

Rubbing the room: *Tactile epistemologies of teacher work*

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Abstract

This article describes a site-specific research-creation project at a New York City public school. The project and the images that resulted—a series of life-size red wax rubbings on paper—work in relation to visual discourses and dynamics of contemporary school accountability. In the article, the author situates the images and image-making in the context of her broader multimodal qualitative study on teachers' invisible labor in urban schools. The author makes sense of this multimodal intervention through a series of three conceptual dyads: witnessing/ evidence; positionality/ art; and intimacy/ "tactile epistemology," (Marks 2000).

Keywords: Research-Creation, arts based research, invisible labor, care work, intimacy, rubbing

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I stood perched atop the shiny surface of a student desk—left foot planted on the chair, right leg bent on the attached table, a curl of blue painter's tape fixing the edge of glassine paper (a translucent tracing paper) to the flat top of Betty's seven-foot particle board bookshelf. My eyes narrowed on the top row of books—muted teal bindings just visible through the onionskin curtain of glassine. How to position my hands to capture the interior angle of the shelf, the uneven slant of chipping board, the stepped silhouette of class texts? I flattened the crinkly paper to the shelf's surface with my left hand and pressed the broad side of a red beeswax crayon to the objects with my right. Crisp, dark lines came through at right angles, softer marks as the paper pulled to accommodate the shelf's three-dimensional form. I could begin to see the drawing emerge, recognizable referents alongside abstract notations—tight marks and wandering lines, a child's hand, the record of skips or bumps (Fieldnote June 27, 2015).

On June 26 2015, the last workday of the school year for New York City public school teachers, I spent ten hours in Betty's math classroom at Bronx Humanities making large-scale drawings on paper. I arrived before 8am with four, forty-three inch rolls of glassine, a wheel of painter's tape, and a tin of rectangular crayons. I had come with a purpose: to trace every object and surface in her classroom using the early printmaking technique of rubbing—laying paper over objects and then lightly scrubbing the paper with a drawing tool, so that the raised surfaces darken, while recessed areas remain blank. My intention was to produce a scaled imprint of every surface and object, an index of Betty's space and teaching tools. Each tile of linoleum, panel of slate board, textbook, and craft supply covered in the crinkly sheath and called forth through strategic wrapping, odd angles and the constant to and fro motion of my hand.

I had begun to conjure this site-specific intervention several weeks earlier as a way to reconnect with my project—the people, and ideas and images—to get close. I wanted to touch and be in touch with the teachers and the spaces and the objects that shape them and shape the stakes of this work. This gut desire for intimacy came in part from the distance I had traveled in the year between. I completed the interviews for my project in May 2014, in June I went on bed rest, in July my second child was born, in August she was diagnosed with a congenital health concern, and in March she underwent major surgery on her skull. This milky year of nurturing two small beings, 15-months apart, of physicality and tenderness and urgency and need, stretched out in space and felt-sense beyond the months. When she was safe and well, when I carved out room and self to come back to this research, I felt far away from the matter and mattering of it. The rubbings would be a way to close in on that gap, to get close again.

I imagined the rubbings—the images, and the process of creating them in relation to dominant de-contextualized digital depictions of teaching and teacher work. Images like the value-added teacher ratings that were published amid great controversy by media outlets including the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and Wall Street Journal beginning in 2010. Figure 1, taken from The Wall Street Journal's 2012 Grading the Teachers Project serves as an apt example of the image genre. This cropped screenshot depicts a table with three vertical columns—a list of sixteen teacher names (blacked out here) at the left; a phrase-long summary of the teachers' classroom experience (2 years, more than 3 years, etc.); and a third column for "performance," where teachers are assigned a ranking based on citywide averages. What at first appears to be a straightforward record of teacher proficiency, is, upon closer analysis an abstracted and stylized visual representation. For example, the teachers' numerical value-added measurements (VAM)—already a reductive depiction of teacher work—are analyzed according to a scale ranging from "low" to "high" and then color-coded in blues and reds of varying chroma. These modifications are designed to communicate complex information quickly and clearly (precluding nuanced readings). They call on grammars of Newtonian science—practices of categorizing and the assumed objectivity of numerical data—to bolster their visual authority.

Teacher	Teaching Experience	Performance Category
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Eng., 6th Grade BELOW AVG.
██████████	2 Years	Eng., 7th Grade BELOW AVG.
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Math, 6th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Eng., 6th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	Co-Teaching	Math, 6th Grade LOW Math, 7th Grade BELOW AVG.
██████████	3 Years	Math, 6th Grade LOW
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Math, 8th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	3 Years	Eng., 7th Grade BELOW AVG.
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Eng., 8th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	Co-Teaching	Math, 7th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Math, 7th Grade BELOW AVG. Math, 8th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Math, 7th Grade BELOW AVG. Math, 8th Grade BELOW AVG.
██████████	2 Years	Math, 7th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Eng., 8th Grade BELOW AVG.
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Math, 8th Grade AVERAGE
██████████	More Than 3 Years	Eng., 8th Grade AVERAGE

* Charter Schools: The performance data on charter school teachers are more incomplete than those on traditional public schools. Only 32 charter schools participated.

Figure 1: *Grading the Teachers Project*. Wall Street Journal, 2012. [Screenshot, names blacked out for privacy]

I envisioned this project in dialogue with value-added charts and tables in a series of aesthetic and conceptual “whereas” relationships. Whereas the VAM images are abstracted symbols, the rubbings would be mimetic; whereas the VAM images are digital and therefore highly searchable, persistent, replicable, and scalable, (boyd 2007) the rubbings would be analog; whereas the VAM images were created by and for computer screens, the rubbings would be life-sized; whereas the VAM images are aesthetically standardized—each school and teacher is depicted in the same font and style, the rubbings would be particular—the objects and spaces in a specific math classroom at a particular school; whereas the VAM images pretend at certainty, the rubbings would be less sure. And whereas the purpose of standardization serves to normalize and control (students and teachers), the aim of the rubbings towards thick description and intimacy works to differentiate, to learn with aberrations, subjectivities and entanglements. As Pindyck (2018, p.15) writes of frottage (a surrealist form of rubbing), “In a society that promotes efficient and effective productions – and in the context of school cultures driven by such capitalist workings and values – the slow and wayward processes of frottage work as a political act that values an inefficient and unpredictable mode of moving and working.” While the VAM images come across as smooth and consistent, rubbings are necessarily textured, bumpy and uneven. The act of rubbing highlights every scrape and chip, every peel of paint, the imperfections of the objects and artist’s hand. The value-added graphics are the visual outcome of several cycles of abstracting and condensing volumes of teacher and student data—as if reducing fractions until the simplest form of the numerical relationship comes forward. The rubbings would be excessive—layered, bodily, intimate—

more data than necessary, or than “can be contained by an educational discourse” (Orner, Miller, & Ellsworth’s, 1996, p.111).

