

Arts-Based Research

A Critique and a Proposal

jan jagodzinski | Jason Wallin



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DEDICATION

jan

This book is dedicated to my teacher
Harry Garfinkle
on his 90th birthday

Jason

This book is dedicated to Petrina
for her love and support

To do what I have done here has been an act
of prolonged precision in cold blood
beyond anything that I have ever written

—Raymond Pettibon

ENDORSEMENT

Approaching the creative impulse in the arts from the philosophical perspectives of Deleuze + Guattari, Jagodzinski and Wallin make a compelling argument for blurring the boundaries of arts-based research in the field of art education. The authors contend that the *radical* ideas of leading scholars in the field are *not radical enough* due to their reliance on existing research ontologies and those that end in epistemological representations. In contrast, they propose arts-based research as *the event of ontological immanence*, an incipient, machinic process of *becoming-research* through arts practice that enables seeing and thinking in irreducible ways while resisting normalization and subsumption under existing modes of address. As such, arts practice, as *research-in-the making*, constitutes a *betrayal* of prevailing cultural assumptions, according to the authors, an interminable renouncement of normalized research representations in favor of the contingent problematic that emerges during arts practice.

Charles R. Garoian, Professor of Art Education, Penn State University,
author of *The Prosthetic Pedagogy of Art*.

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INTRODUCTION

THE ETHICS OF BETRAYAL

“I write for a species that does not yet exist.”

– Nietzsche (958)

What does it mean to *betray* Arts-Based Research by offering a critique of its fundamental tenants? Why betray it in the first place? There are a number of ways betrayal might be thought more favorably than the one that most readily comes to mind: to be disloyal to friends by acting in the interests of enemies. And, of course, in the Christian world, Judas immediately comes to the lips. What form does his particular betrayal take? In the short story by Jorge Luis Borges, “The Three Version of Judas,” the most extreme version is where Judas premeditates his sins and violates trust. There is no virtue in his act. But then there is the Judas who alone, amongst the apostles intuits the necessity of the divine plan: the Word has to be made flesh through a sacrifice on the cross to assure a political rebellion and movement. Judas in some way reflects Jesus in his own sacrifice, willing to deliberately self-destruct. In this view Jesus needs Judas’ betrayal to assure that the divine plan would be accomplished. If Jesus’ aestheticism degrades and mortifies the flesh for the greater glory of God, Judas’ equally renounced honor, good, peace, and the Kingdom of Heaven in order that these very possibilities will be achieved. Pushed even further, Borges speaking through Nils Runeberg, one assumes a monastic scholar who is writing this account in 1904, blasphemously concludes that God only becomes Man, not through Jesus alone, but through Judas, to display the culpability of such a reprehensible act. Runeberg publishes his thesis, but riddled with guilt for having discovered this dark secret, or at the very least for even having thought such a possibility, is accused as a heretic, and dies of an aneurysm on the first day of March, 1912. This is his sacrifice for having a counter-factual claim released into the public world.

Slavoj Žižek (2003), alluding to Borges story, presents Judas as a hero, but a hero in a very specific way, a hero that betrays out of *love*. “I respect you for your universal features, but I love you for an X beyond these features, and the only way to discern this X is betrayal. I betray you and then, when you are down, destroyed by my betrayal, we exchange glances—if you understand my act of betrayal, and only if you do, you are a true hero” (16). Said in an equally strange Lacanian (1978) way: “I love you, but because inexplicably I love in you something more than you — the *objet a*— I mutilate you” (268). Betrayal becomes the absolute form of fidelity, or is it that fidelity is the absolute form of betrayal? And, so it is the betrayal directed at Arts-based Research. Our betrayal is both to see where the ‘divine’ plan might be

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heading, but stopping at a certain point, not following any further, as an act of love and in the belief that another direction is required to continue to make its promises possible. In this sense this work is a ‘betrayal’ for it can only go so far in its support of arts-based research, but in no way does it reject the general aspirations of many of its intentions—especially critical ones. This is not to say that it does not support the ‘divine’ plan of redeeming the arts to have their own ‘special’ forms of acting in the world, but to cut ties with a number of its directions for specific ethical, aesthetical and political reasons when it comes to furthering that trajectory along epistemological claims, and with a self-serving representational aesthetic.

