

A Role for Poetry in Consumer Research

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Consumer researchers are wrestling with the crisis of representation that has challenged contiguous disciplines over the past decade. Traditional or conventional prose articles seem increasingly insufficient as vessels for representing our understandings and experiences. In this article, we demonstrate how poetry contributes to the research enterprise. We use our own experiences as researcher-poets to illustrate how the writing and close reading of poetry can take us directly to the heart of consumption. Our essay is intended to provide a philosophical basis for the inclusion of poetry between the covers of this journal.

One aim of the physical sciences has been to give an exact picture of the material world. One achievement of physics in the twentieth century has been to prove that that aim is unattainable. (BRONOWSKI 1973)

As a literary forum, poetry is making a strong comeback (Bugeja 1996; Meulen 1998). After languishing through the 1970s and 1980s as a neglected genre, poetry is reemerging as a voice of the people in places as diverse as cafés, personal Web sites, public buses and subways, state fairs, and presidential inaugurations (Bugeja 1996). Poetry slams are burgeoning. Barnes and Noble reports a 30% increase in poetry sales from 1997 to 2000, and New York's Poets House reckons an increase of almost 100% in the number of poetry books published between 1993 and 1999 (*Economist* 2001). Even the dot-coms abet this renaissance. When we first wrote this article, poetry ranked among the top 10 most frequently requested subjects on the Lycos 50 (<http://50.lycos.com/>), and Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" was incorporated into an advertisement for monster.com (<http://www.monster.com/>) featured during Super Bowl XXXIV. During the essay's first revision, Seamus Heaney's (2000) poetic translation of the epic *Beowulf* reached the best-seller list of the *New York Times*. As we undertook the final revision, the *Chicago Tribune* published a poem commissioned of Anthony Libby (2001) to lament the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the editors declaring that "it takes more than opinion, analysis or a factual presentation to help people think about the

essence of an event." The *New York Times* has subsequently acknowledged the consolation that poetry has afforded in the wake of this tragedy (Smith 2001). At least as surprising is the recent tendency of poetry to show up among the academic writings of such disciplines as marketing (Schouten 1995, 1999; Sherry 1992a, 1993a, 1993b; Zinkhan 1994) and consumer behavior (Holbrook 1995; Levy 1996; Schouten, 1991a, 1991b; Sherry 1992b, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Stern 1998a; Zinkhan 1998, 1999).

As one of the only forms of public communication that struggles financially to break even, poetry may join academic research as one of the few media that can be (more or less) trusted to represent honestly and authentically the "truth"—a notion we unpack a bit later—as understood by its authors. We strive to provoke as well as inform in this article and enlist language itself in this effort, so that style as well as concept may give the reader pause. Those few unfamiliar words we offer (and, we hope, tame) attest to the parsimony and evocativeness of language too often left to languish.

Abu-Lughod (1986, p. 177) recognizes that social scientific treatments of poetics often concentrate on the social use of discourse, effectively slighting the "expressive aspect of the arts as reflections on and statements about profound human experiences." We strive to correct this imbalance even as we tout the research value of poetry, by including enough poems themselves to engage the reader's humanity and to allow for a visceral resonance. This approach echoes Stern's (1998a) strategy of coupling a historical account of poetic criticism with a sampling of contemporary poetry written by consumer researchers. In this article, we are not concerned with such criticism per se but, rather, with the poetics of research representation as understood by practicing poet-researchers. We show poetry to be both a vehicle of researcher reflexivity and a form of research inquiry in its own right.

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EXPRESSING THE INEFFABLE

Maslow (1964) laments the artificial, psychologically counterproductive split between the sacred and the secular, especially as studied and understood from a scientific perspective. He holds that life's most meaningful experiences, those that are capable of profoundly changing us for the better, can occur "in almost any activity of life, if this activity is raised to a suitable level of perfection" (p. xii). In fact, peak experiences demonstrably occur in various kinds of consumption and production activities that are plainly secular in nature (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

Such transcendent experiences may be difficult to understand and communicate because they are particularly resistant to scientific language. In Maslow's words, they are "not communicable by words that are analytic, abstract, linear, rational, exact, etc. Poetic and metaphorical language, physiognomic and synesthetic language, primary process language of the kind found in dreams, reveries, free associations and fantasies, not to mention pre-words and non-words such as gestures, tone of voice, style of speaking, body tonus, facial expression—all these are more efficacious in communicating certain aspects of the ineffable" (Maslow 1964, p. 85). Mythopoetic language captures the eternal truths that our workbench focus on empirical truths threatens to obscure (May 1991).

To communicate the essence of some of our most meaningful consumer experiences, the precise, linear language of science and academia may be, in and of itself, unsuitable. Poetry redresses the "expressive inadequacy of prose" in our yearning to "represent an otherwise eluding clarity of experience" (Daniel and Peck 1996, p. 7). What is called for may be what Maslow (1964, p. 64) describes as "rhapsodic communication . . . a kind of emotional contagion in isomorphic parallel." To clarify his meaning, he reverts to more poetic language, referring metaphorically to "a tuning fork (that) will set off a sympathetic piano wire across the room" (Maslow 1964, p. 86). Perhaps emotional truths are best communicated emotionally. Perhaps we know certain things are true or valid because, like good poetry, they resonate within us, expanding and enriching our consciousness. The visceral impact of good poetry is undeniable (Housman 1933).

Science and the Pragmatics of Poetry

Perhaps because of its paradoxical ability to communicate parsimoniously certain aspects of human experience and to condense the polyvocal nature of that experience in such a manner that it threatens to explode with additional meanings on every (re)reading, poetry is elbowing its way out of its traditional place in narrowly read literary publications and into the realm of science. Even in such "hard-science" disciplines as medicine (Forster 1996; Platt 1996) and mathematics education (Curcio, Zarnowski, and Vigliarolo 1995; Graves 1992), practitioners have rediscovered the power of poetry to deliver with economy what normal speech, schol-

arship, or pedagogy can do only with greater difficulty, if at all. Noting that such mainstream medical journals as the *Lancet*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *Annals of Internal Medicine* all publish original poetry, Forster (1996, p. 22) describes instances where poetry by both physicians and patients "puts us in touch with the layer of feeling and meaning and sheer life that lies beneath the surface of our daily interactions." Platt (1996, p. 231) describes the case of a 70-year-old patient who, when asked by her doctor to describe her symptoms of hyperventilation, returned the following week with a poem that, according to the physician, described her experience "better than any doctor-patient interview ever could." Similarly pragmatic, Curcio et al. (1995) invoke poetry in the teaching of mathematics. They observe that "many poems—through rhythm, rhyme, story, and interesting word choices—evoke situations that engage children and can serve as a basis for mathematical problem solving" (Curcio et al. 1995, p. 370). This is because, as Graves (1992, p. 163) puts it, "numbers are always more than numbers," implying that beneath a study of mathematics lie real people with real problems. Not too different, perhaps, from consumer behavior.

Consumer researchers are not alone in knitting back together the strands of the sciences and humanities pulled so ruthlessly apart by the dualist impulse of modernism (Holbrook, Gray, and Grayson 1989). For example, the New York University School of Medicine, in conjunction with its Web site, *Medical Humanities* (<http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med/>) maintains a "Literature, Arts and Medicine Database" and posts links to the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, *Literature and Medicine*, and *Mediphors: A Literary Journal of the Health Professions*. Another venerable scientific organization, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), hosts an *NOAA History* Web site (<http://www.history.noaa.gov/index.html>) that prominently features "Stories & Tales" and "Art and Poetry" sections. The Academy of Management includes an "Art and Poetry" track in its annual conference and posts poems on its Web site (<http://www.csupomona.edu/~mhr/facFolders/cfpoulson/expressions.html>). In the effort to understand consumers as meaning makers, we can scarcely afford to neglect any discipline that offers insight into their hearts and minds. Scientists and practitioners in other fields have paved the way for poetry to enter into scientific literature. We feel consumer researchers should not be the last to embrace poetry as a legitimate means of inquiry.

