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Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research

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Picking up on Norman Denzin’s and Yvonna Lincoln’s articulation of the concept of bricolage, the essay describes a critical notion of this research orientation. As an interdisciplinary approach, bricolage avoids both the superficiality of methodological breadth and the parochialism of undisisciplinary approaches. The notion of the bricolage advocated here recognizes the dialectical nature of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary relationship and promotes a synergistic interaction between the two concepts. In this context, the bricolage is concerned not only with divergent methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical understandings of the various elements encountered in the act of research. The insights garnered here move researchers to a better conceptual grasp of the complexity of the research act—a cognizance often missed in mainstream versions of qualitative research. In particular, critical bricoleurs employ historiographical, philosophical, and social theoretical lenses to gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design.

As a preface to this essay, I want to express what an honor it is for me to deliver the Egon Guba Lecture. I consider Egon one of the most important figures in research in the 20th and 21st centuries and consider his career the best model I know for a life of rigorous, innovative scholarship in education. Every idea expressed in this essay is tied to concepts Egon developed over the past few decades. If they are insufficiently developed, it is an expression of my limitations, not his. In this spirit, I dedicate this lecture to Egon Guba and his innovative scholarship and pedagogy.

My desire to write this essay and ultimately a more comprehensive work on bricolage comes from two sources. The first involves my fascination with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) use of the term in their work on research methods over the past decade. From my perspective, no concept better captures the possibility of the future of qualitative research. When I first encountered the term in their work, I knew that I would have to devote much effort to specifying the notion and pushing it to the next conceptual level. Secondly, coupled with this recognition of the power of bricolage was the experience several of my doctoral students brought back from their job interviews.
and ready to answer in detail questions about their methods and research agendas, my students spoke of their theoretical embrace and methodological employment of the bricolage. Much too often for our comfort, search committee members responded quite negatively: “bricolage, oh I know what that is; that’s when you really don’t know anything about research but have a lot to say about it.” Much to our dismay, the use of the concept persuaded such committee members not to employ the students. I had no choice, I had to respond.

Yvonna Lincoln and Norm Denzin (2000) used the term in the spirit of Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and his lengthy discussion of it in The Savage Mind. The French word, bricoleur, describes a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task. Some connotations of the term involve trickery and cunning and remind me of the chicanery of Hermes, in particular his ambiguity concerning the messages of the gods. If hermeneutics came to connote the ambiguity and slipperiness of textual meaning, then bricolage can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research. Indeed, as cultural studies of science have indicated, all scientific inquiry is jerryrigged to a degree; science, as we all know by now, is not nearly as clean, simple, and procedural as scientists would have us believe. Maybe this is an admission many in our field would wish to keep in the closet. Maybe at a tacit level this is what many search committee members were reacting to when my doctoral students discussed it so openly, enthusiastically, and unabashedly.

BRICOLAGE IN THE COSMOS OF DISCIPLINARITY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

My umbrage at the denigration of bricolage by my students’ interlocutors should in no way be taken as disrespect for those who question the value of the concept. For those of us committed to theorizing and implementing such an approach to research, there are some profound questions that need to be answered as we plot our course. As we think in terms of using multiple methods and perspectives in our research and attempt to synthesize contemporary developments in social theory, epistemology, and interpretation, we must consider the critiques of many diverse scholars. At the core of the deployment of bricolage in the discourse of research rests the question of disciplinarity/interdisciplinarity. Bricolage, of course, signifies interdisciplinarity—a concept that serves as a magnet for controversy in the contemporary academy. Researching this article, I listened to several colleagues maintain that if one is focused on getting tenure he or she should eschew interdisciplinarity; if one is interested in only doing good research, she or he should embrace it.

Implicit in the critique of interdisciplinarity and thus of bricolage as its manifestation in research is the assumption that interdisciplinarity is by
nature superficial. Superficiality results when scholars, researchers, and students fail to devote sufficient time to understanding the disciplinary fields and knowledge bases from which particular modes of research emanate. Many maintain that such an effort leads not only to superficiality but madness. Attempting to know so much, the bricoleur not only knows nothing well but also goes crazy in the misguided process (Friedman, 1998; McLeod, 2000; Palmer, 1996). My assertion in this article respects these questions and concerns but argues that given the social, cultural, epistemological, and paradigmatic upheavals and alterations of the past few decades, rigorous researchers may no longer enjoy the luxury of choosing whether to embrace the bricolage (Friedman, 1998; McLeod, 2000).

THE GREAT IMPLOSION: DEALING WITH THE DEBRIS OF DISCIPLINARITY

Once understanding of the limits of objective science and its universal knowledge escaped from the genie’s bottle, there was no going back. Despite the best efforts to recover “what was lost” in the implosion of social science, too many researchers understand its socially constructed nature, its value-laden products that operate under the flag of objectivity, its avoidance of contextual specificities that subvert the stability of its structures, and its fragmenting impulse that moves it to fold its methodologies and the knowledge they produce neatly into disciplinary drawers. My argument here is that we must operate in the ruins of the temple, in a postapocalyptic social, cultural, psychological, and educational science where certainty and stability have long departed for parts unknown.

In the best sense of Levi-Strauss’s (1966) concept, the research bricoleurs pick up the pieces of what’s left and paste them together as best they can. The critics are probably correct, such a daunting task cannot be accomplished in the time span of a doctoral program; but the process can be named and the dimensions of a lifetime scholarly pursuit can be in part delineated. Our transcendence of the old regime’s reductionism and our understanding of the complexity of the research task demand the lifetime effort. It is this lifetime commitment to study, clarify, sophisticate, and add to the bricolage that this article advocates.

As bricoleurs recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process. To account for their cognizance of such complexity bricoleurs seek a rigor that alerts them to new ontological insights. In this ontological context, they can no longer accept the status of an object of
inquiry as a thing-in-itself. Any social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger ongoing process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of its meaning(s) as an entity in the world (Morawski, 1997).

RIGOR IN THE RUINS

Thus, bricolage is concerned not only with multiple methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various elements encountered in the research act. Bricoleurs understand that the ways these dynamics are addressed—whether overtly or tacitly—exerts profound influence on the nature of the knowledge produced by researchers. Thus, these aspects of research possess important lived world political consequences, as they shape the ways we come to view the social cosmos and operate within it (Blommaert, 1997). In this context, Douglas Kellner’s (1995) notion of a “multiperspectival cultural studies” is helpful, as it draws on numerous textual and critical strategies to “interpret, criticize, and deconstruct” the cultural artifacts under observation.

Employing Nietzsche’s notion of perspectivism to ground his version of a multimethodological research strategy, Kellner (1995) maintains that any single research perspective is laden with assumptions, blindnesses, and limitations. To avoid one-sided reductionism, he contends that researchers must learn a variety of ways of seeing and interpreting in the pursuit of knowledge. The more perspectival variety a researcher employs, Kellner concludes, the more dimensions and consequences of a text will be illuminated. Kellner’s multiperspectivism resonates with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) bricolage and its concept of “blurred genres.” To better “interpret, criticize, and deconstruct,” Denzin and Lincoln call for bricoleurs to employ “hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism” (p. 3). Embedded in Kellner’s (1995) and Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) calls is the proto-articulation of a new rigor—certainly in research but with implications for scholarship and pedagogy in general.