Our proposal is therefore a critique as well as a direction. The arts-based research directions we critique and the people who have written these directions are friends, and therefore we love them in a particular way. So, if we ‘betray’ them in particular ways, arguing and defending why there are limitations to the in-roads they have made, it is done with love and respect. This, of course, should be part of academic life, yet critique is never easy, and needs to be reexamined. This agonistic|antagonistic side of the Academy performs a certain dialectic that persists as a sign of rigor to assure quality control. But critique should no longer be critique in the traditional sense; it strives to ask what each direction of an arts-based education is doing and what the limitations of its ‘doing’ entails. Hence, we would expect the same ‘betrayal’ of the proposed direction that we developed throughout the book to be questioned in the same way. To take ‘seriously’ the collegial directions taken to arts-based research is therefore this paradoxical position of “betrayed love” or “love betrayed.” Deleuze put it another way regarding his ‘mediators’ (*intercesseurs*), “Creation’s all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. [...] Whether they are real or imaginary (*fictifs*), animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. [...] I need my mediators to express myself, and they’d never express themselves without me: you’re always working in group, even when you seem to be on your own” (1995, 125).

Our arguments will concern themselves with the practice of arts, however not as orthodox research, if research is continually enfolded into forms of epistemology, which is what some directions of arts-based research tries currently to do to ensure university legitimacy. Rather, it is an ethics as ontology to generate a “belief in the world” as Deleuze (1989, 166) would say. “[To] say that ‘truth is created’ implies that the production of truth involves a series of operations that amount to working on a material—strictly speaking, a series of falsifications” (Deleuze 1995, 126). In section 2, Contemporary Currents, we will argue that qualitative research, from where some claim arts-based research has its roots, is simply too conservative, repeating the technicity of science already forewarned by Heidegger. The claims to connoisseurship models and the like are the other side of the coin to quantitative research, and that this direction merely will continue to preserve the false dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research, which science as a leviathan in its own right has surpassed through the paradigm of complexity. In this section we also raise issues with arts-based research that calls itself *cognitive*,

arguing that the processes of art making should be limited in its use. We are better served grasping these artistic processes as various forms of *simulacra*, as the ‘powers of the false, which create new worlds and new experiences informed by the serialization of the information-digital age. This is “ becoming “ in a digital age by following fabulation as Deleuze|Guattari developed it. We also worry the variety of arts-based research that purport themselves to be phenomenological and poststructuralist that are hegemonic in the field. There seems to be two directions here: one direction tries to dismantle the humanist notion of self through forms of radical autoethnography; the other marshals complexity theory that erases the subject, often placed into the (post)structuralist collective ‘*we*’ of processes. We argue that both these directions are well suited to maintain the complementarity of arts-based research in the academy, but at the expense of repeating a subjectivity that serves current neo-liberal and capitalist ends. Our direction is machinic. We also put forward the thesis that various performance arts-based research are on the right track, but are not radical enough for the posthuman condition we find ourselves in, and that critical theory requires another level of subjectivity—that is an understanding of the unconscious as theorized by both Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari that problematizes a semiotic analysis. Finally, we try to develop the line of flight for arts-based research that builds on the performative machinic understanding of the arts, incorporating the view that art should not be theorized as an object but re-theorized as an *event* that first emerged with the avant-garde but remains suppressed. What art can ‘do’ is our focus. This project is Dada-like in its attempt to develop a new ‘subjective’ research position of arts education, which laughingly might be called Dada-sein (as a playful critique of Heidegger’s notion and claims of truth as *aletheia* as unconcealing). It is our contention that Deleuze|Guattari ‘complete’ the Heideggerian project of a ‘people to come’ as adumbrated by the Nietzschean quote that opens our introduction. The imaginary self that informs so much of the embodied arts-based research needs to be grasped for the fantasy structures that emerge and that the “force” of art requires an understanding, not as a form of epistemology, but from the position of the first philosophy, ethics with a particular politics of the middle voice. As an ‘event’ it becomes a transversal transformative act that escapes productionist logic of modern power that designer capitalism puts into play. Politics in this regime looks very different when witnessing is taken into account.

Ethics of Betrayal

As it pertains to the state of art education, this book is then intimately concerned with the image. Specifically, our interest herein is in part oriented to the reception of the image into educational research, including how this reception has functioned to advance, limit, and disappear the pedagogical potential of the image itself. *What is the relationship between art and research anyway?* This approach necessitates that we not simply begin with the problem of how the visual is brought into relation with

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systems of academic thinking and action. This would be to commence our enquiry at the point of a synthesis that might already be called *arts-based research*. Instead, we would like to begin with the consideration of a different *kind* of image dubbed the *image of thought* (Deleuze 1994; Deleuze 2000). It is via the consideration of such an image that we aim to evoke new problems for the field of *arts-based research*. In address to these problems, we will argue that contemporary arts-based research requires the fabrication of a new ethics. More specifically, we will herein advocate **four aphorisms for an ethics of betrayal** functioning as an abstract-machine throughout this book. This will unfold due course. For now it will suffice to begin by asking what is meant by the *image of thought*?

