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ARTS-INFORMED RESEARCH

◆ Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles

BEGINNINGS

Contemporary American artist Martha Rosler (cited in Gever, 1981) states, “[If you want to] bring conscious, concrete knowledge to your work . . . you had better locate yourself pretty concretely in it” (p. 11). We are life history researchers with deep roots in meaning making systems that honor the many and diverse ways of knowing—personal, narrative, embodied, artistic, aesthetic—that stand outside sanctioned intellectual frameworks. To begin this chapter we surface these roots.

ARDRA

As the youngest of three children and an only and much-wanted daughter, I grew up in the coddled environment of adults. Around kitchen tables, with my mother and her friends, I learned to make sense of the world. It was there that meaning was given to all that was good, bad, and indifferent in my mother’s world as she and her friends philosophized and analyzed their way through bottomless teacups and countless packs of Black Cat cigarettes. Together for friendly visits, neighborly chats, weekly card games, domestic chores, or planning and preparing for community events, they’d tell stories, share

opinions and confidences, gossip, give and receive advice and emotional support. I'd listen and watch as smoke, slowly but confidently released through crimson- and cotton candy-colored lips, enwreathed their spoken words. I took it all in, adding the knowledge to my accumulating understandings of my small but growing world. I formed (silent) opinions of my own, felt pleasure and pain, learned compassion, made promises to myself about how I would be in the world and what I would do. As a child of the 1950s and 1960s, at "the academy of the kitchen table" (Neilsen, 1998) in the company of women, I ground the lenses through which I see and understand the world.

After my mother's funeral, on the way to the cemetery, the silence of our inconsolable grief was finally broken by my niece who, between body-wracking sobs, pleaded with her father to tell some "Nanny stories." Telling stories of my mother, at a time when almost nothing made sense or seemed fair, was the only thing that did make sense to us. After all, "The truth about stories," says Aboriginal scholar Thomas King (2003, p. 2), "is that's all we are." They are who we are, who we have been, and who we will become.

I grew up in a working-class family, steeped in the Protestant work ethic, where actions spoke louder than words and "big feeling" people with "high falutin'" ideas didn't pass muster. What mattered most was the reward of a solid day's work and meaty ideas that produced tangible results and made a difference in the lives of everyday people. It was no surprise to discover in graduate school that William James's philosophy of pragmatism made inherent sense to me. Subsequently, the choices I made throughout my academic life and career naturally reflected the values and perspectives I grew up with.

GARY

I lived in the southernmost province of Aotearoa, New Zealand, for the first 22 years of my life. As an only child I often came to express and require the quietness of solitude in explorations of landscape and community. This fostered an ability to follow my own intuitions and dreams rather than those of siblings or peers. Also, for the first 13 years of my life, I grew head and shoulders above my peers in physical stature and this played out in some unexpected ways. For instance, I never experienced degradation at the hand of bullies and was most often the master of my own childhood games, fantasies, and explorations.

In a windswept, small, rural town I learned about the power of place and had the freedom to explore and express the learnings that resulted from being relatively unfettered in my day-to-day movements. Cycling throughout the community and beyond, I learned the powers of understanding that, perhaps, only finely tuned observations can bring. I learned experientially and geographically because I had the freedom to roam, sometimes by foot but, mostly, by bicycle.

Intergenerationally, strong women led my family and, to them, I attribute much learning about the order of the world around me. Everything that was done within the family had practical value borne of working-class roots and a quest for neo-middle-class status. Under these conditions and circumstances adults impressed upon me values and stories that afforded a glimpse into who I was and would become and where I came from. The power of personal and family stories was more than mildly obvious to me then as it is now. Like me, extended family members had both individual and familial scripts to follow but, unlike me, had little opportunity to

deviate from them. Family stories, often about the context or experiences of labor, were told and retold in the context of yet more laboring work. Such was the source of my ingrained perspectives on the relationship between the purpose of one's life work and the public good.

Influenced strongly by a pragmatic, hard working mother, my emerging values were metered by an avocational artist father (whose dreams of daily existence seldom experienced joy in the mundane). Influenced by him, I gravitated toward the visual arts, eventually becoming involved in architecture. Not surprisingly, it was the technical, the pragmatic—the vernacular—that guided the emerging principles of design and aesthetics that I came to hold. A job needed to be accomplished, a building built, and there was always a bottom-line, functional element involved. Years later, having honed my drafting and painterly skills, I regularly exhibited work and came to see myself as a visual artist. This coincided somewhat with the process of becoming an academic, seeing myself as a scholar. Given these circumstances, it was natural that I sought ways to fuse artistry and artmaking with scholarship that evidenced a practical bent.

◆ *Dissatisfaction and Disillusionment*

Prior to assuming roles as academics and learning the language of the academy, we did not put names on how we (and others) came to know the world. But, as professors, we quickly came to know that our jobs were in large part defined by our abilities to attach words of explanation to phenomena, experiences, processes, contexts, and systems. We soon discovered, however, that the predominant language—or discourse—of the

academy did not ring true to us or how we perceived our task.

We quickly became disillusioned by the moat of science and mysticism built to keep researchers in and communities out of the ivory tower. Bolstered and challenged by our personal histories to build a bridge across the moat, we began to question the pragmatic value of our conventional-looking scholarship and imagine new possibilities. The language of the academy and all that it symbolized fell short in its ability to capture and communicate the complexity of human experience in all its diversity. Even challenging conventions of positivism and following qualitative research methodologies resulted in research representations wrung dry of life—of emotion, of sensuality, of physicality. Individuals and their lives were flattened into a form mostly unrecognizable to those directly and indirectly involved or represented. The result, with just the right academic ring, satisfied the academy but, with the extraction of life juices, those words became too light to take hold in the lives of the people and communities we researched.

We sought what we considered to be more appropriately inclusive approaches to inquiry processes and representation—methodologies that honored the diverse forms of knowing that were part of everyday experience and that paid appropriate respect to both research participants and those who “read” or might be interested in “reading” research texts. Our goals related to integrity, relevance, accessibility, and engagement. We wanted research to reach audiences beyond the academy and to make a difference.

◆ *Enter the Arts*

Within the broad paradigmatic framework containing qualitative methodologies, we

began to experiment with process and form. We started in small ways, beginning, for example, by writing journal articles in alternative formats and in a personal narrative style with autobiographical elements. Our challenges to methodological convention got bolder as our experimentations with form brought color, texture, and life into work that had begun to seem grey, flat, and lifeless. These explorations, and the promises and possibilities they inspired, reawakened in us an excitement for our work. They reconnected us with our long-held epistemological roots and brought together elements of our personal and professional lives that had, to that point, been forced apart by academic orthodoxy. We continued to push boundaries of what was then possible in inquiry and representation (i.e., marginally acceptable as scholarship), trying to get closer and closer to human experience and to communicate it in a way that seemed truer to its original form and to those who may be involved.

Drawing on our artistic sensibilities, relationship to the arts, and respect for ways in which artists of all genres have, throughout history, tackled society's pressing sociopolitical concerns and confronted public audiences with their messages, we turned our attention to the relationship between art and research and the possibilities inherent in infusing processes and representational forms of the arts into social science inquiry. We began by dabbling with two- and three-dimensional art, performance, and fiction mainly for purposes of representation. At the same time we encouraged graduate students to explore media of poetry, literary prose, playwriting, visual arts, dance, and music as alternative approaches to knowledge representation and advancement.

By the early 1990s, a wave of change began to swell particularly in the educational research community where, perhaps because of its broad intellectual heritage or because of its interdisciplinary

nature or its broader commitment to practice and practical application of research, there is a history of methodological innovation. In 1993, Elliot Eisner gave a distinguished Presidential Address to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in which he speculated about the future of educational research witnessing an expanding array of research methods to acknowledge and account for the range of forms and modes of understanding that comprise human development. "Images created by literature, poetry, the visual arts, dance, and music," he states,

give us insights that inform us in the special ways that only artistically rendered forms make possible. . . . [Beyond stories and narrative] film, video, the multiple displays made possible through computers, and even poetically crafted narrative are waiting in the wings. . . . We won't have long to wait until they are called to center stage. (pp. 7, 8)

Soon after, the Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group of AERA was formed and quickly grew.

In 1997, Stefinee Pinnegar organized a groundbreaking session at the AERA Annual Meeting in which she invited several researchers to represent a set of conventionally gathered data each using a different art form such as painting, dance, creative nonfiction, readers' theatre, and poetry. At about this time a small but growing number of scholarly outlets (book and journal publications and professional and academic conferences) started to support "alternative" qualitative research. In 1998, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, we started an informal working group of faculty and graduate students with a shared commitment to exploring, articulating, and supporting each other in bringing together

art and social science research. As word got out and interest grew, the working group became formalized.

The Centre for Arts-Informed Research was established in 2000. It provides a context for promoting innovative research that infuses processes and forms of the arts into scholarly work for purposes of advancing knowledge and bridging the connection between academy and community. Those associated with the Centre continue to explore, encourage, and foster arts-informed research in a variety of ways through seminars, workshops, and works-in-progress series; exhibits, performances, and conference presentations; an active research and publishing program; and ongoing supervision and support of graduate students engaged in arts-informed research.

The time was right to forge ahead with formalizing and articulating the theoretical underpinnings, practices, and issues associated with the methodology that was emerging from our research and that of graduate students with whom we worked. It was also important to distinguish it from other companion methodologies established and evolving at the same time, such as arts-based research, art-based inquiry, image-based research, and visual sociology. This was important so as to, in Eisner's (1993) words, "achieve complementarity rather than methodological hegemony" (p. 9).

◆ *Arts-Informed Research*

Arts-informed research is a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived. The central purposes of arts-informed research are to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship

more accessible. The methodology infuses the languages, processes, and forms of literary, visual, and performing arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge (Cole, 2001, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Knowles & Cole, 2002). Researchers working in this way might explicitly ground the processes and representational forms in one or several of the arts (see, e.g., Cole, Neilsen, Knowles, & Luciani, 2004; Knowles, Luciani, Cole, & Neilsen, 2007; Neilsen, Cole, & Knowles, 2001).

Arts-informed research is a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry. This redefinition reflects an explicit challenge to logical positivism and technical rationality as the only acceptable guides to explaining human behavior and understanding. Bringing together the systematic and rigorous qualities of conventional qualitative methodologies with the artistic, disciplined, and imaginative qualities of the arts acknowledges the power of art forms to reach diverse audiences and the importance of diverse languages for gaining insights into the complexities of the human condition.

The dominant paradigm of positivism historically has governed the way research is defined, conducted, and communicated and consciously and unconsciously defined what society accepts as Knowledge; however, it is not a paradigm that reflects how individuals in society actually experience and process the world. Life is lived and knowledge made through kitchen table conversations and yarnin' at the wharf or transit station or coffee shop or tavern, in the imaginative spaces created between the lines of a good book or an encounter with an evocative photograph, in an embodied response to a musical composition or interpretive dance. These moments of meaning making, however, are not typically thought

of as Knowledge. “Knowledge,” as society has learned to define it, dwells beyond the realm of the everyday. It is discovered by intellectuals—researchers and theorists—and held by them until its implications are determined and passed on for consumption. Knowledge is propositional and generalizable and Research is the process by which it is generated.

According to this paradigmatic view, Knowledge remains the purview of the academy where it can be carefully defined and controlled. But, as Eisner (1993, p. 6) states:

Humans are sentient creatures who live in a qualitative world. The sensory system that humans possess provides the means through which the qualities of the world are experienced . . . [and] out of experience, concepts are formed. . . . Our conceptual life, shaped by imagination and the qualities of the world experienced, gives rise to the intentions that direct our activities.

Arts-informed research, with one of its main goals of accessibility (and breadth of audience), is an attempt to acknowledge individuals in societies as knowledge makers engaged in the act of knowledge advancement. Tied to moral purpose, it is also an explicit attempt to make a difference through research, not only in the lives of ordinary citizens but also in the thinking and decisions of policymakers, politicians, legislators, and other key decision makers.

Arts-informed research is part of a broader commitment to shift the dominant paradigmatic view that keeps the academy and community separated: to acknowledge the multiple dimensions that constitute and form the human condition—physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural—and the myriad ways of engaging in the world—oral, literal, visual, embodied. That is, to connect the work of the academy with the life and lives of communities through research that is

accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, and provocative.

Following Suzi Gablik (1991), arts-informed research is part of a larger agenda to reenchant research. According to Gablik, reenchantment

means stepping beyond the modern traditions of mechanism, positivism, empiricism, rationalism, materialism, secularism and scientism—the whole objectifying consciousness of the Enlightenment—in a way that allows for a return of soul. . . . It also refers to that change in the general social mood toward a new paradigmatic idealism and a more integrated value system that brings head and heart together. (p. 11)

◆ *Defining Elements and Form*

- How can the arts (broadly conceived) inform the research process?
- How can the arts inform the representational form of research?

As a framework for inquiry, arts-informed research is sufficiently fluid and flexible to serve either as a methodological enhancement to other research approaches or as a stand-alone qualitative methodology. For example, as a methodological enhancement, one might conduct an arts-informed life history study (see, e.g., McIntyre, 2000; Miller, 2001; Promislow, 2005), an arts-informed phenomenological inquiry (see, e.g., Halifax, 2002; Rykov, 2006; Thomas, 2004), an arts-informed narrative inquiry (see, e.g., Kunkel, 2000), or an arts-informed ethnography (see, e.g., McIntyre, 2005). As a stand-alone methodology, situated within a qualitative framework, arts-informed research perspectives enhance the possibilities of information

gathering and representation (see, e.g., brown, 2000; Cole & McIntyre, 2001, 2004, 2006; de Freitas, 2003; Gosse, 2005; Grant, 2003; Knowles & Thomas, 2002; Luciani, 2006; Mantas, 2004; Sbrocchi, 2005).

DEFINING ELEMENTS

Broadly grounded in assumptions that define a qualitative paradigm, arts-informed research has several defining elements:

- First and foremost, arts-informed research involves a *commitment to a particular art form* (or forms in the case of mixed or multimedia) that is reflected in elements of the creative research process and in the representation of the research “text.” The selected art form or forms serve to frame and define the inquiry process and “text.”

- The *methodological integrity* of the research, a second defining element, is determined in large part by the relationship between the form and substance of the research text and the inquiry process reflected in the text. In other words, the rationale for the use of photography, for example, as the defining art form guiding the inquiry or representation must be readily apparent by how and how well it works to illuminate and achieve the research purposes.

- Following the emergent nature of qualitative research in general, *the creative inquiry process* of arts-informed research is defined by an openness to the expansive possibilities of the human imagination. Rather than adhering to a set of rigid guidelines for gathering and working with research material, a researcher using arts-informed methodology follows a more natural process of engagement relying on commonsense decision making, intuition, and a general responsiveness to the natural flow of events and experiences. Serendipity plays a key role in the inquiry process much as it does

in life. Moreover, we infer that researchers can learn from artists about matters of process. That is, the processes of art making inform the inquiry in ways congruent with the artistic sensitivities and technical (artistic) strengths of the researcher in concert with the overall spirit and purpose of the inquiry.

- Also, as in most qualitative research, the subjective and reflexive *presence of the researcher* is evident in the research text in varying ways depending on the focus and purpose of the inquiry. In arts-informed research, however, the researcher’s artistry is also predominant. By artistry, we include conceptual artistry and creative and aesthetic sensibilities, not only technical skills or an externally sanctioned title of “artist.” Extending the idea from qualitative inquiry of “researcher as instrument,” in arts-informed research the “instrument” of research is also the researcher-as-artist.

- Although we operate on the assumption that all research is inherently autobiographical—a reflection of who we are—arts-informed research is not exclusively about the researcher. In other words, although the focus of an arts-informed inquiry *may* be the researcher herself or himself, it is not necessarily so. Arts-informed research differs, for example, from autoethnography (see Scott-Hoy & Ellis, this volume) or autobiography, both of which focus on the researcher as the subject of inquiry. Arts-informed research has *strong reflexive elements* that evidence the presence and signature of the researcher, but the researcher is not necessarily the focus or subject of study.

- A sixth defining element of arts-informed research relates to *audience*. Consistent with one of the overarching purposes of arts-informed research, there must be an explicit intention for the research to reach communities and audiences including but beyond the academy. The choice and articulation of form will reflect this intention.

• Related to research relevance and accessibility to audience is the *centrality of audience engagement*. The use of the arts in research is not for art's sake. It is explicitly tied to moral purposes of social responsibility and epistemological equity. Thus, the research text is intended to involve the reader/audience in an active process of meaning making that is likely to have transformative potential. Relying on the power of art to both inform and engage, the research text is explicitly intended to evoke and provoke emotion, thought, and action.

FORM

To embrace the potential of the arts to inform scholarship is to be open to the ways in which the literary, visual, or performing arts—and the inherent methods and processes of those various art forms—can inform processes and representations of scholarly inquiry. The relationship between and among research purposes related to knowledge advancement and research communication, art form, and the artist-researchers' grounding in and developing expertise/competence with the chosen art form is key. Indeed, form is the main defining element of arts-informed research. Choice of art form that will guide inquiry processes and/or representation involves a consideration of form in its many manifestations.

• *Form as genre and/or medium* means the way or mode of presenting the text or concepts including text-based means such as fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry; performative and time-sensitive approaches such as dance, performance, theatre, and music; and image-based approaches including painting, photography, collage, multimedia, sculpture, film/video, folk arts, and installation art. Important in decisions about

form as genre are prior experiences and familiarity with the particular genre or medium and how the use of that medium will contribute to knowledge production—in other words, how representation and inquiry process are unified.

• *Form as method* speaks to the relationship between the art form and the creative inquiry processes. Carl Leggo (2004) describes himself as living in the world as a poet, eager to rethink poetry into human life by engaging in a poetics of research. He describes poetry as a way of “making the world in words . . . a site for dwelling, for holding up, for stopping” (Leggo, 1998, p. 182). Carl's poetic research texts and the creative process they represent echo his way of being in the world as a poet. His work is a vivid example of how form and method can dwell in communion.

• *Form as structural element* refers to the literal or metaphorical arrangements of theoretical constructs, narratives, experiences, and their various representations, so that there is a coherent articulation of a particular perspective that illustrates knowledge production and purposeful communication. For example, Lois Kunkel's (2000) research about children of missionaries from their now adult perspectives is set in West Africa, where the author herself grew up as a child of missionary parents. West Africa is also the home of the mythological character, Anansi the Spider. Because, coincidentally, an epiphanal event in Lois's early life also involved a spider, she chose to work with a spider metaphor to define the structure of her research text. The result is an evocative and compelling arts-informed narrative, *Spiders Spin Silk*, with the Anansi stories providing the metaphorical structure for the research text.

• *Form as technical element* refers to the place of templates for designing the

physical appearance of the document—how the text and media are presented on the page. In her book *Of Earth and Flesh and Bones and Breath: Landscapes of Embodiment and Moments of Re-enactment*, Suzanne Thomas (2004) uses languages of poetry and photography to create an intertextual space for phenomenological engagement with the natural world. Her intent is for the reader to “dwell in the intimacy of knowledge” and experience aesthetic representations “as a continuous unfolding of meanings” (p. 12). To create this kind of engagement, Suzanne developed a template for the aesthetic arrangement of visual and textual fragments—a skeletal frame to hold image and text in rhythmic patterns. The beauty, sensuality, and overall power of this work are in large part due to the author’s attention to compositional arrangement and her use of an organizational template to “develop a symbiotic synergy between the elements of images/space/words” (p. 7).

- *Form as communication element* involves a consideration of both audience and research purpose to determine whether the form is optimal for full and rich communication of ideas and constructs. In other words, to paraphrase Elliot Eisner (1993), decisions about form as communication involve consideration of the question, “How and whom will the form inform?”

- *Form as aesthetic element* relates to how the work “should” look based on the aesthetic principles and conventions of the genre. By aesthetic we mean consideration of the enduring principles of form and composition, of weight and light, of color and line, of texture and tone, as when working in the painterly arts, for example. The aesthetic element reflects how central principles upheld in a variety of art forms—internal consistency and coherence, clarity and quality, authenticity and sincerity,

evocation and resonance—combine to contribute to the beauty of the work. Attending to aesthetics of form does not necessarily mean that researchers identify themselves as artists or have extensive background or experience in arts production. It does mean, though, that the researcher-as-artist must make a commitment to learning how the aesthetic elements of an art form can inform a research project.

- *Form as procedural element and emergent phenomenon* means that elements of form may change over time as the inquiry matures or develops and as ideas evolve. Inspiration for form may come at the outset and drive an inquiry. Inspiration may also present itself in various ways at any point in the research process; often it is because of implicit or metaphorical connections that become evident while immersed in the inquiry process. Inspiration may have rational, reasoned sources or it may be happenstance, serendipitous. It is at these times that the researcher’s full depth of professional experience and perspective come into play. The researcher is, after all, the instrument of form.

- *Form as reflection of the qualities of goodness of inquiry* requires that, while the research must exhibit qualities of sound scholarship (focus, intensity, authority, relevance, substance, and so on), it must do so in a way that is congruent with the art form used. This speaks to the form being integral to research purposes and procedural approaches in conjunction with the potential of the work to influence the public good. The qualities of goodness (elaborated later in the chapter) are a set of broad principles that guide and define the qualities of arts-informed research. Under scrutiny it ought to be evident that the purposes, processes, orientations, literatures, and outcomes of the study work together in harmony.

♦ *Ways and Means of Finding Form*

FINDING FORM THROUGH DATA

During research conversations with professors of teacher education in a life history study, Ardra became vividly aware that some of the experiences being recounted were so imbued with emotion and such poignant illustrations of the often dysfunctional relationship between academic institutions and individual faculty members' goals and values that conventional forms of representing these experiences seemed inadequate. Frequently, the participants used graphic language to create images or metaphors to describe elements of their experience. They often struggled to find words to adequately convey the passion and emotion felt about certain issues and experiences. In an attempt to find a representational form that would more closely render the aesthetic of lived experience, however partial, and afford readers better opportunities for their own resonant interpretations, Ardra turned to the *tableau* art form, inspired by American contemporary artists Edward Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz.

The experiences recounted by the teacher educators, and the themes and issues embedded in those experiences and in the telling of them, inspired the conceptualization and creation of a series of three-dimensional representations entitled *Living in Paradox* (Cole, Knowles, Brown, & Buttignol, 1999). In *Academic Altarcations* a conveyor belt carries symbols of personal sacrifice to the altar of the academy. *A Perfect Imbalance* is an unevenly weighted balance scale that depicts the dual mandate of teacher educators' work and the associated elusive pursuit of a balanced life. In *Wrestling Differences*, action figures set up in a toy wrestling ring depict the gender inequities that continue to define much of academic

life for women. Together, the images rely on shock value and exaggeration to draw viewers in to connect with the truths expressed, the ultimate goal being to precipitate the creation of a more humane and generous reality for teacher educators in the academy.

FINDING FORM BASED ON RESEARCHER'S ARTISTIC IDENTITY

During a visit to an art gallery, Gary came across the photographic and installation work of Canadian artist Marlene Creates. He was both intrigued and motivated by the resonance he felt with her art. The exhibit was a one-person, multi-installation, retrospective work entitled *Marlene Creates: Land Works 1979–1991* (Creates, 1992). The work portrays notions of space and place and humans' impressions and responses.

Two installations within the larger exhibit clearly expressed Creates's method of artistic inquiry. *The Distance Between Two Points Is Measured in Memories* (Creates, 1990) explored "the relationship between human experience and the landscape and, in particular, the ways in which landscape is richly and profoundly differentiated into 'places'" (Creates, quoted in Garvey, 1993, p. 20). The artist was primarily interested in how people remember place, and she used black and white photography, personal narratives, and graphite map drawings on paper with artifacts/found objects to articulate her artistic findings about individuals' memories of the landscape. *Places of Presence: Newfoundland Kin and Ancestral Land, Newfoundland, 1989–1991* (Creates, 1991) consisted of photographs, handwritten narratives, and hand-drawn memory maps, along with found objects as artifacts.

The complexities, yet also the simplicities, of Creates's life history-based, visual stories

were obvious. She showed the personal strengths and attachments of her relatives to place and community and her own responses to them and their contexts. Her work reinforced Gary's intuitive feelings about the limitations of conventional, oral, and text-based life history work. Creates's work also offered insights into the creative art-making inquiry process. This happenstance encounter by one artist with the work of another gave rise to a program of research on "sense of place" that evolved over several years (see, e.g., Knowles & Thomas, 2000, 2002; Thomas & Knowles, 2002).

FINDING FORM BASED ON INTENDED AUDIENCE

In a research project on caregiving and Alzheimer's disease (Cole & McIntyre, 2004, 2006; McIntyre & Cole, 2006), the researchers identified public education and caregiver support as two of their goals. They created a seven-piece, two- and three-dimensional mixed media installation about caregiving and Alzheimer's disease that paid tribute to those with the illness and those in caregiving roles. One purpose of the exhibit was to make Alzheimer's disease more familiar to a wide public audience. Another aim was to provide opportunities for those directly affected by the illness to feel affirmed and supported. The Alzheimer's Project was displayed for several days in prominent public venues across Canada, and family caregivers were invited to view the work and share their experiences of Alzheimer's disease and caregiving through group and individual conversations and by contributing written responses and artifacts related to their experiences. Members of the general public responded through written comments and audiotape-recorded stories. Visitors to the exhibit were invited to participate in different ways. They could view the work; sit with

others and enjoy conversation over a puzzle or game; share a thought, impression, or story by writing in a journal or speaking into a tape recorder; leave a memory (a poem, photograph, or memento) and be part of a collective remembering of care; and/or participate in a group conversation about issues of caregiving. Creating spaces for people to feel comfortable with the work was one of the central principles guiding the researchers' attention to form.

Regardless of how or when an art form is selected as a key methodological component, important in arts-informed research is the researcher's commitment to it in all of its manifestations.

◆ *Qualities of Goodness in Arts-Informed Research*

Arts-informed research, in process and representational form, is neither prescriptive nor codified. It is the creative meshing of scholarly and artistic endeavors. Nevertheless, like all research, studies following arts-informed research methodology must be subjected to scrutiny to assess, and perhaps help to explain, their worth or value as research. A broad assessment is guided by the two general questions: How do the arts inform the research process, and how do the arts inform the research representation? More specifically, a study imbued with the following qualities is one that is likely to both exemplify and contribute to the broad agenda of arts-informed research, that of enhancing understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and reaching multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible.

- **Intentionality.** All research has one or more purposes but not all research is

driven by a moral commitment. Consistent with the broad agenda of social science research to improve the human condition, arts-informed research has both a clear *intellectual purpose* and *moral purpose*. Ultimately, the research must stand for something. Arts-informed research representations, then, are not intended as titillations but as opportunities for transformation, revelation, or some other intellectual and moral shift. They must be more than good stories, images, or performances. For example brenda brown's (2000) *Lost Bodies and Wild Imaginations* is a provocative tale about telling and "what it's like to tell about childhood sexual abuse through artistic enterprise." brown describes the intention of her work as "a testimony to lives lost and lives reclaimed, to the power of the imagination to . . . return these histories to their rightful place in the world" (p. ii). (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Researcher Presence.** A researcher's presence is evident in a number of ways throughout an arts-informed research "text" (in whatever form it is presented and, by implication, throughout the entire researching process). The researcher is present through an explicit *reflexive self-accounting*; her presence is also implied and *felt*, and the research text (the representational form) clearly bears the *signature* or *fingerprint* of researcher-as-artist. Nancy Davis Halifax is a visual artist, poet, prose writer, and researcher in areas of health, disability, and homelessness. Her work (e.g., Halifax, 2002, 2007) is a vivid example of artist-researcher confluence. (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Aesthetic Quality.** The central purpose of arts-informed research is knowledge advancement through research, not the production of fine art works. Art is a medium through which research purposes are achieved. The quality of the artistic

elements of an arts-informed research project is defined by how well the artistic process and form serve research goals. Attention to the aesthetics of a particular genre are, therefore, important; aesthetics of form are integrally tied to communication. In *On Women's Domestic Knowledge and Work: Growing Up in an Italian Kitchen* (2006), Teresa Luciani combines fiction, autobiography, and photography in an exploration that celebrates the depth and complexity of domestic knowledge and makes visible women's domestic labor. The power and beauty of her work reflects rigorous attention to the aesthetic qualities of each art form and, in turn, how the art forms combine in an aesthetic whole. (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Methodological Commitment.** Arts-informed research evidences attention to the defining elements and form of arts-informed research. As such the work reflects a methodological commitment through evidence of a *principled process*, *procedural harmony*, and attention to *aesthetic quality*. *Love Stories About Caregiving and Alzheimer's Disease* (McIntyre & Cole, 2006) is a 45-minute spoken word performance created from data gathered in a study of caregivers' experiences of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease. Working with the data to identify substantive themes related to the research purpose, it became clear that, to preserve the integrity of and honor the caregivers' experiences, the form of representation needed to remain true to the narrative and emotive quality of what people contributed. (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Holistic Quality.** From purpose to method to interpretation and representation, arts-informed research is a holistic process and rendering that runs counter to more conventional research endeavors that tend to be more linear, sequential,

compartmentalized, and distanced from researcher and participants. A rigorous arts-informed “text” is imbued with an *internal consistency* and *coherence* that represents a strong and seamless relationship between purpose and method (process and form). The research text also evidences a high level of *authenticity* that speaks to the truthfulness and sincerity of the research relationship, process of inquiry, interpretation, and representational form. Gary Knowles’s and Suzanne Thomas’s research with high school students exploring sense of place in schools (Knowles & Thomas, 2000, 2002; Thomas & Knowles, 2002) is an example of holistic quality in research. The student-researchers in the project were at once information gatherers, portraiture artists, and interpreters of experience. The students’ creations, made up of personal narratives, photographs, memory maps, and found objects, became at once “data” and representations indicative of the inquiry focus. (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Communicability.** Foremost in arts-informed work are issues related to audience and the *transformative potential* of the work. Research that maximizes its communicative potential addresses concerns about the *accessibility* of the research account usually through the form and language in which it is written, performed, or otherwise presented. Accessibility is related to the potential for audience engagement and response. Such representations of research have the express purpose of connecting, in a holistic way, with the hearts, souls, and minds of the audience. They are intended to have an *evocative quality* and a high level of *resonance* for diverse audiences. In the Alzheimer’s Project, described earlier, children, rural women, and men over 80—people who do not usually attend research presentations—came to see the

work and spend time at the various spaces in the exhibit created for social interaction, information exchange, or silent repose. (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Knowledge Advancement.** Research is about advancing knowledge however “knowledge” is defined. The knowledge advanced in arts-informed research is generative rather than propositional and based on assumptions that reflect the multidimensional, complex, dynamic, intersubjective, and contextual nature of human experience. In so doing, knowledge claims must be made with sufficient *ambiguity* and *humility* to allow for multiple interpretations and reader response. Kathryn Church’s research-based installation, *Fabrications: Stitching Ourselves Together*, is constructed around 22 wedding dresses that her mother sewed over 50 years. From 1997 to 2001, she exhibited the work in public venues to audiences who could immediately connect with the familiarity of the display and be challenged, perhaps for the first time, to think about some of the sociocultural complexities depicted. (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

- **Contributions.** Tied to the intellectual and moral purposes of arts-informed research are its theoretical and practical contributions. Sound and rigorous arts-informed work has both *theoretical potential* and *transformative potential*. The former acknowledges the centrality of the So What? question and the power of the inquiry work to provide insights into the human condition, while the latter urges researchers to imagine new possibilities for those whom the work is about and for. Researchers are not passive agents of the state, university, or any other agency of society. Researchers’ responsibilities are toward fellow humans, neighbors, and community members. Ross Gray and Chris Sinding poignantly

confront this issue in their research-based dramas on/with people living with cancer (see, e.g., Gray & Sinding, 2002). (www.sagepub.com/knowlessupplement)

The transformative potential of arts-informed research speaks to the need for researchers to develop representations that address audiences in ways that do not pacify or indulge the senses but arouse them and the intellect to new heights of response and action. In essence, and ideally, the educative possibilities of arts-informed work are foremost in the heart, soul, and mind of the researcher from the onset of an inquiry. The possibilities of such educative endeavors, broadly defined, are near limitless; their power to inform and provoke action are only constrained by the human spirit and its energies.

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