

Creating Scholartistry: Imagining the Arts-informed Thesis or Dissertation (Volume 4, Arts-informed Inquiry Series)

Edited by J. Gary Knowles, Sara Promislow and Ardra L. Cole

# Creating Scholartistry: Imagining the Arts-informed Thesis or Dissertation

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Volume 4  
Arts-informed Inquiry Series

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## 2. Sticky Knot Danish

by PETER GOUZOUASIS AND KAREN V. LEE

"But how does a person systematically investigate truth?" Rain rumbles on a gray, blustery day. "I don't know, Peter. But story writing is research. And it's arts-informed," says Karen. "But how does it relate to current music research? What's your purpose and problem?" Peter walks quickly on the sandy grass at the beach. "You know what I mean, KV?" He looks behind him. "Where are you?"

"Karen, what the hell happened?" She hangs onto Peter's arm. "You scared the heck out of me, KV." She staggers but stands. Peter wipes chunks of wet grass off her sleeve. He holds her left arm and they walk. "Let's go sit in my car." Dazed and drenched they walk toward Peter's car. "Are you okay? Are you ill?" Karen looks down. "Karen?"

"Maybe it was that cigarette, Peter." "Huh?" He opens the door as Karen looks over her clothes. Wet pants stick to her legs. Her coat is drenched. Strands of hair drip water. She pulls her hair over her right ear. "I'm soaked. There's wet grass all over me." "Never mind, just get in. It'll be okay. I'll turn on the heater." With the ignition, the car stereo begins. "Let's listen to some music. Maybe you'll feel better." Karen nods.

Wes Montgomery plays *West Coast Blues*. "This tune really gets me. Even before Wes moved to the "left coast" he must have seen the Pacific Northwest when he wrote it. You know, the rhythmic persistency of his solo is like the rhythms created by the falling rain." "I like it." "Want another cigarette?" Peter laughs and bumps Karen's arm. Karen takes the cigarette but frowns.

"I brought you here to think more freely. You know, getting away from the campus and distractions and academic guidelines helps me. But I didn't mean to get you bent out of shape. This arts-based stuff seems somewhat," Peter pauses, "subversive. Know what I mean? Research needs to be systematic." "What do you mean?" "That there must be some sense of rigour. A clearly defined purpose and problem. A certain structure — an introduction, a lit review, a methodology, tangible results, and conclusions, and all of those components linked through various substructures in the thesis. Structural corroboration, not multiplicative corroboration. I mean, how can you hand in a thesis that's merely a series of stories?"

"Why not? Arts-based inquiry involves different forms of representations. There are aesthetic qualities or elements that infuse the

writing. That's what Tom Barone (1995) talks about. It's a more pluralistic view. Knowledge is embodied in different ways. I'll have music, stories, poetry, photos, autobiography. Alternative forms of research. In the end, the character in my stories changes or grows from events that occur. There's a new vision of educational phenomena. I'll get you some articles on the topic."

Peter takes a quick drag on his cigarette. "Listen to the hypnotic chromaticism of the improvisation. Listen to these twists and turns. I'd swear he's plugged into the guitar." Rain dances on the windows. Peter continues, "You know, listen to the changes. Tonic, flat subtonic, tonic, two-five of seven, sliding down to a two-five of flat seven. Isn't that cool? A two-five of flat five that sneaks through three straight measures of two-fives that slide down chromatically. And that funky turnaround."

*Wes Montgomery plays in the background*

"Sounds just like how you slid when you fainted." He chuckles and nudges Karen. "I've got most of Wes's recordings on vinyl. One of my guitar teachers once told me that Wes Montgomery regretted not learning how to read music fluently and play guitar with a plectrum. Gets me thinking. His signature is that beautiful tone he got by plucking and strumming the strings with his thumb. Highly unorthodox but he took the craft to a whole other level. You know, I stopped performing seriously for a few years in the late eighties because I thought I could never play as well as Wes. The lineage, from Eddie Lang to Pat Martino, and what I thought I had to do was too much for me to handle. Too much history and too many guitar players in one town for a humble kid like me. But you know what I always say, if I didn't love music and the guitar so much, I wouldn't be sitting here right now."

Karen finally changes the subject. "I wanna talk more about my thesis. Art makes a different kind of truth claim than science. That's what Joe Norris (1988) says." "What truth claim? How can an inanimate thing claim anything?" "Arts-based research

promotes doubt about values and interests with knowledge. Our framework. Our worldview." Peter messes with the car stereo and loads another CD. "What worldviews? Come on. You know that paradigms and worldviews have been replaced by a broader perspective of research programs. Go back and read Stephen Pepper (1942), Larry Laudan (1977), and Willis Overton (1984), and all those other things we read in my class."