Re-visualizing care

I carried out this site-specific intervention in the context of my broader study on the invisible work of teaching in urban schools. In 2014, I had joined with a group of teacher-activists through the New York Collective of Radical Educators and their “Inquiry to Action Groups.” This program invites groups of teachers to explore a topic of interest and create a collective action in the form of art, pedagogy, or protest. Our group was titled, “Beyond scores, ranks, and rubrics: Re-imagining teacher evaluation.” And over 5 months, we met for weekly workshops where we analyzed dominant images (like the VAM charts) and discourses of teacher labor and assessment (like standardized observations, and comments from family and partners). We also collected images, remixed existing representations, and made new images to picture teacher practice and especially the invisible labor that urban teachers do in the context of racialized, discriminatory school and social policies (for more on this collaborative process, see Restler & Luttrell 2018; Restler 2019). As the culmination of our work together, we created a multimodal art-activist Tumblr called “Those who can,” which asks teachers to visualize their work outside the borders of what can be counted or calculated.

My research centers images as a way of taking up and challenging the visual dynamics of teacher labor, and drawing attention to both the teachers’ work and the structural contexts that they work within. Art-making and images are woven through each facet of the project. They are central to my theoretical framing of teachers’ invisible labor, to my research methods, various approaches to analysis, and to the multimodal objects (paper, website, video, drawing, etc.) that trace and share out the work. In addition to writing up my research, I drew it, audio-recorded it, scanned it, collaged it, rubbed it, and remixed it. I created four “bodies of (art)work” in my research process. And alongside the printed work, I published a multimedia digital assemblage that presents some of these artworks together with textual analysis on a scalar website¹.

This article zooms in on the rubbings, the first artwork that I created out of and into this research. After that long and stretchy year, I began by making things. Ahead of coding and narrative analysis, I drew and rubbed, and scanned and videoed. I took up these practices before I had theories and long words and citations and books to explain them (to myself, to my committee, to my communities). At the time, I thought, *this is movement*; I thought, *this feels necessary*; I thought, *I am an artist and making has always been part of the ways I make sense*.

In the more than five years since, I have found joy and overwhelm and belonging in the work and worlds of post-qualitative and arts-based research—in the entangled echoes of identities and practices across artist-researcher-teacher in a/r/tography (LaJevic & Springgay 2008; Irwin, et al. 2018); in the wide frames and applications of arts-based educational research towards nuance, intimacy and the evocative (Barone & Eisner 2011; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund 2017; Fellner & Kwah 2018); in the thick weave of new materialism’s ecological intermingling of human and more-than-human agencies (Niccolini &

Pindyck 2018; Bennett 2010; Barad 2012); in the haptic assertions of affective multimodal practice up against limited and limiting raced and gendered ways of knowing and being (Sharpe 2016; Bhattacharya & Payne 2016; Ohito 2016; Franklin-Phipps & Rath 2019; Franklin-Phipps 2018).

Pulling on these strands (looking back from the present-future), my way of *thinking-making-doing* (Springgay 2019) this work resonates with practices of “research-creation.” Truman & Springgay (2015, p.152) describe research-creation as “the complex intersection of art, theory, and research.” In research-creation, art-making is not a tool for analysis (a bridge to the “real work”) or an exciting-evocative way of representing the research (“real work”), rather, art-making is both research and thinking. This approach is profoundly relational, leveling practices of research, thinking-feeling and art-making, while knitting together text with art with experience with theory as the vital stuff of research. Research-creation suspends the usual aims of study towards capture, documentation and representation. As Truman & Shannon (2018) explain, it “moves away from approaches to qualitative research that assume data can be collected, extracted, and then represented, and towards an affective, emergent, relational and more-than-representational approach to doing-research (Thrift 2007; McCormack 2008; Truman 2016).” Research-creation is demanding—it demands attunement and presence; it demands to be engaged on its own terms, outside of pre-determined or pre-existing frameworks of analysis; it pushes us into unfamiliar spaces of uncertainty; it challenges us to find new ways of knowing and being with and valuing the work. Writing on research-creation, Erin Manning (2016, p.134) implores us to “Take seriously that generating new forms of knowledge implies generating new forms of experience for which there are no pre-given methodologies, for which there is no pre-determined value. What research-creation can do is propose concrete assemblages for rethinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation.” The rubbings locate my project outside of the dominant frames for valuing teacher work and educational research, and frame the stakes of the study in vibrant relation.

In this way, I understand both the project and the rubbings as an assemblage—a relational jumble (Restler, 2017) of human and more-than-human matter—the school spaces and objects, the images, the sensory experience of making them, people and conversations, fieldnotes, later writings and digital collage. Attuning to the embodied, processual, and unstable nature of the work, I take up analysis of the rubbings across a series of three dialectical frames: Witnessing/ Evidence; Positioning/ Art; and Care/ Tactile epistemology (Marks 2000). In and through these dyads, I consider what the work (rubbing assemblage) *is*—naming the image genre and its antecedents in art and research—and what it *does*—how it helps us see and feel into the terrain of the project. This analysis is guided by a collaborative seeing approach (Fontaine & Luttrell 2015), which aims to address the structural imbalances of power embedded in research relationships and preserve the multiplicity of meanings that are co-constructed between researcher and researched. The rubbings, from this angle, resist a single or authoritative interpretation. Rather, I make sense of the rubbings in and across overlapping contexts—in the context of white supremacist neoliberal education policies like Value Added Measurement; in the context of teaching at an urban school with 98% students of color and 85% low income students; in the context of other sites of the study—participants’ images and words, and my own embodied experiences of “being-with” the teachers, data, and school spaces (La Jevic & Springgay 2008).