This rigor in the ruins of traditional disciplinarity connects a particular concept—in contemporary education, for example, the call for educational standards—to the epistemological, ontological, cultural, social, political, economic, psychological, and pedagogical domains for the purpose of multiperspectival analysis. In the second edition of their Handbook of Qualitative Research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) maintain that this process has already taken place to some extent; they referred to it as a two-way methodological Diaspora where humanists migrated to the social sciences and social scientists to the humanities. Ethnographic methodologists snuggled up with tex-
Thus, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, disciplinary demarcations no longer shape in the manner they once did in the way scholars look at the world. Indeed, disciplinary boundaries have less and less to do with the way scholars group themselves and build intellectual communities. Furthermore, what we refer to as the traditional disciplines in the first decade of the 21st century are anything but fixed, uniform, and monolithic structures. It is not uncommon for contemporary scholars in a particular discipline to report that they find more commonalities with individuals in different fields of study than they do with colleagues in their own disciplines. We occupy a scholarly world with faded disciplinary boundary lines. Thus, the point need not be made that bricolage should take place—it already has and is continuing. The research work needed in this context involves opening an elastic conversation about the ways such a bricolage can be rigorously developed. Such cultivation should not take place in pursuit of some form of proceduralization but an effort to better understand the beast and to realize its profound possibilities (Friedman, 1998; Palmer, 1996; Young & Yarbrough, 1993).

**BRICOLAGE AND THE DIALECTICAL VIEW OF DISCIPLINARITY**

Questions of disciplinarity permeate efforts to theorize the research bricolage. Exploring such inquiries, one notes a consistent division between disciplinarians and interdisciplinarians: Disciplinarians maintain that interdisciplinary approaches to analysis and research result in superficiality; interdisciplinary proponents argue that disciplinarity produces naïve overspecialization. The vision of the bricolage promoted here recognizes the dialectical nature of this disciplinary and interdisciplinary relationship and calls for a synergistic interaction between the two concepts. Before one can engage successfully in the bricolage, it is important to develop a rigorous understanding of the ways traditional disciplines have operated. I maintain the best way to do this is to study the workings of a particular discipline. In the context of becoming a bricoleur, such a study would not take place in the traditional manner where scholars learned to accept the conventions of a particular discipline as a natural way of producing knowledge and viewing a particular aspect of the world.

Instead, such a disciplinary study would be conducted more like a Foucauldian genealogy where scholars would study the social construction of the discipline’s knowledge bases, epistemologies, and knowledge production methodologies. As scholars analyzed the historical origins of the field, they would trace the emergence of various schools of thought, conflicts
within the discipline, and the nature and effects of paradigmatic changes. In this genealogical context they would explore the discipline as a discursive system of regulatory power with its propensity to impound knowledge within arbitrary and exclusive boundaries. In this context, scholars would come to understand the ideological dimensions of the discipline and the ways knowledge is produced for the purposes of supporting various power blocs.

It is not contradictory, I assert, to argue in a dialectical spirit that at the same time this genealogical analysis is taking place, the bricoleur would also be studying positive features of the discipline. Even though the discipline operates in a power-saturated and regulatory manner, disciplinarians have often developed important models for engaging in a methodical, persistent, and well-coordinated process of knowledge production. Obviously, there are examples not only of genius within these domains but of great triumphs of scholarly breakthroughs leading to improvements in the human condition. The diverse understanding of these types of disciplinary practices empowers the bricoleur to ask compelling questions of other disciplines he or she will encounter. Such smart questions will facilitate the researcher’s capacity to make use of positive contributions of disciplines while avoiding disciplinary parochialism and domination.

As bricoleurs pursue this dialectic of disciplinarity, gaining a deep knowledge of the literature and conversations within a field, they would concurrently examine both the etymology and the critique of what many refer to as the disciplines’ arbitrary demarcations for arranging knowledge and structuring research. In a critical context, the bricoleur would develop a power literacy to facilitate his or her understanding of the nature and effects of the web of power relations underlying a discipline’s official research methodologies. Here bricoleurs would trace the ways these power dynamics shaped the knowledge produced within the disciplinary research tradition. Learning multiple lessons from their in-depth study of the discipline in particular and disciplinarity in general, the bricoleur becomes an expert on the relationships connecting cultural context, meaning making, power, and oppression within disciplinary boundaries. Their rigorous understanding of these dynamics possibly makes them more aware of the influence of such factors on the everyday practices of the discipline than those who have traditionally operated as scholars within the discipline (Freidman, 1998; Lutz, Jones, & Kendall, 1997; Morawski, 1997).

**Questioning the Social Construction of Interdisciplinarity**

Thus, bricoleurs operating within this dialectic of disciplinarity gain an in-depth understanding of the “process of disciplinarity,” adeptly avoiding any superficiality that might result from their interdisciplinary pursuits. At the
same time, such researchers possess the insight to avoid complicity in colonized knowledge production designed to regulate and discipline. Such subtle expertise illustrates an appreciation of the complexity of knowledge work to which bricolage aspires. Understanding disciplinary processes and models of expertise while recognizing the elitist dimensions of dominant cultural knowledge technologies involves a nuanced discernment of the double-edged sword of disciplinarity. Concurrently, bricoleurs subject interdisciplinarity to the same rigorous perusal. Accordingly, bricoleurs understand that interdisciplinarity is as much a social construction as disciplinarity. Just because bricolage is about interdisciplinarity, bricoleurs must not release the notion from the same form of power analysis used to explore disciplinarity. In addition, bricoleurs must clarify what is meant by interdisciplinarity. A fuzzy concept at best, interdisciplinarity generally refers to a process where disciplinary boundaries are crossed and the analytical frames of more than one discipline are employed by the researcher. Surveying the use of the term, it quickly becomes apparent that little attention has been paid to what exactly interdisciplinarity implies for researchers. Some uses of the concept assume the deployment of numerous disciplinary methodologies in a study where disciplinary distinctions are maintained; other uses imply an integrated melding of disciplinary perspectives into a new methodological synthesis. Advocates of bricolage must consider the diverse approaches that take place in the name of interdisciplinarity and their implications for constructing the bricolage.

In light of the disciplinary implosion that has taken place over the past few decades and the “no going back” stance previously delineated, I feel no compulsion to preserve the disciplines in some pure, uncorrupted state of nature. Although there is much to learn from their histories, the stages of disciplinary emergence, growth and development, alteration, and devolution and decline, the complex view of bricolage I am presenting embraces a deep form of interdisciplinarity. A deep interdisciplinarity seeks to modify the disciplines and the view of research brought to the negotiating table constructed by the bricolage. Everyone leaves the table informed by the dialogue in a way that idiosyncratically influences the research methods they subsequently employ.

