Bad Blood and Tender Nomadics: The Returns of Poetic Brutality

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to liberate the possibility of poetics in the research of consumer and idea behavior. It proposes the concept of poetic brutality, and advances connections for the returns of poetics in ten themes. True to its generative nature, it performs a novel academic progression from pre-inventive insight generation to structured ideation.

INTRODUCTION

One thing still clings to poetry, like a wet piece of litter to the bottom of the bin, that advertising has lost but might yet exploit: the profitless, the nihilism, the truth that hurts, that doesn’t want to be heard.’

Nick Ashton (2003)

Before the publication of a dedicated article on the role of poetics in consumer research (Sherry & Schouten, 2002), the qualitative landscape for lyrical research was deemed to be populated by an interpretive and phenomenological stream (Spiggle, 1994). In the early part of this century, poetics in the minds of the wider marketing research community has remained restricted under stationary interpretive, postmodern and introspective labels, which do neither the bold original advances of the past nor an energetic creative future of the poetic possibility justice. This article aims to revisit poetics as the road less taken, and remedies the lost attention to the liberal inclusion of art and literature in the aesthetic procurement of market intelligence (Belk, 1986; Stern, 1988a, 1988b).

The term poetics is used to denote figurative thinking in general, beyond the literal effect of poetry as a literary format condensed in language, and for predominantly metaphoric presentations in for instance language and psychology (Gibbs 1994), architecture (Bach 1978), sociology (Brown 1977) or anthropology (Brady 2000). Poetics refers to a mode of inquiry and form of presentation of reality that is aesthetically conscious, uses condensed evocative forms, applies figurative and metaphoric language, avoids the artificial distancing that characterises academic endeavours and is unafraid of experiential and sensual immersion. Poetics in academia result in an ‘artful-science’ (Brady 2004). Poetics has been reinvigorated in more recent theoretical contributions (Canniford, 2012; Wijland, 2011; Wijland & Fell, 2009). The acceptance of the representation in creative writing (Brown, 2014; Schroeder, 2014) as a form of inquiry has seen new projects that challenge aesthetic academic boundaries (Schouten, 2014; Wijland, 2014).

We see the future of the ancient heritage of poetics, as a nomadic hunt into the invisible everydayness, and a high potency option to open up deviant insights into the chaosmos and multiplicity of contemporary consumer and idea behaviour. It provides an alternative to examine the often ‘unrepresentable’ details or minuitia of life in pre-cognitive examinations in the mapping of affective and atmospheric intensities (Hill, Canniford, and Mol 2014). In idea behaviour, poetics procures managerial returns in the acceptance of fragmented brandscapes that live in the expressive contexts of digital brevity. Finally it offers methodological forays in post-ironic stylistics that may build on the previous attention for expressive form (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996) and on past applications of the roots of poetics in premodern allegories (Stern, 1989).

THE SITUATED RETURNS OF POETICS

Something between breaths, if only for the sake of others and their desire to understand you and desert you For other centers of communication so that understanding May begin, and in doing so be undone.

(Asbbery 1975)

The canvasses academics have at their disposal offer few opportunities to both illuminate a poetic process in theory, and make it perform itself as a transparent journey, from the intuition of contributive gaps and multi-sensory inceptions across media, to conceptualisation in the cool landings of textuality of an article. Or, to phrase it in the theme of this ACR conference: to advance the connections of a perceptual and conceptual process. The ACR tradition however makes a little explored allowance. Here, the publication of the winning entry in the 2014 ACR Film Festival functions as a pre-inventive exposure to the precognitive intuitions of the constructs surrounding poetic brutality. This article builds on the intuitively grounded multi-media sketching of the film ‘In Brutal Times’ (Wijland 2014) and unfolds a conceptual textual representation as repeatable process in form.

The following 10 film themes showcase the potential of songs in situ. They represent the returns of poetic brutality, as a cyclical refreshment of the accomplishments of past travellers, as a future oriented and innovative alternative in a digital world, and not least in positional nudges that aim to liberate poetics from ingrained limitations of its use in the narrow field of marketing and consumer behavior.