Witnessing/ evidence

witnessing

I made the rubbings at Bronx Humanities, a public transfer school that serves students ages 16-21 who have previously dropped out, been pushed out, or struggled with schooling in other ways. I chose this site because three out of the ten teacher participants worked there and spending time at the school allowed me to reconnect with all three, while offering insight into their school setting. While I completed the rubbings in Betty's math classroom, I also spent time with the two other participants— Sarah, a white queer woman with a mop of ginger hair, completing her second year at Bronx Humanities. And Michelle, a slim woman with long dark hair, pale skin and vintage glasses finishing her 6th year at the school. Aquiles, a Latinx colleague in my doctoral program and thirteen-year veteran teacher who also taught at the school often joined us for breaks or snacks and sat talking with me as I worked.

In part, the rubbings are a record (through fieldnotes, memories, in my body) of the activities, conversations, sounds and textures that took place with and around me as I produced them (and the three days of preparatory field observation that I made in the weeks prior). Discussions with teacher-participants, conversations that I overheard, interactions that I caught out of the corner of my eye standing propped on a chair rubbing the bulbous rusted hinge of Betty's heavy classroom door. Here is a partial list, excerpted from fieldnotes, of some of what I witnessed in my days at Bronx Humanities:

-Walking the hallway-length of the school with Michelle on my first visit. Ducking into each classroom so that she could introduce me to teachers and school staff.

-Whispered conversations with Betty as she recounted a difficult year of teaching. Betty's wide blue eyes filled with tears as she told me about many nights of coming home to cry. She said that she was often miserable and guessed that it was probably really hard for her partner to be around her. She wasn't sure if after next year—what would be her 5th at a "Title 1" school (a requirement for graduate school loan remission), she would continue to teach. She said she wasn't sure she could be a mother and a teacher or a wife and a teacher or just a happy person and a teacher too.

-Kirk, a 30ish straight white male teacher roamed the halls and entered each classroom with tears in his eyes reporting on the supreme court decision, "marriage is legal!"

-Walking with Michelle, Betty, and Aquiles to Dunkin Donuts for lunch on the last day of school. Michelle had a glassy look on her face and wasn't saying much. After we ordered she turned to us and said numbly, "I'm here but I'm really not here."

-Sarah told me that she had informed the principal that morning that she had accepted a position at another school and would be leaving Bronx Humanities. Over a few hours of cleaning and talking in her classroom, she explained personal circumstances that had made the year challenging—a suicidal friend

and the death of her grandfather. She admitted that her work had suffered due to these life events and that her fall semester evaluations reflected this. She said, "The good news is that I really turned things around in the second semester. That's the good thing and the bad thing, because it makes it hard to leave."

-Sarah wasn't the only teacher leaving. I met five other teachers who had all resigned (more than 1/3 of the 15 person faculty). The prolonged absence of the principal had made for a particularly difficult year and the teacher exodus seemed to be contagious. Learning of all the turnover, the principal had canceled the day's meetings which were geared towards planning for fall. So everyone was sort of listlessly wandering around—cleaning classrooms, taking down bulletin boards, surveying the empty spaces, passing the time.

-Around 2:30 as Michelle was getting ready to go home, she sat with me and Aquiles in Betty's room on top of the two teacher desks. Betty came in, joined our huddle and whispered, "Dickie was excessed" (laid off) and started tearing up. I was introduced to Dickie, a man with light brown skin and quick jokes on my first day at Bronx Humanities as one of two people who "really kept the school going." They whispered quietly for a few minutes recounting what they knew, and then all sat silently, dejected. Michelle said, "You know Betty, you're going out to celebrate your birthday tonight and don't let all of this ruin it. I'm going to get my wedding dress fitted tomorrow, and these are good, exciting things. We have lives outside of this place and we're going to be OK." After a couple of beats I said, "I can only imagine what an emotional day this is. And I want to say thank you for welcoming me in during this time and also apologize for invading your space while you all have so much on your minds." Aquiles said, "Actually, I think it's been good for me. It's kind of a distraction and it's also affirming. Like you are coming from the outside and you get what we're saying, we're not crazy!" Then Michelle turned to me and said, "I think maybe it's good you're here and that you're seeing all of this, for your project." And it sounded to me like what someone in the midst of a humanitarian crisis says to a photographer or journalist—bear witness to this and share it! Testify to the fact that this all really happened. Tell our story. This moment signaled both a trust between us and a great sense of responsibility—being let in to the world of their school and into the thick of messy emotions. Not the anger or righteousness of critiquing the school/ system/ policies from a distance, but the sad confusion of sitting in the middle of the muck, before you even make sense of it.

These vignettes and phrases of recorded dialogue, like the rubbings, are textured and bumpy, and in particular and evocative ways, they shape the stakes of my multimodal data. They add shade and depth to other teacher stories about managing school relationships and emotional work, about the face of exhaustion, and their personal and professional commitments.

These notes are like the color of the day while they also speak to the particular positioning of the school and resonate with the themes and findings of my study about the invisibility of urban teachers' labor within a system normed to standards/practices/ and expectations of whiteness (Restler 2017; Restler 2019). The teacher exodus is woven with the broader problem of teacher turnover and the social location of Bronx Humanities, a transfer school designed to serve students who are marked with the

oppressive racialized label of “over-age and under-credited” by the state. While the national turnover rate is high at 16%, it is nearly 50% higher for teachers in Title I schools and 70% higher for teachers in schools serving the largest concentrations of students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond 2017). Furthermore, this event in the life of Bronx Humanities suggests multi-layered and enduring after-effects including: the emotional loss of colleagues, friends, mentors, and institutional knowledge; a sense of being “left behind,” for those remaining and some loss of hope about the project of the school; the logistics of hiring and training new teachers, building a new community, trust, and ways of working together. And these consequences demand all kinds of work, time, and resources from administrators, teachers, and students who are already stretched thin.