"This stuff has been marginalized. But can't you see? It just plays into the discourse about validating art. That art is a form of epistemology. That aesthetic experiences can bring transformations. Norman Denzin (1989) calls it epiphanies." "I'm still not convinced. How about what other people (e.g., Bowman, 1991) think about aesthetics in music education?" "Okay. You have a point." She takes a puff. "But, I've started this short story and crafted a metaphor to raise questions. I brought a few pages to show you. The first is a postcard." "A postcard?" "Yeah. The character in the story is a computer whiz who e-mails postcards to his girlfriend during his gig on a cruise. There are photos."

Peter turns up the music. "Here's a really cool section. Check it out. Listen to the octave solo in this tune. It's Sundown, another Wes Montgomery tune." He closes his eyes and winces at the virtuosity.

Karen uses both hands to rustle the wet papers. "Here, Peter." Slowly, he unfolds the sticky pages. "What's the name of this story?" "Unlikely Character". It's about a bass player in turmoil over teacher education. Giggling for a living versus teaching for financial security. His girlfriend supports him being a musician more than being a teacher. But he's lonely on the cruise ship and E-mails the University of British Columbia Teacher Education about applying." She points, "Take a look."

Karen continues, "That's the beginning and it goes on and on. In the end, the girlfriend accepts a nursing position out of town. They break up." "Oh."

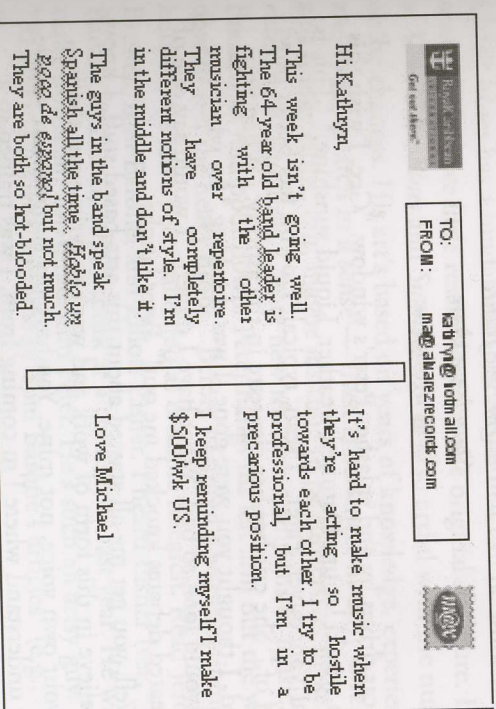


Figure 1. Karen V. Lee, 2004. *Royal Caribbean Cruise*. Postcard. 3 cm x 5 cm.

*Disrupting Traditions*

"But he's happy and moves on to teacher education. He has such a strong identity as a musician." She takes more papers out of her pocket.

"*Sundown's* a more unique 12 bar blues that has even more chromatic features than the first tune. Jazz composers and improvisers break rules all the time. It's much more fun playing outside of the chord changes than inside. I love that crunchiness of playing a blues from the flat five to the flat five of the scale." Karen shakes her head, "I want to start my thesis with a poem. I might read it at my defense."

*We begin new music*

*By a walk through the leaves*

*At the mercy of the trees*

*Imagine the future*

*Sounds we share*

*Time against us*

A car drives by and splashes Peter's window. "Gee, I wish this storm would let up. Damned weather. Liquid sunshine." "This is typical Vancouver, Peter." "Yeah, typical. Do you feel better now?" "Kind of." She crushes her cigarette in the ashtray. "When you fainted, I thought you were gone. I was thinking," he whispers, "this would look so bad. What have I done?" "I would say one of our heated debates knocked me out!" Peter laughs.

"Well, you get me all started about this arts-based stuff. I know you believe in this form of work and want to write your thesis with your own voice, not mine. You have my support but you've got to understand where I'm coming from. I was trained in a totally different way. My own doctoral supervisor was an American who mostly did quantitative research. University of Iowa, home of

*Sticky Knot Danish*

dustbowl behaviourism. It was enough work for me to get him to think about his research program from an organismic perspective. I read a lot of philosophy — Kant, Leibnitz, Hegel, Pepper, Kuhn, Laudan, Overton — but he never really embraced my ideas. And back then people in music doctoral programs were never encouraged to publish while they were in graduate school. My reviews of his studies and challenging questions forced him to articulate the weaknesses in his work. He felt he was too far into his career to change his theoretical stance."