The Sign Must be Set in Opposition to Logos

In Deleuzian terms, the image of thought refers to a particular territorialization that effectively *stops people from thinking*. In an example that is germane to the field of *arts-based research*, one such territorialization might be named “friendship”. Perhaps necessarily, friends come to agree on the signification of words and things (Deleuze, 2000). They come to share conventions that support the ease with which they can communicate and in terms of which such communication might proceed under the banner of *mutual goodwill*. The recognition of a truth between friends becomes easier for having the conventions of signification and communication upon which to found it. Yet, there is a problem that accompanies friendship, and in particular, the kinds of truth that friendship is capable of founding. Proust, for whom the fidelity and agreement shared between friends can only ever lead to conventions of thought, evokes such a problematic. This image of friendship is a corollary to a particular *image of thought* Proust detects in classical philosophy. For Proust, the founding of philosophy is drawn from the presupposition that thinking is naturally oriented to *seek the truth*. It is in this way that classical philosophy presumes the implicit friendship between thought and truth. For Proust, this moment of philosophy’s founding *already* proceeds from the discovery and organization of ideas according to an “order of thought...that would assure agreement between minds” (Deleuze, 2000, 94). Akin to the conventions upon which a friendship might be founded, Proust charges that the search for truth conducted in philosophy commences upon an image that restricts thought to already *possible* orders of signification. Yet, in Proustian terms, this has yet to think that which makes thought necessary in the first place. Such necessity, he avers, is obfuscated by the *goodwill* of friendship.

Like philosophy, Deleuze writes, “friendship...is ignorant of the dark regions in which are elaborated the effective forces that act on thought” (95). In other words, the goodwill shared between friends is insufficient to apprehend a radical “outside thought” that *forces* us to think. For Proust, what is summoned in this critique of the friend is the very thing that makes thought necessary. Put differently, the enjoinder of thinking and truth founded in classical philosophy does not yet

explain what necessitates thinking, nor does it apprehend truth of an order other than that presupposed by the *possible*. More important than an *image of thought* through which agreement can be founded is that which leads to thought in the first place. In a word, we might call that which necessitates such thought *violence*. Deleuze (2000) writes, “thought is nothing without something that forces and does violence to it” (96). *Violence* forces us to recommence thinking in ways subtracted from the necessity of the *possible* and the stupor of a *a priori* agreement. Yet, we must be careful to avoid falling into an image of thought that is already intolerant of *violence*, for only in this way might we recommence its question as it pertains to the necessity of truth. Toward this, Deleuze advances a postulate germane to the conceptualization of art. Via what Deleuze dubs the *secret pressures* of art, we might once again encounter a *violence* that forces us to think: “*There is no Logos; there are only hieroglyphs*” (101). This is not simply an appeal to the absence of truth, but rather, the necessity that truth be commenced by an encounter that demands explication, deciphering, and translation. This is the impulse that lies at the heart of a good detective who, necessitated by the singular case, must always be forced to *think anew*.

It is only via an encounter with that which does *violence* to thought that the act of thinking itself is recommenced. Within the field of art for example, it is via a particular style no longer obsessed with *recognizable* objects that such a shock to thought might be forged. That is, only once the signs of art become capable of *betraying* the truth might they release thinking from an a priori *image of thought*. “The truth is [never] revealed” Deleuze writes, “it is betrayed” (95). This conceptualization is itself a betrayal of classical philosophical thinking, insofar as it suggests that thinking is not, in itself, naturally inclined to the discovery of the truth. What is necessary to the truth, Deleuze counterposes, is an *outside thought*, an *unrecognizable sign*, or “*secret pressure*” that does *violence* to thought, or more adequately, *violates an image of thought* that would attempt to think *on our behalf*. Thought can never come before the sign of art, since the sign appeals to a style of thinking that must necessarily come *after*. We might otherwise name this conceptualization “the pedagogy of the image” insofar as it commences thinking in ways not yet attributed particular contents. This is, of course, to assault a kind of representational lethargy by which signs are *always-already* distributed within a semiotic field. However, such representational fidelity is not yet to encounter thinking, lest a form of education (*educare*) capable of “leading out”, or otherwise, of creating a pedagogical encounter with an *outside thought* that might once again *force us to think*. This is, perhaps the most unique contribution of art to education insofar as it demands of teaching and learning something radically other than the voluntary movement of memory (reflection), the application of representational matrices (transcendence), or the deployment of laws known prior to that which they apply (morality). It is via the act of the necessity of thinking that founds truth so that it may be unleashed from that which we have already discovered, given ourselves, or derived from an image set out in advance. This is the beginning of an ethics of betrayal.

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APHORISM ONE

Betrayal is not the destruction of truth, but the condition whereupon the necessity of truth might be thought anew.