The rubbings tell some piece of this story:

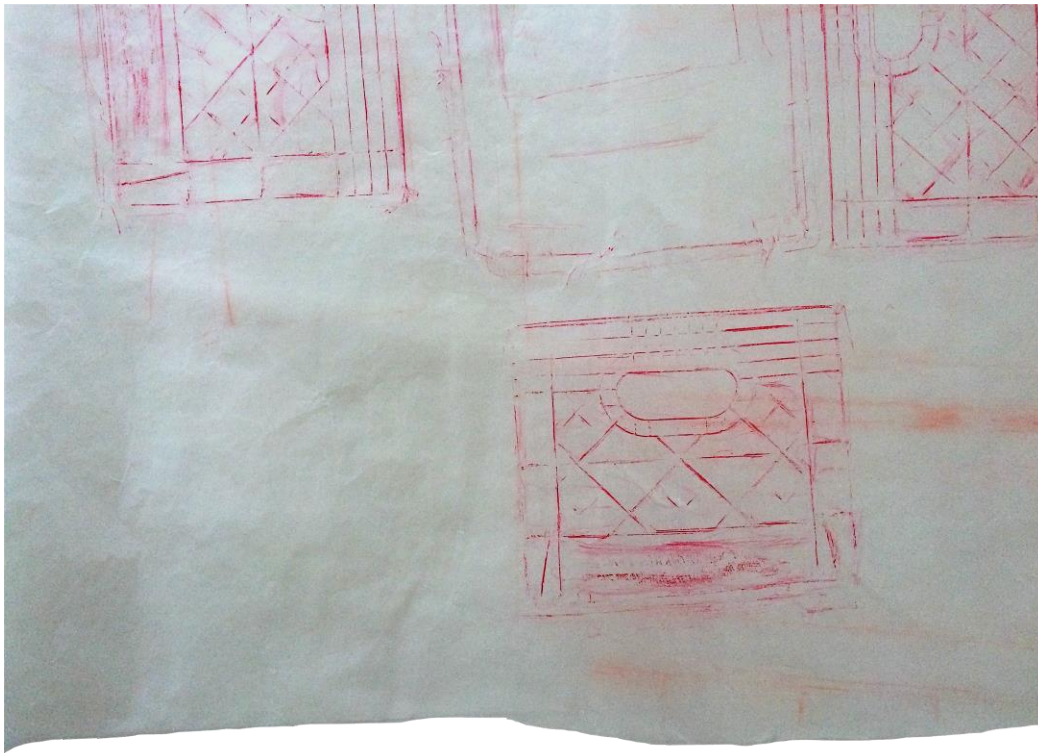


Figure 2: *splayed crate* [wax crayon rubbing, digital cut-out]. (2015)

-The fragility of the thin paper like the tenuous ecosystem of community, especially those shaped by the destructive forces of poverty, racism, and systemic disinvestment

-The lines and creases like wrinkled testimony to the hardships that the school-spaces-teachers-students-objects-community have faced and will continue to face

-The act of rubbing imbued with a melancholic nostalgia. The effort to preserve “the thing” as it was, while knowing it would change/ is changing/ has already changed

-The play of in/visibility all throughout the artwork and its making—covering over, highlighting small quotidian moments, hard to read marks, the translucent surface—speak to the teachers’ invisible work. All the issues tied up in and around the staff turnover which are invisible to teacher evaluation frames, and the value Michelle attributed to me “being here...and seeing all of this,” which was perhaps another way of saying, “this (tumult, turnover, toll) feels invisible to the world outside the school,” or “I’m glad you’re here and experiencing it, because there’s no way to put this into words,” or “you/ we must make something of this, get it noticed, make it visible.”

evidence

As scaled representations of Betty’s scissors and rulers, bulletin board and desk chairs, the drawings are a catalogue of the composition of one teacher’s classroom at the close of the 2015 school year. They form an index, like the manifest of a cargo plane—all the items on such and such date. In the de-contextualized public discourse on schools and teacher work, these images are a form of evidence, proof of what was there (that I was there, and that the objects and spaces were there too). If we can’t quite trust the spectacular display of school letter grades, student test scores, or teacher rankings, then perhaps we can at least believe in these drawings as a catalogue of objects. And they convey a different sort of information than the typewritten list—for we can imagine our fingers into the slightly shrunken oblong handles of Betty’s classroom scissors. The drawings locate shape, scale and texture.

The images overlap in intentions and aesthetics with other genres of rubbings—the nostalgic imprints of the gravestone rubbings of family historians; the documentary drives of 19th century Japanese fisherman recording their daily catch with *Gyotaku* or hand-pressed monoprints; the indexical quality of artist, Simryn Gill’s, *Caress* (2010)—her graphite-rubbed depictions searching out the form of her “Royal Quiet Deluxe,” typewriter from three different angles. In the moments where coarse abstractions meet referential line, the images call to mind surrealist *frottage*, the “automatic” drawing technique developed by Max Ernst in 1925 to combine textured tracings with hand-drawn marks.

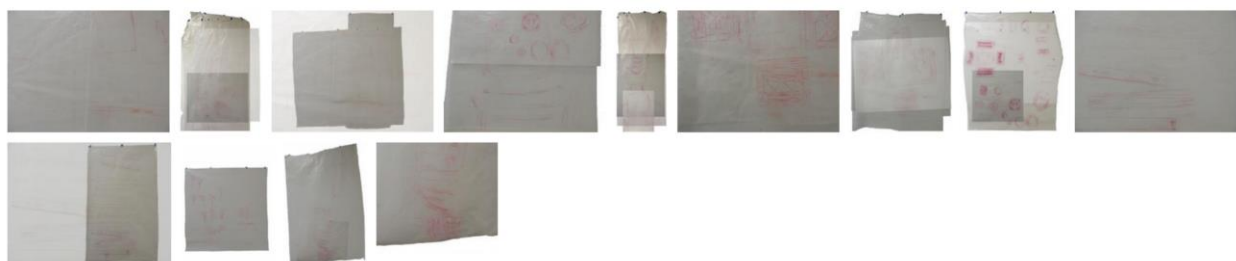


Figure 3: rubbing thumbnails [wax crayon rubbing, digital cut-out]. (2015)

As “evidence,” the images also reference an element of the Advance Teacher Evaluation rubric. Accounting for 5% of their “overall rating” (from “ineffective,” to “highly effective”), teachers are invited to submit “artifacts,” of their teaching practice which the United Federation of Teachers (2014) explains to their members as, “items that you as a teacher gather over the course of the

school year to illustrate and provide tangible evidence of your best teaching practices.” Seen in this way, the rubbings reference the multiple modes of surveillance that govern school spaces and teacher work in the form of metal detectors, “school safety” personnel, surveillance cameras, the massive documentation of student and teacher data, and policies such as the “Advance Teacher Evaluation System,” that support the exercise of these disciplinary tools[vii]. They are also the product of an outsider’s scrutinizing eye, looking closely at the granular details of teacher space and practice. From this angle of vision, the rubbings reference the “inspecting gaze” of neoliberal accountability, the need for teachers to document and continually prove their worth and trustworthiness.