Surface Phenomena. The probing to sense the outer layers of a setting often metaphorically start on the reverse side of the screen of information, with an attention for external appearances as a less obvious perspective. The suspension of a priori mental conceptualisations in which the ‘phenomenon is likely to be envisaged as a large, indistinct mass’ (Hirschman 1986), with textures that are fully open to impressions. In hindsight, interpretive avenues have become the dominant qualitative operand in the last 20 years, since its difference with phenomenological approaches was made explicit (Spiggle 1994). This rekindles an aesthetic attention for what demands little notice, and ‘sets before our eyes the absent object’ (Dryden 1667).

Instant Brutality. One of the radical ways to discern the complexity of atmospheres, is to let attention zoom in on a stand-alone moment, and apprehend each component as an open-ended possibility. As a poetic attitude, it is deemed to adopt a firm rejection of closure (Hejinian 1985). The quest for acute perceptions may be a sequence of fragments, and an assimilation of instants in an as yet non-accumulative process (Lefebvre 2005). This itinerant rendering redresses the utilitarian allurement of conceptual imagination.

Narrative Fallacy. The meaning makers in marketing have long been infatuated with the aptitude to become ‘myth’ merchants (Wijland 2009a). At the level of noticing, a pre-emptive narrative may clean up the native messiness (Law 2004) of indigenous observations. The insight procurement in the lives and stuff in the market may paint an anti-paysage of disenchantment that fit stories in culture. Poetics ploughs in a more open field, and implicitly critiques the pre- and post-structuring in narrative possibilities.

Quick Inscription. Then again, the singularity of inscriptions (Sherry, 2000) of poetics may offer alternatives in future-oriented open-sourced marketing concepts and situated digital contexts. In
contemporary meaning markets every process is accelerated and clocks at increased speeds, for both producers and consumers. The returns of a brutal poetics relies on a quickening of perceptions.

Prospecting Outside. The method of introspection has been one of the bones of contention, even among fellow travellers (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993) in the consumer Odysseus (Belk 1986). While introspection as a way of knowing has been vindicated since (Gould 2011), the singularity of poetry specifically still suffers from a confining association with subjectivity. Poetic brutality would argue for powerful returns in the opposite realm: as a revelatory approach that may be better attuned to the subtleties of the external rhythm of marketscapes, as a savage attitude and formal mediation to make surrounding superficiality sing, and as a better way to apprehend the fake, real and raw in the outside.

Material Poetics. Market intelligence and conceptual ideation have a great stake in being able to eloquently arrest the meaning of the silent things. Material poetics (Wijland 2009b) has been the subject of ACR’s heretical opening act (Wijland and Houston 2008). Brutality in this respect may have two perspectives: on the one hand a close attention to the form and presence of inanimate minutiae which are performative in their own right. They are deemed to possess a poetic agency (Wijland 2011), and especially idea development finds its inspiration the way in which tangible and touchable stuff quietly sings. On the other hand, textual poetry may be able to capture a fine representation of physical surroundings.

Lyrical Planning. Brutal insight generation in planning may be seen as is a reformulation of information ‘from below’(Mayer 1995); not as a linear chain of associations, but as a way of looking that by-passes the mental blocks of a functional fixedness that temporarily defers expertise. This works as a conscious counteractant to looking ‘from above’: with a specific goal in mind. Brutality then functions as a kind of open-minded deconstruction that gauges the creative ‘affordances’ in a given challenge. In Pattern Recognition (Gibson 2003) planner Cayce Pollard wears clothes from which every trade mark has been carefully removed, she responds to labels by getting sick. She lives in a ‘design-free’ zone to keep her sensitivity to brands optimized, when she is called into action as a market ‘dowser’, a tender nomad for a forensic apprehension of the bloody traces of marketable meaning.

Advertising Songs. In a similar way as researchers privileging interpretative alternatives, copywriters have been immersed in a cultural storytelling as a conceptual thought pattern. In the shifting sensibilities of the digital world however, in which a cohesive control of the narrative has been cut-up in bite-sized exclamations at the mobile fingertips of a lightening fast audience. Puma’s ‘After Hours Athlete becomes a staccato ideation ‘with a ring of truth to it’ in which a runner’s category finds an identity (Droga 2011).