"Wow." Karen pauses. "Well, what do you think?" "You're pushing it. But I feel a sense of responsibility toward your research. You are my doctoral student." "Isn't it like Wes? Breaking rules?" "Look, Karen, there are pressures that come with following and breaking traditions. I mean, the blues are tradition. And even a basic blues has a fundamental structure that can be worked and reworked to have little resemblance to the original structure. Look at *West Coast Blues* and *Sundown*. Wes is so artful with the nuance of the changes. His art's based on years of knowledge, experience, and even research in a sense — lived experiences in dirty dive bars and smoky clubs. But, maybe it's time to be subversive, make new rules, new structures. Create new research traditions in music." Buckets of rain pour down. Peter hangs his left arm out the window to feel the heavy drops. "Before I fainted I was explaining how stories have been validated as credible research. Read Jerome Bruner, Tom Barone, and Elliott Eisner. I heard Eisner (see, Barone & Eisner, 1997) speak at a conference last year. He was really powerful. You'd like him Peter. He's such an artsy guy." "Really?" "I'll give you some of Tom Barone's articles" (e.g., Barone, 1995).

"Alternative forms of representation. Arts-based research. That's the discourse. And you're a great storyteller! You're always telling

me stories. Over the years, you tell me story after story. That's your truth. I know you can write narrative. It is a whole other way of knowing. It's a form of ontology and epistemology."

"It just seems hippy-dippy right now." "But there are multiple ways of learning, Peter. Through art, music, poetry, story, and autobiography. Doesn't a poem tell you something? Last year, someone (Rasberry, 1998) wrote his thesis as a poetic transcription. He passed. And another (Dunlop, 2000) is writing a novel." "Sure, and I've heard mixed reports about those projects, Karen. You know my concerns. Postmodernism and relativism. There's so much contradiction in many postmodernist writings. Plus, this is all still so new that many people, especially in music education, are going to challenge what we're doing." "I'm ready!"

"What a rainstorm this has been," Peter grumbles. "When we left UBC it was barely raining." "I'll pass. Give it a few hours." Peter looks through the lifting fog. The musky aroma of low tide wafts through the cracked windows. "I remember when I wrote my master's thesis. I had all this great observational data that I wanted to include. And reflections on each day that I spent at day-care centers teaching music to little ones. Stories on each child's reactions to the activities. My committee told me that all of that stuff was incidental, not central, to my thesis so I ripped it out of my findings. I argued for months to include some of it in an appendix. And any ideas that were related to that data could only be placed in a discussion section, after my conclusions." "Things change, Peter. Arts-based inquiry is a new way of doing research. It's great progress." "Okay, I'm always willing to listen. I'll need a copy of this story." "I'm not finished yet." "When you're done."

"Tell me what you are looking for in research. I need your help." "Ah-huh. Well, when I first met Orin Keepnews, in 1985, he drove me from the radio station KJAZ in Alameda over to Fantasy Records in Berkeley. After some polite chit-chat he asked me what I wanted to talk about. So I asked him to tell me stories. His eyes lit up when I said 'So how did you discover Wes?' What

fantastic stories he told me that afternoon." "You'll have to share some."

Peter wipes the mist off his window. "You know, three years later he published a book, *The View From Within* (Keepnews, 1988), after I convinced him how important his stories were to our understanding of the evolution of the music. That's a seminal text in jazz history."

"The view from within. Reminds me about that sticky knot Danish you ate last summer." "What?" "Remember? When the Hong Kong students visited? We took them to the docks to walk around. We went to the Steveston Bakery. I watched you eat two of those sticky knot danishes. They were sticky and gooey with corn syrup and molasses dripping off them!" "You're too funny, KV."

"Those sticky knot danishes made you happy." Peter chuckles, "It's fun to unravel those suckers."

"So, I need my research to unravel the musicians' stories. To capture the essence." "The crux of the sticky knot? Truth about sticky knots? How about Lee's theory of the relativity of stickiness?" "Huh?" "Okay, E-mail me the rest of this story. I'm ready to get relatively sticky." Peter lights a cigarette and hands one to Karen. She lights it and slowly inhales. Clouds of smoke rise out of the cracked open windows. The rain has slowed to a fine but steady drizzle.

"What a rainstorm."  
"What a brainstorm."

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About the Authors

Peter Gouzouasis is Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of British Columbia (UBC) and coordinates the Fine Arts and New Media in Education (FAME)

cohort. He actively promotes arts-based educational research with the a/r/t/ography Research Group (UBC). Peter considers himself a lifelong learner of music and still pursues serious studies, studio work, and performance. He is former music director of WRTT / JAZZ 90 radio station, Philadelphia, and has written and produced television and radio commercials.

Karen V. Lee is Faculty Advisor and co-founder of the Teaching Initiative for Music Educators cohort (TIME) at the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in both classroom and online learning contexts. Her research interests include issues of musician identity, teacher identity, music education, teacher education, and arts-based approaches to qualitative research. She is a writer, musician, music educator, and researcher.

In her doctoral thesis, *Riffs of Change: Musicians Becoming Music Educators*, Karen explores the inherent shifts and extensions in musicians' identities as they transform into school teachers. We begin new music / by a walk through the leaves / at the mercy of the trees / imagine the future / sounds we share /time against us. Karen wrote eight short stories and an autobiographical account of her experience. The stories confront, challenge, and steer readers into critical places and unexpected spaces.