The point of the interaction is not standardized agreement as to some reductionistic notion of “the proper interdisciplinary research method” but awareness of the diverse tools in the researcher’s toolbox. The form such deep interdisciplinarity may take is shaped by the object of inquiry in question. Thus, in the bricolage, the context in which research takes place always affects the nature of the deep interdisciplinarity employed. In the spirit of the dialectic of disciplinarity, the ways these context-driven articulations of interdisciplinarity are constructed must be examined in light of the power literacy previously mentioned (Freidman, 1998; Blommaert, 1997; Pryse, 1998; Young & Yarbrough, 1993).
Bricolage as Deep Interdisciplinarity: The Synergy of Multiple Perspectives

With these disciplinary concerns in the forefront of our mind, I will now focus attention on the intellectual power of the bricolage. It does not seem a conceptual stretch to argue that there is a synergy that emerges in the use of different methodological and interpretive perspectives in the analysis of an artifact. Historians, for example, who are conversant with the insights of hermeneutics, will produce richer interpretations of the historical processes they encounter in their research. In the deep interdisciplinarity of the bricolage the historian takes concepts from hermeneutics and combines them with historiographical methods. What is produced is something new, a new form of hermeneutical historiography or historical hermeneutics. Whatever its name, the methodology could not have been predicted by examining historiography and hermeneutics separately, outside of the context of the historical processes under examination (Varenne, 1996). The possibilities offered by such interdisciplinary synergies are limitless.

An ethnographer who is conversant with social theory and its recent history is better equipped to transcend certain forms of formulaic ethnography that are reduced by the so-called “observational constraint” on the methodology. Using the x-ray vision of contemporary social-theoretically informed strategies of discourse analysis, poststructural psychoanalysis, and ideology-critique, the ethnographer gains the ability to see beyond the literalness of the observed. In this maneuver, the ethnographer-as-bricoleur moves to a deeper level of data analysis as he or she sees “what’s not there” in physical presence, what is not discernible by the ethnographic eye. Synergized by the interaction of ethnography and the social theoretical discourses, the resulting bricolage provides a new angle of analysis, a multidimensional perspective on a cultural phenomenon (Dicks & Mason, 1998; Foster, 1997).

Carefully exploring the relationships connecting the object of inquiry to the contexts in which it exists, the researcher constructs the most useful bricolage his or her wide knowledge of research strategies can provide. The strict disciplinarian operating in a reductionistic framework chained to the prearranged procedures of a monological way of seeing is less likely to produce frame-shattering research than the synergized bricoleur. The process at work in the bricolage involves learning from difference. Researchers employing multiple research methods are often not chained to the same assumptions as individuals operating within a particular discipline. As they study the methods of diverse disciplines, they are forced to compare not only methods but also differing epistemologies and social theoretical assumptions. Such diversity frames research orientations as particular socially constructed perspectives—not sacrosanct pathways to the truth. All methods are subject to questioning and analysis, especially in light of so many other strategies designed for similar purposes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lester, 1997; Thomas, 1998).
This defamiliarization process highlights the power of the confrontation with difference to expand the researcher’s interpretive horizons. Bricolage does not simply tolerate difference but cultivates it as a spark to researcher creativity. Here rests a central contribution of the deep interdisciplinarity of the bricolage: As researchers draw together divergent forms of research, they gain the unique insight of multiple perspectives. Thus, a complex understanding of research and knowledge production prepares bricoleurs to address the complexities of the social, cultural, psychological, and educational domains. Sensitive to complexity, bricoleurs use multiple methods to uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles, and reexamine accepted interpretations in unanticipated contexts. Using any methods necessary to gain new perspectives on objects of inquiry, bricoleurs employ the principle of difference not only in research methods but in cross-cultural analysis as well. In this domain, bricoleurs explore the different perspectives of the socially privileged and the marginalized in relation to formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality (McLeod, 2000; Pryse, 1998; Young & Yarbrough, 1993).

The deep interdisciplinarity of bricolage is sensitive to multivocality and the consciousness of difference it produces in a variety of contexts. Described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as “multi-competent, skilled at using interviews, observation, personal documents,” the bricoleur explores the use of ethnography, Pinarian currere, historiography, genre studies, psychoanalysis, rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, ad infinitum. The addition of historiography, for example, to the bricoleur’s tool kit profoundly expands his or her interpretive facility. As bricoleurs historically contextualize their ethnographies, discourse analysis, and semiotic studies, they tap into the power of etymology. Etymological insight (Kinchoele & Steinberg, 1993; Kinchseloe, Steinberg, & Hinche, 1999) involves an understanding of the origins of the construction of social, cultural, psychological, political, economic, and educational artifacts and the ways they shape our subjectivities. Indeed, our conception of self, world, and our positionalities as researchers can only become complex and critical when we appreciate the historical aspect of its formation. With this one addition, we dramatically sophisticate the quality and depth of our knowledge work (Zammito, 1996).

Expanding the Boundaries: The Search for New Forms of Knowledge Production

Operating as a form of deep interdisciplinarity, bricolage is unembarassed in its effort to rupture particular ways of functioning in the established disciplines of research. One of the best ways to accomplish this goal is to include what might be termed philosophical research to the bricolage. In the same way that historiography ruptures the stability of particular disciplinary
methods, philosophical research provides bricoleurs with the dangerous knowledge of the multivocal results of humans’ desire to understand, to know themselves and the world. Differing philosophical/cultural conventions have employed diverse epistemological, ontological, and cosmological assumptions as well as different methods of inquiry. Again, depending on the context of the object of inquiry, bricoleurs use their knowledge of these dynamics to shape their research design. It is not difficult to understand the epistemological contention that the types of logic, criteria for validity, and methods of inquiry used in clinical medicine as opposed to teaching effectiveness in teaching critical thinking will differ.

In making such an assertion the bricoleur is displaying philosophical/epistemological/ontological sensitivity to the context of analysis. Such a sensitivity is a key element of the bricolage, as it brings an understanding of social theory together with an appreciation of the demands of particular contexts; this fused concept is subsequently used to examine the repertoire of methods the bricoleur can draw on and to help decide which ones are relevant to the project at hand. Practicing this mode of analysis in a variety of research situations, the bricoleur becomes increasingly adept at employing multiple methods in concrete venues. Such a historiographically and philosophically informed bricolage helps researchers move into a new, more complex domain of knowledge production where they are far more conscious of multiple layers of intersections between the knower and the known, perception and the lived world, and discourse and representation. Employing the benefits of philosophical inquiry, the bricoleur gains a new ability to account for and incorporate these dynamics into his or her research narratives (Bridges, 1997; Fischer, 1998; Madison, 1988; McCarthy, 1997).

This is what expanding the boundaries of knowledge production specifically references. In the particularities of the philosophical interactions with the empirical in a variety of contexts, bricoleurs devise new forms of rigor, new challenges to other researchers to push the methodological and interpretive envelopes. As bricoleurs study the subjective meanings that human beings make, for example, they use their philosophical modes of inquiry to understand that this phenomenological form of information has no analogue in the methods of particular formalist forms of empirical research. Thus, in an obvious example, a choice of methods is necessitated by particular epistemological and ontological conditions—epistemological and ontological conditions rarely recognized in monological forms of empirical research (Haggerson, 2000; Lee, 1997).

I want to be as specific as possible about the nature of these epistemological and ontological conditions. Although we have made progress, much of the research that is devoid of the benefits philosophical inquiry brings to the bricolage still tends to study the world as if ontologically it consists of a series of static images. Entities are often removed from the contexts that shape them, the processes of which they are a part, and the relationships
and connections that structure their being-in-the-world. Such ontological orientations impose particular epistemologies, specific ways of producing knowledge about such inert entities. In this ontological context, the task of researchers is reduced, as they simply do not have to worry about contextual insights, etymological processes, and the multiple relationships that constitute the complexity of lived reality. In a reductionistic mode of research, these dynamics are irrelevant and the knowledge produced in such contexts reflects the reductionism. The bricolage struggles to find new ways of seeing and interpreting that avoid this curse and that produce thick, complex, and rigorous forms of knowledge (Karunaratne, 1997).

