In an earlier writing (Hernández-Hernández, 2013b) I traced the end of the 1970s as the period when ABR emerged in some English-speaking universities as therapists using artistic methods entered into the academy and began to contribute to the methodological discussions. These professionals, who, in general, tended to unite art practice and psychology, and who up to this point had been working in institutions and the private sector, realized the need to develop academic accreditation for clinical and empirical research founded in the arts. This led them to introduce research forms and narrative practices that took researchers and readers of these studies beyond classical presentations of clinical cases. Emergent publications (Hervey, 2000; Kapitan, 2003; McNiff, 1998) showed how to systematize and share this type of work using narrative modes linked to research in the humanities and social sciences, which, until that moment, had remained exclusive to a small group of professionals (Huss & Cwikel, 2005). This emergence of the broader use of the arts in research also gave rise to a debate regarding the format for presenting work that allows for a key activity in the academic process: peer review.

A similar path can be traced regarding what is known as AR. In this case the denomination began to emerge, also at the end of the 1970s, when art schools were

incorporated into universities or were granted the status of independent universities or a ranking similar to that of universities. This shift obliged artists, musicians, dancers, choreographers, playwrights, actors, filmmakers, and Fine Arts professors to produce master's or doctoral dissertations, present research grants, and open their work to the criticism of other, nonartist colleagues. From this perspective, "artistic research" is the term for a specific practice in art that, in Europe, rose to prominence during the course of the Bologna Declaration (1999), through which artists assumed the role of researchers and began to present their research results in the form of art, as well as explore the potential for artistic knowledge to be considered research. Proceeding from a concrete question, and following the epistemological and methodological approach natural to their disciplines, they began to distinguish their research from scientific research and from art that is not research in orientation or intent (Caduff & Walchli, 2010).

This situation began the departure from the belief that all arts practice is research in its own right, moving toward an understanding that AR, in order to be considered as such within the academy, must adhere to a certain set of standards. Although it is possible and rather often occurs, these requirements are not always met through an individual art practice that results in an exhibition, performance, or the interpretation of a musical or dance piece, nor is meeting these an objective. Instead, the research need and orientation gives meaning to art practice, not through its status as an epiphenomenon—wherein all art practice is considered research—but by considering how it may account for a process, revealing developments and actions related to the creative process or an artistic interpretation. This shift means that artistic practice is not the same as an AR or ABR practice or project (Calderón García, 2015).

The need to distinguish between the two different orientations, desires and goals for art, has led authors such as Graeme Sullivan (2004) to propose a model that allows us to theorize (visual) art practice as research, situating it in relation to three recognized research perspectives: interpretative, empirical, and critical. Sullivan argues that the explicative and transformative theories of learning can be localized in the experience that takes place in the art studio. In this context, "studio" may also be understood as referring to music, dance, or theatre rehearsals. At the heart of Sullivan's justification, we can find a way of understanding research that is influenced by Barone and Eisner (2006), who propose that knowledge can also emerge from experience. In this context, the act of creating art constitutes a genuine form of experience, which becomes research when practices are articulated as inquiry (Eisner, 1991). Furthermore, to withhold ourselves from the idea that everything done as art practice or with an artistic aim may be named as AR or ABR, it seems relevant to reflect on Rosengren's (2010) contemplation that AR and ABR should not

endorse a *laissez-faire* relativism in epistemic matters. It needs to distinguish facts from illusions, knowing from believing, in order to be able to defend its place within academia. But it has to make these distinctions in the full awareness that they are constructions, and that their validity is confined to the epistemic space that it can claim for itself, always minding the fact that each academic field is constantly constructing its own epistemology, in confrontation and cooperation with the surrounding fields. I see this work as perhaps the most urgent and delicate task for artistic research. (p. 115)

## When Research in Arts Becomes ABR

The position I have just articulated, which may be shared by others to a greater or lesser extent, becomes convoluted when AR comes into contact with a broader discourse and is subject to evaluation by others. Here, I refer not to galleries, museums, stage performances, or other art reviews—which are the usual sources of professional art critique—but rather to contexts in which, and the moment when, the knowledge generated by an artistic process must be made explicit, and the creative process is assessed according to a different rationale, within and from other disciplinary frameworks. What tends to be controversial is the researchers' decision to submit works that are traditionally subjected to the intersubjective assessment and evaluation of other artists, critics, or connoisseurs, to the review of an academic community that is familiar with the themes and issues that relate to the work in question (Elkins, 2009) but unfamiliar with the inherent epistemic demands that orient and form these projects. Thus, it seems necessary to establish a provisional, common definition of what research (without adjectives) could be.

