

Speaking With/in the Lines: An Autoethnographical Study of Three Literacy Researchers-Artists

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Figure 1. Poetic Analysis of Jerry's Collage, Watercolor and Paper

	<p>Goats tumble Metaphors settle Signs of literacy Metaphors of inscription—Peggy</p>	<p>Goats and Metaphors I'd say they evolved in our words if it weren't for trails of tenacity (unless you want to argue that evolution is bullheaded)—Teri</p>	<p>Let's look At literacy From the other side As inscribed goats—Jerry</p>
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Several years ago, we engaged in a series of conversations about ourselves, our art, and how art informed our writing as literacy scholars. These initial conversations prompted us to pursue a systematic, longitudinal study of ourselves both as artists and literacy researchers, now in its second year. We were preoccupied with a quest to understand internal dialogues regarding our inquiry in the arts and external dialogues regarding our work as literacy researchers. All three of us have a deep personal passion for the arts and over the course of our lives have participated in them in some form or another, starting in childhood and continuing into our professions as teachers and teacher educators. All three of us have fused this passion with literacy research and, in so doing, continue to investigate how our interest in the arts interlocks with our academic scholarship. In essence, we study our embodied selves both as literacy scholars and artists to understand how our scholarship in literacy has shaped us as artists and how our being artists has shaped our literacy scholarship.

As researchers and writers, in our scholarly and artistic lives we had adopted rhythms of practice that seemed as natural to us as breaths. The fine grit of clay between fingers, the close observation of children in classrooms, the translucence of pigment swept on paper—these were well-honed facets of our collective lives. Similarly, we were well-practiced in conventional qualitative research methods and the authoring of conventional research texts. For this study to produce insights, we knew we needed to take our inquiry into what for us were uncommon textual spaces; we would need to think and speak with and in language that “allowed ourselves to be startled” (Neilsen, 2004, p. 54). To that end, we invoked autoethnography as a method through which to study ourselves, literacy, literacy teaching, and literacy research, and we drew upon poetic analysis to expand and disrupt our commonplace notions of how to analyze research. Our aim was to respond to Neilsen Glenn’s (in press) conceptualization of poetry as “philosophy” through which we are “learning to pay attention, to listen, to be awake...[and] to ask bigger questions, to take down the name of ghosts” (<http://learningthreshold.blogspot.com/2011/02/excerpt-from-homing-chapter-on-poetic.html>). While in this work we call ourselves artists, we do not call ourselves poets. Instead, we frame ourselves as

writers pulling upon what we conceive as poetic impulses in our voiced language to look at our lives newly and with “beginner’s eyes” (Neilsen, 2004, p. 54).

The multi-vocal study presented here—one point in an ongoing autoethnographic inquiry—attempts to highlight our “out-of-school” experiences as artists with our “in-school” experiences as literacy scholars. In so doing, we seek to thread together our discourse communities as artists and literacy researchers, to make visible and tangible the recognition that our scholarship is borne out of our experiences as artists as much as our work as artists draws from our experiences as scholars. Art is not a “hobby” that we engage in on the weekends, but deliberate study that engages us in deep thought about literacy and social semiotics, and their significance to meaning-making, whether in academic journals, trade journals, or on our Etsy sites. We situate the arts and ourselves as artists directly in our work as scholars, not only expanding our definition of literacy, but also articulating how our scholarship in literacy has evolved as a result of our work as artists. Our research questions are situated in embodied experience, or what Spry (2001) calls the “body as site from which the story is generated” (p. 708). We asked: (a) How does working in the arts enable us to understand how we are becoming different from what we have been as literacy researchers?; (b) What is the role of embodied knowledge in our work as artists and as researchers?; and (c) What does autoethnography allow us to understand about stories as sites for producing knowledge?

Education has only recently acknowledged embodied knowledge as significant to literacy scholarship. From a philosophical standpoint, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that the mind is inherently embodied. According to an interview with Lakoff (1999):

Anything we can think or understand is shaped by, made possible by, and limited by our bodies, brains, and our embodied interactions in the world. This is what we have to theorize with....Our brains take their input from the rest of our bodies. What our bodies are like and how they function in the world thus structures the very concepts we can use to think. We cannot think just anything - only what our embodied brains permit” (http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/lakoff/lakoff_p1.html).