Imagine that we apprehend "reality" as a layering of seeings, or tastings or touchings or hearings or smellings—or intersensory reverberations (Schechner 1985). If, like Oakeshott (1991), we accept that the task of science is to accommodate disparate voices and attend to the polyphony of science (Jackson 1998), then poetry is a viable vessel for the conveyance of research experiences. Science and poetry are kindred enterprises, common pursuits, undertaken in different keys. Perhaps former poet laureate Rita Dove's belief that poetry makes "the interior life of one individual available to others" (Dove 1994, p. 25) can serve as a ra-

tionale for the rapprochement of art and science in consumer research.

The pragmatics of poetry in social science arises in part from the so-called crisis of representation described by Lincoln and Denzin (1994). Some social scientists have begun to resist the authoritative voice of realist ethnography, experimenting at times with alternative modes of representation in order to achieve a more multivocal and reflexive understanding of informant realities (Lincoln and Denzin 1994; Van Maanen 1995). Something of this resistance is now surfacing in the consumer research literature (Stern 1998b). Poetry is one of the alternative modes being used in the so-called historical Sixth Moment of qualitative research to negotiate the tensions animating our inquiry at century's end (Denzin 1997; Lincoln and Denzin 1994).

The shift from ethnographic realism, with its emphasis on the thick description of social worlds, to a cultural phenomenology that captures what it feels like to be present in those social worlds (Denzin 1997) is at the heart of our enterprise. Denzin (1997) imagines the language of cultural phenomenology breaching the barriers between writer and reader as it privileges emotionality and strives to present unmediated personal experience. Among the literary genres employing this language, poetry is now appearing in mainstream social scientific journals such as the *American Anthropologist*. Such efforts are intended to help us learn to see phenomenologically and to grasp presence (Richardson 1998). This kind of representation presupposes a different model of truth than the one routinely employed in consumer research, which may be at once complementary and conflictual. Poetic language always resists reducing felt meaning or lived experience merely to clinical terms (or perhaps, more accurately, to jargon) that would distort or transform phenomena (Brady 2000).

The Challenge of Intersubjectivity

As the cross-disciplinary critique of essentialism deepens, some researchers maintain that the deeper you are implicated in local life worlds, the "more hesitant you grow to use their existential complexity as the basis for generalizations about humankind" (Jackson 1998, p. xx). If anthropologists use their marginal experiences to understand their own cultures more deeply, might we not use the insight of poets to understand consumer behavior more comprehensively? Especially when those poets are consumer researchers themselves?

Since the mid-1970s, theorists have criticized the ethnocentric ontological and epistemological reifying of form as a container "waiting to receive small dollops of referential content" (Bauman and Briggs 1990, p. 79). As we learn to construe the complex dialectics of intersubjectivity more precisely, it becomes more apparent that we must also represent our understandings intersubjectively (Jackson 1998). Poetry is one effective way of writing intersubjectively. As Friedrich (1996, p. 40) notes, the basics of good poetry—"economy,

elegance, emotional condensation"—contribute to "superior cultural studies."

Etymologically, poetry is about making. Here we give this construction project both physical and metaphysical inflections. Poets are attuned to features, benefits, and experiences, almost preternaturally so. Here is an introspective comment by poet Peter Balakina: "I believe in the animating power of things. Not only the things of the natural world, but of the human-made world. Certain artifacts have significance for us. Certain artifacts have evocative powers. Certain artifacts have psychic presences. One of my tasks as a poet is to discover the artifact, to find out what the artifact might mean. What buried life lies in it" (Pack and Parini 1997, p. 35).

Unpacking artifacts of their meanings and repacking these same artifacts with new meanings—a fundamental dynamic of consumer behavior—begins at the level of language, whether phoneme or morpheme (Pinsky 1998). Style and substance, word and deed, language and interpretation are inextricably intertwined. The poets of consumer research are ethnographers, introspective exhibitionists, brute empiricists, and mystics seeking to illuminate the production of consumption.

QUALIFYING "TRUTH" AND CRITERIAL QUICKENING

What is false in the science of facts may be true in the science of values. (SANTAYANA 1900)

The antifoundationalism and antiessentialism espoused by postmodern researchers have challenged all our disciplinary notions about knowledge and truth (Ellis and Bochner 2000; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Notions of what constitutes legitimate inquiry are rapidly expanding, with representation being perhaps the most fervid controversy motivating ethnographic and phenomenological research at present (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Let's unpack these emerging notions of knowing and representing a bit.

Knowing and Representing

If we accept that neither knowledge nor observation can be theory free, then method, not being neutral, is never a "repository of procedural objectivity" (Smith and Deemer 2000, p. 879). In reaction to the perceived threat of relativism, a species of quasi foundationalism or neorealism has arisen to assert the need for a canon of criteria, despite the condition of judgment being an inescapable social process (Smith and Deemer 2000). "Cults of criteriology" that lobby for the regulation of inquiry and removal of doubt are challenged by qualitative researchers who view social inquiry as practical philosophy and who call for the ongoing revision of criteria (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 179). These researchers believe the hermeneutic circle is an inescapable condition of social inquiry and that understanding is interpretation "all

the way down” (Schwandt 2000, p. 201; Smith and Deemer 2000).

Olson (1999, p. 14) maintains that every text is “poured out of three crucibles: the author, the culture and the technology of its production.” Author studies, genre studies, and media studies have attempted to account for the shaping of the text by examining the idiosyncrasy of creative agency, the ideological and narratological milieus of textual production, and the media embodying the text, as all of these forces interact in dynamic interrelationships (Olson 1999). While we have attempted to explore each of these dimensions in this article, the issue of most probable pressing concern to consumer researchers is that of transparency, that is, the ability of a text to seem familiar despite its provenance.

Negotiation theory presumes a dialectical interaction between text and interpretive communities that yields a synthesized reading, as inferred and implied meanings contend in analysis. Polysemy theory presumes a broader range of meanings unearthed less through negotiation than through a smorgasbord-like selection (Olson 1999, pp. 19–20). While both negotiation and polysemy are at work in poetic reception, the traditional consumer research community favors transparency produced by the former process (controlled by the audience) rather than the contradictory, destabilizing, and resistant readings arising from the latter process (controlled by the text). As a discipline, we are growing more comfortable with exegesis, the eliciting of meaning from a text by a reader. We are just beginning to wrestle with eisegesis (Mick and Buhl 1992; Ritson and Elliott 1999), the infusing of a text with personal meaning, even though our literature has begun to incorporate theories of reader response (Scott 1994), reception (Stern 1993), and misprision (Brown 1999) that have advanced the field of literary criticism. Olson (1999, p. 22) pronounces the denial of eisegesis in textual production and the polysemy that transparency enables in the creation of local meaning, a “fallacy” in our interpretive quest.

Bayley (2000, p. 37) asserts a critical commonplace in his belief that “poetry . . . need not be fully understood, as prose has to be, in order to be wholly appreciated.” Further, observes poet Charles Simic (2000, p. 52): “In poetry, life’s ambiguities are worth more than what can be explained. They cause poems to be written. The true poet, one might say, gropes in the dark. Far from being omniscient on the subject of his work, he is merely a faithful servant of his hunches. The poem, with all its false starts and endless revisions, still mostly writes itself . . . consequently, no poet can possibly envision the full meaning and eventual fate of one of his metaphors. . . . The more original the poet, the wider the gap between his intentions and his inventions.”

