Somewhere between *Currere* and Ficto-*currere*, with My Teacher The Near-Sighted Monkey

TESNI ELLIS
York University

> *I think that [memory and imagination] are absolutely intertwined. I don't know if there's necessarily a difference, but I don't think they can exist one without the other, absolutely not. Like that question, can you remember something you can't imagine? I like those questions that when I think about them they make my brain kind of stop. You know, is a dream autobiography? Is it autobiography or fiction?*
>
> — Lynda Barry in conversation with Hilary Chute (Chute, 2014, p. 77)

THE CELEBRATED ARTIST LYNDA BARRY goes by many names. That is, she transforms into a variety of characters in her drawing classes, instructional texts, and artworks. One of her longest-running alter-egos, The Near-Sighted Monkey, is featured prominently in her work, through which she tells her readers "Words and pictures together make something happen that is more than good or bad drawing. You don't have to have any artistic skill to do this. You just need to be brave and sincere" (Barry, 2019, p. 18; see also Barry, 2008, 2010, 2015). To start making their own comics, Barry's students are encouraged to role-play, too, by drawing characters like scribble monsters and animals much like the ones they may have drawn when they were children. Still, the images that emerge contain both memory and imagination, intertwined as they are (Barry in Chute, 2014). Barry (2002) calls this *autobifictionalography*, her neologism for her distinct approach to deconstructing and reconstructing memory, imagination, and experience by drawing.

Making comics is conceived by Barry (2015, 2019) as a form of reflective practice through which memories and experiences may be analyzed and, as she puts it, transmitted. This resonates with the reflective method of *currere* which begins with the self to understand the significance of educational experiences and desires past, future, and present (Pinar & Grumet, 1976/2015). Further, ficto-*currere* involves explicit engagement with fictional storytelling to subvert our expectations of autobiographical inquiry (McNulty, 2018, 2019)—much like the way imaginary encounters, characters, and multidimensional perspectives can be rendered in comics that are

"something other than representation" (Barry, 2019, p. 22). Somewhere between *currere* and ficto-*currere*, then, we find Barry's *autobifictionalography.* This mode of storytelling is seen across her artwork and makes its way into her teaching—whichever characters we may transform into, Barry invites practicing drawing as a way of seeing and being in the world. She insists drawing is "about increasing your capacity to gaze and to listen and most importantly, to notice what you notice" (Barry, 2019, p. 37). Thinking with Barry, my present research concerns what happens when post-secondary students come together to draw comics, as I explore how drawing generates a sense of attunement to self, others, and the world—and what this means for curriculum study.

In the following, I offer making *autobifictionalographic* comics as a form of inquiry that, like *currere* and ficto-*currere*, can enable one to (re)construct the self while confronting (and even embracing) the limits of self-representation. I am thinking about the possibilities offered by speculative, subversive, arts-based forms of inquiry that implicate the autobiographical even as they leave intentional gaps, traces, and inconsistencies to play with notions of self-representation and generate fantastical, even monstrous, characters and situations. I begin by exploring *currere* and ficto-*currere* before situating my work in comics-based inquiry. Following that, I explore Barry's *autobifictionalographic* practice and analyze an example from a comic of my own, to consider the limits of autobiographical inquiry and whether comics might intervene to offer alternative, expansive modes of representation that invite relationship and dialogue.

Currere, Ficto-*currere*, and Comics-Based Inquiry

In the method of *currere*'s four recursive stages—regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic—what is already present may be brought closer for analysis (Pinar & Grumet, 1976/2015). The emphasis on temporality is obvious and the jump from past to future and back is telling—the method is not linear but recursive, encouraging a multidimensional reflective practice (Wang, 2010). Notably, in the imaginative progressive stage, what is *not yet* is considered as revelatory as past experiences (Pinar & Grumet, 1976/2015). The addition of ficto-*currere* by Morna McDermott McNulty (2018, 2019) takes this further to analyze what is *not even.* As the "definitive example of ficto-*currere*" (Downey, 2023, p. 9), McNulty's (2018) gothic novel, *Blood's Will*, explores the figure of the vampire, drawing on post-human, decolonial, feminist theorizing to engage "the reader in an exploration of the contingency of existence and, thus, the role of emergence and intertextuality in the making of one's *currere*" (McNulty, 2019, p. 78). Throughout the novel, human and vampire characters' experiences and reflections are framed through *currere*'s stages, and McNulty (2019) explains, eventually the (human) protagonist embraces a way of being in the world that is "far more emergent and unknown" (p. 79). McNulty's (2019) ficto-*currere* emphasizes a speculative mode, calling attention to the "unreal" and "constructed" nature of memory and fiction alike (p. 75). As Adrian Downey (2013) remarks, through form and content, McNulty (2018) subverts our expectations of autobiographical inquiry.

Downey (2023) argues that *currere* must maintain subversive intentions or else risk producing narratives that are "swallowed up by the same systems they once fought against" (p. 12). For instance, "subversive dreaming" through ficto-*currere* might be a form of "affective resistance to the post-truth movement" because "the speculative modality offers a vision of reality without denying the existence of truth" (Downey, 2023, pp. 7, 10). As works of fiction teach us, fictionalized accounts of experience that explore alternative realities may end up generating alternative ways of being in *this* world.

Taking up the form of the gothic novel and drawing on the literary practice of auto-fiction, McNulty (2018, 2019) shows that artistic practice can complicate autobiographical inquiry by offering ways of interpreting and representing experience that do not provide closure. As McNulty (2019) writes, "fiction is not the opposite of fact; it is the opposite of finitude" (p. 75). Recall, too, what Maxine Greene (1995) knew: through conscious attention to the "as if" worlds made by artists, students, teachers, and scholars alike, we can begin to develop new and ever-shifting perspectives to imagine alternative "possibilities for [our] own becoming and [our] group's becoming" (p. 39).

Curriculum reconceptualist scholarship is intricately tied to arts-based educational research's emergence and ongoing practice; in their earliest conceptions, these fields took dual turns to narrative and autobiographical inquiry. To be subversive in autobiographical inquiry we might, then, continue to expand the expressive forms through which we compose. The materials and artistic modes we play with to do so come with their own affordances and constraints. For instance, comics have recognizable conventions and "while these aspects are not definitional by themselves, take away too many and the work may no longer be recognizable as a comic" (Kuttner et al., 2018, p. 397). Comics are celebrated for their accessibility as much as their complexity, in which stories are told through a blend of images, character dialogue, and text narration, typically across frames known as panels (McCloud, 1993). The field of comics scholarship not only involves literary analysis, but also seeks to understand the thinking and ways of being involved in the act of making comics. I situate my own work in this latter area, aligned with scholars like Nick Sousanis (2015) who rendered his dissertation, *Unflattening*, in graphic-essay form, the first of its kind. Not just an "illustrated text," a comic is "a collective voice made of words and images" typically intended to convey a narrative (Pirie, 2024, p. 7). While the field of comics studies has eked out some space in the academy, comics-based research is still an emerging field of practice involving a meeting of visual, narrative, and arts-based methods (Kuttner et al., 2021). Comics may be made wholly by scholars or by participants or a combination of both, at any stage of inquiry. Wherever in the research process they are made, making comics is considered a way of thinking.

As Sousanis (2015) writes, "we draw not to transcribe ideas from our heads but to generate them in search of greater understanding" (p. 79). Similarly, Barry (2019) believes drawing provokes a "state of seeing" akin to a childlike wonder (p. 37), enabling us to see an "unexpected aliveness in things" (p. 23). Barry believes everyone can draw comics. But, she observes, most people gave up drawing at some point in their childhood, and many can hardly bear the images that emerge if they try to draw later as an adult. She says, "People are dismayed by this and even ashamed enough to destroy the picture—get rid of it—immediately" (Barry, 2015, p. 31). She saves abandoned student drawings from such a fate, insisting she loves their "strangeness that can't be faked" as much as the "realness in them that is hard to come by" (Barry, 2019, pp. 50–51). The strange and the real exist, all at once, in Barry's classroom; they also appear simultaneously across Barry's own work, in what she calls *autobifictionalography.*

Making *Autobifictionalographic* Comics as Inquiry

An *autobifictionalographic* comic might adopt the conventions of autobiography to tell a fictional tale; on the flipside, what may start as an autobiographical narrative is not limited to the *facts* and embraces the fictional elements and detours that *show up* (Barry, 2002, 2015, 2019). The

result is a kind of magical-realism that embraces context, subjectivity, and historicity even as it confronts the inevitable fallibility of memory and constructs some monsters along the way. For example, at the beginning of Barry's (2002) *One Hundred Demons*, we meet present-day Barry, rendered in her now-unmistakable cartoon likeness, sitting across from a demon at a drawing desk. Here, she asks, "Is it autobiography if parts of it are not true? Is it fiction if parts of it are?" (Barry, 2002, p. 7). While this question resonates before and beyond Barry, her belief in artistic practice as a transformative process of both deconstructing and amplifying "fluid and slippery truth claims" is made explicit in this piece (Trousdale, 2022, p. 125). Across the full-colour pages of *One Hundred Demons*, each chapter is divided by a scrapbooked title page filled with glitter, scraps, doodles, poems, photographs, and other childhood and school ephemera of Barry's. In these comics, the character "Lynda" confronts the various "demons" of her life. As a reader, you get the sense that Lynda is looking back on various experiences with these demons to better understand her relationship to them in the present.

These stories move back and forth in time and between settings; we often simultaneously hear adult Lynda's perspective in the narration while a child Lynda is seen in dialogue or activity with other characters. Susan Kirtley (2012) explains the effect:

> In *Demons* Barry limns multiple selves conversing with one another across boundaries of time, space, place, text, and image. The representations of self—child, teen, and adult—challenge notions of femininity and beauty, of race and passing, and of class and social dictates, exploring how the figure of "Lynda Barry" was constructed by and in opposition to these discourse communities. (p. 148)

At the end of *One Hundred Demons*, Barry (2002) invites the reader to pick up their own ink and brush to "paint your demon," insisting, "Try it! You will dig it!" (p. 224). Here and in her instructional, mixed-media publications that follow, Barry models drawing as a reflective practice that is not about visualizing or even interpreting events from lived experience—she says, rather, it's about *re-experiencing* them (Chute, 2014). Her enduring interest in the multidimensional nature of memory is clear in *Making Comics* (Barry, 2019) when she writes:

> The past is in constant motion. Some say a memory changes each time we remember it—giving the impression that a memory degrades over time—but what exactly is degrading? "What really happened" is never a fixed state. The significance of any element changes depending on when we're recalling it, why we are recalling it, and who we are re-counting it to. The past is in constant motion. (p. 150)

As Hongyu Wang (2010) points out, *currere* is a multidimensional reflective practice that stimulates an expansive sense of time—that is, as long as the conditions to engage in the method allow for attention to be paid to one's inner world over a sustained period of time. Sustained attention is central to drawing practice, because "your hand needs time to wander" (Barry, 2015, p. 9). We pay attention, too, by "accepting what shows up" (Barry, 2019, p. 13). Then again, many of Barry's drawing exercises rely on short bursts of activity in time to songs, poems, and movements—suggesting sustained attention to our inner world is not about quantifying the length of time spent. Instead, it is about attunement, the quality of our effort in study.

Making a comic is an experience of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. To better illustrate this, the *autobifictionalographic* mode, and its potential to stimulate *currere*-like

revelations, I offer a brief look at images from a recent comic of my own (Ellis, 2022). Before I began drawing, I intended to centre the story on my evolving research interests over the past decade. Instead, while the scenes appeared before me, the trials and transformations that had occurred in my personal life took over the narrative. I made sense of this while drawing, where I tend to represent my inner world using imaginative imagery. Another past self, the one I remember being publicly is rendered through scenes of memories. Still, my hesitation to reveal the full story (even to myself) competed with my desire to understand and relay the significance of these experiences.

Select panels from the comic, made by hand in pencil on paper, are seen in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Figure 1: Select panel from "A Decade of Becoming" comic by Ellis, 2022

Figure 2: Select panel from "A Decade of Becoming" comic by Ellis, 2022

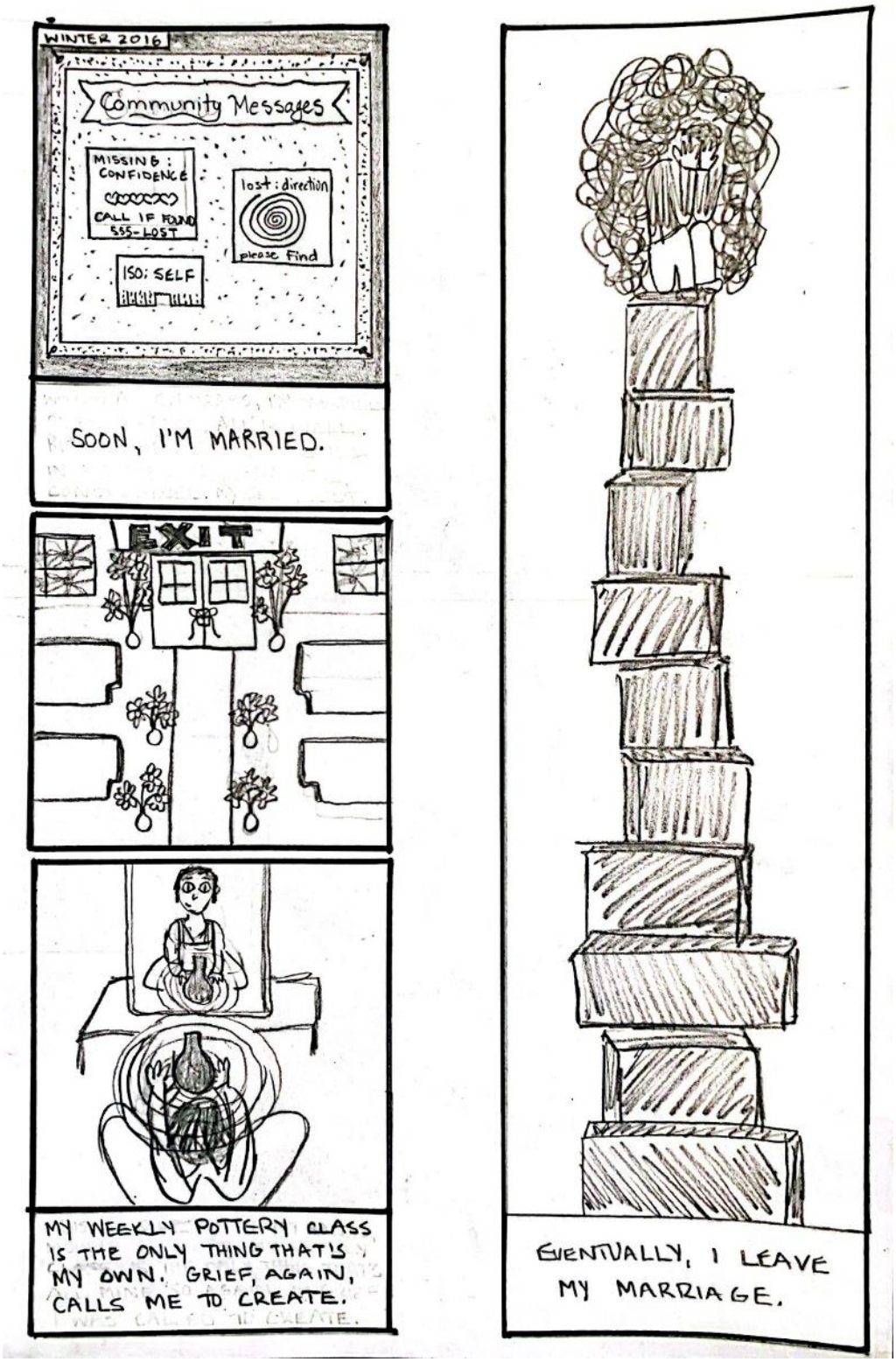

Figure 3: Select page from "A Decade of Becoming" comic by Ellis, 2022

One page of the comic (Figure 3) includes four panels that contain: an impossible figure, a photograph I copied from memory, a metaphor, and even a scene from a memory that does not actually belong to me. There's a chronological inconsistency too. However, this remains obscure to the reader, though the narration vaguely addresses the images. Recognizing this, I decided to make authorial ambivalence even more noticeable in the piece. I left visible traces of the comic's own process of becoming—pencil marks, mistakes, erasures, and other ghosts of my process are laid bare. Here, I imply that inquiry and artistry, topics discussed throughout the comic, are processes through which we might attempt to structure and generate insight, but this is never complete, perfect, or tidy—much like my understanding of self.

My choice to leave ghosts of the longer, descriptive narration I later erased might make me an unreliable narrator. But, might an unreliable narrator still give something in what they refuse to disclose? Gaps like these are ready for manipulation thanks to some of the structural conventions available in comics. Indeed, the formal features of this artform are used to amplify the narrative (Lewkowich, 2020). When teacher candidates constructed "dreamwork" comics, David Lewkowich (2020) took to reading these comics with their formal qualities in mind, exploring the ways students used aesthetic strategies available in making comics to reconstruct their fears, anxieties, and desires about teaching. A multidimensional approach to reading the comics is important here: Lewkowich (2020) focuses on what is present in the comics while also reading for the "traces," temporalities, metaphors, gaps in meaning, and ambiguities the form itself enabled their authors to explore.

The frames of my comic are not equal in size; they take up space differently than each other from page to page; and what is outside the frame are those things I still could not confess, even as a drawing. In comics, even the spaces between panels have meaning. These *gutters* contain unseen information the reader fills in on their own, like imagining unseen events, time passing, and actions taking place (Lewkowich & Jacobs, 2019). This absence "that is also a presence" makes for a complex reading experience: the "stillness of the gutter is therefore stirred to life and filled with unpredictable manifestations of the reader's unconscious" (Lewkowich & Jacobs, 2019, pp. 21–22).

A complex reading experience, like what happens in the gutters, also occurs as authors and readers negotiate presenting and perceiving *autobifictional* characters in comics. In Barry's (2002) fictional worlds that feel autobiographical, childhood traumas are exposed, protagonists are sometimes bullies, and parents and teachers can abuse in one scene and care in the next. We learn to extend empathy not just to characters we relate to or care for but even to those antagonistic others we don't even like. Rachel Trousdale (2022) explains that Barry demonstrates

> the double-edged possibilities of autobiography as healing and as mode of attack … an ethical model of life writing not just as reclamation of the past self but as a way to understand the subjectivities of the people around us. (p. 125)

Indeed, as Grumet (1988) reminds us, "every autobiography is both someone else's story and our own" (p. 175).

While making this comic, I confronted my experiences and became aware of the contrivance of reconstructing certain memories. For instance, I negotiated the complications inherent in my approach to representing others in the story. Looking at it now as I think about the opportunities for *autobifictionalographic* comics in curriculum inquiry, I see that I might have taken the work further by putting my past, future, and present selves in a multidimensional

conversation with each other. I might also have broadened that conversation beyond myself, including those present as much as not present in the comic, the characters hovering perhaps just beyond the frame but inevitably implicated in what is made visible. *Unskinning* my own story, as Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis (1998/2013) put it, "recasting self-images, renaming, unfixing" (p. 89), I might have gone further to risk giving voice to the "shared action, shared responsibility, shared lives" that are entangled in what I 'know' about this story (p. 77).

Thinking of Barry's (2002) invitation to make comics about one's "demons," I recognize it may not always seem relevant or appropriate, in educational inquiry, to make public the intimate aspects of experience—revealing our inner world is risky. Leaning more into the fictional side of *autobifictionalography*, and the progressive, future-oriented stage of *currere* might offer a way to navigate that complexity. And with comics, where the creator's unique style and voice are ever present, where the simplest line can denote a figure and any variety of marks can create a world, the limits of self-representation seem not to reside in the marks on the page or even artistic skill, but in our willingness to be brave and sincere as we confront what shows up.

By confronting our demons from the past, even the ones we may have ourselves been, or imagining encounters with antagonistic others in the future, we might do better today. Through *autobifictionalographic* comics, we might re-write parts of ourselves, giving these experiences *second thought.* Thinking with Hannah Arendt (1978), Anne Phelan (2017) describes, "The idea of second thoughts conjures images of revisiting taken-for-granted assumptions and disentangling oneself from memories that have become confused with 'reality' so that they can be reconsidered and argued about" (p. 23). Second thoughts can be analyzed through *currere*, ficto-*currere*, or *autobifictionalography*, if they involve a determined focus on relating (personal, educational) experience to broader, public concerns. This might provoke the kind of meaning-making Stephanie Mackler (2009) wants to see flourish in education and beyond—a "seeing the whole" that determines how we choose to act in the world and "how well we live" (pp. 22–23). Positioned as a curriculum of second-thoughts, autobiographical inquiry might attempt to turn familiar memories, events, or objects on their side to illuminate something forgotten, assumed, or previously hidden from view.

Comics are especially suited to doing and showing this thanks to the ways in which non-representational drawing can render this perspective-shift. For example, we might draw a view of a scene or memory from above, from below, with a micro or macro lens, or from elsewhere entirely. Impossible figures like mine precariously perched atop a stack of boxes can evoke emotion in ways words might not. Characters can be larger (or smaller) than life or embodied by figures that exist outside of reality, like demons, monsters, animals, or aliens.

In the charming, heart wrenching cartooned book by Jonny Sun (2017), an alien is sent to earth to observe humans. In the allegory that follows, Jomny [sic] the alien, who's an outcast amongst his own kind, encounters Earth's creatures and learns about friendship, love, loneliness, fear, knowledge, birth, becoming, and death. That is, he learns all this from the plants and animals he meets, mistaking them all for humans, never having met one. The alien ethnographer is attuned to the relationships he crafts with those he encounters and with the world, even when it makes him sad or distressed. Through this story, "Jomny's curious presence allows these characters to open up in ways they were never able to before, revealing the power of somebody who is just there to listen" (Sun, 2017, back cover). Thinking again of Barry's (2002) invitation to "draw your demon," I wonder what kind of alien encounters and demons of educational experience might emerge from students, what they might look like and say, if they took to drawing them out. If this sounds like child's play, it should, for "the drawing of the child [is] an experience of ability, and of reaching

out a hand to the world" (Vansieleghem, 2021, p. 279). Drawing, after all, is a "prehistoric stage in evolution," our primary language of invention as children before rational, linear thinking dominates and "a mighty gap opens up between words and things, no smaller than between words and pictures" (Taussig, 2011, p. 35).

The stuff of dreams is well-suited to exploring through comics, too, as Lewkowich (2020) explores. Lewkowich (2020) asked teacher candidates to draw comics, constructed as dreams, to explore their "innermost fears, anxieties, wishes and desires about school—the otherwise unrepresentable and impossible psychic life of education" (p. 36). Lewkowich (2020) positions comics as uniquely able to mimic dreams, like moving "suddenly and without transition" from scene to scene (p. 30). Further, distorted versions of experience, fears, or wishes that might appear in dreams can be conveyed in comics. Lewkowich (2020) writes,

> [The] value of using comics to explore the teacher's dream life is that they are inevitably imprecise and incomplete, and since their meanings are never foretold or finally settled, their approximations and imperfections bring us to a place where the limits of knowledge are constantly reinvented, including the limits of what can and cannot be thought in teacher education. To recognize the presence of gaps in our thinking without necessarily needing to fill them in, this is a lesson that comics teach, identical to that initially devised by dreams. (p. 45)

Assured the activity wasn't about their drawing skills, and with an open-ended invitation, Lewkowich's (2020) students took to drawing comics using a range of approaches in their layouts, uses of narration and text, colour scheme, metaphor, sequencing, and more. Again, anyone can draw comics.

As I discovered while crafting my short piece, making *autobifictionalographic* comics provokes what Barry (2019) calls "a certain kind of remembering" (p. 155). She writes,

> It's a sort of living snapshot, the kind of memory you can turn around in. It needs very little set up or explanation. If you can "see" it in your mind's eye with your whole body there will be a hint of a story that bids you to follow. This kind of story moves not from fact to fact but image to image. It can jump time. (Barry, 2019, p. 155)

Turning around in the scene suggests an embodied experience and the parallels with *currere*, here, are evident. Indeed, Wang (2010) finds students describe the memory work of *currere* similarly, where fragments of images appear, out of order, before the story itself; these stories begin with the body, senses, and emotions. I find that a compelling place to begin confronting and interpreting educational experiences, giving them second thought, through figures like demons, aliens, and the stuff of dreams.

Like McNulty's (2018, 2019) ficto-*currere*, Barry's mode of *autobifictionalography* is disruptive. Barry doesn't seem to need an answer to her question, "Is a dream … autobiography or fiction?" (Chute, 2014, p. 77). *Autobifictionalography* does not deny the truth; nor is it about spinning lies—rather, it is an imaginative act of making or engaging with second thoughts and "as if" worlds. Comics are more than representational and through form and structure they can encourage makers to do something other than end tidily. Barry (2019) remarks, "I've always wondered about the four panel structure of comics. Stories and jokes use a three beat: beginning, middle, end. Comics use an additional, unnamed beat—the beat between beats drummers call the

pocket" (p. 124). That pocket might invite *currere* narratives "leaning into uncertainty" (Downey, 2023, p. 7), enabling makers and readers to confront the ambiguities of experience more compassionately. In her practice of (re)membering images, Barry is often especially focused on childhood and, indeed, experiences at school. Importantly, "Barry avoids a retrospective and nostalgic overdose: one is invited back not to *be* a child but to regain and rebuild *some* of what is lost in childhood" (Tolmie, 2022, p. 5, emphasis in original). Might *currere* be described the same way—regaining and rebuilding ways of seeing and being together that are lost in an alienated, instrumentalized education?

If ficto-*currere* can disrupt "the singular story we tell ourselves about ourselves and others, about the possibilities for transformation, and 'invites in' a liminal form of inquiry that is both fictive and real" (McNulty, 2019, p. 83), Barry's (2002) *autobifictionalography* offers a mode through which we might do so. With comics, we can craft and encounter narratives that play with expectations for authenticity in autobiography, enabling us to question broader concerns regarding what is "true" and can be known or narrated about experience—including regarding the other.

Still, curriculum scholarship has a long tradition of complicating the limits and assumptions of autobiographical inquiry in education (Chambers, 2003). Even Grumet admits feeling like she is "drowning in narrative" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976/2015, p. 233); she's wary of autobiographical narratives by teachers that are detached from educational theory and neglect to expand the scope of understanding beyond the self. Similarly, Janet Miller (2005) worries banal invitations to "just tell your story" miss something crucial and risk producing "unified, singular, and essentialized versions of 'self,' 'experience,' 'other' and 'voice'" (pp. 51–52). Grumet suggests autobiographical inquiry can't just be "parallel play" but, rather, "We must write narratives that pose a question about our experience in the world and invite our readers to join us in the exploration that results" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976/2015, p. 239).

Arendt (1958), as Adriana Cavarero (1997/2000) recounts, thought autobiography an "absurd exercise" because the meaning of one's actions is not known to the autobiographer but, rather, the narrator, as in biography (p. 24). The narrator, having witnessed the subject's actions in public, is entrusted to make meaning of the story—a political, relational rendering (Cavarero, 1997/2000). However, Cavarero (1997/2000) offers what she says Arendt missed: "between identity and narration … there is a tenacious relation of desire" (p. 32). That is, we desire both to tell our story and to have it told back to us. Cavarero (1997/2000) writes, "Autobiography and biography, while being different genres of the story, do not seem to be able to manage without one another within the economy of a common desire.…The story is what is desired" (p. 37). For Cavarero (1997/2000), through storytelling and listening, we generate *relating narratives*. This, surely, is more than just parallel play.

Comics rendered as reflective practice might be similarly thought of as a kind of relational, reciprocal artefact between our past/future/present selves and others—especially when we make and share them in each other's company. The significance of relationship in educational experience is implicated here—interpersonal relationships as much as those we craft with ideas. Indeed, while *currere*'s self-study is typically taken up through solitary writing practice, its meaning deepens through sharing and responding to each other's work (Wallace & Byers, 2018). This primarily happens in dialogue and writing, so I offer the addition of further aesthetic strategies of elaboration: *autobifictionalographic* comics, through which we might generate a kind of life-boat full of second thoughts that we can grab onto instead of drowning.

Autobiographical, biographical, and even *autobifictional* narratives need tending to in a relational dynamic. This might be what Barry (2019) means when she describes her experience of

"meeting" an image: "I'm meeting something. And it's also meeting me, if I can stand it" (p. 102). When I make a comic in solitude, it's an exploratory act. But it's a revelatory experience when images are brought to life in a group context, like a class or collective, while others draw and practice and confront their own demons, aliens, and dreams around me. Comics, the way Barry (2019) teaches them, are less about whether we can "accurately" draw a specific thing we set out to express—they are a mode for discovering what we didn't even know was there, waiting to be met. This is an opening for curriculum inquiry just as it is for arts-based educational research, which has long been concerned with debates regarding what is "art" in/and "research," "how" to do and judge it, "when" it "happens," and "who" makes it, sees it, or benefits from it. Attention to techniques, form, and craft remain important—and what we do with what emerges is, too. I learned this from my teacher, The Near-Sighted Monkey: by coming together to make comics that "bring about the unthinkable" (Barry, 2015, p. 10), we ask something of ourselves and of each other. Something we might not know we needed to ask until drawing and writing and sharing stories serves as a kind of incantation, through which we bring forth the strange and the real for analysis.

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