Pomo Postmortem. Few interventions have left more indelible traces in academic minds across beliefs than the promo of the pomo. Its success as a branded paradigm has made it a blanket response for all non-positivist adventures, and it has stopped the living development of poetics dead in its tracks. It is suitably ironic that the most fervent supporters of poetics (Brown 1998a; Sherry 1991) as a way of seeing and knowing in marketing and consumer behavior have provided reviewers sui generis with a one word short cut for the dismissal of ancient poetics in the late 90’s. With reviewers from all denominations mentally pre-categorizing and spelling every poem as a pomo, the fall-out for poetics as a distinct research methodology has been devastating. Poetics may offer new baroque possibilities, which accept the messiness of marketing moments, prioritizes evocation, and in its quitted questioning of narrative spills over the edges in an openness of interpretations in the disjointed scavenging of percepts.

Premodern Romance. And so in 2015, the lifecycle of particularistic singing may offer the post-romantic enticement of a nomadic tenderness and the post-ironic revelation of a scenic post-digital view that respects metoric flashes from the accelerated market scape. Then again in the ancient foraging of meaning, the hunting and gathering of impressions we may reacquaint with a more brutal market mechanistic as an artful part of the academic guild ‘clothed alle in o lyveree / of a solmple and a great fraternitee’ (Chaucer 1977).

ON POETIC BRUTALITY

‘Je n’ai jamais été de ce people-ci. Je n’ai jamais été chré- tien; je ne comprends pas les lois.

Je n’ai pas le sens moral, je suis une brute…..’

(Rimbaud 1873b)

We unfold poetic brutality as an alternative to constitute a lyrical interdisciplinary meaning-making process that transcends the mental boundaries of art and commerce. The overall objective is to analyse how a poetic approach imaginatively works in the context of marketable meaning, not least in the inspirational context of brandscapes as mental spaces, which are particularly suited for assessment through aesthetic and evocative techniques. The article expands the positions which claim that the poets of consumer research are ‘brute empiricists’ (Sherry and Schouten 2002), and the managerial benefit to call on poetic techniques in facilitating the chunking of branded messages (Stern 1999). Poems, are a very literal variant of a poetics research culture (Sherry and Schouten 2002), which mirrors the everyday occurrence of brands as a gathering of interactive artifacts (Lury 2004) that generate their own cultural poesis (Stewart 2005). Brandscapes form an emergent assemblage (Hill et al. 2014), that actively impacts forms of knowledge with a life of their own (Stewart 2005). This fortifies the idea, that the researcher of inherently metaphoric concepts such as brands, has to be ‘attuned to the poetic dimensions of culture’ (Friedrich 1996). Marketing research and poetry have been linked regularly, especially in representing consumer behaviour, although the poets’ ‘way of knowing’ was still considered ‘other’ compared to the researcher’s way (Stern 1998).

Gregory O’Brien, the curator of the Wellington Art Gallery, comments: ‘The branded environment, in the commercial sense, is a nightmare from hell’ . The intentions of a contemporary lyrical engagement with marketplace artefacts is reflected in the working title of Une Saison en Enfer (Rimbaud 1873b) as an acute expression of the idealism of youth ‘hurt by the ugliness which it encounters’ (Starkie 1961). ‘To paraphrase Rimbaud’s term: there is bad blood, ‘Mauvais sang’ (Rimbaud 1873a), between poets and the dominant culture of marketplace. A radical rebuke that is brutal in its form is as salient today as it was in the 19th century. The market functions as the dominant logic against which a poet, as projects critical sensibilities:

‘…if Rimbaud were to be revived, resurrected and reconfig- ured today, it is doubtful whether he would be impressed by our prosaic attempts to capture the poetics of the market place […] it has to be said that the essential enchantment of the market place still eludes us. Indeed, if Rimbaud were alive today, one suspects that he would once again turn his back on the world of marketing letters and seek the derèglement de tous les sens …’. (Brown 1998b)

In terms of exposure and reach, advertising may have has displaced unsponsored poetry as a vehicle for expressing a culture’s sentiments. There is no doubt that poetry had an elevated place as a guardian of cultural values, although poets themselves have expressed their worries on the death of the art form as a leading medium
Advertising has been designated as ‘the poetry of commerce’ (Stern 1988); the two are cultural meaning producers with shared sensibilities. While traditionally operating in disparate spheres, the well-worn path of antagonism may be the least exciting avenue to explore a vagabond poets in the assessment of aesthetic consumer and producer strategies. Rimbaud’s artistic quest mourned the bitter loss of beauty, and how to recapture her from memory. The poetic approach based on a systematic sensual derangement, in the evaluation of what’s ugly and what is beautiful, casts a shadow forward to a more sensuous version of scholarship (Stoller 1997). We propose that the understanding of the concept of poetic brutality, as the mental and spiritual engagement of talented humans with the cultural artefacts of brandscapes that invite individual meaning making, may be dissected in three main components: pre-inventive noticing, patterned insight and creative ideation. They each provide a theoretical buttress for the domains of a poetised research culture in a market context.

**Brute Noticing.** Poetics enables a form of brutal pre-cognition as to how sense, see and preconceive the quality of the objects of an inquiry. The ‘

\textit{dérèglement de tous les sens}’ enables an intentional approach for a reinvigorating reshuffling as a decomposition of reality (Clifford 1981). The ethnographic requirement of a fearless noticing (McCracken 2009) of brute facts and meaningful stuff is opened up by poetics in a sensual pre-patterning. This may reside in a black box of solipsism and absorption (Pinsky 1977), but we propose four poetic inflections of brute noticing. \textit{Immediacy} and instantaneity are cornerstones in the perception of currency and nowness. An aesthetic deconstruction benefits from arresting an atomic array of disconnected moments. \textit{Distantiation}, in all its forms and figures, constitutes, par excellence, the critical moment in understanding (Ricoeur 1981). The nomadic distance from hegemonic myths, specifically related to the awareness of the language of marketing and markets, favours a critical perceptiveness of its function. In poetic research, distantiation operates as a defamiliarisation with hegemonic exchange experiences; it is an essential pre-requisite to perform a hermeneutical progression (Ricoeur 1981). The concept of \textit{indeterminacy} enables brutal views of brandscapes as open-ended and fragmented spaces, made up of solitary objects with links that are imbued with an unpredictable anti-theatricality, largely innocent of syntax. Indeterminacy fosters open-ended ambiguities, in sound and imagery as a distinctively poetic act (Perloff 1981, 1991). Here, we may focus more on the internal rhythm of a brand’s rubato, and capture how its presence speeds up or slows down. Finally, we may be supported by the idea that the task of poetry is that we do not represent, but recognize and respond to \textit{otherness} (Blanchot 1969). What is notable in artful and commercial poetics is a striking commitment to the strangeness of the common (Edmond 2012). Otherness is an attitudinal position that oscillates between sameness and difference as an a priori refusal to be limited by a pre-emptive engagement with a brandscape, as a consciously conceptualised dress for use value.

**Brute Insight.** The generation of brutal insights is a necessarily messy inception, in which we factualise relative meaning as a lyrical, but conscious patterning process. The poetic codification of what we select in this stage is a wilful approximation of what makes sense. We propose four articulations of brutal codification. Poetic insights are subject to a brutal \textit{reduction} as an intervention rationale, which affirms, emphasizes or subverts an aspect of a brandscape in the most concise length of utterance. This radical progression to casual combinations privileges a ‘cutting away’ to elements, in which the objective must be to invoke a superior form of reduction (Friedrich 1996), relies on the combination of radical economy and condensation. Language has poetry as its most elegant linguistic technique of reduction, to some not dissimilar to pleasingly brief mathematical presentations (Sapir 1951). Secondly, in purveying uniqueness, conscious insights are fuelled by an awareness of \textit{aesthetic scarcity}. It requires the compliant reconnaissance of edgy ‘connoisseurs’ with a sensitive cultural palate for unexpected niches of aesthetic expression. Brands, like all other economically worthy entities, derive their aesthetic value from the relative position of scarcity. In line with the required particularity that sets a brand apart from its competitors, the value of cultural capital is best expressed through aesthetic styles that are ‘socially scarce’ (Holt 1998). Following on from this, brute insights benefit from a \textit{discrepancy} that explores paradoxical fits and counterintuitive matches. As is fictionally staged in the praxis of \textit{Pattern Recognition} (Gibson 2003) and \textit{The Savage Girl} (Shakar 2002), brutality revolves around locating a semiotic ‘differencia specifica’ as the most distinctive poetic acumen (Jakobsen 1960). Beyond the radar for scarcity, brute poetic insight generation scopes the potency of difference, as an anti-dote in a market context that has a fundamental predisposition for integrated cognitive and relational structures. Finally, brute insight doesn’t shy away from \textit{intimacy}, as the capability to fabricate embodied scenarios of ‘isolated objectivity’ and a way to conceive of intimate (Stern, 1997) perceptions in analogue and digital markets. This is a contradistinction from the subjective introspection to which poetic approaches are traditionally related. Instead, it shifts the fragile percepts on the basis of a situated interiority, in order to harvest vulnerable song lines from the marketplace.

**Brute Ideation.** How we \textit{re-present} aesthetic market concepts, such as brandscapes, in content, form and style depends on the creative deed to conventionalise the mental relationships of an idea, with the intent to communicate. Etymologically poetics simply means ‘making’, an act to conceive in form. Be you poet, brand planner or copywriter: in the final instance we strive to give imagination a voice: ‘trouver une langue’ and find your tongue. We propose four poetic inflections of brutal ideation that authenticate its stylistic differential. First, the predisposition of the maker to adopt a brute \textit{mentalism}, in the faculty to lyrically conceptualise possible worlds in bits and bites. The increasingly contingent character of unstable brandscapes favours a sequence of permanently opened-end enchantments, not primarily bound by consistency. The idea that brands are poetry volumes an a disparate assemblage of moods and atmospheres, with an intuitive suspicion of a singular fingerprint, seems more contemporary than the brand as a novel. As such, poetised ideas benefit from a brutal \textit{currency}, in which nowness translates with a pragmatic intentionality of purpose, is more important than stringent conceptual continuity. This prioritises an attuning to everyday, everywhere (digital) engagement, in which we seek a deconstructed harmony. Poets not only happily live with the idea that no meaning, however sweeping, is ever intended to be finite: openness is a productive invitation. Advertising and poetics have always shared the persuasive addiction to brutal \textit{brevity}. This urgency reconfirms a particular fashion of composing a style, with poetics as a creative condensation strategy to the shortest mean utterance, in which loans and tweets meet as equals (Droga 2011). Even though brevity makes poets seem like essentialists, lines may never intended to be more than inconclusive approximations. Finally, commercial and artistic ideation meet in the brutal \textit{beat}. Rhythm is what sets poetry apart from other textual and literary expressions. The idea that a heartbeat is as quintessential as the meaning of words, and even that true poetry relies on white breathing spaces as silences in between lines and stanzas, defines what makes brutal ideation tick.
POETIC INDWELLING AS AN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Poetry is the subject of the poem, From this the poem issues and To this returns. Between the two, Between issue and return, there is An absence in reality, Things as they are. Or so we say.

From : The Man With The Blue Guitar
Wallace Stevens (1937)

In its conferential brevity, this article argues that the returns of poetics are an exciting part of the future of consumer research and idea behavior and its smooth ride badly needed debadging (Hewer and Brownlie 2010), not least from the branded dents caused by limiting introspection and the persistent aftershocks of pomofication. Its timeless contribution is both in the theoretical and situated argument to poetics as a logic of discovery. In its twinned poetic-prosaic presentation, it aims to confirm a fresh performative opportunity within the body of ACR. The subsequent film and article stages provide a powerful exposition of a pre-inventive multi-media-intimation, with a theoretical contribution that enhances the open future afforded by poetic brutality. The returns show how intuitive noticing, perceptual insight and conceptual ideation, comfortably live in the fluidity of market currencies.

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