Scholarship in embodied knowledge is limited; however, we highlight several studies of note. In 2011, a series of papers at the 2011 Literacy Research Association conference addressed the relationship between body and mind in preservice education (Jones, 2011), struggling readers (Enriquez, 2011), and high school students (Johnson, 2011). Collectively, these researchers found tangible evidence that described body responses and literacy engagements, and suggested the importance of continued study in embodied knowledge to inform practice and research. Davies, Dormer, Gannon, Laws, Rocco, Taguchi, & McCann (2001), through collective biography, closely examine the process of subjectification, specifically locating how their bodies were subjected within available discourses of what it meant to be school girls. Through discussion of their memories, they recognized when and how they took up and/or contested these discourses. In a self-study, Lussier-Ley (2010) describes her embodied experiences and the role of the body in her consulting work with athletes and dancers, finding that an embodied perspective is an important part of a relational pedagogy. Cryle (2000) argues that “the body’...is shaped by, and made available through, discourse . . . [T]he only body we can ever talk about, the only body we can think, is shaped and indeed disciplined by the language in which it is known and recognized” (p. 18).

Alongside these scholars and others, we argue for the importance of examining embodied experiences in literacy research and practice. Our embodied experiences are shaped by and disciplined by languages—art and written/oral language. In turn, our embodied selves shape and discipline these languages. We use “experiences” not simply to define events in which we participate as artists and researchers, but to understand that we are *experiencing* artists and researchers in which experience is not the “the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced” (Scott, 1992, pp. 25–26).

To engage in such inquiry is to participate in what Greene (1988) calls the dialectic of freedom, or the open spaces that provide opportunity for articulation of multiple perspectives. Figure 1 that opens this writing reflects the shift in our scholarship to employ autoethnographical and poetic methods to study ourselves, to investigate within our experiences the significance of the arts to our lives as literacy researchers, and the tensions and possibilities that emerge from such practices. Understanding ourselves as texts, a “discursive template” (Kaufmann, 2005, p. 577) on which we write our world as well as being written by it, this research is riveted in methods of ethnography and theories of aesthetics and critical literacy. This dialectical process between theory and method enables us to acknowledge how embodied knowledge has shaped our thinking, our making, and our reflecting on our work, as well as allows us to shape the very methods with which we take on this inquiry.

Informed by the multi-vocal, multi-faceted textual format of published autoethnographies, throughout the remainder of this article we interrupt our descriptions of the study’s design with our data—artworks, poems, and dialogues that we had with each other—at times without written explanation, situating meaning in the image or the way in which written and visual language is captured. These data function as illustrations or counterpoints to our understanding of ourselves as artist/literacy researchers. Our own thoughts are off-set by text boxes at times, and recorded as dialogue in others. Our findings reflect the themes that we saw operating within our conversations, artworks, and analyses, again, illustrated by data. Because we are artists, we re-story our experiences through a multi-voiced dialogue between our various “bodies” at play.

DOING CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

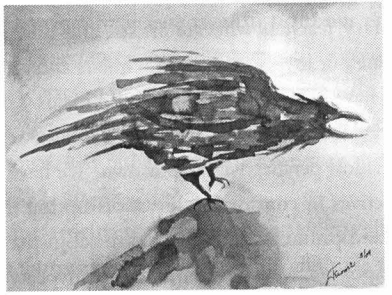
We are now into our second year of systematic study. This work reflects our desire to explore the best we know how to be in talking about the significance of the arts in our lives as researchers, to “do” ethnography, a practice located “in an interpretive search of meaning” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5), in a move to push our thinking forward. By theoretically invoking Greene’s (1988) concept of the dialectic of freedom, we open spaces around which we, as artists and researchers, have creatively played in for years but now do so freshly. In exploring the issue of freedom, Greene (1988) wrote,

... for those authentically concerned about the ‘birth of meaning,’ about breaking through the surfaces, about teaching others to ‘read’ their own worlds, art forms must be conceived of as an ever-present possibility. They ought not to be treated as decorative, as frivolous. They ought to be, if transformative teaching is our concern, a central part of the curriculum (p. 131).

Greene's (1988) words situate precisely our many years of work within the arts; transformation does not result from a one-year study of one's processes and thinking, but occurs through many experiences as artists, literacy teachers who are artists, and now researchers as artists. By naming ourselves as artists, we locate our identities as both scholars and artists, and in this writing, pay clear attention to what the arts have done and continue to do for us. Greene (2000) positions the arts as a path towards defamiliarization, the freedom to think otherwise, to say it strange, and to release the imagination. Such a critical perspective fits our own. We have written about the importance of engaging multiple perspectives in considering ideas, disrupting the commonplace assumptions of what constitutes literacy, and promoted and enacted social justice through our work and writings. Alongside this critical perspective, we have continued to advocate for the arts, primarily as literacy scholars, but now as artists-researchers-scholars. For us, the arts give permission for people to become different than they might otherwise be, to open up dialogue with others, and to engage the intellect through multiple symbol systems. They engage us in metaphorical, theoretical, and pragmatic thinking about social issues, and offer us spaces to share these perspectives through our art. In this vision, the arts require an aesthetic staying power to explore imaginative possibilities and aesthetic daring to take interpretive risks to explore these possibilities.

