Article

Toddler Encounters as Aesthetic Interviews? Discussing an Arts-Based Data Gathering

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Abstract

This article introduces encounters between the researcher and toddlers, in which the interaction is performed and data primarily constructed through the arts, and the encounters seen as *aesthetic interviews*. The aim of the article is to exemplify, explore, and discuss such an arts-based data gathering, and to elicit how understanding this as interviews may put forward other nuances of such a methodology. Although the method has obvious resemblances with observation methods, the energy and intervention on behalf of the researcher is most similar to the qualitative interview, keeping the relational qualities from the interview at the forefront. Exemplified by a fieldwork in a Norwegian day-care center and inspired by interview theories, early childhood research, arts-based research, and more, the article questions the dominance of the verbal language in interviews, and discusses the core of the interview as a relational interchange of views, dialogue, interaction, and as aesthetic habits of mind.

Keywords

Aesthetic interview, arts-based research, data gathering, music education research, early childhood research

Introduction

> Entering the interview room with Salomon (1.5 years old), we approached the djembe in the middle of the room. I performed my pre-planned "question," a short drum rhythm, expecting Salomon to take this as an invitation for him to "answer" with similar sounds on the African drum. It did not happen. He replied by walking around it, around and around, visually and tactilely investigating this instrument, which he was probably seeing for the first time in his life. The wooden trunk, the goatskin and the rope that kept the skin fastened to the trunk were all sensitively investigated, thus giving the interviewer a new understanding about one-year-olds' potential learning, concentration, motivation and aesthetic experiences. Special interest was given to the visual and tactile experience of the rope pattern around the trunk and the fur left on the edges of the drum skin. Actually, the only sound that caught his interest appeared when he pushed on the stiff edge of the skin. I imitated the same sound, and we played this sound back and forth for a while. Not until five minutes into the interview did he climb onto my lap and start drumming. (Fieldwork, 2014)

What would be the best term to describe the encounter between the researcher, the toddler and the djembe in the narrative presented above? Despite "interview room" and "question," many qualitative research discourses probably see this as some type of participant observation. However, the focus in this article is not to decide on the best term, but to explore how one particular term—the interview—may inspire, put forward, and make explicit other nuances of such a research context and methodology, using narratives from conducted aesthetic interviews to illustrate the discussion. If we—studying children in context (Graue & Walsh, 1998)—agree on any learning or research situation to be contextual, the perspective or "context in the researcher's mind" will also matter, thereby influencing the development of both the knowledge and methodology. What happens, then, to the researcher's thinking and reflection if (in this case) she approaches and reflects upon this encounter as an interviewer and the method as a research interview? In my opinion, using the research interview as the methodological perspective will create a distinctive theoretical and embodied "perspective-context."

Obviously, arts-based media and aesthetic experiences are also central in this approach. Therefore, the method is called *the aesthetic interview.* It can be described as an encounter between human beings and arts-based media for the purpose of research, keeping the relational qualities from the interview at the forefront. Arts-based communication has the main role, but verbal communication also appears. Hence, it is an arts-based encounter between interviewer and interviewee, in which interaction is performed and data primarily constructed through the arts. Although the method has an obvious resemblance with certain types of participant observation, I claim

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that the energy and intervention on behalf of the researcher is closer to the qualitative interview, and inspired by principles from the research interview. Thus, the aim of this article is to exemplify, explore, and discuss such an arts-based (Barone & Eisner, 2012) and aesthetically based (Bresler, 2006) data collection or gathering (Graue & Walsh, 1998), seen as a type of research interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003b; Kvale, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

"Why Not Talk With Them?"

Interview knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction between the participants of the interview, and actively created through questions and answers (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003b; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is neither objective nor subjective, but intersubjective and relational, hence eliciting the connection and action between the participants as well as the communication. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) put it, "The knowledge produced in a research interview is constituted by the interaction itself" (p. 32).

Still, introducing the qualitative research interview, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) ask, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?" (p. xvii). Preparing for fieldwork in a Norwegian day-care institution, verbally interviewing toddlers was not an option, although as parents we talk with our children from the day they are born. The words may not be the most important part of our expressions, but children understand, share meaning, or answer through their voice, pulse, rhythm, gestures, movement, and so on, in what can best be termed their communicative musicality (Malloch, 1999; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). This ability is biologically crucial (Dissanayake, 2001), and the lack of this sharing of emotional and relational states could severely damage children's development (Stern, 1985/2000). Consequently, a dialogical approach could be as relevant for investigating the lives of 1- and 2-year-olds as for everyone else. But is it adequate to use the interview term? "Interviews with children allow them to give voice to their own experiences and understandings" Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 145) claim. In the case of toddlers, we need to allow them to also "give body and movement" to their own experiences.

