

Chapter 2

Why Do Arts Based Research?

In this chapter, we continue our investigation into the character of arts based research by focusing on issues of purpose. Why, one might rightfully ask, should a researcher in the academic and professional fields of the humanities, arts, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, education, social work, women's studies, ethnic studies, communications, journalism, health and medical humanities studies, and justice studies—to name a few—choose to engage in arts based forms of inquiry?

Let us first quickly rule out a few reasons for doing so that are, from our vantage point, insufficient. One is a belief in the inherent inadequacy of other forms of social research. We do not believe that available forms of quantitative and qualitative social research are necessarily inadequate for the purpose for which they are employed. Nor should a social researcher choose arts based inquiry as a default approach, perhaps out of a performance anxiety regarding quantitative or other forms of qualitative research. Alas, arts based research will not necessarily be “easier” than other approaches. An infatuation with or genuine love for the arts, or talent in a particular art form, are also not in themselves adequate reasons for engaging in arts based research, even if they are important attributes of an arts based researcher.

A better reason for doing arts based research may be this: to the extent that an arts based research project effectively employs aesthetic dimensions in both its inquiry and representational phases, to that extent the work may provide an important public service that may be otherwise unavailable. Works of arts based research may, that is, be useful in unique ways. In this chapter (and later in Chapter 7), we elaborate on the character of that potential usefulness and

discuss examples of works of arts based research that reside within various fields of study and that employ different forms of art.

TWO WAYS THAT SOCIAL RESEARCH CAN BE USEFUL

The usefulness of any project of arts based research is best understood, in part, in reference to the epistemological underpinnings of this sort of inquiry. Doing some arts based research implies a fundamental shift away from the conventional assumption that all research is meant to bring us closer to a final understanding of various dimensions of the social world. It means abandoning the notion that the research process—whether through the social sciences or otherwise—should *always* result in a more persuasive argument or interpretation of how social and cultural phenomena are best perceived or conceptualized.

A hallmark of conventional social research has been a predisposition toward a kind of closure—even if that is, admittedly, an unachievable goal in any final sense. The aim is to reduce by degree, if never to eliminate or fully dispel, existing uncertainty regarding the truthfulness of knowledge claims. Of course science is always open to the possibility of revision or even replacement of “the highly probably true.” But a knowledge claim that is repeatedly replicated and reconfirmed is treated as “certain . . . enough that we act on it as though it were unquestionably true” (Kratwohl, 1993), a condition that is seen as empowering us to explain, predict, and sometimes control the outcomes of similar future events. It allows us to be fairly certain about how to argue about how to act.

Unlike certain postmodernists who dismiss the value of all forms of social science, we believe that there is an important role for (both qualitative and quantitative) scientific research in the human studies that can provide at least temporary answers to nettlesome questions that plague our lives and potentially useful solutions to the seemingly intractable public policy issues that frustrate us. It is, we believe, only human to seek the kinds of reassurance that some social science seems to offer. Prolonged doubt and constant, pervasive uncertainty about important matters in our lives may in fact be psychologically hazardous. Traditional forms of social science may indeed be viewed as a necessary antidote to high anxiety.

Some scholars have noted, however, that a single-minded quest for absolute certainty in human matters has for too long dominated the Western philosophical tradition. Indeed, the first appearance of this quest in the history of Western thought may be located in the writings of the Greek

philosopher Parmenides. Parmenides craved a kind of knowledge that evidenced “complete certainty and absolute unity” (Diefenbeck, 1984, p. 10). Much later, Descartes’ epistemological project likewise harbored a “preoccupation with the indubitable” (Williams, 1972, p. 136). This preoccupation may be seen as afflicting thinkers from August Comte to the logical positivists and may be viewed as undergirding modern day scientism. Evidence of scientific views of the world—ones in which only science offers any sort of useful knowledge—may also be found in the socialization process undergone by many doctoral students in a variety of academic fields. Much less evident are inclinations to consider as legitimate those forms of social research based in the humanities and—even more rarely—in the arts. And finally, where and when do future academics encounter identification of an additional, equally important, human need as worthy of pursuit through their scholarship and research? Where in academia are the advertisements for forms of research whose purpose it is to fulfill a need other than the one framed by Caputo (1987) as “the metaphysical desire to make things safe and secure” (p. 7)?