To do autoethnography is, as Kaufmann (2005) writes, "to recognize that in a dialectical process, every text [we] read is interpreted and rewritten through [our] own biography and [our] autobiography is rewritten as [we] read it through alternate texts, a reciprocal writing and rewriting" (p. 577). The context of this study began with conversations about our biographies, our early and ongoing experiences with the arts. We are three literacy researchers who have studied in community arts programs over many years. Peggy has been involved in the arts, first as an actress in school and community plays, and then as a director of high school plays. As a result of her dissertation work with an art teacher and her first encounter with clay, she shifted her interest towards pottery, studying at a local community arts center for 15 years, all the while showing and selling her work at local venues. Her work focuses closely on arts-based literacy practices and critical analyses of visual information in student- and professionally-generated texts. Teri's childhood endeavors in creative writing led to a career as a published novelist. Her more recent interest to "beat back language" and to interrogate its disciplining function engaged her in the study of photography and collage at a notable school of art and design. She currently explores the role of the arts to speak to and against issues surrounding discourses of disability/ability as they involve texts. Jerry has studied drawing nearly all his life, developed interest in sand sculpting during his family vacations to the beach, and is currently studying watercolor. His work initiated discussions in the significance of semiotics to literacy, and what can be learned about children's literacy when multiple sign systems are an essential part of literacy practices. In essence, the three of us have been artists since childhood and have engaged continuously in the study of an art form, continue today to study art forms, participate as artists in art venues, and have made the arts a significant part of our current scholarship.

Figure 2. Found Poems of Jerry's Watercolor, "Baby Crow"

<p>Signing the Crow <i>Do you think now about the name on the front?</i> I wish I hadn't put it there. I could have reprinted And signed the original Artists do that. When they reprint, they double signature</p>		<p>Is it a crow or a blackbird? It's a crow, a little baby crow. It's meant to capture the essence of black of grouchiness of limiting your palette but getting your voice heard.</p>
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Data Collection and Analysis

As autoethnographic researchers, we claim ourselves as primary social actors in the research. We are fully immersed both in the collection and reporting of the data. For this study, data were comprised of 10 self-selected pieces of artwork by each artist ($N = 30$ pieces), four Skype digitally recorded conversations, and four face-to-face recorded conversations that totaled 12 hours of recorded talk. To prepare, each of us looked over our years of artwork and chose 10 pieces that signified a meaning for us that other examples of our work did not. We then presented these 10 artworks to each other. The selection and discussion of these 10 pieces as we presented them to each other constituted our first layer of analysis. The second layer of analysis occurred as we interviewed each other about these pieces, with focused attention on questions such as: What were you trying to say with this piece? Do you feel you were successful? What did you learn about the discipline by doing this piece? Our conversations were not linear. That is, although we had focused questions, in our talk we moved between and among what we were saying about our art, who we were becoming as artists, and the significance the arts had for us as scholars. Subsequent conversations focused on understanding how we had become different as artists and literacy scholars, what we had learned about the process of making art, and how this contributed to our knowledge of an expanded notion of literacy. All conversations were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to elicit analytic insights (Anderson, 2006) about our art and its relationship to our work as literacy scholars.

Data analysis was multi-faceted, particularly drawing upon visual discourse analysis and poetic transcription and analysis to study our data, which we believed were apt methods that captured specific aspects of our scholarship and art. Visual discourse analysis (Albers, 2007) enabled us to study the artworks as texts. We discussed organizational structures, the content, colors, design, layout, and studied how these elements in combinatorial relationship made discourses visible within each other's pieces. Each of us has had experience reading and analyzing student-generated visual texts as well as professionally generated art, and Peggy and Jerry have written elsewhere about the procedures in detail (Albers, Harste, Vander Zanden, & Felderman, 2008; Albers, Frederick, & Cowan, 2010). Simultaneously, as informed researchers, we studied the written transcripts, open coded for key points, and collapsed these codes into idea units, or key concepts we saw emerging in our conversations (Table 1).

We found this method of coding artistically and theoretically unsatisfying; it did not offer us the level of insight we sought in our research questions. We decided to explore our transcribed

Table 1. Initial Analysis of Transcripts, Open Coding

Project: Literacy Artists

Method: Poetic Analysis

Transcript: 4-49-2010

Lines: 1-260

Date: 4.17.11

Brief: Identify idea units; create 4-line found poems; analyze for semantics, idea unit overlaps, effective of poetry to capture both


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Open Codes	Transcript Line #	Collapsed codes	Transcript Line #	Idea Units	Transcript Line #
Talking to/ Talking back	1-15; 151	Talking to/Talking Back Political/Intention s/Envisioning	1-15; 151; 125; 149; 149	Talking to Talking Back	1-15
Impetus & interest	16-22; 86- 89	Traces/personal history/impetus & interest/ Emotion/passion/ significance	16-22; 24-30; 86- 89; 80-90; 106- 108; 167-168	Impetus & Interest	16-22
Emotion/passion	24-30	Echoes	96-100; 105-109; 193-194; 245	Emotion/Passion	24-30
Ugly writing/ugly art	31-55	Kinds of thinking Affordances In the round thinking	57-61; 224-245	In the round thinking	224-245
Kinds of thinking Affordances In the round thinking	57-61; 224- 245	Surveillance/Surv eyed Watching-Being Watched	103-104; 122-124; 134-141; 145-146; 148	Metaphor	71-76
Metaphor	71-76	Embodied/Disem bodied Making/Process/N oticing/ Doing/Reflect/ Readings of art/Read around/Caught/En visioning/ Playful work/Reflect	125-132; 230-237; 146-147; 147-148; 149; 153-154; 157-159; 161-165; 168; 201-208; 212; 160-224; 170-172; 188	Traces	80-90
Traces/personal history	80-90; 106- 108	Collaboration	154-159	Echoes	96-100
Color	91-94; 162	Materials Canvas/fragments /photos architecture	110-117; 118-121; 120; 124-125; 144-145	Watching/Being Watched	134-141
Line	162; 180	Elements Color/Line/Metap	71-76; 91-94; 162; 162; 180	Canvas	110-117

conversations by way of found poems, a process that entailed reading across transcripts to locate key phrasing and recurring motifs. Distilling our words into found poems enabled us to tap into both our literacy and artistic imaginations and to study our embodied experiences in unfamiliar ways. Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor (2010) write, "Poetic drafts may push forward how we remember

or think about our experience, or, ultimately, how we want to present and explain our materials . . . may help build toward a more rigorous analysis and theoretical understanding of what we observe” (p. 4). We note here that we indeed conceptualized these texts as “poetic drafts”; they were not intended to be polished poems or final drafts but rather poetically informed and analyzed research units that opened spaces to engage with our data differently than we might otherwise. In this article, we use the term *found poems* to describe the short forms we made of our data during analysis. Specifically, we returned to our transcriptions, independently generated “poem-like compositions” (Glesne, 1997, p. 202) from the language in the transcripts (first level), and shared these found poems with each other. We found that we captured similar words, phrases, and ideas from which we then generated another set of conversations about the power of poetry “to sum up” (Friedrich, 1996), and succinctly capture ideas about the relationship between art and scholarship. We delved deeper into our Level 1 found poems and distilled each poem to four lines (Level 2) with the purpose of “remov[ing] excess, highlighting emotions and attitudes . . . as well as ideas” (Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor, p. 8). We came together yet again to study how each of us further distilled our analysis in short four-line found poems. Table 2 represents a sample of the analysis of our data:

Table 2. Deeper Level of Analysis, Distilled Poems

Visual discourse analysis	Transcript (excerpted)	Level 1 found poem	Level 2 found poem (distilled)
	<p>Jerry: <i>I did this painting and realized I needed to make this a lot darker to get the contrast of the face to stand out. I wanted the eye to go in... this was a real study in how to get the eye to move into a picture and to be where you wanted it to be.</i></p> <p>Peggy: <i>And I see also that she has a little cleavage in there too.</i></p> <p>Jerry: <i>... I like the dark here. [Indicates the upper background] Because it forces the eye back in here.</i></p>	<p>Eye Sockets</p> <p>I took color out of her cheek, her arm. Put a little cleavage there. I wanted the eye to go there... To force the eye back in.</p>	<p>Eye Sockets</p> <p>color out cleavage in the artist forces the eye to move</p>

This analysis led to three key findings which we present in the next section.

WORKING WITH/IN THE LINES

Dialogue about our work was essential in helping us understand how our previous experiences in literacy really had informed our artistic practices, creating echoes that reverberated across our selected artworks. For Peggy, it was a focus on satire and parody, pushing the edges of what she

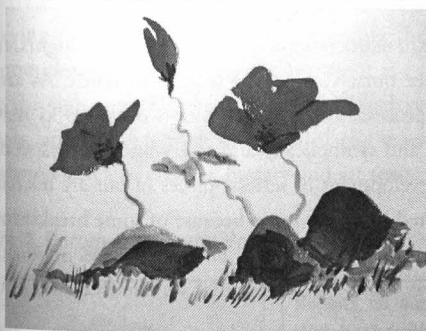
thought was safe art, purposefully making art that would stop viewers, for good or bad, and force them to take a closer look. For Teri, surveillance emerged as a recurring mark, whether it was in her use of cameras, images of windows, or transparent velum that overlay other images and objects to create the effect of a lens. For Jerry, it was a focus on mastering technique, whether it was a poppy, a cornflower, or the subtle use of gradation to stimulate the senses, especially sight and smell, in a piece he simply called “The Fireman.” Significance in three areas related to meaning—the aesthetic, transmediation, and signature—continually rose to the surface, breaking through in our art, our talk, and our analyses.

Meaning-making began with the aesthetic and stimulations of the senses, including pleasure and discomfort.

I think one has to be
A damn optimist
To see peeling paint
As hopeful.

For us, discussions around our meaning-making were situated initially in the aesthetic, evoking a stimulation of the senses, the first avenue to consciousness. Aesthetics is in a triadic relationship to our skills (flexible use of technique) and the art object that signals our intent in the making of the object (transmediation). Each of us had many experiences with galleries, museums, and readings about art. However, as apprentices to the art form that we study, we found that our art forms engaged us in imagining and discovering, opening up spaces to speak visually.

Figure 3. Found Poems



Poppies
That ephemeral red
A good breeze would make them fall apart
A subtle sense of essence.—Jerry

Our meaning-making began with our desire to know the art form; we wanted to know skills associated with the art form, how the media within the art form worked, and how art objects provoked sensations of joy, desire, intrigue, inquiry—even discomfort or confusion. We noticed our desire to play with media and its affordances, as Teri stated about a photograph she took of a historic prison: “I like the pattern in here and the level of depth through here. That you have to look through this window and through the grid and down into the prison yard behind it.” Lana Wilson (personal communication, January, 2011), a potter from California, stated in a workshop, “It’s not helpful having rules with art. The most fun you have is discovering for yourself by following possibilities, not rules. Use rules to get acquainted with art.” Peggy discovered the value of using rules and following possibilities through a workshop she took with a noted potter who:

...throws very loose. He throws a quick cylinder, does a trim here, pulls it off the wheel, sets it aside for an hour, comes back and trims the foot, and then he paints it. So my painting and my technique of throwing loose came as a result of that. That was extraordinarily huge for me. It reminded me of Tom Romano's idea that once you know the rules you can break the rules. So I knew the rules of how to make a tight cylinder, to make a perfect cup, but now choose to break them.

At the same time that we learned about art, we learned through art. We learned to perceive, to notice closely and with an informed artistic eye perspective, beauty, line, and design. As we talked about our art-making and what drew us to it, we discovered that our art was informed by our past experiences, and that those experiences were tied to particular sensations. In other words, we drew from what called to us.

Aesthetics also elicited pleasure and desire in us and pushed us to continue our artistic inquiry. Each of us takes classes at various studios in our cities; these classes drive our interest and provide spaces for us to study others' work and to listen to others' remarks about our own work. Jerry imagined a still life, and in so doing, discovered the relationship between ink and color. This learning demystified techniques in doing pen and ink paintings, and his immediate and sensory newfound learning prompted him to do "about 50 more."

Working in the arts fostered transmediation that enabled us to see ourselves and the world differently.

I got interested in capturing essence
 And then how the eye would travel
 And now I accidentally got thinking about things
 like line
 and design

For all of us, the arts fostered transmediation, a rearticulation of content, ideas, thoughts, from one sign system to another that enabled us to see ourselves and the world differently. As artists, we understood meaning-making as a dynamic process, a way to reposition ourselves as new in the world that allows us to think metaphorically and symbolically and to try on new perspectives. That new-ness arose in our work through the development of series—pieces of our art related by subject matter, technique, or statement. We entered into new series because of some breakthrough or pivotal piece, which caused us to look differently at our mediums. Through a series of work, we were able to rearticulate—sometimes over and over again—a concept that we ourselves had not yet worked through.

Transmediation also provided space to study technique, to understand its affordances, and to work it and work it, often in dialogue with others, especially instructors. A found poem unit, followed by transcript data, depicts Teri's inquiry into how she thinks about collage construction in the context of instructor feedback and studio critiques:

Six collages!!
 They say it doesn't work.
 Why do I not feel discouraged
 Rather, I want to figure out why.

Teri: The first level is just a paper layer. I start with torn paper either tissue paper, frequently it's tissue paper, but it can be butcher paper that I've colored. Then after that, I just start playing with image and other papers

and color elements like crayons, pastels, paints, and go back and forth, layering paper, color elements and images back and forth on top of each other.

Peggy: So these are photos and you apply other media on top of them. So how do you make the choices that you do?

Teri: I have a big box—I have all my photos in different sizes. Some of them have been manipulated and colored in different ways. I typically turn them—this is what my instructor told me—I typically turn them upside down so I'm not reading the image. I start looking at color and line, and not context and not the whole piece, and start ripping and start putting them together.

Jerry: Art for us is a playground. It allowed me to step away from being a professor. The art teacher I'm working with says things like, "Okay, we're going to start with a line today." Now that is no direction whatsoever from my vantage point. What's a line? A curved line, a straight line, a jagged line? What do you mean? She never did tell us.

Take a pen
 (It wasn't watercolor?)
 Do a quick line drawing
 (A gestural drawing?)
 Add watercolor
 (And your life changed after that, didn't it?)
 Presto!! Art.

Transmediation centered our attention on making critical statements through our art, and displaying pieces in public spaces by entering them in shows, galleries, or trade journals. Across conversations, we noted the significance of art as a subversive language, a way to communicate social issues through metaphor. Peggy's interest in such speaking-back surfaced in her anthropomorphized animals, animals that took on issues of gay marriage, artificiality of reality shows like *The Real Housewives of...*, or classical literary and art texts. (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Parody and Found Poems in Clay



Rabbits, no less,
 With buck teeth
 As if they haven't been maligned enough
 Now fornicating on my cup
 Questioning marriage
 Making trouble

Moving beyond the notion of visual art as the merely pretty, we see how art can chafe and bother the taken-for-granted. In schools, the arts are often used as rewards or positioned as entry points to content areas. Our work as both artists and literacy researchers has led us to see the deep transformative value of the arts as sociocultural critique (Albers, Holbrook, & Harste, 2010).

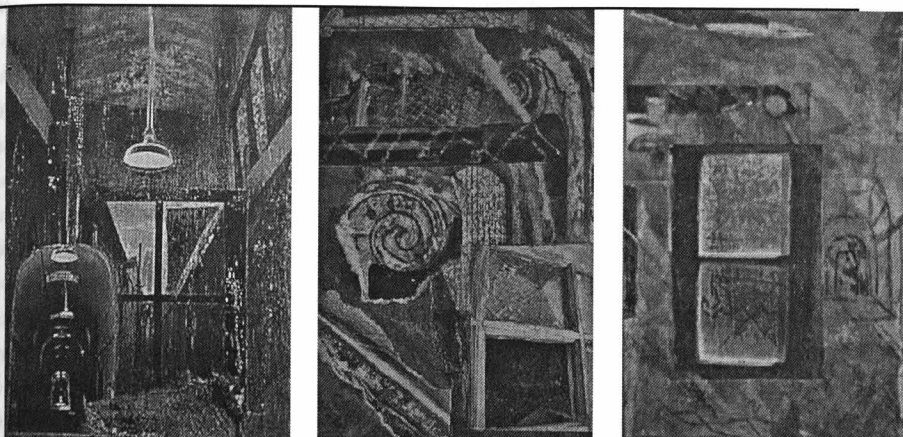
Our identities were signaled throughout our work by the signatures that could be traced across our pieces.

My doodles	Where the hell am I going to sign this piece?
I never saw them as art	I don't want to screw up where the eye goes.
I never made the connection	Is "signing your name on the front" a requirement?
Who knew	What's that you're asking!?
they were an early	
Signature	

One of our most interesting discoveries about ourselves was our unconscious marking of signature, not the signing of our names on the front, back or bottom of our pieces, but rather signature as inscription. From the tools we used, to the way in which we marked our surfaces, our processes of inscription signaled our identities, our interests, our beliefs. They appeared time and time again, collectively voicing a signature that was particularly ours. These (re)marks (Albers & Frederick, 2009) made visible how we inscribed ourselves in our art through tools, technique, color, design, and subject matter. Only when we presented our 10 pieces as a collection to each other did we discover, and delightfully so, our signatures. Jerry reflected, "If you look at my work, every now and then, there's a poppy picture because I have something still about poppies. I guess because I was successful once, I think maybe I could do something good with poppies." For him, poppies became one of the signature marks in his work. In Teri's photographic and collage images, references to surveillance and eluded escape dominate. In a description of a 19th century prison surveillance system that relied on mirrors inset into fancy wooden casings, she noted, "In the early photographs, I was not thinking about the panopticon because I didn't know about it. By the time I took this one, I knew about the panopticon, which is why I have other pictures of this [pointing to the mirror surveillance system]. I thought this was interesting, not just the cabinetry around them, but the idea that they reflect off each other to create the surveillance system." Signature windows, light, and open spaces cut across her artworks. (Figure 5)

Signature surfaced not only in our images but in our discussions. Jerry remarked, "One of the other things I haven't thought about yet is that all of us are playing with highly cultured symbols. [Peggy is] taking the American Gothic to task, sort of [through her parody of classic art], and Teri is taking on surveillance. I'm taking very traditional watercolor things. It's highly cultured. In a way we're all speaking back to what we see as some sort of omnipresence that the rest of the world sees as invisible."

Figure 5. Surveillance as Signature in Collages



Windows come up in all three collages because, again, windows dominate the photographs. I also tried to do a series of collages with doors that I didn't pick as (one of my ten images) because they're not as interesting to me as the windows are.

DISCUSSION

Transgression as Technique
 Technique as Aesthetics
 Aesthetics as Abduction
 Abduction as Transgression

Autoethnography encourages a discussion of how researchers make sense of studying themselves. For us, poetic and visual analyses encourage us to find what is strange and to work with/ in spaces and lines that open up our concepts of literacy, research, and meaning-making. Embodied knowledge offers insights into who we are becoming as individuals who do not just have experiences with the arts, but who constituted ourselves and are constituted as experiencing subjects (Davies et. al., 2001).

Autoethnography as a method enabled us to articulate through an understanding of ourselves the larger issue of “why the arts” in literacy. First, we recognize how the arts have made us different from what we were before. The format of this article—a fusion of exposition, found poems, image, and conversations—released us from interpreting through the known and dared us to think about the arts otherwise. From this investigation, we acknowledge that art stimulates our senses and heightens in us an awareness in *how* we look. By studying the marks we inscribe and how we see, we come to an understanding of how the marks signal meaning for us and for others. As artists, we are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity; we cannot always know the direction of our thinking, and a single experience can make way for new series of thought to emerge. Art also makes us vulnerable and opens us up to criticism and critique. Through the on-going learning of technique in art classes and workshops, we transgress; we increase the flexibility in how we use art as a language, what we can say through art, and what we can say about art.

As our study suggests, poetic and visual analyses encourage us to find what is strange. Deep and thorough analysis of our talk and our work led us to notice that ideas and concepts can be distilled poetically and more importantly, capture that part of ourselves which we call *artist*. This method of inquiry disrupts and transforms how data is analyzed and calls for researchers to consider new spaces of possible analysis. It calls for different “research/scholarly practices and oftentimes requires a dismantling of normal ways of thinking about and doing and representing research” (O’Donoghue, 2007, cited in Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009, p. 2). While our artworks, conversations, and transcriptions provided data, our found poems also became data when we studied to what extent they reflected key ideas presented in the transcripts. In this way, found poems served a dual purpose: to present the data as well as a way to interpret the results of the data. Poetic analysis enabled us to take “the risk of seeking insight, not just information,” (Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor, p.9). Further, poetic analysis for us was about breaking through the surfaces of adopted rhythms of practice and teaching others to ‘read’ our worlds in new ways (Greene, 1988). As an art form, found poems offered “an ever-present possibility” to re-present data and interpretation of findings (Greene, p. 131).

Embodied knowledge offers insights into who we are becoming not as literacy researchers or artists, but as experiencing subjects (Davies et al., 2001) or the “body as site from which the story is generated” (Spry, 2003, p. 708). We cannot but help fuse our work as artists with our work as literacy researchers. Our study of art and the critical talk around it allows us to see literacy newly. Our heightened awareness of social issues is brought to the surface of our physical art, art that embodies our emotional, intellectual, social, and political responses. Our stories are situated directly within the social and discursive processes in which we participate as artists and literacy researchers. Our participation in gallery shows, art fairs, and art communities position us to recognize that in these spaces/places/discourses new embodied knowledge is produced. This knowledge signals that threads of both art and oral/written language are inextricably woven in our embodied selves.

Intrinsic to embodied knowledge is perception, a noticing and becoming aware of the many facets of a work, such as medium, textures, light, color and so on; an example is when Jerry noticed how he could apply color on simple pen and ink drawings to create beautiful poppies. With such noticing comes informed and critical talk about art objects, not just as naïve interacters with such objects, but as attentive perceivers whose talk is more precise, imaginative, and articulate, and which elucidates a deeper apprehension of particular works of art. How Teri discusses her techniques for collage helps us understand that art is a language. Much like a linguist studies written language, the design choices she makes (tearing, layering, placement) contribute to the significance of its reading and viewing. Developing our imagination enables us to explore new possibilities and frees us from the literal and mundane, allowing us to experience life vicariously that we have not yet experienced directly. Peggy’s clay baskets move into parody and satire, communicating not only function but echoes of literary conventions. These are examples of how embodied knowledge allows us to particularize, to see, hear, and experience things in their concreteness and within our own contexts. This is what we have to theorize with, and our how our bodies respond and interact in the world structure the very concepts that we use to think (Lakoff, 1999).

