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Consumer poetry: insightful data and methodological approaches.

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'Partnership' - Bri Williams (reproduced with permission)

My wife's cooking is spontaneous,
using no paper recipes, extraneous.
Her "recipes" come from her cook's mind,
using what, in the kitchen, she does find.
She uses no measuring devices, but.......
does use, at times, a pinch of spices.
Her cooking may come CLOSE to "gourmet";
home-cooking, if asked, is what I'd say.

At times I'm accused of not savouring my meals;
food on my plate has no time to spoil.
Most of the plants and meats she cooks are organic,
and often are cooked with olive oil.

She's compared me to a ravenous dog.
At least she does NOT say: "Food you waste!"
She is skilled with knives and pots and pans;
rarely does she cook in haste.

Consumer poetry: insightful data and methodological approaches.

Within interpretive consumer research there is sustained interest in preserving the authentic emic voice of consumers within research accounts (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). The use of diaries (Patterson, 2005) photography (Dion et al, 2014) and consumer verbatim (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006) all have heritage as evidence of the consumer within researcher interpretation. This paper considers the potential of consumer authored poetry as an additional source of the consumer insight. It argues that, despite notable calls (Sherry & Schouten, 2002) for the inclusion of poetry within interpretive consumer research, it remains largely absent as a source of consumer storytelling.

It considers that there may be two bases for this. That there may be disciplinary reluctance to engage in the unfamiliarity of poetic deconstruction; and that there may be a lack of value placed upon the data and resultant insight which poetry can provide. To address these issues it suggests methodological considerations which may be useful for consumer researchers considering engagement with poetic materials.

Poetry and Textual Analysis in Consumer Research

It is over a decade since consumer researchers began seriously considering poetry as a means of representing and interpreting consumer experience. In such work however the consumer's poetic voice is often subservient to that of the researcher. Sherry & Schouten (2002) discuss poetry as a form of researcher reflexivity: of poet-researchers producing poetry to represent their research experience, and such work is evident within conference proceedings, books and journals (e.g. Ozanne et al, 2011; Brown, 2014). Stemming from arts based qualitative inquiry (Finley, 2002) poetry emerges as one of a number of new forms of written texts chosen for their unique qualities when communicating research. Ethnographic poetry, drama, and fiction have all been utilised to demonstrate the strength of literary forms for reporting research (Denzin, 2009).

Sherry & Schouten (2002) however also propose the potential of poetry as a form of research inquiry. Such research is particularly rare and often such that both the consumers' poetic voice and the researchers analytic detail remain absent. Karababa & Ger (2011) collect historical poetry as part of larger bricolage of data but give us no detail of any distinctive means employed to analyse their poetic materials and Somers-Willet (2009) considers slam poetry but uses it primarily as a means of exploring the authored context. Yet Sherry and Schouten (2002: 218) argue for poetry to be one of the only written forms to be "trusted to represent honestly and authentically the truth" while simultaneously providing opportunity for an evocative portrayal of the consumer experience such as that advocated by researcher videographers (Schembri & Boyle, 2013). Visual researchers such as Warren (2005: 886) suggests that, as interpretive researchers become concerned with immersion in their contextual worlds, photography can "almost literally act as a lens through which we see what others 'see' and importantly, deem important enough to 'capture' with a camera". While some elements of human experience may be best represented visually others may elude such representation and alternatives such as poetry "which can stir us before we capture their meaning" (Wainwright, 2011: XVII) and "can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision unapproachable by any other means." (Leavis, 1972: 17) may become relevant.

Consumption poetry has been deconstructed within literary studies seeking insight about aesthetics, the avant garde and forms of "sensuous" knowledge where the poem stands as a form of "literary still life" (Delville, 2008:3). Meanwhile other social science disciplines such as human geography have considered the impact of poetry as a means of constructing and reconstructing the meaning of concepts such as place, leading to the emergence of a theory of literary geography (Alexander and Cooper, 2013). Stern (1989) has long suggested means for literary criticism to be employed in analysing consumer culture materials such as advertising. There is a tradition of utilising extant consumer culture artefacts as a means of garnering insight (Schroeder, 1997) and textual analysis has

been used in interpretive consumer research to explore issues of author, reader and text (Hogg et al, 2011). Yet application of Stern's (1989) textual approach has centred upon prose forms and analytics e.g. Brownlie & Hewer (2007). This is despite Easthope's (2013: 3) argument that consumer culture abounds with examples of unofficial poetry "in advertising, on toilet walls, in football chants [...] by any neutral definition, they are a form of poetry".

Methodological Considerations

This paper suggests that poetry is an accessible form of research data given an appropriate means of analysis which guards against criticism of soft or inadequate research (Butler-Kisber, 2002). It proposes that, while no one approach to poetic material will be wholly satisfactory, interpretation which examines the interrelation between the elements of poetry can be robust in exploring poetic material (Bove, 1990). As such this section suggests some methodological considerations which researchers interested in poetry may consider.