Our mission in this book is indeed the promotion of an additional purpose for doing social research. But before exploring further the question of why “do” arts based research, we are obliged to briefly acknowledge the more than occasional complicity of the arts—and not only the social sciences—in the quest for a safe sort of equilibrium that is maintained through a refusal to ask questions about how things really are. Indeed, one might ask, If a work of art is viewed as a vivid representation of “reality,” or as endorsing a singularly “correct” interpretation of social phenomena, then is it really art? And is a piece of social research that aims in that direction really “arts based”? Other characterizations of such sorts of work may include “propaganda” or “kitsch.” These are works that tend toward exaggeration and distortion in order to maximize a kind of safety and security. They represent heavy-handed attempts at persuasion, usually in support of dominant, and sometimes sentimental, worldviews.

Some subjectivist aestheticians who deride the possibility of objective “truth” are nevertheless reluctant to abandon the word entirely. They choose instead an inversion of the term to point to what they regard as the kind of personal, inner, subjective “truth” that works of art are meant to embody and disclose. Still, the danger of solipsism hangs over any claim of privilege in knowing and revealing what social phenomena finally mean, whether objective or subjective in character. Arts based researchers, we suggest, are better advised to adjust their vocabularies toward an entirely different purpose for engaging in social research, with notions of persuasion and truth taking on radically different meanings in the process.

What, then, is this alternative purpose for engaging in research that guides arts based researchers? It may be most succinctly stated as the promotion of (at the least, momentary) disequilibrium—uncertainty—in the way that both the author/researcher and the audience(s) of the work regard important social and cultural phenomena. Instead of contributing to the stability of prevailing assumptions about these phenomena by (either explicitly through statement, argument, portraiture, or implicitly through silence or elision) reinforcing the conventional way of viewing them, the arts based researcher may *persuade* readers or percipients of the work (including the artist herself) to revisit the world from a different direction, seeing it through fresh eyes, and thereby calling into question a singular, orthodox point of view (POV).

To promote this revisiting, the arts based researcher may, suggested Caputo (1987), intend “to keep a watchful eye for the ruptures and the breaks and irregularities in existence” (p. 6). This watchfulness implies a willingness to return to the “original difficulty of things” (p. 6) by peering beneath the surface of the familiar, the obvious, the orthodox in a rescrutinizing (re-searching) of the world. It is in adopting this interrogative disposition that arts based research (like much art) promotes a level of dislocation, disturbance, disruptiveness, disequilibrium that renders it sufficiently—even highly—useful, and therefore, in this unusual sense of the word, truthful.

The utility of this sort of research is thereby based on its capacity to fulfill a second important human need. This is indeed a need for surprise, for the kind of re-creation that follows from openness to the possibilities of alternative perspectives on the world. Moreover, the promotion of this disequilibrium through the obviation and undercutting of a prevailing worldview may also mean a useful sort of emancipation of readers and viewers. Nelson Goodman (1968) has written about the way in which art can “call for and then resist a usual kind of picture” and, thereby, “bring out . . . neglected likenesses and differences . . . [and] in some measure, remake our world” (p. 33).

In this chapter, several examples of arts based research, out of the untold numbers available, will serve to illustrate how this approach to social inquiry may assist in this return to difficulty and the remaking of the world. Some of these examples will be projects by researchers who call themselves arts based; some will be by researchers who label their work otherwise but whose achievements closely resemble the emancipatory ones found in good arts based research.

And in later chapters, we will extend and refine the notion of world-making to consider the manner in which arts based research might promote the transformation of public policy and of the institutions which that policy serves and shapes.