Aesthetics, transmediation as critical expression and public signification, and signature allow us to imagine freshly the sensitivity that comes with studying the arts. When studied as a discipline

as well as a way to communicate our thoughts and values, art brings to the surface the signature in our voices, the visible marks that position us uniquely, and the subtle marks that gesture to the discourse communities we inhabit. We do not believe we would have understood the importance of this shift in perspective had we not become practicing artists ourselves.

By enacting an embodied autoethnography, we recognize the importance of reflexivity, a self-conscious introspection in which we, the researchers, are both investigators and the investigated, and as such, a visible part of the story we are telling. According to Willig (2001), there are two types of reflexivity, personal and epistemological. Personal reflexivity situates reflection in the researcher's experiences, values, cultural and political beliefs, and so on, and how the research itself has changed the researcher. As individuals who constituted ourselves and are constituted as experiencing subjects, we acknowledge the significance of our past experiences—the daughter of an artist, a former actress and English teacher, and a drawer who liked to doodle—and recognize these influences in the work we do as meaning-makers and producers. As researchers, we notice how inscription is (re)marked and then becomes signature, leaving traces through which the textmaker cannot hide her or his identity, beliefs, values, or convictions. We notice how signatures emerge across time in data we collect in a range of spaces (e.g., classrooms, communities, families). When studied across time, educators and researchers will notice elements that recur among the many visual texts they create; reflexivity allows them to notice how these elements direct attention to the situated stories that learners bring into various spaces.

Epistemological reflexivity engages the researcher in considering questions of design, such as how the research questions defined and limited the findings and how the design of the study constructed the data and findings. From this study, we suggest that the level of our analysis allowed us to capture and record research strangely, using poetic forms to succinctly, holistically, and critically identify significant ideas we saw operating in our art and in our talk about art and literacy. A poetically informed analysis enabled us to see how poetry may present (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2003) as empirical evidence. By writing it we commit to our desire to defamiliarize and disrupt commonplace ways of analyzing data, and inform our thinking about teaching, research, and the work we do as artists. To do such analysis is to understand design, findings, and theoretical contributions in new light. Poetic, visual and written analyses allowed us to speak to and between the lines, to “know” in unique ways (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2003), and to commit to our desire to say something freshly. From its inception, this study was energized with passion, commitment, and a dare to think and say that things could be otherwise. We could embrace the imaginative spaces all three of us inhabited—on the weekends in studios, in community art classes, and with like-minded others—as well as to open spaces where we practiced the freedom to speak about it.

Most importantly, we suggest that this study situates lingering in language—visual, linguistic, dramatic, musical—as key in developing an appreciation for the affordances that languages offer in not only what is said, but how something is said. As artists, we recognize the significance of lingering in the art itself, in the spaces where we make it, and in the conversations around which we create our work. We value the collective thought that emerges from such spaces. It is just this talking about our work that propels us into continued and motivated inquiry and makes us active listeners to each other's stories. As artists, we also linger in our studio spaces, reluctant to leave. While we're

in our studios, long stretches of time seem like minutes; we are lost in the world of making. Even when we are forced to leave, we linger in the thoughts of how to work with our art when we return.

CONCLUSION

*The way to turn fifty
Is to kill off the light
And begin over
In slow motion*

—David Allan Evans, 1976

This study arose from our conversations with each other about our passion and commitment to the arts as part of our own scholarship and as part of our understandings of literacy as a semiotic process of meaning-making. The above short excerpt from a longer poem by Evans provides us with a final metaphor that defines the future of our work as researchers and artists. Now that we have begun to identify the significance of the arts to our personal and professional lives and named ourselves as artists, we can begin over in slow motion, through continued and longitudinal study, to look closely at ourselves as artists and literacy researchers. Greene (2001) argued that “‘education’... is the process of enabling persons to become different” and that it is through the arts that we may come to see the world anew. To participate in fresh perspectives, she wrote, “the learner must break with the taken-for-granted...and look through the lenses of various ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling in a conscious endeavor to impose different orders upon experience” (p. 5). As literacy researchers and artists, we argue that significance resides in our own willingness to accept inquiry-as-risk, to forego the comfort of our privilege, and to trust that knowledge can be made in unknown spaces and through tentative practices. In this way, we situate this analytical autoethnography as an ethical project in which we engage vulnerabilities in order to perceive freshly—or, as St. Pierre (1997) said, “to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently” (p. 175).

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