That Rare Feeling: Re-presenting Research Through Poetic Transcription

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This article explores an experimental form of writing that I'm terming poetic transcription. Inspired by Laurel Richardson (1992, 1994a, 1994b), I define poetic transcription as the creation of poemlike compositions from the words of interviewees. In this article, I present six poetic transcriptions of Dona Juana, an elderly Puerto Rican researcher and educator; describe my poetic transcription process; and examine issues that experimental writing—specifically, poetic transcription—raises for research re-presentation.

That Rare Feeling

I am a flying bird
moving fast
seeing quickly
looking with the eyes of God
from the tops of trees.

How hard for country people
picking green worms
from fields of tobacco,
sending their children to school,
not wanting them to suffer
as they suffer.
In the urban zone,
students worked at night
and so they slept in school.
Teaching was the real university.

So I came to study
to find out how I could help.
I am busy here at the university,
there is so much to do.
But the university
is not the Island.

I am a flying bird
moving fast, seeing quickly
so I can give strength,
so I can have that rare feeling
of being useful.

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When I interviewed Dona Juana in May 1994, she was an 86-year-old professor in the College of Education at the University of Puerto Rico. That she chose a bird to represent her was no surprise. Standing 5 feet tall, very thin ("a problem all my life"), and with bright dark eyes, she was birdlike in appearance. Her office was a nest of books, papers, and folders in organized piles on her large desk, on the beige metal filing cabinets next to the door opposite her desk, in the wooden cabinet along the wall to the right of her desk, on the shelves below the window to her left, and on the two chairs before her desk. There was no sense of disorder, but rather an impression of an archive that would illuminate Dona Juana's 50 years in research and higher education.

We moved a pile of folders from a chair so I could sit. I balanced the tape recorder on a stack nearby and dug between piles to find an outlet. Dona Juana showed me research reports from her students, as well as university material, having accepted the responsibility of preparing the college report for an upcoming accreditation review. In this conservatory of professional life, I interviewed Dona Juana for 10 hours over a period of one week. We talked mostly in English but exchanged Spanish words and phrases as well. I also joined her and her extended family in her home for dinner. I talked some, but not extensively, with others who had known her personally or professionally. I did not explore her records, nor did I "shadow" her, observing her as teacher and researcher. What I present here is a partial rendering of the ways in which Dona Juana has achieved that "rare feeling of being useful."

In addition to re-presenting versions of Dona Juana's story, this article explores the possibilities and questions created when research is depicted through a creative form of writing that I'm calling *poetic transcription*. In my experimental writing, I join others who, through a variety of forms such as auto-ethnography (Ellis, 1995; Krieger, 1991; Linden, 1993; Ronai, 1995), readers' theater or drama (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Mienczakowski, 1995; Paget, 1995), and fiction (Barone, 1990; Stewart, 1989), are blurring

accepted boundaries between art and science, exploring the shapes of intersubjectivity, and examining issues of power and authority, including that of researcher/author.

The realist tale, which minutely details the lives of people studied and presents interpretations with an authoritative air, has been the dominant form of ethnographic writing (Van Maanen, 1988). In the current "crisis of representation" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994), however, claims to authority are challenged and reflexivity is demanded. As the masks of representation are revealed, researchers have begun to try out various modes of re-presenting research (Van Maanen, 1995).

"Experimental forms" is the catch-all phrase for the variety of nontraditional ways in which researchers have begun to portray their inquiry. "One practice these experiments have in common is the violation of prescribed conventions" (Richardson, 1994b, p. 520). Rose (1993) predicts that ethnographies of the future will be multigenre constructions, made up of many voices, and inclusive of emotional reactions as well as analytical descriptions. A single ethnography might include critical, theoretical, and humanist essays; narrative; poetics; and pictures, photos, and drawings. Researchers are motivated to experiment with form for a variety of reasons. I suspect that those who incorporate artistic modes into their research representations do so, at least in part, to combine the "strengths of science with the rewards of the humanities" (Stoller, 1989, p. 9).