EXAMPLES OF ARTS BASED SOCIAL RESEARCH THAT CAN MAKE NEW WORLDS

The first three examples of arts based research that we reference are projects by academics in various fields who do indeed self-identify as arts based researchers. They also represent three different forms of art: (1) poetry, (2) theater, and (3) photography. First, we discuss the questions that each text seems to raise and later the manner in which each accomplishes that feat.

The first example is an article by Anne Sullivan (2000) entitled “Notes from a Marine Biologist’s Daughter: On the Art and Science of Attention” (reprinted in this book). This article incorporates autobiographical poetry into a larger essay on the theme of the nature of attentiveness and its relationship to teaching, learning, and research. Often arts based researchers do not directly identify the questions that their texts are intended to raise. Sullivan (2000), however, did, as she wondered aloud in the introduction to her poetry:

What exactly are teachers asking for when they say, “Pay attention”?
What are the relationships between attention and intrinsic motivation?
Is it possible to teach habits of attending? How can we enroll peripheral
attention to the advantage of education? How can we know the long-term
effects of attending? (p. 211)

And then, referring to the realm of social research, she wrote, “What is the nature of the [qualitative] researcher’s attention? How do we learn to attend with keen eyes and fine sensibilities? How do we teach others to do it?” (pp. 211–212).

Through her poetry and essay, Sullivan, in our judgment, succeeds in doing that which she suggested, following the novelist James Baldwin (1962, p. 17), is the purpose of art: “to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers” (Sullivan, 2000, p. 218).

A second example of arts based research is performance based—an ethnodrama. An ethnodrama is a written script for a work of ethnotheatre. The latter “employs the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data” (Saldana, 2005, p. 1).

The ethnodrama entitled “Street Rat” is the result of a collaboration by arts based researchers Johnny Saldana, Susan Finley, and Macklin Finley (2002), the first two of whom are academics. The script was adapted from a research story composed by the Finleys (Finley & Finley, 1999) and from poetry written by Macklin Finley (2000). This story and poetry were in turn the products

of participatory and observational social research engaged in primarily by Macklin Finley. Several stagings (under the direction of Saldana) have resulted from this and earlier versions of the script.

“Street Rat” is a work of arts based research that focuses on the lives of some homeless youths in pre-Katrina New Orleans. In attending to the play, one may come to vicariously participate in their daily lives and, consequently, to rethink one’s assumptions about various social issues surrounding homeless youth in our culture. These may include the structure of their moral codes and the character of the largely hidden cultural forces that operate to constrain their hopes and aspirations.

For our third example of a project by a self-described arts based researcher, we choose an article by Stephanie Springgay (2003). Entitled “Cloth as Intercorporeality: Touch, Fantasy, and Performance and the Construction of Body Knowledge,” the article is available online at <http://ijea.asu.edu/v4n5/>. In it Springgay blended the following: an analytical essay; photographs of the artist–researcher’s studio compositions of (among other things) cloth, human hair, rose petals, and pins; still photos from a video produced by the author; and autobiographical blurbs that express the personal motivations behind her visual creations and that serve as small bridges between the visual imagery and Springgay’s elaborate theoretical musings.

The essay into which the visual works are folded is designed to challenge the reader–viewer’s preconceptions regarding the nature and place of the body in educational practices. Springgay (2003) extended the work of scholars from other fields who refuse the traditional dichotomy between mind and body through her exploration of the notion of intercorporeality, which, she suggested, refers to “the body in relation to other bodies and the ways in which knowing and being are informed through generative understandings of touch, fantasy, and performance” (p. 1). Springgay contrasted this relational concept of the body and its affiliations with an education of “tactility and felt knowledge,” with the oppressive schooling practices that arise out of a notion of the body-in-need-of-discipline-and-control. In our estimation, as Springgay “folds desire and synaesthesia into education” (p. 17), she succeeded in “destabilizing and rupturing [timeworn] boundaries”—an aim worthy of a self-professed arts based researchers.