Researchers may first consider the source of their poetic material. There are approaches such as found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Richardson, 1994), where poetry is assembled by researchers from nuggets of chained research prose, however this paper suggests that this a practice which privileges the researcher's voice and as such is not a core to its consideration of consumer authored poetry. Rather, as with visual analysis (Warren, 2005), it suggests two broad sources of poetic material which foreground the consumer perspective: using pre-existing consumer authored poetry gathered from consumer culture resources (Tonner, 2014), and eliciting poetic material as a form of primary data within a research project (Hamilton et al, 2012).

Using pre-existing consumer poetry such as Bri Williams' 'Partnership', accessed and archived from Poemhunter.com, allows the researcher to consider the consumer poem as a cultural artefact. It may also make relevant discussion of its consumer culture context of online poetry sharing sites. However using such material raises ethical considerations particularly surrounding anonymity and informed consent in online research (Hair and Clark, 2007). Ethical issues often elude simple answers but following literary criticism, where the consumer author's ownership of the creative material is acknowledged and consent for research implied from its publication may be one approach (Li, 1998). Further as with 'Partnership' reproduced here explicit informed consent may be negotiated with the author presenting opportunity also for further data gathering about his poetic intent and motivation.

Eliciting poetic material as a form of primary data shares characteristics with methods such as visual research. It can help participants to express their feelings, beliefs, and experiences and can function as either as an aid to verbal narrative, or in place of it. In this respect, the creative material functions as a communicative tool whereby the research participants themselves produce the meaning (Warren, 2005). In visual analysis Wagner (1979) calls this "native image-making" but its aim of allowing consumers to speak for as well as about themselves is also characteristic of Couser's (2005) discussion of autobiographical writing by research participants.

Having gathered and archived their poetic material the researcher may then consider their analytical approach. Easthope (2013) suggests that the American tradition of new criticism considered the poem as an object of public knowledge, 'a verbal icon' with embedded meaning independent of the intention of the author or critic [researcher] (Wimsatt, 1970: 5) . This approach to poetry would suggest that analysis may proceed using the kind of close reading associated with American new criticism considering issues such as content, structure, style and poetic effects. Here the researcher may seek to demonstrate the multiple codes and meanings which may be considered in a single poem or stanza. Partnership's metaphorical '"ravenous dog", repetition of "recipes", and Caps Lock device in "CLOSE" and "NOT" may all come under consideration in such a close reading approach. Wainwright (2011) suggests it is a feature of poetry to analyse slowly, to read and re-read in search of meaning, and to pay attention to how its techniques have created this meaning. This is akin to

some of the close reading approaches already familiar to consumer researchers such as conversation analysis (Weatherell, 1998). Effective close reading technique directs the researcher's curiosity, drawing them into a conversation with the poem (Wainwright, 2011).

Easthope (2013) suggests however that to hold the poem as separate from the author is an unnecessary and unhelpful fiction. British new criticism he argues considers the poem as a form of author presence. A real person formed the moment of the poem, and it's wise to seek an understanding of that moment. So in addition to intra-textual analysis the researcher may also consider broader questions of author meaning, purpose and voice. This approach may be particularly relevant in elicited poetry where the poem may be used as a form of auto-driving (Heisley and Levy, 1991). Yet even with extant poetry, consumer poets often include personal profiles to accompany their creative materials which can act as a contextualising evidence and indeed as with Bri Williams may consent to discuss their poetic intent retrospectively.

Finally inter-textual analysis can yield further meaning and insight across poems and poets. While some literary scholars are employing quantitative methods to determine individual intertexts and groups of intertexts which are likely to be meaningful (Coffee et al, 2012), it is perhaps more familiar to interpretive researchers to follow a qualitative intertextual approach (Elkad-Lehman and Greensfeld, 2011). Whether exploring phenomenon (Finlay, 2012) or discourse (Roper et al, 2013) intertexual analysis is commonly employed across forms of qualitative data as a means of enhancing interpretive quality criteria of evidencing, trustworthiness, credibility and plausibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1999). Easthope (2013) suggests that intertextual reading of poetry can also draw these broader insights and benefits.

Conclusions

As suggested above, no single approach to poetic material is wholly satisfactory but by considering the consumer culture worth and methodological choices inherent in addressing such material, poetry as research data may become more accessible and evident in our field. Sometimes a poem can commmunicate what cannot be said in other forms of writing, to suggest an experience, idea, or feeling that can be known but not entirely expressed in any direct or literal way and as consumer researchers we ought to harness and explore such intriguing data. While poetic materials demand distinctive treatment, the skills inherent in their mastery are not entirely unfamiliar to researchers already engaged in textual or visual analysis. From the close reading of the American new criticism to the more author-centred British new criticism, extant research skills developed in handling interview transcript, ethnographic field-notes and the rich array of other research materials we already consider as part of our arsenal, can all be brought to bear when developing a poetic sensibility.

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