In this thick, complex, and rigorous context, bricoleurs in the social, cultural, psychological, and educational domains operate with a sophisticated understanding of the nature of knowledge. To be well prepared, bricoleurs must realize that knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power-inscribed. They are attuned to dynamic relationships connecting individuals, their contexts, and their activities instead of focusing on these separate entities in isolation from one another. In this ontological framework, they concentrate on social activity systems and larger cultural processes and the ways individuals engage or are engaged by them (Blackler, 1995).

Bricoleurs follow such engagements, analyzing how the ever-changing dynamics of the systems and the processes alter the lived realities of participants; concurrently, they monitor the ways participants operate to change the systems and the processes. The complexity of such a mode of inquiry precludes the development of a step-by-step set of research procedures. Bricoleurs know that this inability to proceduralize undermines efforts to “test” the validity of their research. The researcher’s fidelity to procedure cannot simply be checked off and certified. In the complex bricolage the products of research are “evaluated.” The evaluation process draws on the same forms of inquiry and analysis initially delineated by the bricolage itself (Madison, 1988). In this context, the rigor of research intensifies at the same time the boundaries of knowledge production are stretched.

Life on the Boundaries: Facilitating the Work of the Bricoleur

The bricolage understands that the frontiers of knowledge work rest in the liminal zones where disciplines collide. Thus, in the deep interdisciplinarity of the bricolage, researchers learn to engage in a form of boundary work. Such scholarly labor involves establishing diverse networks and conferences where synergistic interactions can take place as proponents of different methodologies, students of divergent subject matters, and individuals confronted with different problems interact. In this context, scholars learn across these
domains and educate intermediaries who can build bridges between various territories. As disciplinary intermediaries operating as bricoleurs facilitate this boundary work, they create conceptual and electronic links that help researchers in different domains interact. If the cutting edge of research lives at the intersection of disciplinary borders, then developing the bricolage is a key strategy in the development of rigorous and innovative research. The facilitation and cultivation of boundary work is a central element of this process.

There is nothing simple about conducting research at the interdisciplinary frontier. Many scholars report that the effort to develop expertise in different disciplines and research methodologies demands more than a casual acquaintance with the literature of a domain. In this context, there is a need for personal interaction between representatives from diverse disciplinary domains and scholarly projects to facilitate these encounters. Many researchers find it extremely difficult to make sense of “outside” fields and the more disciplines a researcher scans the harder the process becomes. If the scholar does not have access to historical dimensions of the field, the contexts that envelop the research methods used and the knowledge produced in the area, or contemporary currents involving debates and controversies in the discipline, the boundary work of the bricolage becomes exceedingly frustrating and futile. Proponents of the bricolage must help develop specific strategies for facilitating this complicated form of scholarly labor.

In this context we come to understand that a key aspect of “doing bricolage” involves the development of conceptual tools for boundary work. Such tools might include the promotion and cultivation of detailed reviews of research in a particular domain written with the needs of bricoleurs in mind. Researchers from a variety of disciplinary domains should develop information for bricolage projects. Hypertextual projects that provide conceptual matrices for bringing together diverse literatures, examples of data produced by different research methods, connective insights, and bibliographic compilations can be undertaken by bricoleurs with the help of information professionals. Such projects would integrate a variety of conceptual understandings, including the previously mentioned historical, contextual, and contemporary currents of disciplines (Friedman, 1998; Palmer, 1996).

Kellner (1995) is helpful in this context with his argument that multiperspectival approaches to research may not be very helpful unless the object of inquiry and the various methods used to study it are situated historically. In this way, the forces operating to socially construct all elements of the research process are understood, an appreciation that leads to a grasp of new relationships and connections. Such an appreciation opens new interpretive windows that lead to more rigorous modes of analysis and interpretation. This historicization of the research and the researched is an intrinsic aspect of the bricolage and the education of the bricoleur. Because learning to become a
bricoleur is a lifelong process, what we are discussing here relates to the lifelong curriculum for preparing bricoleurs.

Also necessary to this boundary work and the education of the bricoleur are social-theoretical and hermeneutical understandings. Social theory alerts bricoleurs to the implicit assumptions within particular approaches to research and the ways they shape their findings. With grounding in social theory, bricoleurs can make more informed decisions about the nature of the knowledge produced in the field and how researchers discern the worth of the knowledge they themselves produce. With the benefit of hermeneutics, bricoleurs are empowered to synthesize data collected via multiple methods. In the hermeneutic process, this ability to synthesize diverse information moves the bricoleur to a more sophisticated level of meaning making (Foster, 1997; Zammito, 1996). Life on the disciplinary boundaries is never easy, but the rewards to be derived from the hard work demanded are profound.

I’ll mercifully stop here... This is part of an expanding piece.

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RESPONSES

An Emerging New *Bricoleur*:
Promises and Possibilities—A Reaction to Joe Kincheloe’s “Describing the Bricoleur”

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**AN EMERGING NEW BRICOLEUR**

This article was so rich and full of ideas that it is difficult to sort them all out. Consequently, I will simply comment on what I believe to be the work’s highlights, and where we might fruitfully wish to pursue *bricolage-as-praxis* and/or *bricolage* as a theoretical concern. Clearly, either direction can and will inform the other; where we enter the ongoing methodological dialogue will eventually be inconsequential.

First, we are talking about an expansion in the definition of bricolage of undreamt-of proportion. When Geertz (1988) picked up Levi-Strauss’s (1966) use of the term *bricoleur*, I believe he was responding to the idea that method is even less preordained than we might have imagined from the general tenor of fieldwork training that has gone on in the United States. This is what I call the “Here are your tickets and your notebooks, Margaret [Mead]; I’ll see you in two years!” school of fieldwork training. Levi-Strauss’s idea of bricolage viewed fieldwork as a far less systematic process, a process far more akin to the handyman’s, jack-of-all-trades’s, use of what materials and tools are available and which seem sensible. Anthropologists have typically referred to bricolage as the assembly of mythic elements, motifs, allusions, characterizations, allegorical bits and pieces, narrative techniques and other stock materials to form stories that are nevertheless new and particularized for the local context. Fieldwork—including both method and representation—might be viewed as a jerryrigged operation.¹ The appropriate metaphor here is Mad Max’s car: parts and pieces assembled from scrap, from what comes to hand, which nevertheless runs across inhospitable and dangerous terrain.

Kincheloe’s (2001 [this issue]) *bricoleur* is far more skilled than merely a handyman. This bricoleur looks for not yet imagined tools, fashioning them with not yet imagined connections. This handyman is searching for the
nodes, the nexuses, the linkages, the interconnections, the fragile bonds between disciplines, between bodies of knowledge, between knowing and understanding themselves. This is not your father’s bricolage. It is “boundary-work” taken to the extreme, boundary-work beyond race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class. It works the margins and liminal spaces between both formal knowledge, and what has been proposed as boundary knowledge, knitting them together, forming a new consciousness.