We agree with the researchers of these three projects that they are indeed examples of arts based research. And we believe that, although these examples are the results of careful scrutinizing of certain aspects of the social world, none makes the sorts of knowledge claims that traditional social researchers offer. None suggests that their view of the highlighted phenomena represents finally correct descriptions, interpretations, or judgments. They are not designed to

reinforce stereotypical or taken-for-granted notions of what it means to attend to the physical world around us, to be homeless in America, or to think about the place of the body in educational activities. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case. Each possesses the capacity to disrupt our comfortable assumptions about these thoroughly human phenomena.

Each of these works also contributes to ongoing conversations, both within scholarly subcommunities and in the realms of the public at large, about the themes upon which they focus. But their contributions to these conversations involve more than merely entering them. By questioning taken-for-granted premises, they serve to move them into radically different directions. They do, indeed, contain the capacity, reiterating the words of Geertz (1983), to “vex” fellow conversationalists. They achieve this, however, not by claiming to add to an existing “knowledge base.” Instead, they succeed in persuading others to look again at the empirical world—the world of practical experience—out of which human judgments are formed and to experience facets of it in an astonishingly new way.

But how precisely do they accomplish that? This question points us to a discussion of elements of research design—elements found in both the inquiry and representational phases of all research projects.

USEFUL DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR FOSTERING UNCERTAINTY

Some readers may be more familiar with the notion of design elements in regard to traditional forms of social research than in regard to arts based research. Consider, for example, experimental research design. Experiments in the fields of the social sciences tend to be deliberately—and systematically—arranged and conducted to protect against the validation of inferior, “rival” explanations. Random assignment of subjects is just one possible element of design employed to further that desirable sort of control. Such control is important if the ultimate goal of an experiment—the enhancement of certainty—is to be approached. Moreover, in the data representation phase of an experiment, one may find a standardized, systematic format for reporting results. The latter may include a formal statement of the problem, a review of the relevant literature, a methods section, a presentation and analysis of findings, and suggestions for further research.

None of the design elements employed in an experimental social research project is, to repeat, present by chance or whim. Each is included for a clear purpose, meant to ensure a high degree of utility in the knowledge claims that are

produced. Other forms of quantitative and qualitative research will, of course, employ alternative design elements for arriving at “valid” and “reliable” knowledge, or at least, in some cases, convincing interpretations of social phenomena.

Arts based researchers also employ design elements in both the inquiry process and in the composition of the research text. Moreover, we see these two dimensions of an arts based project (the manner of inquiry and the aesthetic qualities in the “product”) as interrelated, synergistic, mutually reinforcing. They are also often (although not always) engaged in simultaneously, as the process of inquiry may occur within the act of composition and vice versa. But, leaving the inquiry process to be more fully addressed in Chapter 3, we focus here on textual design. Specifically, we aim to link the arrangement of the aesthetic qualities within each of three texts to the alternative, interrogative purpose of arts based research that they serve.

We first pause to note, however, that not only art (and arts based research) offers the kinds of lenses needed to see social phenomena in fundamentally new ways. Scientists, states people, social theorists, inventors, public intellectuals of all sorts, have, throughout history, helped to “make new worlds.” But only artists—and among academic scholars, arts based researchers—can achieve that feat through the creation of powerful aesthetic forms. Only the compositions of artists and arts based researchers can redirect conversations about social phenomena by enabling others to *vicariously reexperience the world*. Only they choose to use the expressive qualities of an artistic medium to convey meanings that are otherwise unavailable. But it is only to the degree that its artistic elements of design are employed *effectively* can the work achieve, to that degree, a special sort of aesthetic utility.

This achievement requires the following:

- a careful investigation into dimensions of the social world by the arts based researcher;
- a reconfiguration and re-presentation of selected facets of what that research “uncovers,” with those facets now transformed into aesthetic substance upon their embodiment within an aesthetic form; and
- the production of disequilibrium within the percipient of the work as s/he vicariously reexperiences what has been designed.