Simic (2000, p. 53) finds a single poem can “invite” a reader to “endless reverie.” The polysemy that some consumer researchers have spent careers unpacking is being repacked by others in poems intended to create a host of local resonances, whose “return beat” (Taiwo 1998) might best be reflected in this simple example: an anonymous *JCR*

reviewer of this article, claiming no pretensions to being a poet, was “inspired . . . to respond in kind” to our effort and so created a poem that embodied the cognitive substance of the critical prose evaluation that was submitted as part of the overall review.

Attention to issues of validity, voice, reflexivity, and representation is a current preoccupation of qualitative researchers. Criteria for judging are viewed as practical, moral, and ethical rather than epistemological; they are continually (re)negotiated rather than being abstractions and rely on exemplars for extension and elaboration (Smith and Deemer 2000). Uncertainty, contingency, and the absence of final vindications are embraced by these researchers (Smith and Deemer 2000). Rather than stipulate categorical criteria, they seek to balance rigor with imagination (Ellis and Bochner 2000), developing open-ended lists that change over time (Smith and Deemer 2000). The orientation to validity shifts from triangulation to transgression, its rhizomatic (i.e., densely rootlike) and situated character constantly being reassessed (Smith and Deemer 2000). Authenticity is viewed as an integral component of validity (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Validity is interpreted as the seeking of verisimilitude and the evocation of lifelike, believable experience (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Richardson (2000, p. 934) describes the central imaginary for postmodern texts as a crystal rather than a triangle, and her construal of “crystalline validity” being dependent on one’s “angle of repose” has become a hallmark of sixth moment qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative researchers use concrete criteria in their reviews of scholarship. Substantive contribution, aesthetic intent, reflexivity, impact, and expression of a reality constitute one framework we especially like (Richardson 2000, p. 937). They expect to see certain dimensions in storied texts. Again, narrators, dramatic action, shifting viewpoints, concrete grounding, reflexivity, criticalness, the sting of memory, and liminal experience comprise a framework we like (Denzin 2000, p. 905). However, these criteria vary widely in their application. Perhaps the most commonly held criterion is that of evocativeness. Texts should produce consequences, shape writers and readers, and introduce new possibilities for living (Ellis and Bochner 2000). The truth of the text is gauged pragmatically by its effects; critical/moral discourse, empathy, and experience exchange must be facilitated (Lincoln and Denzin 2000). A text’s generalizability is tested continually in its reading, as readers determine whether and how the text speaks to them of experience. This “naturalistic” generalizability is the hallmark of felt meaning transfer and vicarious experience (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p. 751). Coherence and interest (Richardson 2000) are literary criteria that also contribute to the crafting of the text.

Goodall (2000, p. 1) succinctly distills the essence of the writing we explore. Ethnographic writing evinces a tension between the “felt improbability” of the ethnographer’s lived experience and the “known impossibility” of expressing that experience; this striving to capture the ineffable results in a perpetually incomplete project that reveals the ongoing con-

struction of self and knowledge. All representations are “partial, partisan and problematic” (Goodall 2000, pp. 1, 8, 55). The so-called new ethnography is a literary effort that “rhetorically enables intimacy in the study of culture” that demands that readers take the writing personally (Goodall 2000, p. 14). The new ethnography espouses distinctive criteria: writing should be “evocative,” “empathic,” “caring,” “therapeutic,” “emotionally honest,” and “compassionate” (Goodall 2000, pp. 31, 33). Writing is understood as a method of inquiry, with no separation of writing from research. The ethnographer draws from the “rhetorical sources of creativity”—the “confluence of deep, personal self-reflection, epiphany, the use of rhetorical and narrative devices and the poetics of expression”—to produce an account of understanding (Goodall 2000, p. 92). New ethnographic writing is good to the extent that it is dialogic, affects and influences the reader, is self-reflexive, and produces scholarly talk and editorial controversy (Goodall 2000, pp. 195–196). Exemplars of this writing can be found in a collection edited by Ellis and Bochner (1996).

We mean to return to poetry directly. As Frost famously observed, a poem is the shortest emotional distance between two points. To bump this trope into non-Euclidean space, we link it to Behar’s (1996) paean to the vulnerable observer: social science that does not break your heart just is not worth doing. We rephrase her pronouncement a bit by proclaiming that a consumer research that does not allow for the visceral collection, analysis, and representing of data is incomplete. The use of intraceptive intuition, introspection, reflexive commentary, and aesthetic form to induce emotional resonance and insight in the reader, the embodying of emotion in encoding and its re-embodying in decoding as the object of meaning transfer, is the essence of the personal writing regimes at work in contemporary social scientific inquiry. Our consumer poetics lies at the intersection of autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000) and creative analytic practice (CAP) ethnography (Richardson 2000), each of which has a long and distinguished genealogy. The kind of evocative, dialogic narrative that captures the lived experience of consumption, remaking author and reader in its cocreation, is the outcome of the poetics we espouse.

A poet-researcher may begin with his personal life by focusing, via systematic introspection, biographical technique, and affective recall, on his physical feelings, emotions, and thoughts and channel this understanding of his own lived experience into a text (Ellis and Bochner 2000). The meaning of pre-narrative is constituted in the poem, as life and text are mutually implicated; writing itself is a method of inquiry, a constituting force, a rewording of the world (Ellis and Bochner 2000; Richardson 2000). The poem must be apprehended not as a “writing up” of research (a static or mechanistic format akin to a plot summary) but as a “writing” of research, an open strategy of discovery enacted through an intraceptive intuition that does not cease with data collection (Richardson 2000, p. 925). In this writing enterprise, there is no such thing as “getting it right,” only “getting it” differently “nuanced and contoured” (Rich-

ardson 2000, p. 931). Geertz’s (1988, p. 140) wise counsel is helpful in this regard: “The strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that its very nature demands we talk about it without fuss—a spade is a spade, a rose is a rose—on pain of illusion, trumpery, and self-bewitchment, leads to the even stronger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact.”

Poetry as research is an especially intriguing undertaking. Poetry calls attention to its construction and helps further problematize the issues of validity, reliability, transparency, and truth (Richardson 2000) we have just considered. By combining aesthetics and ethnographic accountability to evoke in the reader a comparable experience, a poem rouses passion and emotion and gravitates from inspirational to clairvoyant; it evokes a kinship between author and reader (Brady 2000). Brady emphasizes that just because the poet believes poetry to convey “the nature of experience as pan-human emotion” more effectively than the clinically reductive language of social science, it does not mean that poetry is the “right tool for every job” (Brady 2000, pp. 958, 962). The poetry we have in mind is ultimately allegorical, a vehicle of discovery for personal and moral truths that demands coparticipation and coproduction of readers and that engages the reader’s body as well as mind (Denzin 2000; Richardson 2000). It acknowledges the intellectual, aesthetic, moral, emotional, intuitive, embodied “pull” (Richardson 2000, p. 939) that tugs every researcher a bit distinctively.

Let us emphasize again the contribution poetry stands to make to consumer research. If emotion is still “the stepchild of the neural and cognitive sciences” (Norman 1999, p. 178), its relative neglect in our own discipline will come as no surprise. That it might (or ought to) be privileged over cognition borders on the heretical. And yet, the privileging of emotionality is a diagnostic feature of the wave of humanistic writing sweeping the social sciences at the beginning of qualitative inquiry’s seventh moment (Denzin 2000). The text becomes an agent of self-discovery and self-creation for the author and the reader (Ellis and Bochner 2000). To paraphrase Wallace Stevens, our discipline realizes that researchers never arrive intellectually, but it seems oblivious to the possibility that they constantly arrive emotionally. Poetry highlights this unannounced arrival.