Kincheloe proposes that this interdisciplinarity equals a kind of collaboration between and among border workers in the disciplines. It is a bold proposal, but I believe its realization is a long way off. We have few models to show us how such interdisciplinary collaboration might work. Such collaboration is neither well understood, nor is it well rewarded in the academy, where many knowledge workers make their home. Both the academic reward structure and the socialization process in graduate study create an environment where only the most senior can afford to collaborate (the exception is in the hard sciences and biomedical sciences, where collaboration is not only necessary, but mandated). Usually, by then, it is too late. Patterns of work have been established that reify the bench-scientist, “Lone Ranger” model of research, with individual researchers working in solitude, or at best, working with graduate students.

The best forms of border work being done today are frequently being undertaken by feminists and race-ethnic theorists, for example, Sandoval (2000), DeVault (1999), Hurtado (1996), Pérez (1999), and Wing (2000). If critical race and critical race feminist work furnishes the models for such interdisciplinary border-crossing, then we have at least a place to begin. The somewhat narrow readership, however, for women’s border work—and that of women of color, in particular—is not heartening. Narrow readership suggests that those who would do this work are not accessing the models that would lead to sound archaeological and genealogical work.

Finally, Kincheloe’s (2001) suggestion that we might use Foucauldian genealogy (Foucault, 1972) as the foundation of an interdisciplinary architecture or genealogy of disciplines is a bridge much farther for qualitative methodologists. Foucauldian genealogical analyses are not well laid out, as method, with the best and most accessible proposal having been made by Scheurich (1994, 1997). It is unclear how we might train graduate students to engage in this form of analysis, or what we might utilize to determine whether the analyses have been systematic, disciplined, rigorous, or insightful.

Where does this leave us? With many intriguing methodological, practical, and theoretical questions. Is this what we want a bricoleur to be? Does this suggest that bricoleurs might come in two distinct forms: those who are committed to methodological eclecticism, permitting the scene and circumstance and presence or absence of coresearchers to dictate method, and those whose function is to engage in a genealogy archaeology of the disciplines with some
larger purpose than ethnography in mind? Is there likelihood that disciplinary archaeology will lead to the genealogy of disciplines that Kincheloe (2001) proposes? How would we use such knowledge? What is the nature of the relationship(s) between bricolage and interdisciplinarity? William Pinar (this issue) has proposed that this bricoleur is a “proletarian image,” a kind of intellectual-as-amateur. As attractive as this image is, does it make sense that amateurs would care whether interdisciplinarity exists? Or know enough about the structure of universities or disciplinary-knowledge organization to be able to undertake this task? What is proposed, is, after all, as Pinar noted, a “conceptual architecture of staggering complexity.” Given the restraints of current academic organization, what are the possibilities for interdisciplinary collaboration?

Furthermore, we should ask what the relationship is between disciplines and method. Although policy archaeology might be readily explained and grasped by those in the social sciences or humanities, it is not at all clear that those in the hard sciences would be either interested or comprehending of the proposed task. And finally, we might ask again, how do we know when a resurrection (archaeological) project is complete? Done systematically, rigorously, with some clear framework?

By raising questions, it is not my intention to disparage this work. Quite the opposite. This piece may well have the power to shift the direction of methodological inquiry for the present and foreseeable future. Most assuredly, anyone who reads Kincheloe’s (2001) proposal for bricolage will never again think of it in the same way.

NOTE

1. It should be remembered, however, that Levi-Strauss’s intention in recommending bricolage was, in part, a structuralist project, requiring structuralist analyses. Kincheloe’s (2001) adaptation appears very much a poststructuralist project, or at the very least, a combination structuralist and poststructuralist analysis.

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The French word *bricoleur* describes a handyman or handywoman,” Joe L. Kincheloe (2001 [this issue]) explains early on in his 2001 Egon Guba lecture. This is an intriguing description, and in it I hear echoes of Edward Said’s (1996) model of the intellectual: “The intellectual today ought to be an amateur” (p. 82). Both notions imply risk for us¹ in the field of education during this time of assault on our professionalism, especially from the right. After all, for those who wish to deregulate teacher education—to “break the ed. school monopoly” on teacher certification—isn’t this the admission from us they’ve wanted all along? That we don’t know what we’re doing, that education courses are just hurdles delaying or even preventing competent subject-matter specialists from entering the profession?

Of course, Kincheloe’s (2001) definition of bricoleur as handyman or handywoman and Said’s (1996) notion of amateur take for granted the
researcher’s professional status. Kincheloe’s notion takes for granted disciplinary knowledge and competence, and Said means by amateur that the intellectual is more than a competent professional. Of course, she or he is a competent professional, but more than that, she or he is also someone who is willing to “raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as with other societies” (Said, 1996, pp. 82-83). To engage with such issues, fidelity to one discipline is a likely casualty. And it is a casualty in Kincheloe’s characterization of the bricoleur.

“At the core of the deployment of bricolage in the discourse of research,” Kincheloe (2001, p. 680) tells us, “rests the question of disciplinarity/interdisciplinarity. Bricolage, of course, signifies interdisciplinarity.” But note that such a signification does not imply the absence of disciplinarity. On the contrary, in Kincheloe’s analysis “before one can engage successfully in the bricolage it is important to develop a rigorous understanding of the ways traditional disciplines have operated. I maintain the best way to do this is to study the workings of the particular discipline. . . . Such a disciplinary study would be conducted more like a Foucauldian genealogy” (p. 683).

Such a historical and hermeneutical view of our work as scholars, and as teachers, is anathema to those conservatives who demand, in Louisiana at least, that Sylvan Learning Centers and other private providers “compete” with colleges and universities to produce teachers in abbreviated teacher preparation programs. The conservative tends to commodify the disciplines, and in so doing, suspends key curriculum questions. The conservative tends to focus on instruction and learning, especially the latter, as it is quantified in test scores. In splitting curriculum from instruction—this conservative political move in the public sphere is reflected in the organizational restructuring of a number of Colleges of Education where the historical designation “Department of Curriculum and Teaching” has been replaced with titles such as “Department of Teaching and Learning” or “Department of Instruction and Learning.”

In higher education, most of us remain clear that curriculum and teaching are profoundly linked, that to perform our complicated professional obligations as scholars and teachers we must retain the academic freedom to choose those texts we deem, in our professional judgment, most appropriate. Most of us also appreciate that our professional labor requires that we decide how to examine our students, sometimes by research papers, other times by essay or short-answer tests, and even on occasion by a standardized examination. The situation in higher education is, of course, hardly ideal—the general education curriculum in many public research universities is more a political than curricular arrangement—but my point here is that the inseparable relation between curriculum and teaching remains intact, more or less, at many universities. (Why it was never fully honored in elementary, middle, and secondary schools is a historical and, for me, gendered question.)
In the university we understand that “we occupy a scholarly world with faded disciplinary boundary lines” (as Kincheloe [2001, p. 683] nicely points out), that our intellectual activity (i.e., research and teaching) quickly becomes interdisciplinary, a concept still under construction, as Kincheloe explains.