Arts-Based or Aesthetical

As is regularly the case in Scandinavian educational contexts, I use the term aesthetic in relation to an intensified perception through the senses (Paulsen, 1994), as well as creative expressions formed in different art media. Furthermore, aesthetic experience is often seen as being equivalent to art experience, although it may also include experience in nature. The term *arts-based* is defined in line with Eisner and his colleagues as qualitative research that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, or representational forms from the arts. Arts-based research "uses the arts as a foundation for creating expressive forms that enlighten" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 9), thereby exploring the "alternative researching possibilities that fuse the creative and imaginative possibilities of the arts with social science research" (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. xi). For this reason, in this article the term *arts* is not only limited to fine art or professional artists, but it can also include children's and amateur's aesthetic expressions in various arts media.

Translating the concepts of aesthetic and art from Norwegian to English, a difference in the ways the two languages use the concepts is revealed. Thus, what was naturally described as an aesthetic ("estetisk" in Norwegian) interview in my mother tongue might communicate better as an arts-based interview in English. I stay with the term aesthetic, partly because it is already presented as such (Vist, 2015a, 2016), and partly because the qualities of the aesthetic experience and the way we aesthetically think, feel, and perceive—the aesthetic habits of mind (Bresler, 2006)—are important in this method. The same habits or qualities (i.e., empathy, imagination, embodiment, and so on, see discussion below) are put at the forefront in sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009) and a/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008). They are also essential in the Scandinavian interview perspectives of Fog (2001), Kvale (2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), Eide and Winger (2003), and Lie and Ski (1995), all of them important in the theoretical foundation of this article.

Related Research

A database search of the terms "arts-based interview" and "aesthetic interview" did not yield any results. However, searching "multimedia interview" yielded many hits, although mostly related to the use of video, computers, and other multimedia in *verbal* interviewing. The multimodal research of Kress (2009; Kress & Selander, 2012) is more relevantly defining modes as "a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning" (Kress, 2009, p. 79), but unfortunately he also sees aesthetic modes as "ornamentation." More influential in this article is sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009), in which the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing, and practice are integrated into the lives of all the participants in research. Pink conceptualizes the interview as a multisensory event, which also uses gesture, music, images, and so on. The emphasis on the arts is rather weak, but aesthetic habits of mind are clearly apparent, in particular, aspects of embodiment, imagination, and what she describes as multisensory research. She also includes several references to artistic practices, claiming that "sensory ethnography practice might develop in relation to explorations in art" (Pink, 2009, p. 21), and that "techniques

from arts practice might secure means of communicating academically framed representations of the sensory embodied experiences" (Pink, 2009, p. 24).

In arts-based traditions, verbal interviews are sometimes analyzed and disseminated through the arts (e.g., Barone & Eisner, 2012; Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008). In Bagnoli (2009) and Danby, Ewing, and Thorpe (2011), arts-based interview tools are also given a prominent role in the data gathering, but it is still the verbal language that is considered the primary data. Research in early childhood education and care (ECEC) also reveal a frequent use of artifacts (arts-based and not) in verbal interviews with older children (e.g., Danby et al., 2011; Eide & Winger, 2003; Schoultz, Saljo, & Wyndhamn, 2001), and of course, in research within fields such as early childhood music education, music and related arts-based tools, and expressions are central. However, in reading Young's (2016) updated overview of young early childhood music education research, the term interview is not mentioned.

More influential in developing the aesthetic interview were the early childhood researchers Lie and Ski (1995). In their *nonverbal interview*, they investigated aesthetic being in 5- to 6-year-olds. However, the term nonverbal is misleading, the guiding principle being that through words (!), sounds, song, movements, and (inter)actions, the children often manage to express their meanings more holistically. In her more recent bead collage, Kay (2013) uses beads when inviting her participants "to reflect, communicate and construct their experiences through the manipulation of beads and found objects" (Kay, 2013, p. 1). Although her participants afford verbal data through their verbal reflections, this arts-based method is, by Kay, said to expand the interview beyond words alone and to include art making. Her method is clearly artistically crafted and aesthetically based (Bresler, 2006); it might be seen as a kind of aesthetic interview, although the method engages the participants in a reflective meaning-making that "translate experience into language" (Bresler, 2006, p. 14).

Hence, art(s/ifacts) is common in interview settings, but in my opinion, there is still need for a further theoretical and empirical development of arts-based interview forms, especially when it comes to developing a nonverbal or aesthetical language and "grammar" as the main form of reflection and communication in the data gathering. Furthermore, there still might be a general tendency to under-communicate artistic or arts-based aspects of research—maybe because the arts-based processes were not previously considered important for knowledge production (Vist, 2015b) or acceptable as research (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008).

A Norwegian Fieldwork

The aesthetic interview methodology was explored and developed as part of a fieldwork within the larger research project: "Searching for qualities: relations, play, aesthetics, learning" (2012-2017). This project focuses on children under the age of 3 in Norwegian day-care institutions,[1] and is funded by the Norwegian Research Council. Besides investigating the aesthetic interview as a data gathering method, as in this theoretical article, the intention of this particular fieldwork was to develop knowledge related to toddlers' (1- and 2-year-olds) aesthetic learning and emotion knowledge.[2]

Conducting Aesthetic Interviews

The fieldwork included a 2-week preparatory period of participant observation and log writing, followed by the implementation of approximately 40 aesthetic interviews (individual or small groups of two to five children). Twelve 1- and 2-year-olds (three of them celebrated their third birthday during my stay) were interviewed for 1 min to 33 min (an average of 14 min). All the interviews were conducted by me as the interviewer, in a separate room in the children's kindergarten, and were video-recorded by a coresearcher. The door to the room was closed, but never locked, and the number of interviews was defined in accordance with when a child entered or left the room—whether this took place through the child's own initiative or as a regular invitation from me to start/end an interview. Music became the most prominent media in use, as both adults involved were educated in music. However, drama, dance, poetry, and even visual arts elements also appear in the interviews.

The interviews were performed as rather semistructured, which Eide and Winger (2003) suggest is best for small children, and which Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) say goes with little preplanned structure. Nonetheless, less structured is not the same as less prepared. In preparing regular, semi-structured verbal interviews (Vist, 2009), I designed an interview guide, carefully reflecting around the content, the order, and the form of the questions. However, I did not practice the nuances of how to express the words and how to behave bodily, in the meticulous manner that an actor does before a theater performance. Nor did I find this discussed in the aforementioned interview literature. By contrast, with the aesthetic interview I planned to prepare in this way in advance. I wanted to see every "interview question" as "micro art productions," and in the manner of a musician or actor carefully practicing details of the aesthetic expressions and meanings. I also wanted to investigate and practice the musical material's potential for improvisations (improvisation being important independent of interview style and communication tools, see Eide & Winger, 2003; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Hernes, Os, & Selmer-Olsen, 2010; Hovik, 2014).

Due to the kindergarten's request, the fieldwork was conducted several months before the original plan. Hence, the preparation of the interviews became more similar to

regular, verbal interviews. Probably, the interview situation also became more common in terms of aesthetical activity and everyday life in day-care centers. When the artistic preparation diminishes, the children's aesthetic experiences and the "interview dialogues" may differ. However, this must be investigated when both types of aesthetic interviews are conducted.

As seen in the narrative with Salomon (see introduction above), an interview question can be an improvised aesthetic expression, as well as a precomposed one. Furthermore, the interview question can be an action/expression as well as an artifact. Danby et al. (2011) point to "the value of the artifact as a resource for eliciting elaborated conversation" (Danby et al., 2011, p. 82) in child interviews. Salomon's encounter with the djembe also illustrates this: The short rhythm I played was the defined question. Here, the interviewer's action is the question. As it turned out, and from the way Salomon responded, the appearance of the instrument—as an artifact—could also be seen as a question, thus affording him the ability to investigate and express himself in a way that revealed technical, aesthetic, and emotional knowledge. Although not seen as questions, using aesthetic artifacts in communication with children is as common as using actions (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Pink, 2009).

From the interviews conducted, it is obvious that in regular Norwegian day-care institutions, there are many toys that may easily distract the children's concentration. I hid almost everything in the interview room, but when tools that were part of several "interview questions" were exposed simultaneously, the children's presence and concentration span was often shortened or split. It was as if several verbal interview questions were asked at the same time. The same was often the case when three to four children were interviewed together, although seldom when there were only two. As Lie and Ski (1995) describe, interviewing two children at the same time gives the children an opportunity to interact. In my case, this clearly enabled intersubjective parts of emotion and aesthetic learning to occur.

"The Child's Perspective"

I went back in my own memory to choose the interview narratives illustrating this text; hence, the embodied and sensory memories of the fieldwork inform these elements of analysis (Pink, 2009). After reobserving some of the videos, I transcribed them, using a narrative form and the first person point of view (Burroway, Stuckey-French, & Stuckey-French, 2015), with the interviewer (me) as the first person.

When watching these videos, it became clear that I often took much space—physically—in the rather narrow interview room. Making the interviewer (still me) the first person perspective of the narratives strengthened this unfortunate tendency, thereby revealing that such a data gathering method could end up very far from taking the child's perspective (Eide & Winger, 2003). Nevertheless, due to the methodological aim of this article, the narratives still keep the researcher in the first person perspective. In articles presenting the findings related to emotion knowledge and so on, the same narratives will be rewritten with perspectives closer to the child's. Yet, we have to bear in mind that the child's perspective will always be the researcher's imagined child's perspective.

Open arts-based questions can provide a variety of answers. In a pilot study, I laid down on the floor with my legs in the air, singing a children's song while interacting with one toddler (on the top of my legs, later in the song sliding down into my arms, getting a big hug). This made other toddlers curious, therefore tempting them to approach the interviewer and reveal interesting social competences in forming a perfect queue, while patiently waiting for their turn in the interviewer's lap.

In the main study, I was hoping to get something similar on record, but in interviewing Christopher, the song seemed of little interest, revealing more than anything that the interviewer (me) was not attuned to the child in front of her:

> Christopher (2.0) was sitting on the "kitchen stove" toy. I presented a new children's song for him while playing with his feet. Before the end of the short melody, Christopher starts repeating a word as if to make my singing stop. I insisted on finishing the song (the song lasting a total of 15 sec.), responding to him afterwards, and then repeating the song again. This time, he interrupts the song more clearly with "what's that," pointing to the toy faucet. After responding, I start singing again—with different kinds of movements, partly adjusted to Christopher's actions. Christopher seems to experience it as partly annoying, partly like inevitable background music, inhibiting him from having my full attention. Around this moment I realize what I am about to do, but partly feeling "locked into the situation," and partly seeing the methodological value of it, I continue. With the pilot in mind, I grab a toy animal, singing the song as in the pilot, with the animal in my lap. Afterwards, I interpret Christopher wanting to invite himself into my lap. I was probably wrong. The last (and seventh!) time I sing the song, he is in my lap, clearly not comfortable, and afterwards asking for a glass of water. We leave the room together. (Fieldwork, 2014)

This narrative clearly describes what may take place if the interviewer's intentions and expectations are too explicit and narrow, and the focus on the interviewee's perspective and answer is not given a sufficient amount of attention. In verbal interviews, I have never repeated the same questions seven times! The "rules" of the aesthetic interview may differ, but clearly need to be developed and discussed on the same reflective level as in the verbal interview. This is also an ethical issue: Is it acceptable to continue (if only for a minute) when the instrumentality of the interview becomes this clear?

Child research theories advocate that children should be met by appreciative and caring adults, who are able to take the aforementioned child's perspective (Eide & Winger, 2003; Lie & Ski, 1995). Although I have already suggested we be careful with such terms, keeping in mind that we will never be able to see the world through children's eyes (Graue & Walsh, 1998), this should not stop us from trying. As will be discussed further below, empathy is an important concept in both arts-based and qualitative interview theories. Despite the obvious empathic shortcomings in the narrative above, I want the interviewer's aim toward an empathic approach to be important in the aesthetic interview as well, thus aiming toward the child's perspective. As illustrated above, the aesthetic interview also needs to be aware of approaches that ignore putting the children at the forefront.

Eide and Winger (2003) also write about giving the children the space and tranquility to express their experiences, views, reactions, and feelings. Equally, Lie and Ski (1995) described an open, listening, and dialogical attitude, and what they called musical empathy. With Salomon, I managed to give him the space and tranquility that he seemed to want. This could be seen as a "language code" (Eide & Winger, 2003, p. 45) he was comfortable with, and I was rewarded with Salomon "responding" that the drum was not only mediating sound, but it was also an artifact affording him an aesthetic experience involving visual, tactical and kinesthetical elements. In other words, I was rewarded with an answer to my interview question that I did not foresee.

What is the Core of an Interview?

The aim of this article was to exemplify, explore, and discuss the aforementioned methodology—as an (aesthetic) interview. Hence, we need to explore and discuss *what is the core of an interview*. I have chosen Kvale's (2002, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) approach to the qualitative interview as a reflective tool in the discussion—together with other phenomenologically based Scandinavian interview theories (Eide & Winger, 2003; Fog, 2001; Lie & Ski, 1995), some slightly more postmodern approaches to interviewing (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003b; Pink, 2009) and the early childhood theories of Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) and Stern (1985/2000).

Interview as Relational Inter-Change of Views

Interviews are commonly thought of as *verbal* conversations or dialogues. Nonetheless, already in the term inter*view*, one can trace a metaphor pointing to other senses and media. Is it the verbal language that defines the research interview—or could it be something else? What if it is the *interchange* of *views*, the sharing or creating of a mutual perspective on a topic, which is the core of an interview? Although discussing the verbal interview, Kvale and Brinkmann can be read in this direction:

> The research interview is [. . .] an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee. An interview is literally an inter-view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2)

If the core of the interview is an inter-change of views between persons with mutual interests, is it so important whether we inter-change verbally or in other ways? The Salomon narrative definitely reveals an interchange of views regarding the djembe. With the aim being to obtain new knowledge about toddlers, Salomon's view might take up the most space, but definitely interchanging with mine. In the Christopher narrative, there are obviously two different views, but they are not really inter*changing*. If the interchange of views define the quality of an interview, it becomes even clearer how the interview with Christopher fails—as such.

"An emphasis on 'talk' in discussions of what interviewing involves [. . .] limits the ways interviews can be understood," Pink claims (2009, p. 82). Thinking about the conversation between caregiver and infant, that is also an inter-change of views. The last decades of infant psychology (e.g., Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Papoušek & Papoušek, 1981; Trevarthen & Hubley, 1978) has shown us that even in their first year, children are communicating and relating with others without using verbal language.

While discussing the communication between the parents and their babies, Stern (1985/2000) uses the terms *vitality affects* and *affect attunement* to describe what occurs when the parents understand the emotional and relational expressions of their child and respond or attune to it, not by copying it, but by empathically mirroring it in another way. They are confirming the child's vitality affects and view as well as their own love, thereby encouraging the child to further expressions and revealing an emotional and mutual interest. This attunement is definitely a relative to Kvale and Brinkmann's mutual interest, and in particular when toddlers are involved. It is also related to what was previously described as Malloch and Trevarthen's (2009) communicative musicality. Such communication is not excluding verbal media, although facial expressions, body movement, and the voice are more important (and for the infant more understandable). Due to the child's need for emotional attachment and the competence it has in intersubjectivity—and in experiencing meaning in emotional interaction, patterns, and sounds—this dialogue is, according to Malloch and Trevarthen, understandable for both parts. In music therapy, this is well documented (Holck, 2002; Robarts, 2009; Trolldalen, 1997), and also used with older human beings, including mentally disabled and dementia

patients, without the ability to use verbal language (e.g., Bonde, 2014; Ridder, 2003).

Robarts claims that

> . . . music's communicative properties afford an involuntary sympathetic field of relatedness, or emotional resonance. Musical expression connects individual experiences at a deep implicit level, and it can give expressive form to the emotions of children who are, by all other means, hard to reach. (Robarts, 2009, p. 378)

If we recognize that some arts-based media have special affordances when it comes to representing and communicating emotions (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; Stern, 2010), its relevance in methods such as the aesthetic interview becomes important for further investigation. However, if the qualities of arts-based tools and the level of intervention possible in an interview create a special energy, it might also function as a pitfall (e.g., in relation to empathy and dialogue), even invading the child. This will be further discussed below.

Interview as Relational Dialogue

An interview is often described as a dialogue, a conversational exchange between the participants in the interview (Fog, 2001; Kvale, 2002). Here, the term *relational* elicits a concern about how the persons connect as well as communicate, in accordance with the aforementioned early childhood theories. From the discussion above, the relational dialogue could also be seen as the core of the interview method. In that case, in the conducted aesthetic interview with Salomon, this dialogue was primarily arts-based and embodied. In music, a dialogical approach is well known (e.g., Garred, 2006), with the term *call and response* often used to describe such sounding phrase patterns of questions and answers. In the aesthetic interview dialogue, meaning is created in ways other than words, and knowledge is developed and shared—both verbally and nonverbally. Children's spontaneous singing is frequently motivated to communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions (Bannan & Woodward, 2009). They socialize, vent emotions, and "think aloud through music (Campbell, 1998, p. 4); they even learn about themselves and about their relatedness to the world (Custodero, 2009). If the classical definition of *text* is long past, and now includes discourse and even action (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), we need to widen the definition of *dialogue* in the same way.

Discussing postmodern sensibilities, Fontana (2003) claims that with new forms of communication being used, the roles and boundaries between interviewer and interviewee have become blurred. Thus, an interview can be seen as an encounter—aesthetic in this matter, and "[t]he active subject behind the interviewer becomes a necessary, practical counterpart to the active subject behind the respondent" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003a, p. 33). In the fieldwork, with children after a while seeing me as an (almost) regular adult in the kindergarten, the interviewer role became blurred with the regular teacher role. Furthermore, the many initiatives from the children made it hard to tell who were "asking/calling" and "answering/responding."

Kvale (2006) discusses common conceptions of interviews as dialogues, pointing to the importance of recognizing power dynamics in such communication: "Referring to the interview as dialogue is misleading, although a common practice," he claims (Kvale, 2006, p. 483), and continues,

> In contrast to the mutuality of dialogue, in an interview one part seeks understanding and the other part serves as a means for the interviewer's knowledge interest. The term interview dialogue is therefore a misnomer. It gives an illusion of mutual interests in a conversation, which in actuality takes place for the purpose of just the one part—the interviewer.

This is an important perspective to consider whether one is conducting verbal or aesthetic interviews, but the quote also reveals that a narrow perspective, one way or the other, might be just as dangerous. To put it in the existing toddler context: The toddler's understanding of the encounter as an interview is nonexistent or too weak to clearly differ from other encounters with adult caregivers in the kindergarten. The children are used to adults "being in power," but also "being there for them," hence potentially turning the instrumentality the other way around or revealing that completely "mutual interests" may not exist very often. This possibility may also make it easier to see that neither children, nor adults, manage to be only "means." As human beings, we are all seeking relationships (Gergen, 2011); power being one aspect, together with love, care, and more.

Interview as "Aesthetic Habits of Mind"?

Liora Bresler (2006) claims that "aesthetics is at the heart of both artistic experience and qualitative research," and that "artistic processes, in particular, the space surrounding art experiences, can illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research" (Bresler, 2006, p. 52). In Bresler's view, the process of the perceptual contemplation of an object is central to aesthetic experiences as well as the conduct of qualitative research. Although there has definitely been interview research conducted that do *not* support aesthetic habits of mind, I suggest that elements such as empathic understanding, imagination, sensitivity, and embodiment, even improvisation and creativity, can also be seen as core aspects of qualitative interviewing. For example, Denzin (2003) wants "to cultivate a method of patient listening, a reflexive method of looking, hearing and asking that is dialogic and respectful" (p. 153), while Pink sees interviews as social,

sensorial, and emotive encounters, and "seek[s] routes through which to develop experience-based empathic understandings"(Pink, 2009, p. 65).

Let us take a closer look at empathy: Introduced to the English language as the translation of "Einfühlung," it described our ability to "feel into" works of art and nature (Stueber, 2014). Today, empathy is primarily used as a way to sympathize and "feel into" another human being. Fog (2001) writes that the interactive interviewing context requires an interviewer who listens empathically, identifies with participants and shows respect for a participant's emotionality. Sensitivity toward layers of meaning, as well as imagination while recalling the interview situation during analysis, is essential. If the interviewer does not fully give of himself or herself while entering into the encounter, he or she will not manage to collect the data needed, enriched by the openness, honesty, and confidence that a mutual sharing and participation provide (Fog, 2001).

Nevertheless, this confidence comes with a warning described as a Trojan horse (Fog, 2001). As mentioned above, the openness and confidence in the interview can be unilateral, and conversation in the interview can "seduce" the interviewee to talk more openly about sensitive topics than what he or she really wants to. According to Barone and Eisner (2012), the arts create forms that are evocative and compelling, thereby also being energetic and motivating in a way that can reveal other layers of knowledge, which makes humans exceed thresholds that otherwise seem too high. If we acknowledge the evocative and compelling qualities of art and arts-based research methods, this Trojan horse may come with even more strength in the aesthetic interview, hence bringing the interviewer even further behind the interviewee's "defense."

On the other hand, sometimes we need such evocativeness to help us to get further. The first time Niels (2.3 years) and I met, he expressed that even a glance from me was invading to him, violating his private space, and he continued to keep this clear need for distance the next couple of weeks during my participant observation in his kindergarten. Then

> [. . .] the camerawoman and I closed the door to one of the playrooms, starting the aesthetic interviews. The very first day, after standing outside the door for a while and listening to the sound of the first two interviews (the other adults told me), Niels rushed into the room together with a friend, talking with me about the djembe in the middle of the room, clearly wanting to play. Any need of distance had disappeared; we were playing and dancing together for 30 minutes. At one point, he even repeatedly put a rhythm egg under his sweater, inviting me to take it out, over and over again. [. . .] Later the same day in the middle of another interview, he sneaked in again, running directly towards me and jumped into my lap. (Fieldwork, 2014) (see Vist, 2016 for the full narrative)

Of course, we cannot know for sure, but the evocative and compelling affordances of—in this case—the djembe, seemed to function as a torch, enlightening the motivation for participation and interaction, inviting Niels into the interview. It also helped him exceed the relational thresholds that in 2 weeks had been too high to allow him any contact with "the new adult" in his kindergarten.

These evocative and compelling qualities also influence the researchers. Similar to Stern (1985/2000) and Barone and Eisner (2012), Bresler (2013) writes that, "[i]t is because of the vitality of the arts and the amplification of their dynamic features that the arts help us pay attention" (p. 9). Art encounters can provide an experience of heightened observation analogous to the qualitative research experience, she claims, thus suggesting that researchers train their empathy and heightened sensitivity through art experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) write about careful listening and having an ear for the interviewee's "linguistic style" (p. 166). Careful listening can be translated into active being, which reveals the importance of embodied resonance—paying attention/listening with our eyes and bodies (Margolin, 2013). As a result, another important habit of mind is the focus on embodiment, although traditionally this part of the interview dialogue rarely survives the transcription phase. When interviewing 1- to 2-year-olds, embodied conversation and body language become crucial, and the arguments for using the aesthetic interview in early childhood research could also be grounded in theories of embodiment (e.g., Johnson, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002).

Inter-View as Inter-Action?

Why do we not use the term inter-talk or inter-speech? The term *inter-view* may reveal our vision as one culture's dominant sense or genuine voice (Kress, 2009), but if we really want to get to know 1- to 2-year-olds as individual subjects in our research, we must provide the means to really hear *their* genuine voices (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003a).

Phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) and Løkken (2000b) understand the mind as being rooted in the body and speech as a genuine gesture. "[K]nowing that toddler's way of communicating and playing are based on expressive, bodily actions, Merleau-Ponty's view of man may serve to enhance an in-depth understanding of the meaning of such actions," Løkken (2000b, p. 14) writes. Observing toddlers, Løkken (2000b) found that toddlers' ways of communicating are based on expressive, bodily actions, as is also evident in the Salomon narrative. Løkken sees toddlers' appearance as "incarnated minds," and claims that "[e]xpressive gestures are a first language" (p. 17), and hence that "an analysis of gestural communication and analysis of verbal communication may be viewed as likeworthy" (Løkken, 2009b, p. 18).

Is the aesthetic inter-view better described as aesthetic inter-action?[3] Even Kvale and Brinkman claimed above that knowledge was constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee. I said that if you want to get closer to an understanding of toddlers, you will probably find yourself on the floor, *inter-acting* with them, using your body more than your words when you "talk," thus confirming Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) claim of the body as speech:

> Monday morning, seven o'clock. Waiting for the camerawoman to find the day-care center, I put up the camera and the djembe in front of it, cleaning the room for most other disturbing toys/"research questions." The twins Tina and Tona (3.0) are anxious to join me. I decide to put on the camera and see what happens. "Wanna go in," Tina claims, and we re-enter the room. Tina makes a first beat on the djembe and I respond with the same kind of beat, with everyone laughing. After one second of silence, I play on the drum again. "Tona's turn," Tina claims, and Tona makes the same single beat. I play two beats and Tina responds immediately with three. I respond again with three beats, and Tina's body responded with another three beats, while at the same time turning her head, clearly listening to Tona's verbal expression. (Fieldwork, 2014)

This narrative describes an interchange of (inter-)actions. It seems like Tina, when playing one or "some" beats, is not counting but intuitively and embodied knowing what to play. Such imitations are also common in peer interaction (Halland & Vist, 2016; Løkken, 2000a), and might be interpreted as attunement (Stern, 1985/2000, 2010), both affective and musical.

Final Remarks

In this article, I have introduced the concept of *the* aesthetic *interview*, an arts-based encounter between interviewer and interviewee(s), in which interaction is performed and data primarily constructed through the arts. Although the aesthetic interview has an obvious resemblance with observation methods, the energy and intervention on behalf of the researcher is most similar to the qualitative interview. The aim of the article was neither to justify the interview term as the best, nor to present empirical results on topics such as emotion knowledge and aesthetic learning, but to exemplify, explore, and discuss the previously mentioned data gathering methodology—as an (aesthetic) interview, thus eliciting different nuances of the methodology.

. . . on the Role of the Verbal Language

One topic of the discussion was the role of the verbal medium in interviews. If we agree on the interchange of views as one of the core aspects of the interview, and the relational dialogue, inter-action and habits of mind like empathy and embodiment as other core aspects, I question whether verbal language needs to be defined as the research interview's dominant communication form. If knowledge and understanding can be tacit (Polanyi, 1983) and concepts embodied (Johnson, 1990), then the reflections and thoughts in which we use these embodied concepts may also be embodied, nonverbal, and arts-based (Vist, 2009).

Investigating the lives of toddlers, one easily finds oneself inter-acting with the children, and using body more than words. With the postmodern definition of a research "text" including discourse and action, it is time to widen the definition of dialogue and interview as well, including interaction and arts-based communication. The arts-based media seem to afford other ways of inviting interviewees *into* the interview (Vist, 2016), and different possibilities for the interaction and interchange of views, relation, and dialogue *within* the interview (as in the examples above).

. . .on Participant Observation

Pink (2009) claims that "an understanding of research as *participation* is fundamental" (p. 82). When conducting traditional, verbal interviews (Vist, 2009), I was a *participant* during the interview. Afterward, putting on the ear bells and listening to the audio recordings, I was reexperiencing—or *observing*—the interviews, not only the sounds of them, but also the embodied and visual experiences still left in my imagination. Seen this way, any interview, whether verbal or aesthetic, may be understood as a type of participant observation.

The aesthetic interview lacks the observation method's natural context due to the interviewer's interventions, in addition to lacking the preciseness of the interviewee's thoughts given through words. However, the method benefits from the interviewer's ability to direct the situation toward what the inquiry is supposed to be about, and also benefits from the variety of expressions made possible through various senses and media. Furthermore, it benefits from affording aspects of reality other than verbal ones, and from the arts-based media's aforementioned evocative, holistic, and meaning-condensing qualities.

Pulling it rather far, one could claim that the "the ironic contrast between 'what people do' and 'what people say they do'" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003, p. 120) in the aesthetic interview has been exceeded, and that the method ensures the validity or quality of observation in this matter, revealing "what people do," while at the same time ensuring the relational and emotional qualities of the interview in its dialogical interaction.

. . . on Strengthening the Toddlers' Voice

Eide and Winger (2003) pull a line from the "expert child" view in interviews to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and children's participation in today's society. One could claim that neglecting the communication in aesthetic and arts-based languages can weaken the toddler's voice in the world, even

their identity and self-esteem (Stern, 1985/2000), as was illustrated with Niels' narrative. Different media afford different (ways of) expression and—for the researchers—different aspects and possibilities for knowledge.

Children communicate their experiences differently than adults (Eide & Winger, 2003). As we saw with Salomon, they have another position, and make other experiences, interpretations, and conceptions about what takes place. Thus, the child interviewee may present us with new ideas and new ways to "view" and think—through aesthetic media. In music, the youngest can reveal more musical and aesthetic competency than many adults, as in their more uninhibited bodily response to the music, their creativity and improvisational skills, their joy and confidence, and even in their higher sensitivity to sounds (Trehub, 2006; Vist, 2014). To aim toward the child's perspective could (also) be to meet the children in these nonverbal contexts, in which *they* have flow and expertise—and become our guides (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

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Notes

1. Most preschool day-care institutions in Norway are called "barnehage" (kindergarten), and include children from 0 to 6 years of age. The children start school in August the year they celebrate their sixth birthday. As (payed) parental leave in Norway lasts for approximately 12 months, there are few infants attending day-care until they are close to their first birthday.
2. Emotion knowledge can be briefly explained as emotional and social competence, see Vist (2009, 2011).
3. The hyphen is only to emphasize the action in the relationship and must not be confused with Barad's (2003) intra-action, although her understanding of action (or the ability of action) as emerging from *within* the relationship could have been a relevant expansion of the inter-view term.

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