A proposed guide to respond to this challenge was published by the Arts and Humanities Research Council ([www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/projects-programmes-and-initiatives/ahrc-research-training-framework-for-doctoral-students/](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/projects-programmes-and-initiatives/ahrc-research-training-framework-for-doctoral-students/)). These guidelines, or others similar to these, have been adapted to various academic contexts and by some academic institutions or publications for the evaluation and assessment of works. Focused on the idea of a *disciplined inquiry* that may also be applied to research in art, design, music, dance, or theatre, this approach to research is defined and identified by the following qualities:

*Accessibility*: meaning that the research is considered a public act, open to peer review.

*Transparency*: referring to the clarity of the research structure, processes, and results.

*Transferability*: identifying that the research contributes beyond the parameters of a specific project—in terms of both the issues and themes it addresses and its main aims and methodological decisions—and therefore is useful for other researchers in other research contexts.

These three conditions can serve as a starting point to establish a consensus and, more importantly, to develop criteria for the peer review of work presented, broadly, for research that draws on various artistic modalities or specialities. This approach seems to be close to the definition of research made by Stenhouse that “research is systematic inquiry made public” (Skilbeck, 1983, p. 11).

## Situating ABR Developments and Debates in the Spanish Context

In Spain, academics have been interested in developing a balance between defining research frames for ABR (Hernández-Hernández, 2006, 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Marín Viadel, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011) and experimenting and expanding artistic forms of research (Abakerli Baptista, 2014; Agra Pardiñas, 2005; de Miguel Alvarez, 2010). Spanish scholars have also explored various artistic methods (e.g., photography, collages, narrative writing, performance); outlined ways of linking artistic and pedagogical practices; and engaged actively in exploring methodological issues related to visuals and

art in research. Some of the themes identified are how to “quote” images in research; the role of images as sources of knowledge in research; and the roles and potential for images in educational research and AR.

Inside this active milieu and exchange of idea(l)s we have generally avoided the debate on the research positionalities when speaking about our ABR experiences and the particularities of each project. However, through publications, it is possible to locate and identify *two tendencies or identifiable characteristic orientations*, which I personally consider not as opposites but as complementary to one another.

Some colleagues from the University of Granada emphasize *the roles of images in research*, thereby echoing the debate over visual methods within the larger academic community, as well as exploring the uses of photography as a strategy for artistic research and teacher education (Pinola-Gaudiello & Roldán, 2014; Roldán & Marín Viadel, 2012; Roldán Ramírez & Hernández González, 2010). Based on these explorations they have situated the methodological focus of ABR on the continuum between quantitative and qualitative research, in which art in research is now added as a different and distinctive trend (Gutiérrez Pérez, 2014; Marín Viadel, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011).

Some of my colleagues from Granada are also developing an innovative teaching strategy based on *photodialogue* as a teaching and artistic method. This method or approach could be seen to have characteristics similar to the *a/r/t/ography* ([www.dialogodeimagenes.org](http://www.dialogodeimagenes.org)). This strategy involves a use of photodialogue in the form of a social network for classrooms. Students and other participants utilizing the approach discuss artistic questions using photographs and other art forms (painting, sculpture, illustration, video, literature, music). Based on their findings to date, this approach seems to serve as not only a meaningful educational tool for teaching art concepts but also a practical and meaningful method for building intercultural communication, dialogue, participant self-knowledge, exchange of information, and a direct means toward both personal development and cultivating social relations inside and outside the class context (Marín Viadel & Roldán Ramírez, 2008, 2010). An offshoot of this strategy, the *photoessay*, is considered to be a mode of inquiry that links art teaching as educational experience with knowledge gained from visual narratives concerning the processes taking place as experiences develop. This has been found to be a particularly expressive and meaningful tool and method, especially when working with future primary school teachers (Marín Viadel & Roldán Ramírez, 2008, 2010, 2012b; Peña Sánchez, 2014).

On the other hand, the orientation that has become characteristic of the work developed and created by scholars and students at the University of Barcelona (the context of my work) is primarily concerned about ontological, epistemological, and methodological meanings related to the process of research. So the group working in Barcelona differentiates *creative research* (research implicit in any artistic practice), *artistic research* (where the process of researching is made explicit through written and/or visual forms of narration), and *image-based research*. Image-based research reaches beyond the arts in discipline and scope and presents a rich debate mainly stemming from social sciences, which “combines the practices, theories, and ideas of different disciplines to produce novel outcomes and contributions to knowledge, theory and applied interventions” (Pink, 2012, p. 8). In the final category we have distinguished, ABR, the perspective we present is the fact that using images or developing artistic practice is not enough to

label an educational activity or artistic practice as research. We propose that the focus of ABR is the use of artistic media in social research, education, and AR, which means, “making new worlds; enabling others to re-experience vicariously the world” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 20).

In the context of the University of Barcelona, a long-term ontological, epistemological, and methodological debate linked to the practice of research (Hernández-Hernández, 2013b) has led us to specify the following characteristics that guide our approach to ABR:

1. An artistic process is not necessarily research. Research is embedded in a specific paradigm or approach from which it is formulated. This is not an epiphenomenon but an ontological, epistemological, and methodological frame.