It is indeed through this reexperiencing—not through a logical form of discourse, nor through the acceptance of a linear argument or explanation—that what we call *deep persuasion* might occur. This is a luring of percipients into the acceptance of alternative values and meanings for facets of social issues and practices that were previously misunderstood as being finally understood.

Let us consider how this persuasion to reconsider the world may operate within our three examples of arts based research.

First, let us look at the Sullivan (2000) text.

In crafting her poetry that serves as the heart of her article, Sullivan (2000) revealed an impressive mastery of detail. Many of the particulars she located were extracted from experiences with her mother, who, she contended, first taught her how to attend seriously to facets of her physical environment. The details she chose to include in her poems were reconfigured into an aesthetic form in a purposeful manner. These minutiae of experience—with their powerful sensory qualities of, for example, the colors of blue on the sides of fish, clamshells, “the oyster blue at my inner thigh,” and the “blue-black ink of the squid’s soft gland”—are not included for the purpose of replicating a conventionally “real” world once experienced by Sullivan. Rather, the chosen details were recast into an aesthetic form in order to entice readers into a virtual world, one that is a *semblance* of reality (Langer, 1957).

The poems are structured so as to coax readers into the having of an experience that is analogous to (if not precisely the same as) the experience of the researcher/poet. It is through the reexperiencing of powerful mental images that the reader is brought to vicariously inhabit the virtual world of this work of arts based research.

For readers to be willing and able to enter into an arts based text, the virtual world must be sufficiently believable, credible enough for the reader to recognize it as *possible*, if not actual. It must *seem* authentic. (Does this make Sullivan’s [2000] article a work of fiction? See Chapter 6 for a discussion of that point.) Moreover, it may be precisely because this world is indeed plausible, as opposed to conventionally “real,” that a healthy distance may form between the viewer and her stale images of a taken-for-granted reality. Being transported, at least momentarily, into an “aesthetic remove,” the viewer may be coaxed into viewing her own mundane realities from an unfamiliar—and perhaps disturbing—angle.

Again, those facets of the “real world” are associated with the theme of Sullivan’s [2000] work that surrounds the nature of attentiveness. When Sullivan’s work is successful then the aesthetic distance it has created through its carefully employed elements of design serves to disturb the reader into not merely an imagining of how Sullivan learned to attend to sensory detail through a masterful teacher but, more importantly, a reimagining of how the reader may herself do as much for others.

Other deftly employed elements of design in Sullivan’s (2000) poems—rhythm, balance, flow, language choice, thematic control, and so on—also serve to elevate their aesthetic effect above the level of mere technical proficiency. But to the extent that form is associated with function then these design elements are not merely present for “art’s sake.” Rather, they are brought into

a coherence that maximizes their potential for “deep persuasion,” achieving that primary interrogative purpose of art as a form of human studies.

Our second example of arts based research—the ethnodrama “Street Rat” (Finley, 2000; Saldana, Finley, & Finley, 2002)—is also structured in a powerful manner. One might, in fact, contend that two forms of art are represented in this example—first, the script of the play, and second, the staged production that brought to life that incorporated script. We will discuss, however, a production of this play attended by Tom Barone in April 2004.

To Barone, a string of carefully arranged, telling details (analogous to those found in Sullivan’s [2000] poems) were almost immediately apparent. These included a cascade of concrete images, specific utterances and gestures within particular incidents, both dramatic and mundane, that arose out of the lives of the play’s central characters, Tigger and Roach. These incidents suggested, within these castoffs of society, the presence of unexpected forms of intelligence, of strict, if unanticipated, moral codes and of surprisingly poignant hopes and dreams.