Positioning/ art

(positioning myself)

These rubbings are a map. Dropping the red-balled pin onto the satellite image of Bronx Humanities; charting the angles of Betty’s classroom like a 19th century cartographer tracing the shoreline; and plotting my own contours, relationships to the teacher participants and school spaces, inserting myself (like a scaled referent) into the frame of the study. Part of this work was a site-specific performance piece—a way of seeing, being, and making in a particular place—being in the school (on the last day of the year), wrangling with huge sheets of strange paper, fielding curious questions from teachers. A certain absurdity to it all, because why do it? And how to square it with the very real and obvious, urgent and too-taxing work of teaching at a transfer school? At some point, Betty looked up at me and said, “I want to be doing what you’re doing right now.” Then she turned to Aquiles and repeated, “don’t you want to be doing what Victoria is doing? Making drawings?”

This project in all its parts—the preparatory pilot rubbings in my kitchen, visits to the school and art supply store, framing the idea for Betty and later for her principal, the physicality (dirty knees, sore arms, blister on my index finger) of making the rubbings and carrying them home in large rolls on the subway—located me as an artist. Taking up the part of “artist,” offered other (than teacher or researcher) ways to be and feel in the space. To see Betty’s room in terms of objects, and the objects in terms of textures. To ask questions like, “which corner should I affix the painter’s tape to? How to match the dimensions of a stack of chairs to those of my paper?” To notice the flat and raised planes and to imagine the marks that each surface would yield. This way of seeing and being in the school was both highly visible (loud paper, big sheets, strange intentions) as it offered a sort of cloak—the teachers could feel that I was trained on the space and things as opposed to them. I got to shrug off some of the baggage of being a “researcher” (houghty-toighty, critical) and the closeness of being a fellow teacher. Claiming “artist,” was a form of release, an acceptable excuse for my odd objectives. When Betty commented longingly on how much she wanted to be making drawings, it was as if to say, “making drawings is fun, is light, is easy, is far away from here.” Or perhaps as to say, “making drawings allows for more authorship, control, or creativity.” A yearning for the work of “making”—the expressive rather than the ever-evaluative lens of schooling.

Locating myself as an artist (alongside researcher-educator) in this work provided a certain access with

the faculty at Bronx Humanities, but it was as much about positioning myself for myself as for them. This way of working offered license or what Charles Rosen (2011) calls “elbow room” to think imaginatively into the uneasy processes of research and analysis. It肘ed new space (for me) into the project and made way for a series of subsequent multimodal interventions including layered drawings, videos, and audio works. As Springgay, Irwin, & Kind write, “It is about dwelling in a space of inquiry that resists formal naming: A willingness to allow for discomfort, frayed edges, and holes (2005, p.905).” My visual, sensory, site-specific labor offered a way to be with my research, dwell with the data, pause in the uncomfortable space before analysis coalesces.

(positioning the work)

The rubbings served to position my research, to ground the work in a series of known quantities and relationships: the shape and scale of Betty’s bookcase in her room; her room along the length of the hallway; the hallway on the top floor of the 5-story school (that shares space with three other high schools); the school on the corner of Fleet Street in the Foxhurst neighborhood of the Bronx. Haraway (1991) writes of the importance of such positioning, arguing for the “Politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (589).

These rubbings quite literally locate the work *somewhere*—in Betty’s classroom on the 5th floor, on the right hand side, down the hall from the main staircase. They also locate the teachers in that space and me—our bodies moving among the surfaces of the room. There is a physicality in the work—impressions that match (more or less) to the things themselves. And those things in relationship to bodies—a chalk board that runs 5 wide-stretched arm-lengths; in the crinkles of the paper which trace a process, a thin flat membrane trying to take the shape of something in three dimensions. The work functions in part like an anchor or tether, grounding my theoretical claims to a place and to body(ies). A reminder about the scale and space and lives implicated in my analysis and the responsibility of “seeing all of this” as Michelle expressed.