A fuzzy concept at best, *interdisciplinarity* generally refers to a process where disciplinary boundaries are crossed and the analytical frames of more than one discipline are employed by the researcher. Surveying the use of the term, it quickly becomes apparent that little attention has been paid to what exactly interdisciplinarity implies for researchers. Some uses of the concept assume the deployment of numerous disciplinary methodologies in a study where disciplinary distinctions are maintained; other uses imply an integrated melding of disciplinary perspectives into a new methodological synthesis. (p. 685)

Surely the second is considerably more ambitious than the first, and the first is hardly obvious, as my own attempt at such testifies (see Pinar, 2001 [this issue]).

Kincheloe’s (2001) characterization of bricolage “embraces a deep form of interdisciplinarity . . . [that] seeks to modify the disciplines and the view of research brought to the negotiating table constructed by the bricolage” (p. 685). Moreover, “the bricolage understands that the frontiers of knowledge work rest in the liminal zones where disciplines collide. Thus, in the deep interdisciplinarity of the bricolage researchers learn to engage in a form of boundary work” (p. 689). Such “deep interdisciplinarity” and “boundary work” seem to me precisely the labor of educational scholarship generally and curriculum theory in particular, currently I would argue, a radical site of interdisciplinarity.

Rejecting colonization by the hegemonic disciplines such as psychology, curriculum theory demands hybrid interdisciplinary constructions, utilizing especially fragments from philosophy, history, literary theory, the arts, and from those key interdisciplinary formations already in place: women’s and gender studies, African American studies, queer theory, and studies in popular culture, among others. Employing research completed in other disciplines as well as our own, curriculum theorists construct textbooks that invite public school teachers to reoccupy a vacated “public” domain, not simply as “consumers” of knowledge, but as active participants in conversations they themselves will lead. In drawing—promiscuously but critically—from various academic disciplines and popular culture, curriculum theorists work to create conceptual montages for the public-school teacher who understands that positionality as aspiring to create a “public” space. By so working, we curriculum theorists—amateurs in Said’s (1996) sense, *bricoleurs* in Kincheloe’s (2001)—are working to resuscitate the progressive project.

Our task as the new century begins is nothing less than the intellectual formation of a public sphere in education, a resuscitation of the progressive project in which we renew and perform our commitment to the democratization of American society, a sociopolitical, economic, and intellectual process that
requires that we retain and help public-school teachers gain control of the curriculum, including the means by which teaching and learning are evaluated. Only then do we have a chance of engaging our students and ourselves in interdisciplinary conversations organized, for example, around questions of nation, self, and the historical moment.

Such efforts to reconstitute ourselves from merely competent professionals to public intellectuals is far from risk, as Joe Kincheloe (2001) himself points out, and not only for our students. In a field whose academic standing remains fragile at best, to claim identities such as the bricoleur or the amateur is to invite criticism if not ridicule from our more disciplinary-wed, “hard”-discipline colleagues, not to mention right-wing politicians and other education-is-a-business advocates. But this is a risk, as Kincheloe knows, we must take. Your provocative article, Joe, has clarified what is at stake in such “deep interdisciplinarity.” I am grateful to you for that.

NOTES

1. All of us: elementary, middle school, secondary school teachers, and college and university faculty.

2. Recall that the first Department of Curriculum and Teaching was established at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1937. See Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995).

3. For a historical analysis, see Cuban and Shipps (2000); for a (terse) gendered one see Pinar (1999a). Nor would I defend teacher education programs as they tend now to be structured. In fact, despite the disaster the deregulation agenda threatens for public education, it might, perversely, serve university-based teacher education well, forcing us positioned in the university to cultivate the academic—not vocational—study of education. See Pinar et al. (1995, p. 759) for a succinct statement of the distinction.

4. For an overview of contemporary curriculum scholarship, see Pinar (1999b).

5. A public school curriculum as “conversation” would not, of course, be limited to these questions.

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I am honored to be a participant in this distinguished panel of respondents. I am especially pleased to be offering in brief compass this commentary at an event that honors the stellar contribution of Egon Guba to educational research. It is indeed fitting that Joe Kincheloe was chosen to present the distinguished lecture this evening. Joe is one of the most prominent educational theorists in North America, and I am proud to call him a brother in the struggle against social injustice. There is a joke circulating about Joe and I really being biological brothers—our Scottish ancestors hailing from Appalachia (Joe’s are from the mountains of Tennessee and mine are from rural Ontario, what some have described as Canada’s version of Appalachia)—but I will let that one go unremarked tonight because it might take us into untested waters. I promised Joe that after he presented his provocative and stimulating presentation of the bricoleur and his nuanced rendering of what qualitative bricolage might offer educational research, I would attempt to deliver (under the sign of comradeship) a spirited critique not so much of what he actually said, but of what I feel he has underemphasized in his talk. My distinguished correspondent, Bill Pinar, will, I am sure, do a spirited assessment of what Joe actually developed in his talk—i.e., the architectonics of Joe’s critical bricolage and his reinvention of the term as a heuristic device to deepen and to expand qualitative research in the field of education. I will give Joe’s presentation a cautionary reading in the spirit of “I like what you said, Joe, but I think it is important to inflect what you said in another direction.” The inflection I am referring to is decidedly Marxist, and since Joe likes to joke about me as “The Hollywood Marxist,” I think he half expected this from me.
I want to limit my response to a reading of Joe the bricoleur both against and with the figure of Joe the bricklayer—that is, I want to read Joe’s quest for transdisciplinary rigor in the spirit of his ongoing concern with working class struggle, social transformation, and social justice in contemporary capitalist society. Joe’s work reveals how transdisciplinary rigor and social justice can be complimentary processes animating a world-historic mission of resisting exploitation in all of its hydra-headed manifestations. So what follows are some cautionary warnings to those bricoleurs-in-the-making. In Joe’s postulation of a desideratum of legitimacy for bricolage—in this case, the linkage of discourse, society, and power—it is essential to specify further how power is related to a more generalized political economy of social relations and specifically to clarify what power signifies within such an economy. Unless this is accomplished, qualitative researchers aspiring to become critical bricoleurs run the risk of juxtaposing formalistic concepts or merely refurbishing a standard empiricist demand that ideas be framed by social and historical contexts. I think there is a danger, too, of the bricoleur in the thrall of deep interdisciplinarity lapsing into a form of epistemological relativism, especially if one’s multiperspectival approach (meaning that sometimes you want to have your cake and eat it or that you are tempted to act according to errors even after you have seen through them as errors) is underwritten by a Nietzschean perspectivism. Joe guards against this tendency in his own work by trying to gain insights from postmodern theory while avoiding a postmodernist eclecticism. He achieves this by refusing to abandon the agent of struggle as she faces a cultural landscape of sheer heterogeneity and cultural fragmentation. But preventing the historical agent from being a casualty of history is not an easy task. Whereas Nietzschean perspectivism prohibits the critic of Cartesian rationality from appealing to a normative framework for criticizing that rationality and its power, Joe seeks to shatter epistemological frames not to escape from rationality but to deepen our understanding of it. Embracing multiple perspectives for the critical bricoleur does not mean that each perspective is to be equally valued.

