

Perspective

Arts-Based Research in Cultural Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at ways in which conceptual arts-based methods and research creation approaches are applicable to library and information studies. In particular, my research examines the work of racialized artists, away from the Eurocentric canon, and the ways that these works embody concepts that follow practices in the humanities and how these modes of working can apply to cultural studies. Some of the artistic practices that I explore include the conceptual works of artists such as Yoko Ono, On Kawara, Kara Walker, Brian Jungen, Ai Weiwei, and Félix González-Torres. I look at how research in their work parallels some of the materials, processes, and tools that cultural workers use, such as digitization, archives and databases, code, and the ways in which this information is organized or curated. Many of these artists also work in text-based ways and I also examine how that work is edited based on concepts of indexing and their use of classification methods.

The research looks at various dimensions of these artists' personal histories, stories, and journeys and how they are filled with an emotionally raw temporal articulation of feelings and responses to the world. Some of these artists act as leaders to encourage participation in unfamiliar spaces and hostile environments, in which they are never the center of power but instead struggle against structures of power by operating on the fringes of the art world in order to build bridges with communities.

The arts are filled with activism and seek to disrupt, to confront, and to question on all levels the political motivations of systemic power structures and organizations, and to unify and organize around those hierarchies. This is done with the hopes of dismantling and building new structures and systems in creative ways. I look to public institutions and hope that in the future lateral and collaborative working relationships amongst cultural workers are encouraged so that the creation and gathering of knowledge and ideas in

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different areas plays to organizational and individual strengths. I ask those that are working in the field of Library and Information Studies to repudiate the status quo and instead find new methods for continuous improvements with creative tools and alternate thought processes. Artists are always learning and thinking about ways to use materials in new ways through research, by pushing the boundaries of what can be done both with our physical embodiments and also in how we conceptualize ideas with others in an ongoing dialogue. Through critical analysis, these artists demonstrate inspiration and leadership skills in unconventional and inclusive ways.

In order to gain more insight, I gather qualitative data from recent arts-based research articles and books and look at intersections with the work and techniques of the conceptual methodologies of artists outside the Eurocentric art canon. This article proposes to present and discuss findings with practical suggestions for using arts-based tools and techniques to challenge and disrupt current studies around cultural work. In this article, I will discuss artworks from each artist's oeuvre and also the most important tenets of their work that I think can be applied to arts-based research and also to the more practical work of what can be done in cultural spaces now.

INTRODUCTION: IS IT TIME FOR A REVOLUTION?

Libraries and library staff play an integral role in fighting back against misinformation, disinformation, and book banning. If any time is a good time for a revolution, now is when we can begin creating transformative library spaces. Using arts-based research (ABR) in libraries can help library staff and scholars explore creatively and broaden critical thinking skills in the library and information studies (LIS) field towards change. Today, ABR has evolved to encompass a broader conceptual foundation and is defined as “research that uses the arts, in the broadest sense, to explore, understand, represent and even challenge human action and experience.”¹ Author and filmmaker Toni Cade Bambara is often quoted by activists and artists as saying that the role of the cultural worker or artist is to make the revolution irresistible,² and the ethos of her statement calls for transformation. This kind of thought process is what I hope that creative library scholars can bring to libraries and library scholarship in order to develop more effective spaces and tools for knowledge acquisition and production. As information professionals, it is up to us to challenge the status quo, to discredit disinformation and help our users to discern misinformation and disinformation themselves, and to push each other to research and to critically think about ways that ABR can be used in qualitative ways with processes that may not have been considered before. As academic librarians Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins remind us, we must “continue to resist the conditions and values of laboring within a capitalist system, using critical theory to critique that system and to embrace an emergent critical practice that dreams of alternative futures.”³

WHAT IS ARTS-BASED RESEARCH?

Arts-Based Research (ABR) is a method of research that can be conducted using visual, literary, aural, performative, or other expressions of art as academic tools for research in an effort to construct meaning. It is an approach based on an examination of the aesthetics of art in order to imagine and create alternative solutions and a better understanding of complex issues. This method of research is distinct from quantitative, statistical, or science-based ways of thinking, but should be viewed as a complement to these types of studies. By moving away from a traditional Western based approach that

¹ Maggi Savin-Baden and Katherine Wimpenny, *A Practical Guide to Arts-Related Research* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2014), 1.

² Kay Bonetti, “A Conversation with Toni Cade Bambara,” in *Conversations with Toni Cade Bambara*, ed. Thabiti Lewis (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 35.

³ Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins, “In Resistance to a Capitalist Past: Emerging Practices of Critical Librarianship,” in *The Politics of Theory and the Practice of Critical Librarianship*, eds. Karen P. Nicholson and Maura Seale (Library Juice Press, 2017), 22.

utilizes standardizations of knowledges based upon presumed scientifically based assumptions as ideal models, we can leave room for ambiguity and creativity.⁴

ABR is a unique way to think of problems or situations in a different context and then open them up for alternative creative solutions in the LIS field. Art has always been a practice that values both aesthetics and education at its core.⁵ Using an approach that prioritizes arts-based solutions and includes them along with traditional qualitative and quantitative types of academic research in any decision-making process is critical. As McNiff clearly defines the uniqueness of ABR, “To clarify the distinct nature of ABR, I have described it as a process of inquiry whereby the researcher, alone or with others, engages the making of art as a primary mode of inquiry.”⁶

POSITION STATEMENT: WHO AM I?