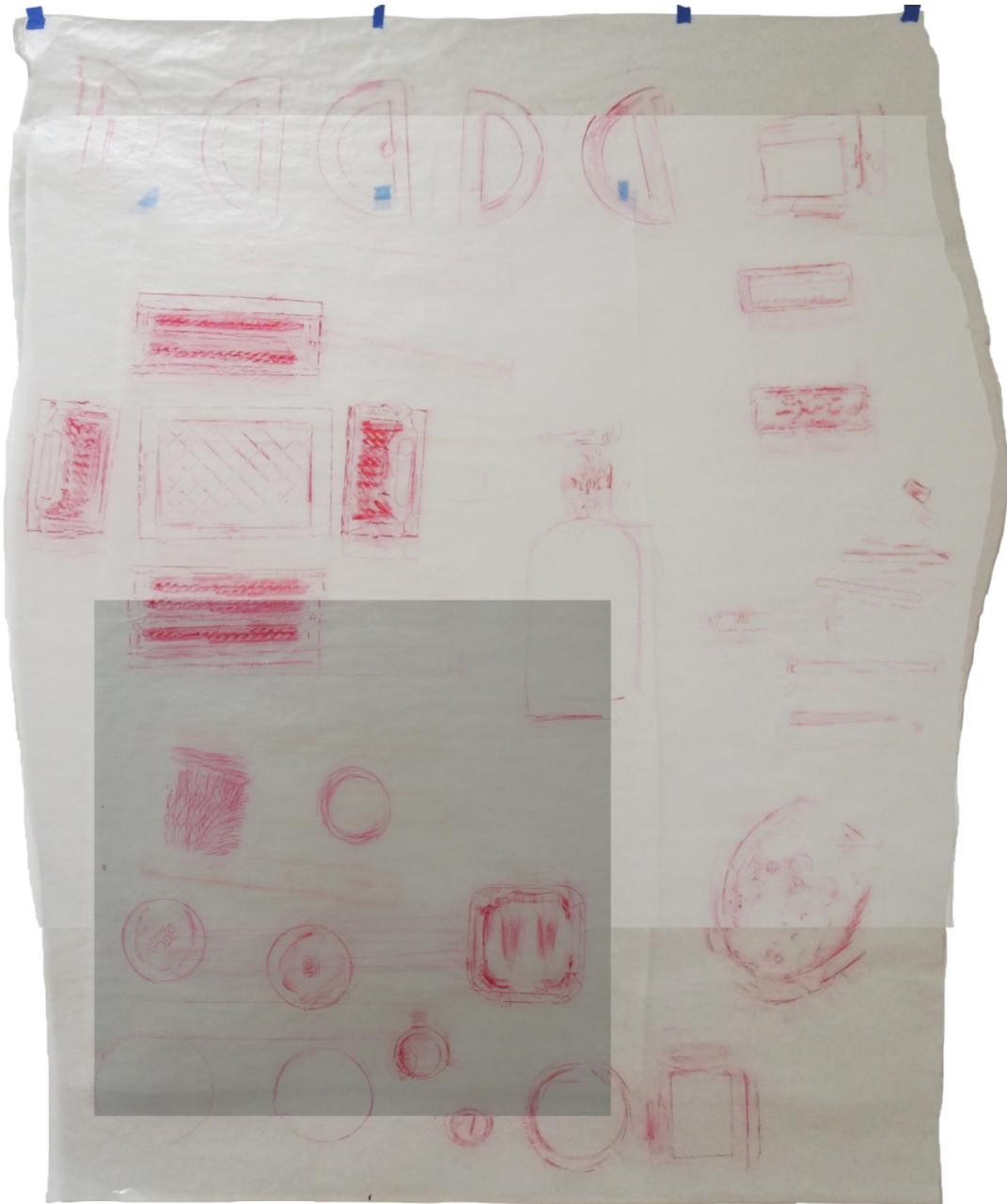


Figure 4: classroom objects, cut-out collage [wax crayon rubbing, digital collage]. (2016)

Care/ tactile epistemology

“Being-with” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind 2005) life at Bronx Humanities in preparation for and while making the rubbings was a kind of sensory record—cognitive, emotional, and bodily. The classroom and hallways, school and stairwells were filled with sensory material. Faint food odors mingling with spray bottle cleaner; the tinny quality of sound—a slight reverberation of voices, loud speaker announcements, footsteps on linoleum hallways; the planks of molded plastic fluorescents that bounce blinding reflections—pale oranges and greens—all up and down the tiled walls and windows. Interiors

composed in a palette of neutrals—beiges and yellowed off-whites, punctuated with incongruent pops of red, turquoise, mint green. Caged hallway clocks, short-stature bathroom stall doors, balled up brown paper-towels in the sink.

These colors, vibrations, sites, and feels are set against the sensory data of making the rubbings. Unfurling long lengths of loud crinkly glassine, pulling at the skim as it twists and creases, reinforcing the edge with two and three pieces of painter's tape, feeling my way around the objects with a prosthetic wax finger. Pressing tenderly—hard enough to get a clear line, but not too hard so as not to rip the paper. This kind of touch tells stories—about the smooth edges of the particleboard shelves, about the bits of grit under foot, about the rust on the doorframe and hinge. And there were other things I learned about the space by working in it in this way, like the hardness of the floors when I jumped down from a chair, the ball of my left foot tender for days, and the loud hum of the air conditioner unit.

It's no accident that artist Simryn Gill titles her typewriter triptych, "Caress," or that the Korean sculptor, Do Ho Suh names his series of rubbings (including a scaled replica of his former New York apartment), "Rubbing/ Loving Project." This kind of touch requires proximity, care and time. Making the drawings offered me a way into Betty's classroom space, surfaces, and the small objects of her daily practice. A lens through which to notice the overstuffed bookcase, the stacks of composition books with names on the covers, the math tools like plastic protractors, jars of glitter, and glue. Through these objects I could see something about how many students she teaches (number of pairs of scissors, number of books), about the way she brings art to her teaching (personalized drawings on the composition book covers, plastic tubs of colored pencils), about the resources she has (natural light, computers that flip into desks for each student, a smart board) and those she lacks (sturdy shelving, private workspace, a 4 foot strip of the back wall where the plaster has come off to expose rough concrete.) There is a kind of loving in the way that Betty cares for and organizes her materials—student work on the walls, writing implements bundled in yogurt containers. And the act of rubbing out their shapes communicates care too. Genetic scientist Barbara McClintock famously said of her corn plants, "I know them intimately, and I find it a great pleasure to know them" (in Keller 1983, 198). The rubbings were also a pleasurable act of intimacy. An offering to the teachers in my study. A way of being near them, in their rooms, carefully tracing the outlines of the things and tools and spaces that made them and that they made. An assertion of solidarity, a way of saying, "these rooms and things matter. And what you (teachers) do matters."

My own caring intervention traces the form of the teachers' caring labor. Quite literally in the way that my hands moved across Betty's carefully arranged bulletin board, feeling out her placement, rigging desks and chairs to reach the top edge as she must also have done. But also figuratively in the way these rubbings mimic a kind of domestic labor designated as women's work. In the making of the pieces, my body took on the shapes of a woman cleaning or organizing—kneeling on the floor, stretching up to high shelves, scrubbing in careful strokes along the length of the chalkboard. This attention to detail calls to mind the notion of "a woman's touch," the feminine-assigned capacity to keep things clean, notice and eradicate dirt, and to design and decorate space in a way that makes it feel warm or human or special. The teachers' attention to space as an act of care came through across the images, interviews, and

dialogue. Michelle talked about it in relation to her practice of purchasing snacks for students and setting up a couch in her classroom as a way of making “our school feel like a second home for our students.” Another participant, V spoke about the “minimalist design” of her classroom space as a form of art, “a way of making my class look and sound and smell and feel like a space for free expression.” And Lee, another teacher-participant and my co-facilitator, highlighted her regular classroom cleaning as a way to affirm her students’ worth in the face of public disinvestment in their communities and the layers of racism that her 97% Black, Latinx, and Asian student-body population faces. In each of these cases, the teachers draw links between space and care, aesthetics and pedagogy—outlining a form of labor that is emotional, physical, and socially situated.