Beginnings

Like so many things in life, my interviews with Dona Juana and my use of poetic transcription are connected to other serendipitous happenings. In the summer of 1992, I attended a teacher-researcher workshop in Maine and met Annette Mendez, the director of educational research at the University of Puerto Rico. The following year, at Annette's invitation, I went to Puerto Rico to hold a workshop on qualitative research for faculty. One day, Dona Juana joined us for lunch.

My memories of that conversation with Dona Juana blend talk with black beans, fried plantain, and the noise of students and traffic. Later, Annette and I talked about Dona Juana, commenting on her wisdom. Annette wanted someone to interview Dona Juana because she was a living history of the institution. I felt drawn to Dona Juana, her energy, her wide-awakeness (Greene, 1978), and wanted to learn from her. A year later, I returned to Puerto Rico to interview her.

My interest in alternative forms of re-presenting research paralleled the evolution of research with Dona Juana. In the summer of 1992, I had just achieved tenure at the University of Vermont and was embarking on a sabbatical in Costa Rica. The sabbatical year gave me time to pursue a goal of

Spanish fluency (a goal still in process), to participate in what I term "volunteer" research (research done *with* and *for* participants), and to realize how unhappy I was with life in the academy as I had been living it. For 14 years, I had been working for a master's, a doctorate, and then tenure. Other needs, long ignored or put on hold, suddenly had an opening and clamored for attention. Ten days after moving to a small remote village in Costa Rica, I stepped into a hole, tore ligaments and cartilage in my left knee, and hobbled around on homemade crutches for months. During that time, I wrote extensively in my journal, where pages chronicle my longing for more creativity, to find a medium for tapping and expressing some connection to the soul.

By the following year when I did the interviews with Dona Juana, I had taken several poetry-writing workshops and classes. I had also begun to explore literature on integrating humanities and arts with curriculum development and with research presentation. Although I did not plan to experiment with poetic transcription when I interviewed Dona Juana, upon receiving the transcripts, I could not ignore the opportunity. I was so immersed in poetry at the time, that the poetic impulse took over. My involvement in poetry continues, along with my interest in creative research presentations. For me, it's a way of reframing an "either/or" perspective into one of "both/and," of moving from dichotomous thinking to more divergent thought. It's the transition from sauntering along dirt roads without thinking about one's feet to the hop-swing on crutches where no movement is taken for granted.

Poetic Transcription

Richardson's (1992, 1994a) transformation of interview transcripts into poetry served as inspiration to my work. Because she does not describe her process, I had to develop my own. Needing some boundaries in my play with prose and poetry, I began with one rule for shaping the poetic vignettes of Dona Juana: The words in the poetic transcriptions would be Dona Juana's, not mine. As I worked on the poetic transcriptions, I created two more rules: I could pull Dona Juana's phrases from anywhere in the transcript and juxtapose them; and I had to keep enough of her words together to re-present her speaking rhythm, her way of saying things. The process described here, therefore, is not *the* way to do poetic transcription; rather it is one way. In the interest of creativity and experimentation or in responsiveness to those interviewed, I might create different rules next time, and the poetic vignettes would assume different forms.

The Dona Juana poetic transcription process began with coding and sorting, similarly to anytime I work with qualitative data.[1] After reading and re-reading interview transcripts, I generated major themes, then coded and sorted the text by those themes. My desire to create varied "portraits" of Dona Juana helped guide the development of themes. Some topics such as "attending school"

or "being a researcher" included much data, because I had developed a series of interview questions specifically about those topics. Other themes such as "relating to material goods" or "encountering racism" contained less data because our discussions on such subjects emerged in the process of the interviews. Whether it was represented by a thick or a thin pile of coded data, each theme seemed to tell me about different aspects of Dona Juana's life. With transcript data sorted, I was ready to write.