I recently graduated with a Master of Library and Information Studies from the University of Alberta and have previously completed an undergraduate degree in Intermedia at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, British Columbia. I have been an artist, writer, and researcher since the early days of elementary school, and often finished my schoolwork early to leave the classroom before the end of the school day. All of this has informed who I am today and how I go about acquiring knowledge when starting any research project. I would also like to situate myself and acknowledge that I am a multiracial transgender settler living on the unceded, ancestral, and stolen homelands of the x̣ẉməθḳẉəỵəm (Musqueam), Sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish), and seḷị́ẉiṭuḷh (Tsleil-Waututh) Peoples, and that I have taken time to reflect upon and continue to acknowledge my own privileges.

What Happened in Art School?

My studies have always been filled with activism where I and other students would take action by disrupting, questioning, and confronting oppression both inside and outside the institution. This would often manifest in our art where we examined the power dynamics and relationships in colonized spaces, in hopes of building better and more creative

⁴ Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner, *Arts Based Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 19.

⁵ Barbara Beyerbach and Tania Ramalho, “Chapter Nineteen: Activist Art in Social Justice Pedagogy,” *Counterpoints* 515 (2017): 247-262, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45212266>.

⁶ Shaun McNiff, “Philosophical and Practical Foundations of Artistic Inquiry: Creating Paradigms, Methods, and Presentations Based in Art,” in *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, ed. Patricia Leavy (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2019), 24.

systems and structures through community collaboration. All art has some political purpose and the kinds of discussions taking place in the classroom have strong parallels with what is happening politically in both education and library studies. Social justice work and skills in applying the principal tenets of justice, equity, diversity/decolonization, and inclusion (JEDI) is something that is often overt on art school campuses, as part of art's ethos in challenging the world politically. It is here that many artists develop a politically radical tendency. As visual methodology scholar Claudia Mitchell states, "Arts-based methods of research including visual, performative and collaborative forms of enquiry have the power to mobilize and provoke individuals and communities to reflect and engage."⁷ Recently, I reflected upon an experience that happened on Friday, May 26, 2000 at the Sydney Biennale that made me think more critically about the arts in relation to research and knowledge in library and information studies. Upon further study I realized that what I had been conceptualizing in my mind at the time was already known as ABR.

The event that had me revisiting how two disparate fields of studies could come together was a performance art piece by Yoko Ono called *Cut String* that took place at the Sydney Opera House. I will describe this event in greater detail later in this essay but will note here how it changed the way I think about creating community and to embrace working with the unknown when researching and studying. I continue to think about what it means to exist in this tenuous and liminal academic space with strangers, while attempting to continually build relationships within the arts community and connect that to my work in the field of library and information studies (LIS).

How Do I Approach Research?

My positionality reflects my research approach, which I define as being one of a "critical ontology" as described by education researcher Joe Kincheloe. Critical ontology involves an understanding around the social construction of politics, religion, gender, race and sexual orientation, and how they intersect and are influenced by dominant cultural perspectives on power.⁸ Epistemologically, I align with the values of critical constructivism in that I do not believe in a singular truth or reality, with the exception of activism for and defending universal human rights. Research scholar Dr. Salma Patel describes this type of

⁷ Claudia Mitchell in *Doing Visual Research* (London: Sage, 2011) quoted in Jenna Ward and Harriet Shortt, "Using Arts-Based Methods of Research: A Critical Introduction to the Development of Arts-Based Research Methods," in *Using Arts-Based Research Methods: Creative Approaches for Researching Business, Organisation and Humanities*, eds. Jenna Ward and Harriet Shortt, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33069-9>.

⁸ Joe L. Kincheloe, "Critical Ontology and Indigenous Ways of Being: Forging a Postcolonial Curriculum," in *Key Works in Critical Pedagogy*, eds. Kecia Hayes, Shirley R. Steinberg, and Kenneth George Tobin, 333-349 (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 334.

research as more likely to use qualitative methods.⁹ Research scholar Michael Crotty's concept of asking for academics to create a research methodology for themselves because every kind of research is "unique and calls for a unique methodology"¹⁰ really resonates with me. The methodology that I have chosen to use to approach my research in LIS is an arts-based narrative feminist form of inquiry, which reflects my education in creative studies as well my orientation towards political activism. Arts-based research, as defined by sociologist Patricia Leavy, is a process that uses the creative arts as a method of inquiry.¹¹ Narrative inquiry, according to psychologist Colette Daiute, centers personal experiences and the construction of knowledge and identity.¹² Most of the methods that I primarily rely on for research are qualitative, consisting of journals, observations, lived experience, narrative texts, creative objects, and design thinking.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO DIVERSIFY LIBRARIES?