2. ABR has a particular context that is different from that in other areas of research. The purpose of educational ABR or the use of the arts in a collaborative research with youth is not the same as that of research in art therapy or AR.

3. Any inquiry process using images per se does not constitute ABR. The use of images (as evidences or as creative objects), the roles these play in research, and the meaning we give them determine whether we are developing research or an artistic process. An image can illustrate, document, or mediate in a research process, and may (or may not) be considered part of an ABR process.

4. Artifacts and art devices are not limited to images: Body gestures, actions, words, texts, music are manifestations that can help us to expand our knowledge of the problem of study.

5. The notion of art (and the artist’s responsibility) has been expanded to reflect current times. The artistic references given by some examples of ABR seem linked to a territory and visual expressiveness that contemporary art has long since crossed. The notion of an artist being linked to these references has been answered by collaborative and community artistic practices that blur the notion of solo authorship and may provide meaningful ABR strategies.

One issue of particular interest in this context is the involvement of both undergraduate and graduate students in developing projects, practices, and understandings of ABR. Throughout their studies, the general issues and topics related to ABR include the initial meaning and consequent expansion of art students’ notions of what research is; developing knowledge generated in collaborative ABR research; contemplation of what is learned and what remains unknown about ABR in the processes of research; the consequences of learning as they apply not only to methods but also the foundations of research processes; and the engaged and shared developments and considerations of ABR as living inquiry and a learning process.

Emerging from these topics and procedural foci, the concept of *living inquiry* (Meyer, 2010), with its ties to action research, is found to be an effective framework for recognizing that the research process cannot be fully controlled or contained, nor should this be the objective for ABR. Rather, this orientation places value on the journey

of a research process and on the transitions the inquirers (and the inquiry itself) go through on its path from start to finish. Guiding student learning, we have found that within this process, our goal as professors and mentors is not to direct the activities that will take place but to guide the group toward developing an “attitude of inquiry” (Marshall & Reason, 2007), which will, and has potential to, cast a quizzical and critical gaze on our own practices (Fendler & Hernández-Hernández, 2014, 2015). In this context, we are interested in exploring the relationship between *becoming inquiries* and *developing ABR skills*.

In order to foster this relationship from the outset, we try to build documentation processes into the structure of the class, experimenting with images and narratives throughout the course of learning in an effort to make sense of these journeys. While this may sound straightforward and simplistic for art students and professors, we find that producing self-reflective documentation, which we can then use to inform our processes, is a skill that must be cultivated (Fendler & Hernández-Hernández, 2014). The concept of living inquiry is an effective framework for opening up research, by acknowledging that everyone is an expert in terms of his or her own lived experience (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In addition to democratizing the notion of who can carry out research, it also recognizes that while the research process cannot be fully controlled or contained, nor should it be, the aim should not be to exclude personal or shared lived experiences but to embrace these as valuable knowledge and insight.

### **A Provisional Balance Created from Debates and Understandings Positionalities**

As I have written this chapter, my aim has been to present considerations that can help situate the different meanings attributed to AR and ABR in the two university programs in Spain, in which the faculty and students of art and art education are invested in exploring the meaning, purpose, forms, and potentialities of the relationship between arts and research in the contemporary cultural and political context of education. While this research focus may contribute to creating meaningful ontological, epistemological, and methodological explorations of research and the arts, it also provides increased visibility and credibility to research developed within the arts in the context of academic assessment and evaluation. Furthermore, this work may eventually aid in expanding notions of research within the humanities and social sciences, beyond the art and art-related fields and disciplines.

With these stated goals, I contend that without shared parameters and attempts to identify and debate criteria, we risk devaluing our umbrella proposal in arguing for alternative and significant ways of doing research related to artistic disciplines, practices, and epistemologies, and potentially undermine the overall project by failing to communicate meaning and therefore failing at recognition. The following is a summary of some of the main issues circulating in the current conversations on ABR, which in turn open up and free spaces for further debate:

- Using images in a research process does not, by default, mean a research project is AR or ABR. There is currently a growing appreciation for the use of visual methodologies

in the social sciences, and also within the experimental sciences; therefore, it is important to question, discuss, explore, and debate the differences and intersections of these distinct traditions.

- Developing an artistic project using images—which document interventions or results—is not necessarily AR or ABR (Tarr, 2015). A project may be considered a creative inquiry, but research must go beyond the act of exhibiting or making a result or process public. It should capture a process of inquiry, as well as the decisions that were made, and the foundations that guided the project, becoming more than an observation by an artist or art educator.

- A recurring discussion needs to be held on whether images and objects, such as artwork, “speak for themselves.” Given that one’s position on this issue conditions one’s understanding of AR and ABR, further and continued exploration concerning this is needed.

- Finally, there is a great need to continue to discuss the possibilities and limits of what may be considered AR or ABR.

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