The process then shifted away from my usual work with qualitative data. Typically, writing up has involved, for me, progressive coding, categorizing, and ordering of large data clumps. Instead of further sorting, I re-read all of Dona Juana's words under one theme and sat reflecting, trying to understand the essence of what she was saying. Describing dance as a mode of research representation, Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) states that "essences (as understood by the artist) are extracted and represented in concrete, condensed forms" (p. 392). I began to write, using only Dona Juana's words to portray the essences that I understood. I found myself sifting through the other piles of coded data, realizing that although the themes got me started, poetic transcription demanded a less-ordered structure. "Country people picking green worms from fields of tobacco," filed under the code "becoming a teacher," suddenly connected to Dona Juana's desire to have "that rare feeling of being useful," filed under "self-perception." I was not only trying to make sense of data but also attempting to use Dona Juana's words to convey the emotions that the interviews evoked in me. To better do so, I gave myself the liberty to repeat her words, to drop or add word endings (*ing, s, ly*), and to occasionally change verb tenses (*would be* became *am*).

My usual research writing has been descriptive in the sense of staying close to the data and analytical in Wolcott's (1994) use of the term: "*Analysis* refers quite specifically and narrowly to systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships" (p. 24). Analytical writing breaks up interview transcriptions and observation field notes into component parts, imposing a researcher-perceived order on things. It requires data reduction and segregation of thoughts. Poetic transcription is also filtered through the researcher but involves word reduction while illuminating the wholeness and interconnections of thoughts. Instead of piecing together aspects of Dona Juana's story into a chronological representational puzzle of her life (with pieces missing), I found myself, through poetic transcription, searching for the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract re-presentation. Somewhat like a photographer, who lets us know a person in a different way, I wanted the reader to come to know Dona Juana through very few words.

Figure 1 provides an example of making a poetic transcription. The left column contains a portion of actual interview transcript. The right side begins with a poetic rendering of the transcript in chronological order. I continued

Transcript	*Poetic Narrative*
C: If I asked you to use a metaphor to describe yourself as a professor, what would you say you were like? Someone I asked said that she was a bridge and then she told me why. What metaphor comes to mind for you?	Version 1: Chronologically and linguistically faithful to the transcript I would be a flying bird. I want to move so fast so I can see quickly, everything. I wish I could look at the world with the eyes of God, to give strength to those that need.
J: I would be a flying bird.	
C: A flying bird. Tell me about it. How are you a flying bird?	
J: Because I want to move so fast.	
C: Mm-hmmm. Cover a lot of territory.	
J: Yes. Yes.	
C: Are you any kind of bird or just any bird?	Version 2: Draws from other sections of the interviews, takes more license with words. I am a flying bird moving fast, seeing quickly, looking with the eyes of God from the tops of trees.
J: Well, any bird because I don't want to mention some birds, some birds here are destructive.	
C: Are what?	
J: Are destructive. They destroy and I don't want to . . .	How hard for country people picking green worms from fields of tobacco, sending their children to school, not wanting them to suffer as they suffer. In the urban zone, students worked at night and so they slept in school. Teaching was the real university.
C: No, you don't want to be one of them. No. You're just a bird that moves fast.	
J: That moves fast and sees from the tops of trees. So I can see quickly.	
C: See quickly, see everything.	
J: Everything.	
J: So you can see me?	
C: I can. I can see you, a flying bird.	
J: I wish I could look at the world with the eyes of God.	So I came to study to find out how I could help. I am busy here at the university, there is so much to do. But the university is not the Island.
C: With the eyes of what?	
J: Of God, of that spiritual power that can give strength.	
C: That can give strength? Strength?	
J: Yes, to those that need.	I am a flying bird moving fast, seeing quickly so I can give strength, so I could have that rare feeling of being useful.

Figure 1: The Making of a Poetic Transcription

this chronological rendering with other sections of the transcript that seemed related. Then I began eliminating words and moving them around to create the poetic transcription that begins this article.

Five poetic transcriptions follow: *A Century of Reading, The Position of the Island, Re-Vision, I Am Not the Same,* and *If It Rains Too Much.* These poetic transcriptions provide varied portraits of Dona Juana. I situate them in some sociohistorical context to provide background for interpretation. After the poetic transcriptions, I turn again to the process of doing poetic transcription and analyze issues it raises in re-presenting research.

Dona Juana: Situated Poetic Transcriptions

A Century of Reading

At the beginning of the century
when the Americans came,
the old people would hire teachers
who went to the home and taught them to read.
So my mother learned and became a teacher.

At the beginning of the century,
the chief of the barrio system
hired people to work the sugar fields.
He was forty years [old][2]
but didn't know how to write.
My mother taught him.
And that was the reason, I think,
I became a teacher.

At the beginning of the century
in 1908, I was born
the oldest [of three].
When I went to school
I was overage because I was so thin.
My father was afraid
[for me] out of the home.
Thin—that's my personal problem.
All my life.

As I knew how to read,
they promoted me immediately to second grade.
Then in arithmetic and language arts,
they said I passed
and promoted me to third.
So I started in third grade
instead of in first.

[Now, at the end of the century]
I would buy books for children.

I would like to have time enough
to teach people reading.
Perhaps the spirit of my mother
is in me still.

In 1898, 10 years before Dona Juana was born, Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States as a result of the Spanish American War. By 1902, the United States embarked on an educational program in Puerto Rico, attempting to replace Spanish with English instruction after first grade and to integrate into daily rituals patriotic exercises such as the pledge to the U.S. flag (Spring, 1994). The United States sent teachers, texts, and curricula to Puerto Rico. Dona Juana was only 4 years old when Puerto Rican teachers organized into a Teachers Association to resist "Americanization" policies. They were able to extend Spanish as the language of instruction to the first four grades, with English included as a subject. The struggles over language continued. It was not until 1952, when Dona Juana was 44 and working as a researcher at the university, that Puerto Ricans voted to become a Commonwealth, and Spanish was restored to the schools as the language of instruction.

Throughout its history, Puerto Rico has been continually affected by international and internal politics. Politics is therefore a topic of much discussion in general, and in Dona Juana's life specifically.

The Position of the Island

Politics. Oh that was a very important thing
for my mother, my aunt, and my uncle.
They were Republican and wanted
statehood for the Island.

The labor movement started in that time
and I accompanied my father to the sugar strikes,
The many hours they have to work, the low salary,
that part of [politics] he would talk,
but he was not interested in statehood.

My father died
and my mother, a little later.
I was ten [when] my sister, brother, and
moved in with an aunt
and three grandchildren.

Every evening I read *El Tiempo* to my aunt
—explained to her what was happening—
who was elected, why.
She was not able to read.

Because when I read the newspaper
they named the labor movement in the States

and they named the movement in France,
I got interested in history
and got a degree in 1940—
although the history of Puerto Rico
was not taught at that time.

As a teacher, I came again to the university
to study courses in English.
We had to teach in Spanish in the morning
and the same classes in English in the afternoon.
That was the rule at the time.

Well, I must tell you something.
Although my family believed in statehood,
the [United] States have some problems.
It is really a great problem,
that of deciding the position of the Island.

Under the colonial control of Spain, Puerto Ricans' political participation had ranged from electing delegates to the Spanish parliament in 1869 to enduring repression and persecution after 1875, when the conservatives returned to power (Phelps de Cordova, 1988). In 1897, Sagasta became Premier of Spain. Aware of the independence movement brewing on the island, he granted Puerto Rico autonomy, although the governor would still be chosen by Spain. This status lasted only a few months before the United States gained control of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Initially, many Puerto Ricans, like Dona Juana's mother, aunt, and uncle, were optimistic about this change, believing that their civil rights and prosperity would increase. The Republican and Socialist parties both advocated citizenship, although several other parties called for independence. For 54 years, however, Puerto Rico remained a colony of the United States. Although its status is now one of commonwealth, "the position of the island" continues to be debated.

During the colonial era, Dona Juana grew up, began teaching in a rural elementary school, received her B.A., and then taught in the city. In 1945, she was asked to work as a researcher and evaluator for the Educational Council, which, in 1966, was reorganized so that its Office of Research was attached to the College of Education at the University of Puerto Rico. As researcher and evaluator, Dona Juana was able to continue her interest in literacy and reading, but on an Island-wide scale. Many of the research projects reflected continuing Puerto Rican dialectic with United States.

Re-Vision

In 1945 I came to the university
to do research in the Council [of Education].
I said, "Well, I'll come but I won't stay."

I didn't want to leave teaching.
But then, they tried to convince me to stay
and the assistant commissioner asked me to stay
and well, I stayed.

With recommendation
from Columbia University,
we counted 7 million words
to organize the 10,000 most common
used in books, radio, written compositions,
religious material, and oral conversations.

We studied adult education
to reduce illiteracy.
I had to analyze the methods—
there weren't so many.
We went to different towns
to find out what they were doing.
Almost all the materials were from United States.
They wanted to, what we say, "Americanize."
We recommended revision.

Since joining the College of Education in 1966, Dona Juana has taught a graduate course in research and evaluation. Although she retired in 1978, she is not only still teaching the course but also continuing to serve on thesis and dissertation committees. For her, being a teacher "is part mother, part police, part nurse, and not teaching . . . the most important thing is showing them how they can get knowledge by themselves." Although she lectured some when she began teaching, she soon moved to group discussions and participatory activities because she "found out that they don't learn enough through lecture. They have to *do*." Through her work with the Council and in the college, Dona Juana not only developed a dialogical teaching style, she also created a new sense of self.

Am Not the Same

At the beginning of my life,
I considered myself not suitable for many things.
Reading and doing things—they were responsible
for the grades I obtained.
I think people just have pity on me.
I was so thin.
They think I am going to die.

In the past I was too timid,
I didn't dare present my view.
I'd be quiet.

Maybe my face would show I didn't agree,
but I didn't speak.
Pleasing everybody, that was my philosophy.
You know, to make things better.

The experience of working with the Council
made me a different person.
Many times we did not agree.
There, I had to present my views
or things I didn't consider right
would be done.
So I learned to say,
"No, I don't believe in that."

Some people think you should be
a religious person, follow something.
If they think you are following the norms
they will accept you.
If not, they will be criticizing you.
Sometimes I worried about this,
but I sort of think now
I don't care what they say.

Now, as I am old, and when I go somewhere,
people ask, "Good Morning, aunt, are you going alone?
Oh my goodness! Why are you going alone?"
And then I'm going to cross the street,
someone comes to help me from behind.
At the beginning of my time,
it was my impression of being thin
and now it is because I am old
that everyone wants to help.

But I am not the same.
I am quite different from the experiences.

"Helping others" is a theme that runs throughout Dona Juana's narrative. She shrugs off the help people offer her that appears to emerge from a sense of pity or concern. Yet she is constantly helping others and asking herself if she has given enough. Although she never married, she raised and educated several generations of extended family. In the half century that Dona Juana has worked as researcher and teacher, she has taken one sabbatical (for a year at Indiana University in 1958). She did not take others because she "couldn't leave the children." Nonetheless, she worries, "I think I haven't given enough." "They have given me more than I have given them."

Dona Juana gives continually to her family, her students, the university. In return, she sometimes enjoys "that rare feeling of being useful," that sense that, I suspect, joins her to many other women in teaching careers.

The poetic transcription that concludes this section is left to re-present on its own another re-vision of Dona Juana.

If It Rains Too Much

I have to admit I spend money,
without giving it too much importance.
Maybe I see a book
and I am not going to read that book just now,
I buy it, I buy the book.
I go to the store, I see something beautiful,
a vase or something like that
and I buy it
without thinking if I have the money.
That's the reason I have not money for ceiling repairs.
Just now, it's all right
because it is not raining.
But if it rains too much—
Oh well, it comes down.

Experimenting With Form: Poetic Transcription

> After all, the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and nonliterature and so forth are not laid up in heaven. (Bakhtin, quoted in Benson, 1993, p. v)

Poetic transcription moves in the direction of poetry but is not necessarily poetry. What poetry is in itself, however, is hard to define. Octavio Paz (1995) refers to it as "the testimony of the senses" (p. 1). He continues, "what the poem shows us we do not see with our carnal eyes but with the eyes of the spirit. Poetry lets us touch the impalpable" (p. 2). Through accessing the senses, poetry makes one pause, reflect, feel. It "gives pleasure first, then truth, and its language is charged, intensified, concentrated" (Drury, 1991, p. 5).

Poetic transcription approximates poetry through the concentrated language of interviewee, shaped by researcher to give pleasure and truth. But the truth may be a "small t" truth of description, re-presenting a perspective or experience of the interviewee, filtered through the researcher. It may not reach the large "T" truth of seeing "with the eyes of the spirit" for which poetry strives. For me, in the Dona Juana poetic transcriptions, *That Rare Feeling* and *If It Rains Too Much* are more evocative than the others. Yet each poetic transcription provides a snapshot of Dona Juana, and I included the ones that

I did to present a kind of album of her professional life, in particular, over time.

Whether poetic transcription or poetry, the writing experiments with form in re-presenting research. Experimental writing reflects, in part, postmodern times where scholars and researchers question the traditional, scientific, authoritarian stance of research presentation. Postmodern scholars acknowledge that

> When we write social science, we use our authority and privileges to talk about the people we study. No matter how we stage the text, we—the authors—are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. (Richardson, 1992, p. 131)

Experimental form makes staging more evident.

"Language is now auditioning for an *a priori* role in the social and material world, bringing facts into consciousness and therefore being" (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 14). Through moving away from a writing transparency where form and writer disappear from view, postmodern authors move readers to raise questions about authenticity and representativeness of the text and about the power and authority of the author that they might not ask otherwise. For example, in *The Position of the Island*, did Dona Juana or did I, the writer, highlight the exploitative nature of the U.S. relationship with Puerto Rico? Did she talk about other aspects of the relationship as well? Obviously, even if all the words are hers, I helped to stage the script.[3]

I am also uneasily aware of colonizing aspects to my re-presentations of Dona Juana. Although fluent in English, Dona Juana's first language is Spanish. Once again, her tongue is "Americanized." If Dona Juana had been interviewed in Spanish (and if this article had been written in Spanish), how different would word flow (and meaning) of the poetic transcriptions appear? Even if Spanish transcripts had been translated to English and then shaped into poetic transcriptions, I am sure her translated Spanish would differ from her spoken English in "rhythms, figures of speech, breath points, pauses, syntax, and diction"—all aspects of speaking that Richardson (1994b, p. 526) identifies as important devices for poetry. Although Dona Juana translates herself, she nonetheless becomes a "translated woman" (Behar, 1993), carried across a commonwealth border.[4]

Experimental writing makes writers and readers more aware of the researcher's relationship with the text and research participants, but that is not why we, the writers, experiment. Rather, experimental form seems to be demanding our attention as a way to help fill holes in our fragmented society. Lincoln and Denzin (1994) contend that "many, including scientists, are searching to find some spiritual core in themselves, a way of reconnecting to meaning, purpose, and the sense of wholeness and holiness" (p. 582). In the process of blurring boundaries, experimental writing helps to heal wounds of scientific categorization and technological dehumanization. With its aesthetic sensibilities, experimental writing can introduce spirit, imagination,

and hope. We struggle to learn how to care for the soul (Moore, 1992) in a world that has valued expert-led effectiveness, efficient time use (Just Do It), and materialism rather than creativity, reflection, and connection. As Greene (1991) indicates, if our work provides an opportunity for the maker and the beholder to reflect upon his or her own life and on what it means to be in the world, it can be transformative. After all, "It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture" (Bruner, 1986, p, 11).

Through experimentation with form, I become more aware of the intersubjectivity inherent in all research presentation. I am also more conscious of my relationship to readers because I'm inviting them to attend to my writing with their minds, feelings, and self-reflection. The following sections explore further the researcher/other relationship and researcher/other/reader relationship that characterize my work with Dona Juana and poetic transcription.

The Writer and Dona Juana

> It takes two to know one. (Bateson, quoted in Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 94)

Poetic transcription creates a third voice that is neither the interviewee's nor the researcher's but is a combination of both. Using Dona Juana's words, I compose the pieces that tell a story, make a point, or evoke a feeling told, heard, and felt by either or both Dona Juana and myself. Poetic transcription disintegrates any notion of separation of observer and observed. These categories are conflated in an interpretive space.

Although qualitative researchers "cosmetically" edit interviewee transcripts and choose which phrases to quote, poetic transcription, as stated earlier, makes the shaping more evident. Organizing a transcript into poetry or poetic transcription imposes particular meaning. Paradoxically, it can also "pull out" meaning, moving into the interpretive realm where the writer (and reader) make leaps (Wolcott, 1994), while staying close to the data.

Through striving to shape Dona Juana's words into poetry, I learned more about her by reading and re-reading the transcript, listening for essential themes, trying to illuminate her truths. But as I worked to provide portraits of her life, I also reflected upon my own. As Clifford (1986) states, "every version of an other, wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self' " (p. 23). I am a female academic who also longs for "that rare feeling of being useful." I too get caught up with university "busyness" but know that the university "is not the Island," that there is a much larger world, a more desperate world, beyond the university and think, at times, perhaps that's where I should be. My mother was a teacher, and she was the reason, I think, that I became an avid reader and later a scholar. For a long time, I too thought that "reading

and doing things—they were responsible for the grades I obtained." I am still sometimes timid, but less quiet than I used to be. Being thin, however, was never a problem, and workers' strikes were not a part of our middle-class household talk. But cultural differences were. A girl from Mexico lived with us when I was in high school. A man from Nepal spent several months in our home. We went to the doctor from Venezuela who most people in our small, Midwest town shunned. As I studied anthropology and later traveled, lived, and worked in other countries, I became painfully aware of cultural hegemony, international politics, and economic power.

So, in the portraits of Dona Juana, there are glimpses of me, the writer. But these are not always simple reflections. Rather, at times, I am, as Richardson (1992) describes it, "rewriting" myself. Richardson states that she feels "more attuned to lived experiences as subjectivity felt by the Other" (p. 135) because she must *feel* some aspect of the experience to write her poems. And then the act of immersing herself in the feeling and creating process "opens up unexpected, shadow places" (p. 131) in herself. As I worked on *If It Rains Too Much*, I delighted in Dona Juana's relationship with money because I am not as carefree and yet often long to be, to be able to say with a shrug of the shoulders, "but if it rains too much—oh well, it comes down." It is not only at the literal level of rain, roofs, books, and vases that her words move me but also at the metaphorical level of spontaneity and surrender of control.

The Writer, Dona Juana, and the Reader

> A work of art affects us as embodying meaning, not as pointing toward a meaning that is somehow separate from it. (Ross, 1984, p. 22)

> All art is a process of making the world a different place in which to live. (Dewey, 1925, p. 363)

Nisbet (1976), in his book *Sociology as an Art Form*, states that he is not against "science, but *scientism*, which is science with the spirit of discovery and creation left out" (p. 4). Poetic transcription could be described as an amalgamation of science and the literary. I believe that this amalgamation is useful, not because it produces good art or rigorous science (although it could possibly do both), but because it opens up a spirit of discovery and creation in the researcher, and in the reader, who may begin to think about the process and product of research in very different ways. "Thinking about how to represent our data forces us to think about the meanings and understandings, voices, and experiences present in the data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 109). The process of writing data in different modes of representation pushes us to try out different analytical ideas. As Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) states, regarding

representing research through dance, the different focus "might extend, energize, and bring out previously unseen aspects of the objects of our interest" (p. 400).

When introduced to experimental forms, students in qualitative research classes have felt freed to write in ways they had never before tried in academia. They have taken risks with their writing, allowing their own voices to appear. And they have spent hours drafting and redrafting to convey some nuance "just right." Greg Simmons (1996) wrote as poetic transcription portions of his pilot study concerning teachers' use of "cooperating grammar." The following is taken from his lengthy poetic transcription that amalgamated words of interviewees:

> Going out on the playground
> I would ask the kids, tell me some playground rules.
> I would get, no running, no hitting, no jumping off the swings,
> no, no, no.
> So after no running I would say,
> so we walk.
> No hitting,
> keep your hands to yourself.
> No jumping off the swings,
> stop the swings and get off.
> No jumping in puddles,
> keep your feet dry,
> walk where it's dry.
> Dry feet are happy feet.