In the types of arts and culture programming that I do in library spaces, I look for social and economic inequities in communities and seek to understand which groups have been underrepresented historically. Then, using a critically diverse and intersectional lens and toolkit as an IBPOC member of the queer community, I'm able to advocate for programming that centers marginalized voices and oppressed groups in the arts and culture sectors. These inherent biases affect how programming works in libraries, and we need be selective to ensure that the knowledge that we ask communities to share has at least an equivalent reciprocity factor of relevance for them. Procedures around the decision-making process with the types of programming that we do needs a level of transparency that is clear to both library staff, partners, stakeholders, and the public.

One of the main issues that many libraries struggle with is highlighted by Morales and Williams: "In what ways do libraries facilitate either destruction or healing in communities through their information-as-business model?"¹³ This is especially relevant

⁹ Salma Patel, "The Research Paradigm—Methodology, Epistemology and Ontology—Explained in Simple Language," Dr. Salma Patel: Research, Digital UX and a PhD, 2015. Accessed April 22, 2024. <http://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-methodology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language/>.

¹⁰ Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspectives in the Research Process* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), p.14.

¹¹ Patricia Leavy, ed., *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (New York and London, UK: The Guilford Press, 2019), vii.

¹² Colette Daiute, *Narrative Inquiry: A Dynamic Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 22.

¹³ Myrna E. Morales and Stacie Williams, "Moving Towards Transformative Librarianship: Naming and Identifying Epistemic Supremacy," in *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies Through Critical Race Theory*, eds. Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2021), 75.

to note in light of hateful disinformation being distributed through questionable “scholarship” that disseminates harmful ideologies under the misnomer of “evidence-based research,” under an umbrella disguised as being solely a discussion about freedom of speech. Morales and Williams go on to argue that “[...] epistemic supremacy is defined as societal systems, infrastructures, and knowledge pathways that facilitate and uphold the conditions for tyranny and fascism by destroying any system of knowledge (epistemicide) not controlled by the ruling class as a means of facilitating racial monopoly capitalism.”¹⁴ They also further elaborate by saying when information pathways are damaged or corrupted via epistemic supremacy, we are not fulfilling a key tenet of librarianship, which is to provide informed and accurate information. This failure can damage a library’s reputation in the community if ideology inciting hatred is given legitimacy by being offered a platform under the guise of libraries upholding democracy and intellectual ideals of freedom.¹⁵

DOES NEUTRALITY EXIST?

As Morales and Williams state, by now library professionals should realize that information is not neutral and therefore librarians, library workers, libraries, and librarianship are also not neutral. As Lankes reminds us, “good librarians aren’t neutral: they are principled.”¹⁶ They have a need to make and believe that communities can be better. Adopting a stance of neutrality and remaining silent is always taking the side of the oppressor. If the profession is to keep up and remain relevant with current humanities discourse, then libraries, librarians, library staff, and the public must realize and acknowledge this:

The biases we hold as human individuals affect every aspect of library work. They affect whom we allow to enter, whom we allow to stay on the premises, the programs and services we offer, the collections we organize, curate, and archive, and most importantly, they affect our colleagues and the people we choose to serve. It is not an accident that many library spaces remain predominantly white and gender- and middle class-oppressed, or that their relevance is being questioned in this current moment.¹⁷

With the rise of right-wing extremism both in the United States and Canada, and the corresponding attempts to interfere with public library policies around collection

¹⁴ Morales and Williams, “Moving Towards Transformative Librarianship,” 75.

¹⁵ Morales and Williams.

¹⁶ R. David Lankes, *The New Librarianship Field Guide* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 19-20.

¹⁷ Morales and Williams, “Moving Towards Transformative Librarianship,” 73.

management and library operations, it is vitally important that a supportive group of library professionals fights for the human rights of the most marginalized and oppressed library patrons and communities. Not only should library studies be focused around JEDI issues, but critical race theory education should also be mandatory, too. This is because “...framing this problem as one of diversity (and/or inclusion) problematically allows LIS as a field to devise superficial solutions that maintain the racial hierarchy where whiteness is dominant.”¹⁸ Knowledge of critical race theory helps to reframe this racial power in LIS, so that information professionals will begin to examine and question their own biases around providing library programs, services, and the development of library collection materials in accordance with human rights policies.¹⁹ Further, many LIS scholars have critically argued for more diversity in the field as there is a huge underrepresentation of IBPOC library staff and an examination using these equity frameworks will hopefully lead to new changes in the profession.²⁰

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES OF USING ARTS-BASED RESEARCH?

Leavy outlines several advantages of using arts-based research, but let’s focus specifically on a few areas that seem to be the most important in a library context:

New insights and learning: the ability to discover new relationships between a diverse range of knowledges. This is possible by looking at alternate answers to research questions or by using critical thinking skills to move outside traditional ways of doing research.

Describe, explore, discover and problem-solve: using arts-based practices to find solutions to problems by describing or looking at research processes in a different way.

Evocative and provocative: the arts have the power to be emotionally moving and powerful. There is an immediacy to the form and this can be captured and utilized in research.

¹⁸ Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight, “Introduction: This Is Only the Beginning,” in *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory*, edited by Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2021), 3.

¹⁹ Morales and Williams, 73.

²⁰ Leung and López-McKnight, “Introduction: This Is Only the Beginning,” 4.

Critical consciousness, raising awareness, and empathy: the cultivation of social consciousness and social justice. Building empathy and raising awareness of the importance in approaching research while understanding the basic tenets of critical race theory.