I know that Joe would agree that one reason the critical bricoleur needs to be cautious as she negotiates her postmodern turn into the mine-infested waters of interdisciplinarity is that oftentimes the material world can slip out of view. We need to keep the economic structure of society squarely in our hermeneutical sights because the forces of and relations of production shape the social character of our ideas. Marx denied an independent historical development to ideas that impact history by arguing that ideas are always shaped by the mode of production in material life; yet he also stressed that ideas are not passive reflexes of the environment but have a reciprocal effect on the economic base. Joe Kincheloe possesses the requisite skills for keeping the materiality of human existence squarely in sight. But this is a hard-won skill at a time when so many disciplinary practices work at eclipsing the very objective conditions that produce the systems of intelligibility on which they
rest—not to mention displacing objective social relations linked to capital’s
law of value in an attempt to capture the object of analysis somewhere in the
semiotic hinterlands between presence and absence.

Capital as the central force structuring social relations is systematically
obscured by many poststructuralist and antifoundational conceptions of
power as diffuse, variegated, and contextually specific and has rendered invis-
ible the objective conditions that have produced the bricoleur by locating the
subject as a fractured yet mobile discursive positionality—in short, as an
effect of texuality. In this instance, the architecture of desire displaces the for-
mations of scarcity and human need. A focus on identity and difference as an
effect of desire could reflect—if the critical bricoleur is not careful—a dualistic
metaphysics that elides the complicity of the systemic accumulation of capital
within culture as a mode of production. Too often a focus on the production of
meanings within discourse and representation leads not to resisting and
transforming the existing conditions of exploitation linked to the division of
labor, but rather to an endless self-reflexive interrogation whose politics are
rendered impotent in the face of the current global capitalist juggernaut.

Once a critical bricoleur begins to seriously interrogate the existing liberal
consensus, she is accused of abandoning scientific objectivity for outdated
ideological positions. Or else she is accused of speaking truth to power at a
time when truth presumably is always already shadowed by its constitutive
impossibility. Although it may be the case that Marxist theory is in some
respects still wanting as a tool for an understanding current manifestations of
globalized capitalist exploitation—including the “capitalization of human
subjectivity”—and for fully challenging it, the idea here is not for the bri-
coeur to abandon Marxism but to deepen its project. Marx himself has pointed
the way to a materialist ontology of emergence and it is the task of the critical bri-
coeur to follow this lead and join explanatory critique to revolutionary praxis.

In the bricoleur’s embrace of a hermeneutics of difference, she must be
careful not to level the contradictions of race, gender, class, and sexuality, or to
swap an historical materialist mapping of geopolitical locations rooted in
class consciousness and political action for an anti-dialectical intuitionism.
Strolling the dank alleys of social science research, many a bricoleur has been
attracted to the sparkle and glitter of knock-off deconstructive methodologies
that line the trenchcoats of contraband researchers. A poststructuralist focus
on discourse and difference via Derrida’s and Nietzsche’s corps, paradoxi-
cally can have the effect of homogenizing all struggles and identities as they
“proceed further into decadence (equality of all values) in the name of ‘pro-
gress’ in order to accelerate the process of self-destruction, which leads to
the necessity of founding new modes and orders” (Joines, 2001, p. 7). As Rick
Joines (2001) has argued, Derrida is a Nietzschean and Schmittian revolution-
ary whose New International is “comprehensively nihilist . . . [and] . . . more
threatening than any mere fascism” (2001, p. 9). The denunciatory cry of some
Derridean inspired poststructuralists (see Lather, 2001) of “Ten Years Later:
Yet Again” (which raises the issue of why Marxist pedagogues still work within supposedly received and exhausted masculinist categories after poststructuralists had—10 years earlier—shown them how to be less self-assured and to adopt a less transparent analysis under the theoretical advance guard of “teletechnic dislocation, rhizomatic spreading and acceleration, and new experiences of frontier and identity”) should be read against another cry in the face of the barbarianized academy: “One Hundred and Fifty years after the *Communist Manifesto*: Ruling Class Pedagogues Defending the Capitalist Class, Yet Again.” In the interpretive sallies of the post-Marxists, the politics of class struggle is replaced by a jacuzzi leftist pedagogy of unknowability and impossibility—ludicrously described as “ontological stammering.” As political activist Raphael Renteria put the issue recently, “For me, the issue surrounding people who advocate that reality is unknowable is that they have things they don’t want known.... I think it is important to ask: Who is served by the unknowability that these people claim is liberatory” (personal communication)?

Derridean “messianicity without messianism” that marks so much of postmodernist educational theorizing today and that makes use of esotericism, sigetics, acroamatics, proleptics, and illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in the disguise of a new pedagogy of the unknowable, wasn’t the answer 10 years ago. Nor will it be the answer 10 years hence. According to Joines (2001), Derrida’s appeal for an international whose essential basis or motivating force is not class, party, or practice of citizenship “should be read and understood as a threat to any potential international organized around such concepts” (p. 12).

I would not want to see the critical bricoleur rejecting the dialectic in favor of the more fashionable varieties of ludic pragmatism, poststructuralist nominalism, and obscurantist idealism for sale in the rag-and-bone shop of today’s theoretical marketplace. On this point, I am sure Joe would agree. Although the bricoleur should mine the richness of the multidisciplinary trajectories that appear on Joe’s list—those that are used to capture the variegated landscape of identity and representation—it is important that the bricoleur recognize the dilemma put forward by Wood (1994), namely, that “Once you replace the concept of capitalism with an undifferentiated plurality of social identities and special oppressions, socialism as the antithesis to capitalism loses all meaning” (p. 29). Here the critical bricoleur importantly challenges the relativism of the gender-race-class grid of reflexive positionality by recognizing that class antagonism or struggle is not simply one in a series of social antagonisms—race, class, gender, and so on—but rather constitutes the part of this series that sustains the horizon of the series itself. In other words, class struggle is the specific antagonism that assigns rank to and modifies the particularities of the other antagonisms in the series (Zizek, 1999). In the face of attacks on critical ethnography and theory as universalist and totalizing, I think it would be prudent for the critical bricoleur to refuse to evacuate refer-
ence to historical structures of totality and universality by recognizing that class struggle itself enables the proliferation of new political subjectivities. Class struggle can be seen to structure “in advance” the very terrain of political antagonisms. Thus, according to Slavoj Zizek (2001b), class struggle “is not the last horizon of meaning, the last signified of all social phenomena, but the formal generative matrix of the different ideological horizons of understanding” (pp. 16-17). In Zizek’s terms, class struggle sets the ground for the empty place of universality, enabling it to be filled variously with contents of different sorts (ecology, feminism, anti-racism). He notes that “the economy is at one and the same time the genus and one of its own species” (2001a, p. 193).