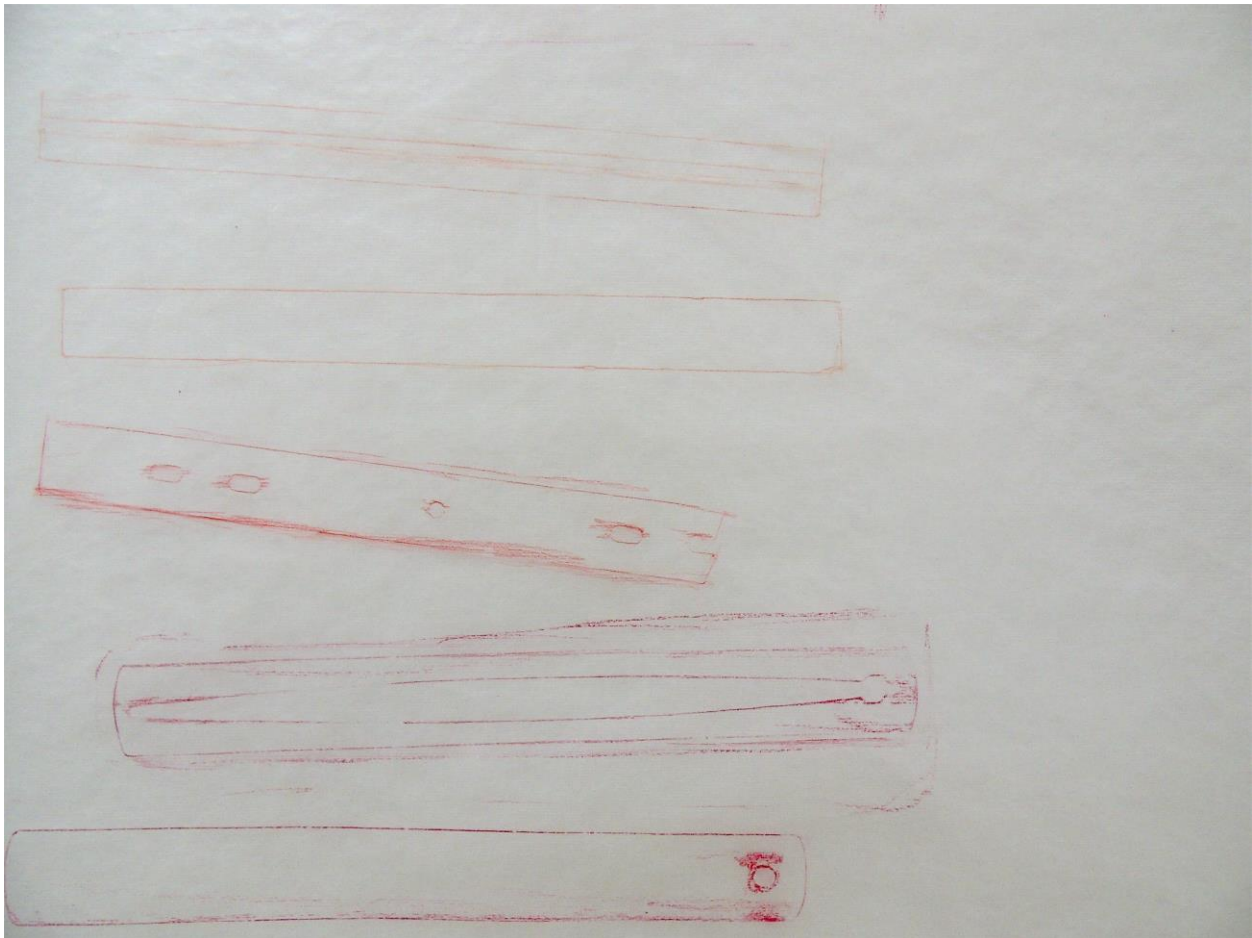


Figure 5: rulers [wax crayon rubbing]. (2015)

Betty’s carefully arranged groups of rulers and scissors and composition books, and my own traced 2-D depictions gesture towards other forms of urban teachers’ carework—a central theme of my broader study. In drawings, dialogue and interviews, participants spoke of translating for families, standing up to the school’s security apparatus, frequent home phone calls, and purchasing food for students in need—caring labor that is intimately linked with race, class, and cultural contexts (their own and their

students), and wholly invisible to policies and structures that center whiteness as the unacknowledged norm.

In making the rubbings, the shapes of my body (scrubbing surfaces, down on knees, reaching up high as if to dust the tops of shelves) traced the teachers' own forms as they clean and decorate and care for their classroom spaces and things. This mode of meticulous arranging and mark making was also in flashes, a way of becoming teacher, becoming object, becoming classroom.

knowing feeling

The rubbings mirror and reflect out the teachers' images and texts, as they offer up a theory of body knowledge, what Laura Marks (2000) calls "tactile epistemology," a way of knowing grounded in physical contact. Marks roots her theory of sensuous knowledge in mimesis, a mode of imitation or copy. As she writes (141),

Mimesis shifts the hierarchical relation between subject and object, indeed it dissolves the dichotomy between the two, such that erstwhile subjects take on the physical, material qualities of objects, while objects take on the perceptive and knowledgeable qualities of subjects. Mimesis is an immanent way of being in the world, whereby the subject comes into being not through abstraction from the world but compassionate involvement in it.

This description envisions mimesis relationally, in the back-and-forth transfer of knowledge between the subject and object. In this way, the rubbings possess a sensory knowledge of me as the maker—my decisions about what to touch and press on, my hands, my eyes—just as I contain the tactile data of the objects and their making—sounds and feels, scale and all that I witnessed in their presence. The act of rubbing—joining paper with the object's surface through the medium of crayon—dissolves—if only for a moment—the dichotomy between thing and representation. In this way, the rubbings too form and dissolve a set of authorial entanglements between me, the spaces and objects, the teachers and missing students. Rooted in Barad's intra-action, Niccolini and Pindyck (2015) explain their arts-based "Classroom Acts" "as involving a molecular shaping between us (researchers, teachers) and our subjects (classroom objects) – palimpsests of touches newly made in the process of our relationality." I also understand the rubbings in a series of sensory, relational interchanges between the materials, the space, me as the maker, and a viewing audience. They reflect my own tactile knowing as they invite viewers into sensory engagement with the work.