Unsettle stereotypes, challenge dominant ideologies, and include marginalized voices and perspectives: confront stereotypes and biases, while using social justice work to be inclusive and to challenge people to think differently.²¹

WHY STUDY CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS?

Why is conceptual art useful for representing the way that arts-based research methods can be used in the field of library studies? Artist Sol LeWitt describes conceptual art as “made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or his emotions.”²² Conceptual art prizes ideas above form and can be expressed using any number of different and diverse methods, as will be demonstrated by the work of the IBPOC artists that are discussed. In this way, conceptual art can be an ideal starting point for further inquiry in the LIS field. Conceptual art comprises a politics that defies the framework around the traditional art canon by breaking down delineated boundaries to bring forth new ideas and ambitious ways of thinking creatively.

In looking at ways in which conceptual arts-based methods and research creation approaches are applicable to LIS, I chose to examine the work of racialized artists, away from the Eurocentric arts canon. I am interested in the ways that their work embodies concepts that follow practices in the digital humanities and how these modes of working can apply to the LIS field. The practices of the artists I examine include conceptual artists such as Yoko Ono, On Kawara, Kara Walker, Brian Jungen, Ai Weiwei, and Félix González-Torres. While not everything I choose to examine will be defined as conceptual art by critics and the artists themselves, I examine their work by prioritizing their ideas using arts-based research methods.

The artists described here were selected for the ways that their conceptual ideas are reflected in the intersectional and political nature of their work. Arts-based research can inform library work by looking at it through a lens of activism. Using creative research methods to examine and question issues of access and privilege to knowledge systems can be used as a means to disrupt systemic oppression.

By examining the dimensions of these artists’ personal histories, stories, and journeys that are filled with emotionally raw temporal articulations of feelings and

²¹ Patricia Leavy, ed., *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2019), 9-10.

²² Sam Hunter and John M. Jacobus, *Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ and New York: Prentice Hall and H.N. Abrams, 1992), 360.

responses to the world, new insights for change can emerge. Some of these artists act as leaders to encourage participation in unfamiliar spaces and hostile environments, in which they are never the center of power but instead struggle against structures of power by operating on the fringes of the art world to build bridges with communities. In each section below, ISBNs are provided as references to specific monographs about each artist that readers may be interested in exploring.

Yoko Ono – Community Collaboration and Silence

978-0743201100 ~ Since my early art school days, one of my favorite artists has been Yoko Ono because of the quiet confidence she possesses as an artist who, at one time, much of the world wanted to destroy. She endured a great amount of racism because of her relationship with John Lennon, when it was he in fact who pursued her at the opening of her gallery show when they first met.

979-8478092658 ~ Yoko Ono was one of the pioneers of the Fluxus movement and influential to its development because she was one of the few women recognized as being an artist included in the group.

978-0819571762 ~ Her presence was an important part of the Cagean avant-garde and had a significant role in shaping the Fluxus movement, which embodied areas of interest in her work as such: “[...]intangibles as temporality, duration, sound, illusion, silence, and idea.”²³ The two core principles that underlie much of Yoko Ono’s artistic practice that I examine are silence and community collaboration and how these relate to the field of LIS studies.

978-0714876634 ~ The first work of art that I’ll look at interrogates community collaboration, and how this core tenet that is frequently referred to in library discourse is reflected in her work. A friend and I had the privilege of attending Yoko Ono’s *Cut String* performance in person at the Sydney Opera House in 2000. The performance involved several balls of wool that Ono asked us to wrap around ourselves several times and then pass it on to the next person. There was no order, but the material moved through the space in a cooperative manner. I am pretty sure the ball of yarn that we had was yellow and we all ended up wrapped up together in a big spiderweb-like formation of yarn in the venue space, called The Studio. After a long Question & Answer session, while we were all still joined together, we awaited her next performance. A large blue vase was brought out that Ono covered with a padded sheet and then proceeded to smash with a hammer. At the end of the evening, the string was cut in various spots with scissors, and she then invited everyone to take pieces of both the string and vase home with them. This was

²³ Joan Rothfuss, “Somewhere for the Dust to Cling: Yoko Ono’s Paintings and Early Objects,” in *Yes Yoko Ono*, eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society, 2000), 93.

done with the promise, she said, that when we meet again in 10 years, we can put the vase back together. She then left the stage.

There were many discussions around the meaning of the work, but the most brilliant aspect was that as strangers we all knew that at one point in the evening, we had all been connected in this space. As Rothfuss notes about Yoko's conceptual philosophy, "[...] her belief that her art could function as a communication device and a way to bring people together."²⁴ There is a generosity in her work that is very much like the spirit of a library in that you come in and enjoy the space and leave with something, usually some type of new skill or knowledge or collection material.

978-3865606525 ~ This leads me to Ono's most famous work of art called *Cut Piece*, which is another piece of performance art that features audience participation but in a more potentially threatening way. She is known for taking risks and for her originality, and this work brings the collective public to her as an individual. As scholar Kristine Stiles describes the work, "*Cut Piece* is an aesthetic commentary on the complicit relationship between individuals and the social body as a whole in its collectivized behavior."²⁵ In Yoko Ono's artwork *Cut Piece*, the premise is simple:

Performer sits on stage with a pair of scissors in front of her. It is announced that members of the audience may come on stage—one at a time—to cut a small piece of the performer's clothing to take with them. Performer remains motionless throughout the piece. Piece ends at the performer's option.²⁶

Cut Piece is also a performance that looks to a presumed notion of hospitality (sometimes gendered) in the work, as art critic Vivian Huang points out when Derrida and Dufourmantele discuss the concept around the willingness to say yes to *who or what turns up* in this state of vulnerability.²⁷ Can a parallel comparison be made with public library spaces, one of the few indoor spaces that are accessible to anyone who walks through the door? The public is invited to stay as long as they'd like, and library staff are expected to be hospitable at all times. This notion of openness can leave library staff in a constant state of vulnerability at times. Huang also writes that Ono is "the host of the performance and her audience members as the guests she invites to the stage who leave with something 'to take with them.'"²⁸

²⁴ Rothfuss, "Somewhere for the Dust to Cling," 96.

²⁵ Kristine Stiles, "Being Undyed: The Meeting of Mind and Matter in Yoko Ono's Events," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, eds. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society, 2000), 158.

²⁶ Vivian L. Huang, "Inscrutably, Actually: Hospitality, Parasitism, and the Silent Work of Yoko Ono and Laurel Nakadate," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 28, no. 3 (2018): 188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2018.1524619>.

²⁷ Huang, "Inscrutably, Actually," 190.

²⁸ Huang, 188.

978-0691239224 ~ Central to *Cut Piece* is the element of silence, which can act as an insidious factor in different ways in many library workplaces. Within organizations such as libraries, silence can manifest itself in the form of employee silence, where staff choose whether or not to speak up against certain political issues that contradict their moral beliefs or whether they opt to stay silent and complicit. Not causing any institutional friction might be beneficial for one's career, so that they will be looked upon favorably as "cooperating" rather than being viewed as a "troublemaker." Silence can also exist at the management and leadership levels where a lack of transparency or communication can be critical.²⁹ If we look at silence in libraries, it is no longer the type that exists between the stacks in the physical space to be concerned with, but a new type of silence that has shifted from external public space to the inner space of the institution. It may take shape as a complicit silence, one where the idea of neutrality is tossed about carelessly without realizing that being neutral on issues around an individual's human rights reinscribes the status quo of the dominant culture through inaction.

On Kawara – Time and Indexical Records

978-0714841045 ~ On Kawara is an artist whose art "[...]is certainly based on a certain idea of truth, exactness, and precision, as well as a relation to Being itself, being open to the openness of Being and may be perceived as an attempt to return to the very foundations of creativity."³⁰ Themes running through Kawara's work that relate to libraries are time and indexical records. After Kawara finished high school in 1951, he went to Tokyo and came up with "an intense reading program for himself, including European philosophy, as well as political (especially Marxist) and psychoanalytical (especially Freudian) theory."³¹ He remembers using a bookshop in Shinjuku as his own personal library where he would stand and read uninterrupted for hours. Through networking with a group of friends that he met at the bookstore, he began working as an artist.³² Kawara's refusal to work in Japanese, so that he is not categorized as strictly a Japanese artist, informs a sense of personal place. "For Kawara, ownership—of place,

²⁹ Andrew Armitage and Diane Ramsay, "A Poetic Approach to Researching Silence in Organisations," in *Using Arts-Based Research Methods: Creative Approaches for Researching Business, Organisation and Humanities*, ed. by Jenna Ward and Harriet Shortt, 209-236 (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33069-9>.

³⁰ Ewa Bobrowska, "Participation in the Present and the Spacing of Time: On Kawara, Nancy, Levinas," *Art Inquiry* 20 (2018): 66, <https://doi.org/10.26485/AI/2018/20/4>.

³¹ Jonathan Watkins, René Denizot, and On Kawara, *On Kawara, Contemporary Artists* (London, UK and New York: Phaidon, 2002), 48.

³² Watkins, Denizot, and Kawara, *On Kawara*.

language, name, work—is always contested, secured only by something as unbinding as a contract.”³³

978-0892075195 ~ The orderliness of his paper works, often on postcards or telegrams, represent indexical records depicting a precise ordering of time and place. Kawara used a process of cataloging to keep a chronological record of his artworks (paintings) as reference and used materials such as newspapers to reflect the element of time. There is a great degree of specificity in his work where text labels were added as paper ephemera to his work. He was an artist that rarely made appearances in galleries, interviews, or talks, but left behind indexical traces of things he used in his artworks that represent the passage of time: brushes, razor blades, rulers, a clock, paint, canvas, cloths, or cigarette butts.³⁴ There is an absence of his bodily presence in his work, too, much like there would be for a cataloger where their seemingly invisible presence enters metadata in an quiet, orderly, and precise way into a public integrated library system (ILS). His work can also be viewed as a form of mark-making and a construction of “an archive of self”³⁵ in the way that the bodily absence of a particular time and place depicted.

978-0300137347 ~ On Kawara’s *Date Paintings* may appear to the naked eye to be only numbers on a canvas represented as a “painting of the date on which it was made,”³⁶ but there is a painstaking amount of work that goes into their craftsmanship. Four coats of paint, carefully drawn and measured text with a ruler, and a set square were placed in a cardboard box, along with a carefully selected newspaper of the same day and place indicating his physical location.³⁷ This orderly repetition is similar to the routine of the laying out and preparing of the daily newspapers at the library for the public and their arrangement on tables by date and then date stamped with ink. The old papers are temporarily archived in physical piles until digital copies are eventually purchased to be kept on microfilm for future use. With Kawara’s work, there is a sort of temporal ordering of things and a personal archiving of history and memory, as well a performance of truthful authenticity through record-keeping. As Bobrowska writes, “In this way, the artist tests and plays with the performative role of art.” Its veracity (the date of the day on which it was painted) has no other attestation than itself, since the painting could well have been painted on another date.”³⁸

³³ Watkins, Denizot, and Kawara, *On Kawara*, 72.

³⁴ Kathryn Chiong, “Kawara on Kawara,” *October* 90 (1999): 57.

³⁵ Chiong, “Kawara on Kawara,” 58.

³⁶ Watkins, Denizot, and Kawara, *On Kawara*, 67.

³⁷ Watkins, Denizot, and Kawara, 78.

³⁸ Ewa Bobrowska, “Participation in the Present and the Spacing of Time: On Kawara, Nancy, Levinas,” *Art Inquiry* 20 (2018): 69-70, <https://doi.org/10.26485/AI/2018/20/4>.

Kara Walker: Social Inequities and Historical Accuracy

978-3037645574 ~ Kara Walker's work is rooted in strength and self-determination which exemplifies how art can be so intensely powerful and political in a reflective way. Messages of defiance and an expectation of critique demonstrate an unwillingness to yield or bend to the powers of patriarchy and white supremacy. Her solid monolithic structures contain a presence that attempts to address historical inequities, or to at least lay them bare before audiences. Walker's *Fons Americanus* was installed in the Tate Modern Turbine Hall and is representative of the immenseness of that particular space, which at one time was also occupied by Louise Bourgeois' *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* (2000) and her famed sculpture *Maman*, of a giant steel spider.

978-1849766852 ~ *Fons Americanus* is a thirteen-meter-high fountain with sculpted figures that critiques British history and the fountain installed outside Buckingham Palace. It attempts to retell the stories of the Black Atlantic with the authentic stories of the transatlantic slave trade, using water as a metaphor to trace the histories of Africa, America, and Europe.³⁹ As curator Clara Kim describes, Walker's "*Fons Americanus* upends the usual narrative and mythologizing role of public monuments, to expose the underbelly that upholds official accounts of history. In questioning what is remembered and how, the artist is deconstructing the power dynamics embedded in the narrating of history, making us confront violent pasts."⁴⁰ This work speaks to historical inaccuracies which can and do exist in the collections and the archives of libraries and other public institutions. An example of this is how librarians have the potential to curate, review, and develop inclusive library collections by adding materials that provide historically accurate and up-to-date information, while excluding disinformation. Additionally, diversity and lived experience for core collections staff is essential for veracity in collection development and the weeding out of material that incites hatred towards already marginalized communities. Speaking to social inequities, as much as we view libraries as sacred spaces and library staff with a sense of "vocational awe,"⁴¹ these same spaces to many marginalized people have been places of institutional violence.⁴² It can be extremely difficult as a marginalized person without support to exist in a public institutional space without having to constantly feel as if there is a need to protect oneself from harm being directed towards us on a regular basis.

³⁹ Clara Kim, ed., *Kara Walker: Fons Americanus* (London, UK: Tate, 2019), overleaf. See also Kara Walker, "Fons Americanus," in *Kara Walker: Fons Americanus*, ed. Clara Kim (London, UK: Tate, 2019), 54-58.

⁴⁰ Clara Kim, "An Allegory of the Black Atlantic," in *Kara Walker: Fons Americanus*, ed. Clara Kim (London, UK: Tate, 2019), 107.

⁴¹ Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, 2018. <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>.

⁴² Leung and López-McKnight, "Introduction: This Is Only the Beginning."

978-0520383333 ~ Walker's work echoes themes of colonization, slave labor, land seizure, capitalism, and exploitation. Her work attempts to correct our "historical amnesia," as novelist Zadie Smith so eloquently puts it. The way that Walker's art displays such amnesia in an overtly "salacious" way seems to cause a certain level of discomfort in the art world, which has still not reconciled its oppressive ranking of art stars.⁴³ It is as if vocalizing violations of colonial acts of oppression and speaking their truths is worse than the actual original oppressive acts themselves. If there is to be true decolonization and radicalization of library spaces, librarians and library staff need to be able and willing to sit with a high level of discomfort to take action against the oppression that they see and know occurs in libraries on a regular basis.

Brian Jungen – Stereotypes and the Commodification of Culture

978-1553651345 ~ One of Brian Jungen's most well-known works, the series *Prototypes for New Understanding*, is made from the deconstruction of pairs of Nike Air Jordan shoes. Using techniques drawn from minimalism, Jungen sews different pieces of the shoes back together again into entirely different forms resembling First Nations masks. An important element in his use of materials is that the colors—red, black, and white—are used because they are commonly used in Indigenous West Coast art. In this work, there is a pairing of materiality and object with the commercially commodified Nike logo and a ceremonial mask, which has often been used as an item of trade.⁴⁴ Jungen's *Prototypes for New Understanding* are, as Jungen sees them, bodies or corpses that he dissects in the way that a taxidermist works. His methods of working with materials challenges stereotypes by remaking prized and commodified shoes into a highly desirable prototype fantasy of Indigenous culture and becomes a radical act.⁴⁵

978-1636810829 ~ Jungen's work plays with the popularity of Nike Air Jordans among Indigenous youth and juxtaposes it with the commodification of settler culture in a way that brings the two together. "Beyond the cultural intermix—some would say 'absorption'—the exhibition's tightest connective thread is how Jungen imbues everyday objects with uncanny strangeness."⁴⁶ Daina Augaitis mentions that Jungen's work causes a rupture in spaces by dismantling traditional stereotypes and looking for new ways to

⁴³ Zadie Smith, "Kara Walker: What Do We Want History to Do to Us?" in *Kara Walker: Fons Americanus*, ed. Clara Kim (London, UK: Tate, 2019), 41.

⁴⁴ Diana Augaitis, "Prototypes for New Understandings," in *Brian Jungen*, ed. Diana Augaitis (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 7.

⁴⁵ Cuauhtémoc Medina, "High Curios," in *Brian Jungen*, ed. Diana Augaitis (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 27-38.

⁴⁶ Earl Miller, "Brian Jungen," *Border Crossings* 38, no. 4 (2019): 124.

engage.⁴⁷ There is a sense of the everydayness of objects in his materials that, when re-constructed and appearing in the institutional space of the gallery, takes up space in a defiant act of resistance.

978-3791359281 ~ His work embodies a critical reminder that work in libraries around Indigenous programming, collections, planning, and advocacy should never be performative, and that Indigenous peoples and their culture should already have a historical grounding presence of some kind in all library spaces. As well, staff need to be educated and trained with an Indigenous-first approach to library spaces, programs, and collection materials. An approach to decolonization must contain an inclusive Indigenous framework for all library branch locations for materials and services. An Indigenous presence in libraries should address worldwide concerns that are culturally, socially, and economically specific.⁴⁸

Ai Weiwei: Architecture and Design

978-3777438641 ~ Ai Weiwei is a renowned artist that the Chinese government considers a dissident and keeps under permanent surveillance in attempts to silence his political comments around the suppression of freedoms in his country. Even though he himself claims that he is nothing more than an artist, he is also an activist, architect, and curator.⁴⁹ Ai Weiwei had a studio space in Caochangdi, a village in a rural part of Beijing and home to a community of blue-collar working settlers. The buildings were eventually demolished in 2018 but prior to that, the construction of the arts compound had become an important part of Ai's work. When he moved into the village, his artist friends also moved into studios that they had requested he build for them because of his unique architectural style. The village became an enormous area of nine compounds which benefitted the whole community in that locals, artists and international galleries co-existed in the same space.⁵⁰ Curator and writer Kate Goodwin suggests that the way in which the complex was built was consistent with Ai's architectural sense of building something that would benefit the community and that the quality of the spaces was reflective of this.⁵¹ The government made sure to monitor Ai with a dozen or more surveillance cameras, of which some were pointed directly at his studio in the government's attempts to monitor activities for anything they deemed illegal.

⁴⁷ Daina Augaitis, "Prototypes for New Understandings," 5.

⁴⁸ Kathleen S. Bartels, "Foreword," in *Brian Jungen*, ed. Diana Augaitis (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 1.

⁴⁹ Reto Geiser, "In the Realm of Architecture," in *Ai Weiwei: Spatial Matters—Art, Architecture and Activism*, ed. Ai Weiwei, Anthony Pins, and An Xiao Mina (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2014), 126-130.

⁵⁰ Kate Goodwin, "Exploring Ai," *Architectural Review* 238, no. 1425 (2015): 77-78.

⁵¹ Goodwin, "Exploring Ai," 81.

978-1872005638 ~ With the complexes in Caochangdi, Ai used his architectural skills in developing and looking at the relationships between public and private spaces while also considering visual sightlines and spatial values.⁵² As Pins writes, architecture has always been a tool of power, attainable to those that have access to resources, material, and labor. As a result, quite often the public is unaware or passive in realizing how political the construction of physical spaces can be and how these resulting spaces hold knowledge. Ai Weiwei has argued previously that architecture can reinforce hegemonic authority by serving those in power.⁵³ Thus, architecture and the resulting design of libraries as institutional spaces and their occupation of “the land” can also be seen as sites of political resistance as well as spaces of contention.

978-1872005638 ~ Architecture in library spaces can also play an important role with accessibility design in many different ways. Libraries are traditionally known in LIS theory as being “third spaces” between work and home, wherein one of their main purposes is to act in a pedagogical role for knowledge gathering and production, as well providing space for community. Architects and planners have an opportunity to ensure that libraries are designed in ways that meet the accessibility and social needs of the public. In the spirit of the way that Ai Weiwei may go about designing space, Sam Demas and Jeffrey Sherer, consultants on library spaces, discuss an “esprit de space” or spirit of a place, suggesting that community spaces should be designed to be both transcendent and transportive, “*transcendent*, in the sense of buildings that delimit physicality through imaginative understanding and application of virtues; and *transportive*, in design that uplifts the patron and enhances the unique experience of sensing past, present, and future simultaneously.”⁵⁴

Félix González-Torres: Queerness and an Ethics of Care

978-3869309217 ~ The last work in this series of artists that I have examined in relation to library spaces is Félix González-Torres and his work *Untitled (Lover Boys) 1991*. This installation is constructed with piles of blue and white wrapped candies, where the weight of the material represents the weight of the bodies of the artist (González-Torres) and his lover, whom he lost to AIDS. This work clearly shows the context in which the artist is working with as being one of the continuing HIV-AIDS crisis. The sculpture becomes an abstraction of the body that challenges binary forms of thinking and exhibits queer

⁵² Goodwin, 78.

⁵³ Anthony Pins, “The Nudged Vernacular: Ai Weiwei and the Architecture of Resistance,” in *Ai Weiwei: Spatial Matters—Art, Architecture and Activism*, ed. Ai Weiwei, Anthony Pins, and An Xiao Mina (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2014), 139.

⁵⁴ Sam Demas and Jeffrey A. Schererm, “Esprit de Place: Maintaining and Designing Library Buildings to Provide Transcendent Spaces,” *American Libraries* 33, no. 4 (2002): 65.

representation in the gallery space. This same queerness of QTBIPOC bodies when brought into library spaces and library studies is intrinsic and affects everything we do. González-Torres' work fights against a framework that "serves the stabilization of the conditions of power, and all the appertaining mystification, promotion of prejudice, and stereotyping."⁵⁵ Queerness and the fight to bring QTBIPOC bodies into libraries and critical library studies is often one of continual struggle and endless emotional exhaustion. One of the biggest issues in contestation in libraries right now in both public and private spaces is that the marginalized identities and subjectivities of some library workers are being used politically to construct agendas of fear. Hateful material and highly polemical talks are insidiously making their way into public libraries under a moniker of freedom of speech or intellectual freedom. Manipulative tactics used by right-wing extremists often leads to a vocal minority of the public misunderstanding issues around material that is anti-LGTBQ+ or racist in nature and how these ideologies can incite hatred towards marginalized library staff and the public.

978-0923183127 ~ When library students learn about an ethics of care in libraries, we need to take note of how this should relate to developing and nurturing caring relationships with the most marginalized and oppressed peoples and communities. As González-Torres argued, "When we start analyzing Supreme Court decisions and public legislation that relates to the body, we start realizing that what we regard as the 'private' sphere has never been private. It has always been public. The government has an interest in this area..."⁵⁶

WHY SHOULD LIBRARIES USE ARTS-BASED RESEARCH?

Using arts-based research in library studies and library spaces can lead us to creatively examine and problem-solve in a more unique and holistic way. There is not a single set of strict skills required for arts-based research, but Leavy suggests broad and evolving criteria for some direction. These include:

Flexibility: Don't be afraid to try out new ideas, be open to failure and rely on your own processes and thoughts to guide you.

Thinking conceptually: Visualize different ideas or materials to think about possible solutions, use what you learn and reflect on what you can do to improve.

⁵⁵ Rainer Fuchs, "The Authorized Viewer," in *Félix González-Torres*, ed. Julie Ault (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2006), 110.

⁵⁶ Felix Gonzalez-Torres, as quoted in Nancy Spector, *Félix González-Torres* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1995), 158.

Practice ethical values: An ethics of care is at the center of using any arts-based research. All thought processes should be done holistically by practicing the core values of justice, equity, diversity/decolonization and inclusion, while also ensuring that we also include the intersection of critical race theory.

Artistic thoughts: Do creative things, whether that be making something physically with your hands or using a pencil to draw; engage with a different way of thinking or looking at how things are designed for inspiration and think critically outside of your usual way of processing things.

Public intellectual: Share your research and ideas with the greater public because your knowledge and ways of thinking are specific to you and unique. Use critique constructively as well and don't be afraid of the opinions of others, use them to improve your research and way of working.⁵⁷

By utilizing these skills, an arts-based researcher can transform their socially engaged studies in new, collaborative, and inclusive ways that add to the knowledge base of library and information studies. I urge library staff to consider arts-based research in everything they do in libraries and to be open to listening to others that work in the same way. Arts-based researchers often have different lived experiences or understandings that pull from ideas in different disciplines in an interdisciplinary manner that can offer alternate ways of accumulating knowledge.

An arts-based research approach can be used in library and information studies and libraries in ways that seek to disrupt current oppressive systemic institutional practices by leading with justice, equity, diversity/decolonization, and inclusion as well as critical race theory. Using this methodology, I hope will demonstrate alternate ways of thinking about art and artists and how some of their thought processes and techniques can be used in libraries to challenge and disrupt current institutional practices. Arts-based research is an act of resistance and a way of creatively taking up space by gathering new knowledges while making a call to action for changes to further improve upon libraries as institutions.

⁵⁷ Patricia Leavy, ed., *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 2019), 11-12.

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