Bringing “bodiliness” into method in a way that viscerally engages the scholar with the subject matter—using the “twinge in the gut as an indicator of inner accuracy of interpretation”—is an enterprise well underway among historians and ethnographers (Csordas 1999, p. 149); it is just taking off in consumer research. To locate cultural sensibility in the evocation of reality, rather than merely in representation, is a postmodern inclination that is both reflexive and dialogic. Csordas (1999, p. 150) argues for a concomitant alternative to this “restructuring of representation” that he labels “reflective” in nature: “prereflective gut feeling and sensory engagement are raised to the level of methodological self-consciousness by insertion of a phenomenological sense of embodiment into the ethnographic enterprise.”

While the combination of reflexive and reflective approaches may contribute to the reformation of ethnography, it has always been a hallmark of poetry.

Stoller (1997, p. xv) has passionately advocated a “sensuous scholarship” in which analysts would “tack between the analytical and the sensible” and use embodied form, not merely disembodied logic, in argumentation. This linking of heart and head, this rejection of dualism, this resensualization—all aspects of the poetic enterprise—he calls an “opening of one’s being to the world,” a kind of “embodied hospitality.” Sensuous scholarship seeks to overcome our denial of the “contingent nature of situated experience” that allows us to skirt the ambiguity of everyday life, in demanding that we use our bodies to capture, rather than merely give metaphorical significance to, experience. Representations of research in the sensuous mode would “reverberate . . . with the tension between the political and the poetic” (Stoller 1997, pp. xviii, 23, 26), would integrate narrative and exposition, would counter the forces of cultural anesthesia that numb our embodied critical consciousness. Stoller advises us to fuse and celebrate “experience and reality, imagination and reason” in both rigorous and imaginative practices as well as in expository and evocative expression. Such “epistemological flexibility” is essential to capture the complexities of contemporary consumption (Stoller 1997, pp. 91, 116). He argues for the tempering of our conservative academic research style with a poetic approach—the figurative, imagistic, destabilizing, polyvocal meaning making that poets employed well before the experimental moment of postmodernity—in the service of innovative, holistic research.

On Craft and Truth

Among his recommended remedies for the latent positivist tendencies harbored by qualitative researchers, Friedrich (1992, p. 222) suggests “wide experimentation with artistic treatments, particularly literary ones, but without preference for realistic prose.” While all the tenets of his vision have implications for our enterprise, Friedrich’s (1992, p. 222) concern for the “principle of craftsmanship” and “models of practice” is perhaps most relevant at this point in our essay. If we accept that a poem is at once a mystical document and a written document (Oliver 1994, p. 1), then we presume that its crafting may be learned. A technical exposition of the crafting of poetry is beyond the scope of our essay, but we can convey a sense of the elements of craft such that the reader might develop a feel for the criteria used by poets in evaluating the technical merit of poetry. Our treatment here is less than cursory, so we advise the reader to consult some familiar examples in consumer research (Sherry and Camargo 1987; Stern 2000) for additional illustration.

Poetic craft demands linguistic dexterity; poets have a profound grasp of the “peculiarities” of language and are hyperattuned to polysemy and nuance (Jerome 1980). A poem may be evaluated technically along the dimensions of

sound, meter, form, genre, diction, tone, voice, imagery, and symbolism (Oliver 1994). Each of these dimensions has a framework of principles and precepts to undergird it. For example, prosody is literally the science of metrics and is concerned with, among other issues, accentual syllabic meter and line division (Jerome 1980; Wallace and Boisseau 2000). Many anthologies contain a prosody appendix that examines the formal patterns of sound. Another example is the exhaustive analysis and illustration of poetic forms produced by Padgett (1987). To complement these treatments of principles, models of practice may be found in numerous excellent collections of writing exercises, such as that by Behn and Twichell (1992). Such vocational guidance offers us a window to poets’ models of technique. Again, we seek only to call attention to the existence of formal standards of craftsmanship, given the thrust of our essay, and to remind the reader that the “poetic” is not simply in the “message” (Friedrich 1991, p. 50).

The mystical aspect of the poem as document is more difficult to dissect in terms of craft. This dissection intersects inevitably with our discussion of poetic truth. Poetry thrives on the margins of knowledge, where literal meaning must be stretched; poetry draws its power from our need to live “beyond our intellectual means,” since we project our commitments beyond our knowledge. Poetry plays with the uncertainty we find frustrating in literal language, and we “delight” in the intricacies of interpretation that we try to avoid in scientific discourse (Fleischacker 1996, pp. 113–114). Hofstadter’s (1997) magisterial unpackings of Marot’s brief poem “Ma Mignonne” comprise a wonderful illustration of such polysemic confounding. Poetry may be said to unmake sense, to challenge our theories of interpretation, to “threaten the completeness of a theory of meaning” itself (Fleischacker 1996, p. 120). What are the implications of this threat for our notions of truth?

Poetry has truth conditions, and has meaning by virtue of these conditions, but does not have any definite set of truth conditions; exegesis never adequately captures truth, and dissatisfaction with this situation drives further interpretation. Fleischacker (1996, p. 124) maintains:

Truth-claims . . . must be simultaneously intelligible and objective. We preserve intelligibility by keeping our background judgments under strict construction, by insisting on incorporating all evidence under classificatory categories and means of explanation established in advance. But we preserve objectivity by allowing these judgments as much flexibility as we can to respond to the unexpected. Thus, poetry and science make each other possible. Scientific theories cannot survive without the possibilities of reinterpretation that poetry keeps open for them, while poetry thrives precisely by contrast with the apparent determinacy of scientific language. Poetry, and the reflective judgment by which we interpret it, occur precisely where ordinary and literal language gets frustrated.

Truth-conditional theories of interpretation are poetic prerequisites, since ordinary ways of determining truth cannot

be supplanted in the absence of accepted “ordinariness” (Fleischacker 1996, p. 124). We encourage the reader to consult Kurt Brown’s (1998) anthology of poems on science and mathematics as a particular example of this contestation of truths.

POETRY, INTROSPECTION, AND RESEARCH

Poets . . . drink at streams which we have not yet made accessible to science. (SIGMUND FREUD, IN MACKAY 1991)

Let us focus for a moment on the introspective inflection of poetry. Introspection has had a checkered career in consumer research but remains a practice of considerable interest (Brown 1995; Gould 1995; Holbrook 1995; Levy 1996; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Because poetry is so alive to contexture, the texture that surrounds and constitutes our lived experience, it is more suited than prose to capturing the radicalness of the Other (Daniel and Peck 1996). Recall that intrareceptive intuition—the researcher as instrument—is a characteristic of postmodern consumer research (Sherry 1991). As culture is increasingly regarded as dialogic, poetry becomes an unsurpassed vehicle for eliciting and representing the intuitions of researcher and researched and for knitting them together in the service of interpretation (Daniel 1996; Van Maanen 1995).

In Wallendorf and Brucks’s (1993) categories of introspection in research we find a discussion of reflexivity within the research process. The main function of the researcher’s reflexive journal is to record personal reactions, thoughts, biases, and observations that emerge in fieldwork. This introspective material may serve in the course of data analysis and reporting to clarify the author’s role and point of view in the research process. Here again, poetry is a legitimate form of expression, allowing the researcher to tap intuitions and explore the unthought known. Let’s look at some examples. During a six-week stay in South Korea in 1990, where he had gone to seek a better understanding of consumer behavior in that nation at that time, John Schouten kept journal entries of feelings and impressions. Later, he developed some of those notations into poems, which he felt captured certain concepts and experiences and his feelings about them. The first (Schouten 1990a) represents his view of a Korea torn between tradition and modernity.

Drum Song

The monk’s head is shaven, serious,
his brown eyes clear as polished pine.
He squares his stance,
grips the heavy sticks
and makes them dance across the temple drum,
a thundering prayer
for the souls of earthly beasts.