The images encode the sensuous knowledge of their referents, their making and materiality. And in their texture and scale, in the way light reflects off the paper's sheen, in the way they tell the story of how they were made—call to imagination the process of draping object with paper, of tracing the lines and shapes—they engage viewers experientially, drawing out another relationship of exchange—"intercorporeal understandings" (Springgay & Freedman 2009) between image, viewer, and maker.

Beyond rubbings

"I didn't think it would turn out this way' is the secret epitaph of intimacy" (Berlant, 1998 p.281).

The rubbings are also abstract and partial. For despite several preparatory studies, I understood just moments into my first rubbing—a stack of four blue metal-legged student chairs—that I had miscalculated the effort (a feeling and practice not unlike the daily work of teaching—re-evaluating a prepared lesson when, for any number of reasons, it doesn’t work in the moment). I hadn’t anticipated the awkwardness of meeting three-dimensional in-situ objects two-dimensionally. And the set up—wrangling large sails of translucent paper, wrapping the objects like form-fitting presents, dragging over chairs and tables to stand on—took much longer than the mark-making. I knew by 8:15 that I would only be able to cover a fraction of the space. So I aimed for a representational selection and set about, moving methodically from one station to the next, working hurriedly against the clock for by end of day, the school would be locked, objects removed for summer storage, and classrooms scrubbed clean of the year. The chart below contains a catalogue of the objects and surfaces that I rubbed and didn’t rub:

RUBBED	NOT RUBBED
All the scissors	
All the rulers	
All the composition books	Stacks of loose leaf paper
The pump bottle hand sanitizer	
A plastic crate	The books and papers inside the crate. Two other crates
All the protractors	
All the compasses	
A collection of plastic and glass jars (some empty, some containing glitter)	The grey metal cabinet that housed these jars, the composition books, rulers, scissors, protractors, compasses, and pencils
The blackboard eraser	
A small plastic tray	The markers inside the tray
The hallway bulletin board	Posters inside the classroom on the back wall
The smart board projector	The smart board projector’s wires
All of the blackboard	The wall beneath the blackboard
	The floors
	The ceiling
	The windows and air conditioning unit
A bulbous hinge at the top of the classroom door	The rest of the door
Four student chairs	The other student chairs (about fifteen)
	Student desks (with fold-down computers)
	The teacher’s (Betty’s) wooden desk and rolling desk chair
	The motivational posters
	The heaviness of the air
	<u>Aguiles’</u> camaraderie, helping prop up the paper as I taped it to the long length of blackboard
	3 locked wooden storage closets
Some shapes I can’t figure out	Some elements of the room I have forgotten

Figure 6: Chart-rubbed, not rubbed

Doing the project was in some way an attempt to pin something down. Like, *I can tell you that this is true. That these objects were there. That this is how big they are and how much space they take up and the side curves around just so.* It's a little like the evaluations themselves--measuring the measurable. Even if I were able to cover every inch and curve, every object and plane of Betty's classroom, the project could only ever be half done. Rubbing out the shape of the bookshelf ultimately says very little about the books that are on it. About who reads them and the pedagogy that shapes their discussion and analysis. About how the school or teacher decided to purchase them and use them in her class. About what happens in front of or next to or in the presence of that bookcase from 8:30AM-3:00PM Monday through Friday September through June. And yet, these images don't aim or claim to measure. They are (and I am) interested in feeling and telling. And as sites of feeling and telling (however incomplete), they have value.

The teacher evaluations, relying largely on student test scores[i], can also only measure (and thus value) a tiny sliver of school life. As a result, what is valued in school is what is measured—the way a collection of students responds to a particular series of standardized test questions on a particular day at a particular time. This project asks questions about how to value what goes on in classrooms that doesn't leave a visible trace. How to see and convey all the learning that happens outside of those test questions, students' and teachers' personal lives and experiences—race, class, culture, and community, or the school's administrative dynamics. How to represent and recognize teachers' emotional, physical, and pedagogical carework.

emergence

Making a rubbing is a little like a magic trick. At first you see only smudges and scribbles. But then, the shape of the thing begins to come through, emerging like the fuzzy coalescing of a photograph in a darkroom tray. When you are used to the deliberate practice of drawing—intentionally marking line and shape, it is surprising and sometimes wondrous to watch and work together with an object to make its image materialize.

Pindyck (2018) posits emergence as way of reframing qualitative research, “one that both acknowledges the inevitability of subjectivity in any study and that tries to make space for those visceral surprises that slip past our research controls, sometimes re-routing us in ways that refuse any obvious links to interpretation or experience.”

Up against the limits of the rubbings—their partialities and uncertainties, all that they do not know and tell—emergence helps frame the work, what it opens up and offers.

- The experiential emergence of images under scrimms of crinkly paper.
- From an elastic year of infant urgencies, a way back, into and on-with my research; a space for playful experimentation.
- Intimacies with the places and things, with the people, with questions.

- Connections to some of the glowing centers of the study—contexts of carework, teachers' bodily labor and knowing—that later reverberated in image analysis and interview transcripts.

Value-added teacher evaluation is part of the totalizing project of racial-capitalism, the hopeful extension of racialized neoliberal frames and market logics across all spaces, systems, and relations. The market for quantitative e/valuation of work and people and processes that are inherently qualitative, situated and relational. Writing on research-creation, Erin Manning cautions that this experimental practice, “hesitantly acknowledges that normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing its value.” We must engage research creation on its own terms. The rubbings refuse the racial-capitalist mode of capture, containment, and e/valuation of teacher work, school spaces, contexts and communities, along with dominant (and interrelated) frames for educational research. They challenge our familiar frames and invite us into new emergences and arrangements of knowing, being with, and valuing. As Manning (2016) writes, “the value produced is the process itself, is its very qualitative autonomy” (p.141).

Acknowledgments

I want to thank brilliant friends and colleagues—Maya Pindyck, Asilia Franklin-Phipps, Tran Templeton, Kay Gordon, Chris Moffett, and Wendy Luttrell—for insightful feedback at multiple stages in the analysis and writing/making of this piece. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers whose generous critiques pushed my thinking and strengthened the work. Finally, I wish to express my deep gratitude for the teachers—Betty, Michelle, Sarah and Aquiles—who welcomed me into the tender spaces of their classrooms. Thank you for reviewing this article and mostly for your work and care and openness.

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ⁱ The full digital assemblage, part of which is adapted in this article can be accessed at:
<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/re-visualizing-care/index>