Although the attack on Eurocentrism and masculinist master narratives has proved important, the critical bricoleur needs to be cautious not to throw out the concept of universalism altogether. As Zizek (2001b) notes, an experience or argument that cannot be universalized “is always and by definition a conservative political gesture: ultimately everyone can evoke his unique experience in order to justify his reprehensible acts” (pp. 4-5). Here he echoes Wood (1994) who maintains that capitalism is “not just another specific oppression alongside many others but an all-embracing compulsion that imposes itself on all our social relations” (p. 29). His position also reflects critical educators such as Paulo Freire who argues against the “basism” of the position, which claims that experiences speak for themselves. All experiences need to be interrogated for their ideological assumptions and effects, regardless of who articulates them or from where they are lived or spoken. The preferential option, of course, is given to the oppressed, as our comrades working in liberation theology would put it. The critical interrogation of experiences on the part of the critical bricoleur is not to pander to the autonomous subject nor to individualistic practices but to see those experiences in relationship to the structure of social antagonisms and class struggle. If critical bricoleurs are not attentive to the law of motion of capital and the social relations of production and choose to replace a dialectical reading of economic exploitation with an overly diffuse notion of power, then they run the risk of helping the capitalist class manage the ongoing crisis of the humanist subject rather than confronting the universalizing effects of finance capital as it appears in new forms. The critical bricoleur asks: How are social agents—real people—historically located in systematic structures of economic relations? How can these structures—these lawless laws of capital—be challenged by both researchers and the researched and transformed through revolutionary praxis into acts of freely associated labor, where as Marx argued, the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all? These are tough questions. But by situating one’s research in the context of class struggle, is one abdicating the struggle against racism or sexism? To draw this conclusion would be a serious error. The critical bricoleur is ever attentive to the imbrication of multiple forms of oppression but recognizes how the division of labor within the social universe of capital works as one of the greatest
totalizing forces in history, the consequences of which lead to an exacerbation of oppression on the basis of race and gender. Racism and sexism are equally important as outcomes and manifestations of class relations that have extended back in history. This is not to say racism or sexism are epiphenomenal outcomes of class relations. It is to claim that within capitalist society they are informed by the relations of class. Racism, sexism and class exploitation reciprocally shape each other. This is something that has consistently been argued by Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg, and others.

If researchers only loosely adhere to the capillary details of the deep bricolage developed by Joe in his talk this evening, especially his focus on etymological insight and the historical formation of subjectivity and agency, it is possible—even probable—that many will purge race, class, and gender relations of their determinate content and reduce them to incommensurable language games rather than see them as new forms of collective labor power that intensify the contradictions at the unmolested core of globalized social relations of capitalist production. The results could be an unwitting tendency toward nominalism, subjectivism, and discursivism and the development of anti-racist struggles and struggles against patriarchy that are unable to smash the foundations of racial and gender oppression within today’s white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. The revolutionary praxis of the critical bricolage entails freeing ourselves from the prison house of esoteric theories detached from forms of class struggle. It is this insight that must be recaptured if critical research is to be regenerated. I want to thank Joe Kincheloe for providing the space for this Marxist “addendum” to his wonderful article.

REFERENCES


Peter McLaren is a professor at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author and editor of 35 books on topics that include critical ethnography, critical social theory, Marxist education, and the sociology of education. His most recent book is Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). His works have been translated into 15 languages.
Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis

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This article argues the personal/professional/political emancipatory potential of autoethnographic performance as a method of inquiry. Autoethnographic performance is the convergence of the “autobiographic impulse” and the “ethnographic moment” represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity. The article offers evaluative standards for the autoethnographic performance methodology, calling on the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy. Autoethnographic performance makes us acutely conscious of how we “I-witness” our own reality constructions. Interpreting culture through the self-reflections and cultural refractions of identity is a defining feature of autoethnographic performance.

In autobiographical narrative performances, the performer often speaks about acts of social transgression. In doing so, the telling of the story itself becomes a transgressive act—a revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced—an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics.

—Linda Park-Fuller (2000, p. 26)

Autoethnography is a form of critique and resistance that can be found in diverse literatures such as ethnic autobiography, fiction, memoir, and texts that identify zones of contact, conquest, and the contested meanings of self and culture that accompanies the exercise of representational authority.

—Mark Neuman (1996, p. 191)

Performance thrills me, theory does not. I would surely lose myself without performance, but I can not live well without theory.

—D. Soyini Madison (1999, p. 109)
BEING THERE:

“Threshold”

Strange
right,
wrong,
odd
tensive, dialectical, liminal
that I am at NCA
nine days
before the trip to Chile
where I am to begin ethnographic fieldwork
with Chilean shaman.

I am not there,
but I am not here either.
NCA is a world I am expected to “report back to”
for critical evaluation,
for verisimilitude,
for promotion.

Clifford Geertz (1988) writes of fieldwork,
“Being There is a postcard experience.
It is Being Here, a scholar among scholars
that gets your anthropology read . . .
published, reviewed, cited, taught” (p. 130).

Trihn Mih-ha (1991) writes, “Knowledge is no knowledge
until it bears the seal
of the Master’s approval” (p. 85).

I can relate to my
Sisters in the Academy
(itself a transgressive phrase),
Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994)
when they write,
“If the professional disciplinary rules that we have specified
were to find absolute adherence, this essay would have been derailed by now,
for it already has revealed something of the history of its production,
hinted at a motivation grounded in anger,
and staked for itself an explicitly politicized position” (p. 384).

There is danger here in this world,
The Academy,
as it conferences in the gilded plastic of the luxury hotel;  
And in spite of myself,  
my shadow selves  
can still be seduced  
by its empty opulence,  
even when it feels like  
an unkind, disembodied, scriptocentric, technocratic  
consumer of knowledge.

bell hooks might call this “eating the Other,”  
consuming ourselves  
with monologues about what should be endorsed,  
authenticated,  
and marked  
as scholarship.

BEING HERE:

This autoethnography was first performed at the National Communication Association Convention just days before I was to leave for Chile and ascend the Andes with a Chilean Shaman trained in the Mapuche traditions, to begin ethnographic research on the efficacy of performance in healing rituals. For me, autoethnographic texts express more fully the interactional textures occurring between self, other, and contexts in ethnographic research.

I have begun creating a self in and out of academe that allows expression of passion and spirit I have long suppressed. However academically heretical this performance of selves may be, I have learned that heresy is greatly maligned and, when put to good use, can begin a robust dance of agency in one’s personal/political/professional life. So, in seeking to dis-(re)-cover my body and voice in all parts of my life, I began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated, thus beginning the methodological praxis of reintegrating my body and mind into my scholarship.

For me, performing autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity personally and professionally. Performing autoethnography has encouraged me to dialogically look back upon my self as other, generating critical agency in the stories of my life, as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogate, and embrace. The previous autoethnography, “Threshold,” and its following sections, articulates the identity fractures and acute liminality I often experience in the days before ethnographic fieldwork, or while in the threshold of Clifford Geertz’s (1988) notion of “Being Here” and “Being There.”
In this essay, through a weave of performative autoethnographic poetry and theoretical prose, I articulate the personally/politically emancipatory potential of autoethnographic performance, intervening, as Mary Louise Pratt (1994) notes, “on metropolitan modes of understanding” (p. 28). First, I offer a discussion of autoethnography as a methodology of scholarly praxis, including evaluative criteria for autoethnography. Second, dialogic performance and performativity in autoethnographic performance is discussed. Finally, I explore the emancipatory potential of autoethnographic performance, and its use as a method of inquiry.

This article reflects my continuing process of integrating the “doing” of autoethnography with critical reflection upon autoethnography as a methodological praxis. I believe the “doing” of autoethnography and its explication benefit by this integration. For that reason, I braid some of my autoethnographic work—subheaded “BEING THERE” as a rift off Geertz’s (1988) discussions—and talk about the work of autoethnography—subheaded “BEING HERE”—throughout the article. It is interesting and not surprising that I find the authorial voice in the autoethnographic texts (BEING THERE) far more engaging due to its emotional texturing of theory and its reliance upon poetic structure to suggest a live participative embodied researcher. