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# Qualitative Inquiry into Art History: A Tribute to Arthur P. Bochner

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## Qualitative Inquiry into Art History: A Tribute to Arthur P. Bochner<sup>1</sup>

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In 1988, an intense,  
driven department chair,  
respected scholar,  
and prolific author  
lost suddenly,  
unexpectedly,  
his aging but vital father,  
and became, as never before,  
a wounded storyteller.

"It's About Time,"<sup>2</sup>  
he came to believe,  
to integrate fractured identities  
divided by academic pursuit  
and personal grief.

Self-transformation  
became a social construction  
when sociology's path  
crossed that of communication.  
Who was this vision,  
on a mission,  
firing a new canon  
that would become *Final Negotiations*?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bochner, A.P. (1997). It's about time: Narrative and the divided self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3, 418-438.

Companion became partner  
 and sometime thereafter,  
 an impulse artfully paternal  
 sparked in the heart Art Bochner.

To be counted  
 among the adopted  
       is not without responsibility.  
 For me it meant assistantships  
       on family dynamics  
 and cinematic relationships,  
                   and a five-course meal  
 of Interpretivism, Narrative Methodology,  
 Close Relationships, Writing Workshop,  
       and Communication Theory.

A class called Interpretivism,  
                                   Fall, 1993,  
 began with Mead's *Mind, Self, & Society*.<sup>4</sup>  
       M.A.s and Ph.D.s to be  
 emplotted our "I"s and tossed our "me"s  
                                   into a sea  
 of essential We.

In a hermeneutic circle  
 we engaged *Interaction Ritual*<sup>5</sup>  
       until teeming  
 with finite provinces<sup>6</sup>  
 and *Acts of Meaning*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ellis, C. (1995). *Final negotiations: A story of love, loss, and chronic illness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Mead, G.H. (1967). *Mind, self, & society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup> Goffman, E. (1982). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon Books.

<sup>6</sup> Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1989). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>7</sup> Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

For Narrative Inquiry,  
 we heard *The Call of Stories*.<sup>8</sup>  
 Through border-crossing life histories,  
 we faced abuse, divorce, cancer, AIDS,  
 their—and our—mortality,  
 at times unbearable reflexivity,  
 the “gift” lost  
 in the chaos of calamity.

And so we wrote.

We wrote of resilience born of fragility,  
 of stumbling toward imperfect mutuality.  
 These projects—these *life* projects—  
     moved through uncertainty  
                     and ineffability,  
                     toward epiphany,  
                     not a recovery

of whom we had been

    but of a rhetoric of possibility  
 of whom we might become.

Our narrative challenge: to co-author stories  
 that could be both told and lived.

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<sup>8</sup> Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Communication in Close Relationships  
 offered homeostasis in Batesonian cybernetics,<sup>9</sup>  
 but tension in Rawlinsonian dialectics.<sup>10</sup>  
 Only 15 weeks, but several *Pathways to Madness*.<sup>11</sup>  
 We were a wreck through *Denial of Death*,<sup>12</sup>  
 gloom oozing into our attitudes  
 when Becker's terrors of finitude  
 wrought too much verisimilitude.  
 Lest other illusions  
 cause confusion,  
 we saw the backward nature of *Betrayal*,  
 and *Scenes from a Marriage* we all hated.

For Writing Workshop,  
 we learned to pen an Art-ful social science.  
 With self-consciousness and interhuman presence,  
 we dizzily spun webs of significance,<sup>13</sup>  
 moving from silence to utterance  
 to transcendence and performance.

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<sup>9</sup> Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>10</sup> Rawlins, W.K. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

<sup>11</sup> Henry, J. (1973). *Pathways to madness*. New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>12</sup> Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York: The Free Press.

<sup>13</sup> Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

In Communication Theory,  
we gained many "Perspectives on Inquiry"<sup>14, 15</sup>  
and forayed into

the interdisciplinary phenomenology  
of Arthur ideology.

Students were infused  
with systems and critical theories,  
pragmatist ontologies,  
constructivist epistemologies,  
and interpretivist methodologies.

Enter intersubjectivity,  
the selectivity of memory,  
Shweder's "Divergent Rationalities,"<sup>16</sup>  
language's exuberences and deficiencies,<sup>17</sup>  
and *Roshomon's* multiple realities.