Katie Furney (1996) included a poetic transcription in her dissertation study of several schools that practice inclusion well. As with Simmons, Furney crafted "School Is Fun—and You Learn a Lot Too" from the voices of respondents—in her case, elementary students in one school. Such work demonstrates how using experimental forms can "enable the author to see familiar social actors and events in new ways, to step into the shoes of the other, and to use individuals' voices and tones in sensitive and meaningful ways" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 129).

As stated previously, poetic transcription does not always result in a poem, but by taking the step of doing poetic transcription, a greater possibility exists that art will occur. And art forms, such as poetry, provide tacit experiences for readers. Interpretation requires engagement in ways that go beyond cognition. Elliot Eisner has long advocated an artistic approach to teaching and research. In *The Enlightened Eye*, Eisner (1991) states,

> For feeling to be conveyed, the "language" of the arts must be used, because it is through the form a symbol displays that feeling is given virtual life. The point, therefore, of exploiting language fully is to do justice to what has been seen; it is to help readers come to know. (p. 4)

We learn through our emotions as well as through analytical thought. Sandelowski (1994) agrees: "The proof for you is in the things I have made—how they look to your mind's eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart" (p. 61).

Return to the first poetic transcription, *That Rare Feeling*. It was my getting in touch with Dona Juana's desire to feel useful that made it clear to me what to draw from her transcript. I am not reporting what Dona Juana *did* to feel useful. Rather, through metaphor and descriptive scenes, I try to make evident her need, her desire. When poetic transcription moves into the realm of poetry, readers also enter into the *feeling*. A space opens and allows us all—Dona Juana, me, and the reader—to be connected in our feelings and reflections, however similar or different they may be. The reader joins Dona Juana and me in constructing the interpretation, realizing that it is not some absolute meaning of the prose that is important, but the multiple meanings and the possible meanings that we create together (see also Barone, 1990; Brieschke, 1990).

Openings

Conclusions suggests an ending, a linear progression that can be resolved in some neat way. I see no conclusions here, but rather *openings*. Experimental form is an opening, a clearing in the woods of research regularities. The clearing away of accustomed practices releases a rare feeling of reflective play in interpretation and language. In this opening, light shines on interconnections among researcher and participants. Readers are invited to join in, not only with critique, but also with their feelings and personal reflections. The clearing ruptures traditional patterns of scientific knowing and notions of research purposes. No longer content to just "understand," the writer of experimental form seeks the transformative powers of language and reflection to open, in some way, all participants: researcher, researched, and readers.

"When," I have been asked, "is poetic transcription appropriate and when should narrative or description be used?" One could also inquire as to the appropriate instances to use readers' theater, a short story, ethno-photography, or dance. My answer is, "it depends." It depends on the inclination of the presenter, the nature of the data, the intended purpose for writing up one's research, and the intended audience (note that I sent this article to *Qualitative Inquiry*, a journal—and presumably a readership—open to experimental forms of representing research). I would not argue that all data be written up as poetic transcription any more than I'd advocate always using matrices to convey analytical patterns. Yet both poetic transcription and matrices can be effective ways to analyze and to re-present data. I agree with Sparkes (1995) that although some experiences may be best expressed in a particular form, this presupposes that researchers are familiar with the wide range of expressive modes available. Researchers need to be aware of many ways to re-present data and to experiment with them to learn about their data, themselves in relation to the data, and about their skills and abilities to communicate inquiry in different ways.

"Life consists of retellings" (Bruner, 1986, p. 12). As researchers, we search for images that re-present lives (Finley & Knowles, 1995). Different mediums allow us to see and to say different things about those lives. And as Richardson (1990) states so truly, "How we are expected to write affects what we can write about" (p. 16). In this research opening of experimental and creative form, our horizons are broadened.

NOTES

1. Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995) indicate that in developing scripts for readers' theater, they also begin with their usual process of data analysis—coding and sorting.
2. Brackets surrounding words in the poetic transcriptions indicate that the words are mine and not Dona Juana's.
3. Dona Juana responded to this section as follows: "Did I give the impression that I consider the nature of the United States exploitative? We have progressed in a century more than under the four centuries with Spain." You now know the answer to my question in the text.
4. See Ruth Behar's (1993) book *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* for a discussion of how translating a person's words entails much more than language.

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