A thundering prayer for progress
rises from the hammers
and the pistons
and the clenched-fist crowds
of Seoul and Pusan.
The turtle of long life is a picture in a book.
The crane of happiness
lifts a steel beam skyward.

Today in a grove at Kaya-san
I picked two ginkgo leaves,
primordial fans from a tender branch.
One I pressed in the pages of this book;
the other I set afloat
to ride the current
of a plunging mountain stream.

Probably he could have written a lengthy article in academic prose that would develop some of the themes embedded in the poem. Perhaps he could have conveyed the tension between two apparently antithetical cultural phenomena. Possibly he even could have expressed something of the strange harmony he sensed between the two. If he were convinced it would tell a more authentic story, he supposes he would have used prose—perhaps even the lyrical prose of a McCracken, a Holbrook, or a Brown. But poetry alone here permits the capture and rendering of this intersubjectivity. Here the researcher sings a song of synecopation and syncretism, as he recognizes and rues the dance of natural and industrial theologies. He invites the reader to inhabit the personal realms of its minions. He offers his own experience of paradox, asking the reader to feel the ineffectuality and inevitability of expiation. He inscribes his understanding in the languages of myth, ritual, and art with an economy and resonance unavailable to prose.

The next poem (Schouten 1990b) reports Schouten’s feelings and interpretations of the subtle architecture and artistry inherent in a common agricultural practice. Once again, poetry was not his only option for recording and reporting his reflections; it just happened to seem the most appropriate. Using the symbolic vocabulary of painting and calligraphy, he captures the perpetual project of world making, the grounded essence of culture as cultivation, and the spirit of place that pervades the planet, making this realization available emotionally to readers in way that social scientific prose would likely obscure.

Transplanting Season

Gather stones and soil
with a palette knife.
Build a dike across a gentle slope.
Level the ground.
Flood the field with sky and clouds.

Brush in shoots of new rice,
short, vertical strokes
in two shades of green,

dark at the heart,
light where the air sifts through.
For the egret, slender dragon
with rice-paper wings,
add sweeping strokes of titanium white.

Paint the sun low in the sky,
a sign to start work or to stop,
then sign the canvas
with a footprint,
deep in mud,
filled with brown water.

John Sherry has also wandered with commonplace book in hand, recording images and sensations, questions and insights, and impressions of local worlds as a complement to his ethnographic research. He has written poems about all his research pursuits: gift giving, marketplace ambience, advertising, cultural ecology, development, materiality. Frequently these themes may coalesce in a single poem and reveal his sense of being in the moment, an often kaleidoscopic experience. Consider the following poem (Sherry 1997), an account (written soon after the fact) of his participation in a Thai festival honoring the goddess of waterways:

Loy Krathong²

heads bowed beneath

a full ancestral moon,
its glow diffused in this

close humid air,
the intermarried fragrances

of incense and exhaust
inspire among us

awkward vigilants
an unconverted

catalytic high
cupped in the woven palm,

banana leaf become
a lotus boat,

our gift begins
all life upon the klong

a simple sacrifice this
candle, coin and flower,

to thank the river
for its petulant resistance

for its sounding of our soul
now long possessed,

our exorcisms fail
fouled in all manner

by all matter
still it lifts our spirits

with our boats

He celebrates metaphysical exaltation amid physical degradation, encourages agnosticism to contend with animism, marvels at the Möbius-strip nature of time, and meditates on the central mystery of the gift, all the while inhabiting a shape-shifting persona the ethnographer rarely reveals in prose social science. He meditates on the transformative nature of the research process, his prime mover of intellectual inquiry. Poetry gives voice to the ethnographer's belief in the thaumaturgy of his method, the knowledge of which he feels the readers of his prose are conventionally denied.

In a more flippant invocation, Sherry (1993a) expresses wonderment and outrage over the commingling of the sacred and the profane, the sublime and the ridiculous, and the latent and the manifest. The indictment, phrased in the incantatory measures of religio-commercial cant, sounds like this:

The Price of Martyrdom

This blood's for you the
litany begins
So rich you'll never taste
its like again
And if it isn't good
to the last drop
You'll know you haven't got
the real thing

And still his railing at the used gods of consumer culture and the sacrifices they demand does not prompt his apostasy. His position reflects the prisoners' dilemma we all appear to face at century's end. Criticism fails to drive praxis when seduction is so effective. The researcher's insight is delivered as a prayer rather than a jeremiad, as chant rather than agitprop. The poem conveys a sense of the researcher's ambivalence and hypocrisy more poignantly than prose permits.

As an example of reflexivity within a conventional research format, these poems might accompany the text of a more traditional scholarly article replete with triangulating literature, informant verbatims, and/or additional observational data. The poems would serve to locate the researchers emotionally within the study. Unbundling the research cor-

²A Thai festival honoring Mae Kongka, goddess of waterways, wherein celebrants launch tiny vessels laden with offertory gifts across canals and rivers throughout the country.

pus, either the poem or the report could stand on its own merits, but each illuminates the other. What is currently absent from most consumer research is this emotional sounding of the moral geography we all traverse. In (re)reading these poems, we learn what it is like to be Schouten and Sherry, how they think about consumer behavior, what it might be like to be their informants, and how these authors strive to articulate the ineffable that they elicited as instruments themselves in their conventional prose publications.

Poetry as Research

Discussions of poetry frequently focus on the form of the finished product and its purpose. How differently might we understand poetry and its usefulness if we concentrated instead on either the process of its production or reception? Although there is no single prescribed process of poetics, each poet has personal habits, rules, rituals, or ways of writing. The process may be quite different from one poet to the next and, for a single poet, from one poem to the next. Nevertheless, in any situation, the poet almost surely is capable of describing the process whereby a poem is created (Pack and Parini 1997). So also does each reader have a strategy for reading poetry in general and for rereading individual poems in the light of accrued experience. Reader-response theory suggests both that interpretive communities will generate alternative glosses and that readers will migrate through a number of these communities over the life course. Readers may be able to describe their reading process without being able to articulate specific patterns of spreading activation that lead to insight. Let's look at writing and reading practices from our own (i.e., the authors') perspectives.

Poetry Writing. The writing of poetry as we approach it here is a literary variant of qualitative research. It involves gathering data, particularly observational data from both external and internal environments. These data take the form of very specific sensory images, and they are derived variously from sources distant as well as immediate, such as memory, objects and artifacts, ambient environment, photographs, commercial media, other texts, interpersonal interactions, and conversations either initiated or overheard by us. For example, for "Transplanting Season," Schouten gathered data over a period of two days that included driving through a rice-producing region during the transplanting season and taking a lengthy walk near dusk through a series of paddies. Specific observations included the complex configuration of dikes, the flooding of the paddies, the tranquility of the water and the reflection of the sky in its surface, the texture and color of young rice plants, the frequent presence of egrets in the shallow water, the length of the work day, and the shape of a footprint left behind by a worker departing a field. He obtained additional information about the cultivation of rice and about oil painting from an agron-

omist and an amateur artist, respectively, with whom he was traveling.

Sherry's "Loy Krathong" was the culmination of several months' field immersion in a cultural setting—characterized doctrinally by Buddhist philosophy and commonsensically by unabashedly enthusiastic acquisitive materialism—that he found paradoxical but that caused his informants no qualms of contradiction. Everywhere he looked, he found "modernity" being actively negotiated, "progress" being nativized, and ecological consequences being discounted. His images are drawn from informants' understandings as they challenged his own. The poem describes the panhuman efficacy of ritual as realized through his participation.

Like all other observational research data, ours are recorded. Usually we write them in a notebook, but we may also use photographs or videotape as well. Schouten's data recording for "Transplanting Season" consisted of journaling bits of imagery, thoughts about what he was seeing, possible metaphors, and information he received through technical queries about rice cultivation and oil painting. Sherry's corpus comprised similar sensual and technical notes, as well as noodlings about "river-ness" and "closeness."

The actual crafting of the poem involves a type of interpretive data analysis. We work with the images, seeking patterns that hold together both thematically and artistically. In some cases, a poem "comes together" quickly and easily; others have taken years. In either case, a poem is not finished until its emotional truth resonates with us as authors and sometimes with others whom we may call on from time to time for peer review.

Reading Poetry. The reading of poetry has been described as an "emerging sacramental event," a way of connecting more deeply with self and other; the poem gives "the gift of intimacy and interiority, privacy and participation" as we reinhabit it through reading (Hirsch 1999, p. 5). The poet provokes an active encounter with the reader (Hirsch 1999), who cocreates the poem, much like the marketer and the consumer conspire to create brand essence. Given that our (social) scientific knowledge of reading practices is so incredibly impoverished (Boyarin 1993), reading being so taken for granted as part of the fabric of our experience—although both Arnould (1998) and Thompson (1998) offer some implicit guidance for reading strategies sensitive to consumer research issues—and that we have no prescribed poetics of reception, we (the authors) unpack several previously unpublished poems in the following paragraphs using both the esoteric and exoteric perspectives that our own experiences comprise.

John Schouten investigates the proposition that formative emotional and social experiences are contextualized and embodied semiotically in objects and activities of consumption, through a poetic exploration and expression of personal consumption realities. His poem, titled "Leap Year," while not claiming to be an accurate depiction of precise events, explores significant images and occurrences from his own boy-

hood. At the poem's conclusion he offers some commentary on its possible value as consumer research.

Leap Year

She screeches to the curb
in her giant Pontiac Bonneville
and, like an explosion in a fabric store,
flies from the car, throws
her arms wide, and shouts, "Lit-tle Johnny!"

If she comes from the city
where she gives drum lessons to teenage boys
and sweet-talks tentative patients through the glass
doors of a dental office,
her car will be shiny clean.

If she comes from Grandpa's fading ranch
out in the sagebrush of Santaquin County
where she drives the fifteen miles of rutted road
flat out, raising plumes of dust like banners on a pole
and aiming her car to run down
any jackrabbit with the poor sense to be on the road,
it will come red-skirted with the residues
of that inhospitable landscape.

"Lit-tle Johnny," she cries.
I remember the afternoon as my second birthday
(at eight years old) and her eighth (at thirty-two).
It is February twenty-ninth
and my Aunt Louise floats
in a sea of burgundy and gold,
takes me in her arms, and presses
me to her cushiony breasts.
I am sinking in furniture and flowers.
She grips my shoulders, gives me a squeeze
that opens my eyes, and exclaims,
"Happy birthday to us, you delicious child,
we are going out on the town."

And we do.
With my clothing pressed and my hair
plastered with Dippity-Do
(my mother's contribution
to my dinner with Aunt Louise),
I climb to the broad seat of the Bonneville.
Three definitive tromps on the accelerator
and a twist of the key set us in motion.

At the Balsam Embers Restaurant I hold
the door as my Aunt Louise
sweeps into the foyer like a parade float.
The carpet is plush and burgundy.
The chairs are cushioned with burgundy velvet.
I am vaguely aware of sustained
sidelong glances.
In the center of the room sits an empty table,

two chairs, a candle,
and a hand-lettered sign: Reserved.

I rehearse my etiquette: napkin in lap,
elbows down, I will be
the perfect gentleman.
I am completely intent on slicing a meatball
as I feel the sharpness
of Aunt Louise's toe pressing on my knee.
I look up. She raises
her eyebrows as if to say, "Behold!"

"Oh my God, my contact.
I've lost a contact lens!" Aunt Louise's voice
fills the restaurant. I feel panic
as she bends toward the floor.
"Did you see where it went?"
The waiter comes running.
"Oh, be careful!" We drop
to our knees and begin combing our fingers through the soft
burgundy nap.
The waiter drops to his knees.
Then the men from the tables around us,
everyone combing and sifting,
under tables, under chairs, rumps in the air . . .
"Oh, here it is! Thank God."
Aunt Louise's hand moves to her eye.
"Thank you everyone. Thank you very much."
I still tingle with excitement
as the spaghetti plate disappears
and a leaning tower of chocolate cake
slides into place.

On the trip home, as I curl
onto the seat of the Bonneville and settle
my head on the wide lap beside me,
I ask, "Aunt Louise, what color
are your contact lenses?"
"Johnny," she replies, "you sweet boy,
Auntie Louise doesn't wear contacts.
I have the eyes of a hawk."

For poetry such as this to succeed as consumer research requires, just as any other research method, a close and thoughtful reading. Where poetry differs from other methods is in its expectation that the audience members engage their own imaginations to "read between the lines" and draw on their personal storehouses of knowledge and emotion. Therein lies the special power of poetry to reveal truth: it helps us find it within ourselves. Poetry thus resembles a test of significance of the kind advocated by Thompson (1990).

"Leap Year" addresses a complex consumption experience that stands out as significant in the mind of the poet. A close reading reveals multiple themes or layers of meaning. On the surface it depicts the excitement and joy inherent in a birthday celebration with a special relative. The emo-

tional communication begins in the first line, which conveys a sense of urgency, excitement, and perhaps recklessness. By the second line we are grounded in a concrete image of an automobile that is reinforced and layered with additional meaning throughout the poem. In the remainder of the first stanza the metaphor of “an explosion in a fabric store” completes the emotional impact of the visitor’s arrival.

The second and third stanzas begin to dig more deeply beneath the experience. They not only establish a sense of the visitor’s personal history and current lifestyle but also delve into a tension between urban life and rural roots. The car acts as an emblem of success in an urban environment and as a means of escape from (and attempted demolition of) a rural past that is not truly past. Both the choice of metaphor—“raising plumes of dust like banners on a pole”—and the nearly breathless cadence of the eight lines of unbroken sentence in the third stanza help convey the emotional consequences of visiting and then fleeing from the rural home.

The next stanza establishes the narrative device (a shared leap year birthday) that structures the poem and provides a metaphor for the special closeness of the aunt-nephew relationship. The emotional qualities of that relationship are further revealed in both metaphor and monologue. The stage now set, the remainder of the poem, right down to its surprise ending, unravels with sensory richness the events of this consumption episode. Grounded in specific, concrete images, dialogue, and metaphor, the language draws the reader into the event as a witness and invites participation from the child narrator’s perspective. Layered beneath the story line are other issues that, although lost on the child narrator, may resonate with the reader. There is a story, partially told, of consumer socialization and also of subversion. There are issues of social control and gender. More important, perhaps, and consistent with the purpose of poetry, there may be still other meanings that an individual reader would derive from this poem. And they would be valid.

Does “Leap Year” effectively explore and communicate the concept of a formative emotional and social experience contextualized and embodied semiotically in objects and activities of consumption? Does it convey a sense of truthfulness about the consumption phenomena it explores? If these questions can be answered affirmatively by readers other than Schouten himself, it would suggest that poetry is indeed a valid medium for both investigating and representing consumer behavior. Does the poem add to our understanding and in some incremental way add support to Schouten’s original proposition? He asserts that it does, and that in so doing it contributes as much to the discipline as some of our more traditionally scientific research, especially if we invoke the popular heuristic of length/contribution ratios.

John Sherry (1998a) explores, from a number of perspectives, the way in which grief is ritualized—how we perform “the work of mourning,” as Freud ([1910] 1957) construed it—to help make our suffering bearable. He invokes Winnicott’s (1965) concepts of playing, holding, tran-

sitional object, potential space, and primary creativity as he questions his role of the good-enough parent, even as he watches the forces of the positive and negative Oedipal complexes contend within his son. Sherry comments at the conclusion of his poem.

the gift
 that night
 the resonance
 was absolute

 so tuned to me
 was his regret
 that it was mine

 he must have felt
 and so to ease
 my leaving of his home

 he bore a handsel
 of his own device
 to the stiff sofa

 where I’d wintered
 and laid the offertory gift
 on the quicksilver

 coffeetable top
 for me to view
 through sleepless eyes

 a rabbit’s foot, a
 toy tarantula, a
 yellowjacket robot

 armed to sting,
 his sacrifice
 a sacrificing too

 an avenging Isaac
 to my awkward
 Abraham

This poem was written on the occasion of the author’s divorce or, more properly, on the announcement of his impending separation and departure from home to his youngest son. It is the literal capturing of an actual event, whose component parts become metaphors for the life-stage traumas the protagonist and antagonist have begun to experience. Sherry uses the idiom of the gift and the gift’s central mystery—sacrifice—to explore the interplay of filial devotion and parental obligation in the darkest hour of the dyad’s bond. The poem is a chronicle of leave-takings and takings-back. The damage inflicted by the poet’s imagined saving of self and son is acknowledged and conditionally forgiven by the son through the vessel of the gift.

A handsel (evocative of the passive protagonist of the

Grimms' fairy tale) is both a goodwill gift given on the occasion of embarking on a new enterprise and the first encounter with something taken as a token of things to come. The son gives prized possessions to the father, who will bear them as talismans on the next stage of his journey (as the monomyth decrees). The objects are a powerful bricolage of hope and fear, protection and danger, the trickster and the duped, anger and joy, and techno-organic animism, held together in an evocative Diderot unity by the son's magical beliefs. The son indulges in keeping-while-giving, leaving the father to ponder the primordial dark side of the gift.

The mirrored surface of table, the altar on which the ritual is performed, evokes self-reflection, a liminal threshold of passing through, and the dialectical merger/individuation the father and son must reenact throughout their lives. The gift embodies the timelessness of this reenactment, suspended as it is in the infinite space of the table glass. If the child must be the father to the man, that siring must be accompanied by all the shared pain such transferred experience requires.

While Sherry has explored many of these issues in his social scientific work, the felt immediacy of lived experience engendering these themes he has rarely been able to capture. By accounting for their confluence in his own life, he is able to privilege emotionality in an efficient manner and, he hopes, to provoke readers to move beyond consideration of his own reflexive commentary to an examination of these themes in their own lives. Such passionate provocation seems denied in standard journal article format, by disciplinary convention that has assumed the force of moral authority. Poetry denies this separation of empirics and morality. The toys comprising Brendan's gift rest on a shrine on the corner of his father's desk at work. The reader is invited to consult Charles Simic's (2001) poem "The Altar" for a related treatment of this issue and to compare that poem with Sherry and Kozinets's (2002) prose unpacking of an identical phenomenon to gauge the gulf between lyrical and social scientific understanding.

Introspection: Reprise

For verse that emerges from and is grounded in external data, it may be a short leap to the conclusion that poetry is research with an alternative form of representation. For poems that rely heavily on the poet's introspection, that conclusion may require additional reassurance for the reader. Probably the most controversial method published to date in the *Journal of Consumer Research* is that of researcher introspection, which we have asserted is a reasonable analogy for the writing of some poetry. Leaving defense of the method aside and focusing instead on cautions, let us examine poetry in light of the following dangers of researcher introspection as envisioned by Wallendorf and Brucks (1993).

First, there is the issue of the accuracy of recollection, especially when retrieved from the distant past. This is not a problem for contemporaneous observations of external

events. Still, a poet relying on memory for salient images can and should, if possible, employ the same kinds of safeguards as an interviewer or ethnographer who deals with an informant's stories or recollections. Acknowledging that long-term memory is reconstructive and selective and that one's image bank may be extraordinarily large and diverse, the poet should make no pretense to the literal, objective accuracy of remembered events. However, if the purpose of the poetry is to investigate and communicate emotional, subjective phenomena (whether based on extraordinary or mundane events), then claims to accurate recording of the "merely objective" are unnecessary and inappropriate.

Another potential problem for introspection is the tendency to form generalizations about a phenomenon without sufficiently grounding them in detailed analysis of specific events. Just as glossy generalities make poor research, so do they make poor poetry. For poetry to achieve its artistic and communicative purposes requires that its painstakingly precise language evoke very specific sensory and emotional events. The power of poetry as a medium lies in its ability to transfer a specific sensory or emotional (and often intellectual) experience to the audience intact so that its truthfulness will manifest itself in its impact or resonance (Levy 1999).

A third potential weakness of introspection may be the difficulty of recording data in such a fashion as to satisfy such arbiters as reviewers, editors, and auditors of rigor in the research design and execution. We, as do Wallendorf and Brucks (1993, p. 356), "concur with a wide body of literature that the specific forms of recording or documentation should be tailored to the theory-building aims of a particular study." In the case of traditional poetry-as-art, data recording may occur as a throwaway part of the writing process. Here, data are incidental to the insights they may set in motion. The somewhat different aims of poetry-as-research may reasonably require a more methodical and permanent record of the observations on which the composition turns. This record might be reflected in headnotes or footnotes to the poem itself. On the other hand, given that poetry-as-research actually turns on the data (which are, often as not, its component images), this would be a requirement of redundancy.

Another concern about introspective data is the sample of one, which Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) point out is justifiable under certain circumstances. This concern is less relevant for poetry based on multiple observations of specific external events, but for that which is based on ephemeral or nonrecurring events, or those grounded entirely in the poet's recollection, it should be addressed. The most obvious reason for minimizing this concern is that poetry makes no claims to transferability or generalizability beyond the resonance it may create within its audience. If a sizable portion of a poem's readership agrees that the poem captures an element of truth with which readers can relate, then the poem is both successful and, by its own demonstration, transferable. Conversely, if an idiographic insight produces idiosyncratic resonance, the poem has succeeded as well.

For remember, where it is commonly held that myth is a portal both to the unconscious and to the transcendent, it is further believed that poets are especially adept at traversing this portal. Poets reveal the findings of their boundary crossings to us in symbolism and imagery that is differentially accessible.

Caution about the analytical stance of the researcher may also be warranted with respect to poetry-as-research. The ideal situation seems to be one of intimacy with the data combined with a more distant analytical perspective. Intimacy yields understanding of the phenomenon for itself, and analytical distance allows the researcher to place the phenomenon into a broader conceptual cradle. In fact, this duality of stance describes nicely what goes on in the poetic process. Writing poetry involves two distinct categories of activity, inspiration and craft, which work hand in hand in an iterative manner. The process of inspiration or epiphany results from intimate engagement with elements in the poet's internal and external environments. It includes introspection and exploration of the multiple meanings of words and phrases. It is this aspect of the creative process that gives good poetry its characteristic authenticity and its freshness of language and perspective. It contains within itself the seeds of perpetual renewal.

It is in the crafting of the poem that the poet withdraws from the raw feelings and imagery enough to discover some truth about their relationships to each other, to the poet, and to life as the poet seeks to understand it. These two categories of process may rarely occur in neat, linear fashion. A particular set of observations may inspire certain images, metaphors, or other concepts. These may lead to thoughtful analysis, consideration of deeper or alternative meanings, experimental word play, juxtaposition of phrases, and other tools of craft. Deeper exploration of the concepts through craft may inspire new connections to imagery and concept. In the final crafting, through word choice, "soundscape," punctuation, line breaks, and so on, the poet strives to produce a holistic work that coheres at multiple levels of meaning. Anyone who has read the painful attempts of beginning poets can understand why inspiration without craft is insufficient. Likewise, without the freshness of inspiration and the authenticity born of intimacy with the subject, craft has nothing with which to work; here writing becomes technical exercise, mere practice.