The Sign Must be Set in Opposition to “Common Sense”

The image of thought in relation to which we have begun to situate an ethics of betrayal is a corollary of *common sense* (Deleuze, 1994). Yet, by all means, we must be cautious to avoid treating the *common* as banal. As Deleuze develops, the character of common sense can be detected throughout the history of philosophy and specifically, in the categorical philosophizing of Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel. More contemporarily, the fabulation of common sense has become the domain of marketing firms and mainstream media outlets that depend on representational thought in their aspiration to recognizability. Briefly put, *common sense* is that which assures the harmonious resemblance between the act of judgment and the reality of its object. Deleuze (2004a) writes that “[c]ommon sense [is] defined subjectively by the supposed identity of a Self which provided the unity and ground of all the faculties, and objectively by the identity of whatever object served as a focus for all the faculties” (226). As such, common sense is an act of coordination between self and object that, in turn, forms the image of world composed of stable correspondences. Such correspondence carries a supreme power. As anyone who has spent any time in an early childhood classroom knows, pedagogies of correspondence have come to form the marrow of the educational project.

Common sense is one of the first senses to be cultivated in the subject and perhaps necessarily so. After all, it is via the coordinating power of common sense that our world might be recognized, and further, that we might communicate about the world with relative ease and understanding. Herein, we might begin to once again detect the image of friendship and the conditions of agreement upon which it is founded. That is, the very notion of agreement relies on the creation of categories through which agreement might itself be coordinated. Supporting such coordination, common sense “contributes the form of the Same”, that is, “the norm of identity...and the essential aspect of recognition – namely, the model itself” (169–170). While the conditions of *common sense* by which the thinking faculties are brought into correspondence with the world found the ease with which we might recognize things, such ease of recognition comes at a cost. That is, the fidelity to recognition instantiated by the idea of *common sense* requires the conformism of thought. Simply, it requires that thought seek its fulmination in representation. The problem that Deleuze detects in philosophy’s history of representation is that philosophy has left us virtually no tools to break with *that which everyone already knows*. It is in this way that Deleuze advocates for the emergence of “someone – if only one – with the necessary modesty [of] not managing to know what everybody [already] knows” (Deleuze, 1994, 130). In short, who might go

against *common sense* in order to break from those *a priori* correspondences already familiar to us?

Today, what is increasingly required is a figure capable of warring against common sense. But we must necessarily take caution here, for such a task must avoid locating its ideal in the gamesmanship of purposeful obfuscation. Rather, what becomes increasingly necessitated in an age wrought by the vicissitudes of common sense is a form of betrayal capable of making the representational solutions available to us inadequate to the problems they are made to contain. This is not simply an appeal to the slippage of signification. Rather, the challenge herein necessitates the introduction of new problems unequal to their *a priori* solutions. To put this another way, the mirror resemblance of the *possible* and the *real* must be opened upon a new dimension of *potential*. Those artists concerned with the fabulation of subjectivities (Matthew Barney and Motohiko Odani), times (Todd Hayes), and places (Öyvind Fahlström and Robert Smithson) not yet anticipated by representational thinking have already begun this project. In a style particular to the problems upon which they work, each betray a commitment to *common sense*, short-circuiting the habitual reterritorialization of the unthought upon a prior image. This tactic marks three aspects significant to composition of an ethics of betrayal.

First, insofar as art becomes capable of palpating the *false*, it functions to compose a plane from which different kinds of *actualities* might be selected. For example, the counter-mythologies of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle are impossible to apprehend via the representational categories available to us contemporarily. As O'Sullivan (2006) writes, "[W]e might say that the [Cremaster] films are addressed less to an already existing audience, who is familiar with an already existing narrative, but to a future audience, a people-yet-to-come, who as such require specifically new narratives, specifically contemporary myths" (150). In the *Cremaster* cycle, the radical potential for instantiating a *future people* born of a different relationship between biology, mythology, and geology is premised on a fundamental betrayal of *common sense*. Put simply, in order that life be relinked to its powers of becoming, the dogmatic image of thought presupposed by *common sense* must be double-crossed. In turn, the notion of the double-cross suggests that the act of betrayal emerge from *within* common sense. In arts-based research, such a betrayal would entail stuttering the conventions of the field in such a way as to make strange the very prospect of what arts-based research might be capable of *doing*. Unfettered from the edicts of *common sense*, arts-based research might become a place for the fabulation of *a-people-yet-to-come*, or rather, a people for which there exists no prior image, narrative, or transcendent organizing myth.

Second, by breaking with the edicts of *common sense*, art assumes its most non-representational force. Art is no longer a reflection of the world, but as Deleuze and Guattari aver, *monumental*. The work of art stands alone and is autonomous from already constituted traditions and experiences. What is unleashed in art's *monumental* autonomy is a sensation no longer born of modernism's *clock-time*, or rather, that image of time premised upon personal or historical memory. Breaking