Said Doctor Bochner,  
"Choose your conversation partners carefully;  
some of them will drive you crazy."

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<sup>14</sup> Bochner, A.P. (1985). Perspectives on inquiry: Representation, conversation, and reflection. In M.L. Knapp & G.R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 27-58). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

<sup>15</sup> Bochner, A.P. (1994). Perspectives on inquiry II: Theories and stories. In M.L. Knapp & G.R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* (pp. 21-41). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>16</sup> Shweder, R.A. (1986). Divergent rationalities. In D.W. Fiske & R.A. Shweder (Eds.), *Metatheory in social science: Pluralisms and subjectivities* (pp. 163-196). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>17</sup> Becker, A.L. (1991). A short essay on languaging. In F. Steier (Ed.), *Research and reflexivity* (pp. 226-234). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

In search of proof,  
we went "Mucking Around Looking for Truth."<sup>18</sup>  
"But how do you know?" we asked King Arthur.  
"I'm not positivist," was his rejoinder,  
"but I promise to tell a truth,  
a local truth,  
an evocative narrative truth,  
so help me Coles.  
And let's forgo how I know.  
Ask instead  
the name and frame of this language game,  
the subtext of this context,  
the pattern of this symbolic interaction—  
in other words: why I talk this way."

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<sup>18</sup> Bochner, A.P., Ellis, C., & Tillmann-Healy, L. (1998). Mucking around looking for truth. In B.M. Montgomery & L.A. Baxter (Eds.), *Dialectical approaches to studying personal relationships* (pp. 41-62). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

To explore this lead, we took in his writing.

*Ethnographically Speaking*,<sup>19</sup>

he connected "Telling and Living."<sup>20</sup>

Art sparked

"Representation, Conversation and Reflection,"<sup>21</sup>

offered a vulnerable observation

of institutional depression,<sup>22</sup>

helped us sense and feel

"The Constraints of Choice in Abortion."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bochner, A.P., & Ellis, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

<sup>20</sup> Bochner, A.P., & Ellis, C. (1995). Telling and living: Narrative co-construction and the practices of interpersonal relationships. In W. Leeds-Hurwitz (Ed.), *Social approaches to communication* (pp. 201-213). New York: Guilford Publications.

<sup>21</sup> Bochner, A.P. (1985). Perspectives on inquiry: Representation, conversation, and reflection. In M.L. Knapp & G.R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 27-58). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

<sup>22</sup> Bochner, A.P. (1997). It's about time: Narrative and the divided self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3, 418-438.

<sup>23</sup> Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (1992). Telling and performing personal stories: The constraints of choice in abortion. In C. Ellis & M.J. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience* (pp. 79-101). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.



"Theories..."<sup>24</sup> and "Relationships as Stories,"<sup>25</sup>  
 "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity,"<sup>26</sup>  
 and *Composing Ethnography*<sup>27</sup>  
 contested the politics of neutrality,  
 offering instead the certainty of contingency,  
 and clarity of irony,  
 enclosing us warmly  
 in a therapeutic double bind of hope and empathy.

"The author is dead,"  
 Michel Foucault had said.

But Arthur lives—and tells.

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<sup>24</sup> Bochner, A.P. (1994). Perspectives on inquiry II: *Theories and stories*. In M.L. Knapp & G.R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication (2nd ed.)* (pp. 21-41). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>25</sup> Bochner, A.P., Ellis, C., & Tillmann-Healy, L.M. (2000). Relationships as stories: Accounts, storied lives, evocative narratives. In K. Dindia & S. Duck (Eds.), *Communication and personal relationships* (pp. 12-29). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed.)* (pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (Eds.). (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Arthur P. Bochner:  
science spinner,  
literature weaver,  
Kuhnian paradigm shifter,  
dialogic facilitator,  
co-parent and mentor,  
recovering empiricist,  
Rortian anti-foundationalist,  
master narrative deconstructionist,  
compassionate Art therapist—  
and this:

a fellow traveler  
through grief and strife,  
a builder of collective consciousness  
strong enough to endure full life.

Could any legacy  
be more worthy  
of Art history?