A sixth caveat from Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) regarding introspective data is well taken: not all topics may lend themselves to investigation through any one individual's poetic process. They do point out, however, that researcher introspection "may be the best means of providing researchers with data about unobservable individual experiences occurring in real time" (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993, p. 351). We concur, and we believe that where the topic under consideration is an individual's emotional or spiritual understanding of consumption objects, his or her grasping of the thing-in-the-thing, poetry may be the most appropriate method of both investigation and expression. In many cases the poem will stand alone to give witness to a subjective

truth. In other cases it may be better presented in the context of a multimethod approach.

A final word of caution comes from Gould (1995), who maintains that, like any other research method, the use of researcher introspection requires certain training and discipline. Similarly, we would expect that poetry-as-research might be used most effectively by researchers who also are practiced poets. Predictably, for poetry, like other forms of academic and artistic endeavor, there exist refereed forums that exercise quality control and help establish the credibility of the poet through the review process.

CONCLUSION

It is his intuition, his mystical insight into the nature of things, rather than his reasoning, which makes a great scientist. (POPPER 1945)

Fernandez (1997) has giped that poets were banned from Plato's Republic because they discovered alternative meanings in the images flickering on the walls of the cave. This sentiment has probably been held by researchers of each of the successive disciplines that have swept through our field since the mid-1970s, as they contested and countered the orthodoxy they encountered in ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Sherry 1991). Well, as the next millennium approaches with the waxing of qualitative research's Sixth Moment, here we go again. The emotional consequences of outsiderhood, marginality, and otherness are manifesting with a vengeance during the crisis of representation.

One of the chief stumbling blocks to the acceptance of poetry in consumer research is the discipline's entrenched belief in the notion of progress. This notion may have to be bracketed, if not suspended entirely, in the near term, until a corpus of exemplars is amassed. Progress is not traditionally recognized as a hallmark of poetics. Hollander (1997, p. 4) observes, "But if there is no progress in the realm of art, there is always a continuing task, and a poet is like someone in a quest story, for whom the end of the journey . . . always results in the discovery of a new sort of task that had never been set before. To most people, it may not even look like a task." This continuing task, the hermeneutic quest of (re)figuring the situated meanings of consumption, should help renew the discipline's intellectual vigor as well as replenish its soul. This refreshing might be construed as a species of progress, at least on the macro level.

We have discussed two ways that poetry can inform studies of consumer behavior: as reflexivity within research and a revelation of researcher point of view and as stand-alone qualitative research in its own right. Yet these are not the only means by which poetry may contribute to the discourse on consumer behavior. We have written this article simply to launch the tide of exploration. In summing up the underlying ideas of Feyerabend's (1999, pp. xvii-xviii) thought, Terpstra divines that our perception is shaped by language, that ambiguity preserves the possibility of change,

that abstract theory cannot voice ultimate reality, that logic is a kind of storytelling, and that being does not respond to all approaches. Feyerabend's philosophy would argue strongly for a role for poetry in the research process, especially as we have advanced it here in this article.

Poetry can surely be included among the data collection methods Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) collectively refer to as guided introspection. In addition to more traditional methods of eliciting consumers' inner worlds (e.g., open-ended questionnaires and phenomenological interviews), we might add informant-created poetry. Informants (as well as researchers themselves) can be asked to write poetry to express their thoughts and feelings about a topic of interest. As an open-ended task this might seem unnatural and possibly daunting to anyone unaccustomed to writing verse. However, when given simple tasks or forms to follow, anyone can create incredibly revealing, and occasionally excellent, poetry. Poetry is both a way to establish better social relations and a "projective technique that will stimulate value-laden discourse among the people we are interested in" (Friedrich 1996, pp. 39–40). Given our field's renewed interest in projective tasks as an aid to guided introspection (e.g., Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, Personally Relevant Elicited Projectives, etc.), this use of poetry may become a welcome addition to our tool kit, as Kozinets's (2002b) "Desert Pilgrim" aptly illustrates.

Another consideration here is what Glesne (1997) refers to as poetic transcription (see also Richardson 1992, 1994a, 1994b). In an exercise that achieves what Ellis (1991; see also Wallendorf and Brucks 1993) calls interactive introspection between a researcher and informant, Glesne (1997) creates poetic constructions using her informant's words and phrases. The poetry that emerges from this confluence of the writer's creative processes and the informant's words reveals new insights into the informant's mind and life. The process introduces useful new guidelines and boundaries to the data analysis that yield a result that is arguably more organically faithful to the informant's perspective. The results are easily reflected back to the informant for member checking. As a representation of informant reality, the interpretations derived from poetic transcription remain intimate with the data and retain the informant's rhythms and manners of speech. This technique might also be added to our tool kit.

Poetry historically has had an important role in illuminating cultural inequities and other folly. For example, William Blake's ([1789] 1978) "The Chimney Sweeper" takes on child labor and oppression in his native London. W. H. Auden's ([1940] 1978) "The Unknown Citizen" beautifully examines anonymity, conformity, and the meaning of the unexamined life in America. For critical perspectives of African Americans on the dominant U.S. culture, the poetry of Langston Hughes (1973, e.g.) and Maya Angelou (1975, e.g.) are among the most powerful and enduring. For emancipatory perspectives of consumer culture, poetry may also be a powerful and legitimate tool. Kozinets's (2002a, 2002b) cognate pieces on his experience of non- and antimarketized

consumption among American technopagans perform such a function.

Imagine the potential of a poeticized research culture. Richard Rorty (1989, pp. 53–54) believes such a culture "would not insist we find the real wall behind the painted ones, the real touchstones of truth as opposed to touchstones which are merely cultural artifacts. It would be a culture which, precisely by appreciating that all touchstones are such artifacts, would take as its goal the creation of ever more various and multicolored artifacts." Perhaps such a culture would foster Gibbs's (1994, p. xx) hope for a greater recognition of the poet in each of us and help us "to recognize that figuration is not an escape from reality but constitutes the way we ordinarily understand ourselves and the world in which we live."

In lamenting the failure of American verse to address most public concerns, Dana Gioia (1992) uses the lives and works of poets such as Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, A. R. Ammons, James Dickey, Victor Hugo, and others to assert that poets who pursue primary careers in business are paradoxically able to avoid the destruction or distraction our society visits on artists, perhaps in large part because they keep their vocations and avocations separate. By not writing about business, however, these businessman-poets deprive us of a vital understanding of perhaps the most human of all our enterprises. We hope consumer researchers will not follow in this tradition but, rather, will use their professional base to help us all know consumption more holistically. For just as poetry may inform such interests of ours as advertising (Perloff 1991; Twitchell 1996), so also may advertising inspire poetry itself (Yeats's "Lake Isle of Innisfree," e.g.). In the "boundary struggles between enchanted and disenchanting discourse" (Schneider 1993, p. 194), in the engagement of the hermeneutic with the scientific, this holism will be advanced.

The art of poetry involves a sifting and analyzing of personal data, close observation of the external and internal worlds, and the creation therefrom of a condensed, holistic narrative. The validity of the poem lies in its ability to resonate in the reader, to communicate emotional truths in language that is fresh and engaging. Obviously, not all poetry achieves these ends for all readers. We argue similarly that not all (social) scientific writing achieves its purposes uniformly among its intended audiences. If poetry is to have a role among consumer research methodologies, it will have to be used like any other research tool, with skillful application to research questions. Ultimately, it is the task of the researcher to convince one's peers of the validity of a particular research approach and the believability of the resulting report. When researchers choose methods that are regarded as experimental (or worse, heretical!) within a discipline, the task becomes particularly daunting. We invite you to accept Friedrich's (1997) challenge to consecrate your intuitive perception in formulaic language worthy of your insight. Cast a spell that moves your readers rather than simply informing them.

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