These images and utterances were sculptured into a somewhat conventional dramatic form as the action moved from an introduction of the two homeless boys to complications arising from their relationships with each other and their friends to a tense climax and finally a touching denouement in which Tigger and Roach, apparently filling a void in each other’s lives left there by others, proclaim their garbage-strewn living quarters as “home.”

Visual elements also contributed to the production’s effective *mise-en-scène*. Absent a proscenium arch, audience members were seated in a black draped, rectangular room, its floor shared with the actors. The minimal props, authentic costuming, and background music were all carefully designed and selected to advance the vision of the director and his collaborators and allowed audience members to dwell within a credible world, one that was at once strange and familiar. Within this world were believable characters that, while unique to the play, were paradoxically reminiscent of other distressed, alienated youngsters previously encountered on terrain outside of that auditorium. In that manner did the play achieve metaphorical power for at least one attendee who departed convinced that he would never see homeless youngsters in the same way again.

In “Street Rat” (Finley, 2000; Saldana, Finley, & Finley, 2002), as in the Sullivan (2000) text, that which Iser (1993) called an *imaginary*, an array of “arbitrary apparitions,” a set of “diffuse fleeting impressions,” were shaped into an “articulate gestalt,” thereby providing an opening into a new psychological landscape, into a possible, as *if* world. Entering into such a landscape, the viewer may be rendered at least momentarily disoriented before slowly

acquiring a degree of empathic understanding of the inhabitants of that world who are slowly transformed from aliens—“others” with whom it may be difficult to feel a sense of solidarity—into people who live inside of what Rorty (1989) referred to as “the range of us.” This sense of dizziness, of disequilibrium, though, is what artists and arts based researchers strive toward as they call into question that which has become the all-too-familiar.

Dizziness and a sense of destabilization may also be appropriate responses to the Springgay (2003) project. A sense of dislocation may indeed arise in one’s reading and viewing of this arts based text with its enormously significant implications for thinking about the embodied self and its relationships with other embodied selves. In fostering this dislocation our deeply entrenched ways of thinking about the human (the “social,” the “lived”) body as existing in opposition to the mind, as dangerous, in need of regulation, are changed.

Springgay (2003) offers a genre-blended text, one in which the written word and the visual image are mutually reinforcing. One might argue that the product, taken in its entirety, is a less unified work than the script of “Street Rat” (Finley, 2000; Saldana, Finley, & Finley, 2002), insofar as the latter offers an aesthetic form *sans* the presence of an explanatory envelope. The part of Springgay’s article that attempts to persuade through argument may more closely resemble a work of art criticism with an academic emphasis, one that imports notions from an array of postmodernist, poststructuralist, and feminist thinkers to displace prevailing conceptions of the human body. But unlike most works of art criticism, Springgay’s article is studded with artistic constructions of her own making—namely, those powerfully vexing photographs of her studio compositions. More importantly, she avoided relegating those works, with their stunning visual imagery, to a role of servitude as ornamental illustrations for grounding a general “model of intercorporeality.”

Instead, the photos themselves—employing various design elements from the visual arts—*embody* that notion. Moreover, these visual components (along with the artfully crafted autobiographical nuggets) are both evocative and provocative, possessing a capacity to engage our imagination in the reformulation of meaning. Enabling us to *experience* her ideas directly for ourselves, Springgay’s photos achieve the status of art, thereby legitimating her article, in its entirety, as a work of arts *based* research.

These three examples of social research, all by self-identified arts based researchers, achieve that which we have identified as the oft-ignored, yet absolutely vital, *interrogative* purpose of inquiry into the human condition. Again, they do this by allowing readers and viewers to vicariously reexperience significant dimensions of human affairs through the use of aesthetic design elements. But now here is another often misunderstood notion concerning arts

based research: Arts based research is not only practiced by artist–academics who label their research arts based—the Sullivans, Saldanas, and Springgays of the world. Other researchers, from both within and outside of the academy, some of whom see themselves as artists and some of whom do not, may also produce texts that—insofar as they, through their skillful use of aesthetic design elements, convey otherwise unavailable social meaning—may also be identified as arts based.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH THAT MAKE NEW WORLDS

The terms *arts based research* and *artistic research* are not, we contend, identical. Rather, the former term implies a continuum that extends from qualitative research projects that, while being officially tagged as science, effectively deploy a few aesthetic design elements to those who exhibit maximum artistry. Aesthetic design elements can indeed be located most obviously in works of art, whether the “high art” of professional artists or “everyday,” popular art (including those we mentioned in Chapter 1 by the likes of Arthur Miller, Charles Dickens, and Mario Puzo).

A deep pool of research texts that achieve the important inquiry purpose of raising questions for the sake of generating and redirecting conversations, but which exhibit only a few aesthetic elements, has long existed. But this pool was publicized in the 1970s as the anthropologist–storyteller Clifford Geertz named (and helped to legitimate) the phenomenon of *genre blending*. Later the pool deepened significantly as both qualitative social scientists and arts based research types sensed an enhanced freedom to explore the possibilities within various amalgamations of artistic and scientific research design elements.

Out of the myriad available, we now identify three accomplished published works that are the results of such explorations. We see these works as largely arts based, even if the authors/researchers are unacquainted with the term. Two are by academics; one is not. Some contain more (and more effectively employed) artistic design elements than do others. They are works by Ruth Behar (1996), Laura Simon (1997), and Anna Deavere Smith (1993), and they take the forms, respectively, of a literary autobiographical essay, a documentary video, and an ethnodrama. All, we argue, represent qualitative research texts that are useful in the same way that art can be. Variouslly labeled, crafted from within or outside of the academy, each is an example of good arts based research that “makes new worlds.”

“The Girl in the Cast” is a glorious literary-style autoethnographic essay from the book *The Vulnerable Observer* by Ruth Behar (1996). In it, the ethnographic storyteller reflects upon her time as a child immobilized for 9 months in a body cast following a horrendous automobile accident on Long Island and upon the psychological trauma that lingered into her adulthood. It is only in her fourth decade, upon Behar’s return from a visit to her homeland Cuba, back to the country where the accident occurred, that she is finally able to find peace through forgiveness of the reckless teenage driver who had caused her such enormous pain.

The aesthetic elements within Behar’s vivid retelling of the ordeal provide a window into the complex psychosocial dynamics that accompanied this particular life incident, but its graceful encompassing of the thoughts of other great artists and essayists adds to the metaphorical power of the essay. The once physically crippled Behar ranges far and wide as she weaves ideas from a wide-ranging group of authors, including the likes of Sandra Cisneros, Oliver Sachs, Carol Gilligan, and Salman Rushdie into a thematically rich tapestry. Her themes include at least two that are familiar to social scientists, especially cultural anthropologists and ethnographers: the insecurities endured by immigrants in a new place, and the coming of age of (here Latina) adolescents. Others include the meaning of confinement and of independence (both physical and psychological) and the usefulness of combining autobiography with ethnography into autoethnography.

That utility for Behar (1996) lies in a capacity to create “forms of embodied knowledge in which the (adult) self and the (child) other can rediscover and reaffirm their connectedness” (p. 135). Through an effective employment of literary elements, this particular autoethnography does indeed foster an empathic understanding of at least a version of the author’s “self”—one that serves to interrupt our own sense of safety by calling into question certain dimensions of our own lives. Its capacity to do so suggests its close kinship with arts based inquiry.

The second example is a film directed not by a Hollywood professional but by an elementary school teacher at a predominantly Latino/a school in Los Angeles. First shown as part of the POV Series on the Public Broadcasting Service, *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* (Simon, 1997) traces events that transpired as a result of the passage of California’s Proposition 187, a proposal that aimed to deny public education to undocumented immigrants by requiring their teachers to report them to authorities. Indeed, the film dramatically illustrates the dire consequences of the proposition’s passage, especially the heightening of mistrust between people of different ethnic groups.

The film achieves this by focusing primarily on the lives of a few individual school people, especially the charming, feisty, intelligent Maira, and her

teacher, Simon, herself. Its carefully etched portrait of the rupture in the close relationship between these two victims vividly illustrates how the tentacles of social policy can reach deeply into the realm of everyday human experience. And this picture of deeply personal tragedy serves as the metaphor for the central theme of ethnicity-based mistrust within the society at large.

The film uses careful editing and documentary footage to develop this theme, especially through the elements of characterization and narrative drive. The visual imagery is especially telling, from helicopters hovering over a polluted city's protestor-filled streets, to a close inspection of the tight living quarters of Maira and her family.

By the conclusion of the film, we have been left with disturbing questions about the kinds of social policy that can lead to an enhanced dissolution of community. We are moved because Simon's research and artistry enables us to recognize ourselves as members of that community and because we want to save ourselves. The film's theme is both timely and timeless as it calls into question all social policy that is based on fear and the manner in which that policy can exacerbate estrangement of people who can no longer recognize each other as fellow inhabitants of one world.

The third example is a carefully researched play, somewhat in the style of "Street Rat" (Finley, 2000; Saldana, Finley, & Finley, 2002). "Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities" by Anna Deavere Smith (1993) is a compelling ethnodrama that skillfully explores a variety of complex themes, from racial animosity in America to the nature of truth. (It also, coincidentally, involves an automobile accident in New York.) Having conducted over 100 interviews with people of various backgrounds—from a Lubavitcher woman who was a graphic designer to the Reverend Al Sharpton—all of whom were affected by the 1991 riots following a fatal car accident in Brooklyn, the researcher/playwright shaped excerpts from them into a tapestry of monologues.

In the original production, all 29 roles were performed by Smith herself. This design choice may have diminished any sense of a privileging of some accountings over others, a point essential to the play's thesis about how the cores of worldviews are shaped within the crucible of life experience.

As with "Street Rat" (Finley, 2002; Saldana, Finley, & Finley, 2002), other staging elements added to a heuristic power that is the hallmark of arts based research. Indeed, the lingering questions of playgoers have been so pressing that, within some local venues, opportunities for structured conversation following the play have been prearranged, in order to address directly the disequilibrium felt by audience members.

These examples by Ruth Behar, Laura Simon, and Anna Deavere Smith—alongside those of Sullivan, Saldana, and Springgay—represent only a few of

the many available forms of arts based research and adjacent (or overlapping) fields of qualitative research with significant aesthetic features. For word-based, or alphanumeric, texts, the last several decades have witnessed the so-called linguistic, narrative, and literary “turns” in the humanities and social sciences resulting in a burgeoning of literary forms. A short list includes the following: allegory, autobiography, autoethnography, biography, fictional storytelling, layered accounts, life story, life history, literary essay, literary ethnography, memoir, mixed genres, mystory, narrative composition, nonfictional novel, novel, novella, performance science, poetry, polyvocal texts, readers theater, saga, short story, writing-story, mixed genres (see also Richardson, 2000, p. 930). Arts based research may also employ forms of performance and plastic art including, among others, readers theater, collage, painting, documentary films, photography, multimedia and mixed-media installations, and digital hypertext.

Our move in this chapter is, finally, not toward a presumptuous subsuming of all of these aesthetically sensitive styles of social research into an oversized hamper labeled arts based. It is, rather, to advance, discursively and through examples, a conception of *arts based* research as a broad approach to social inquiry. It is also meant to illustrate the manner in which some projects of qualitative research that are not labeled arts based may nevertheless evidence sufficient aesthetic capacity to foster the transformation of worldviews. This can occur when any piece of social research does *not* move to enhance certainty but instead, through the use of expressive design elements, succeeds (in varying measures) in the unearthing of questions that have been buried by the answers, and thereby in remaking the social world. That, in our judgment, is a very good reason indeed for doing arts based research.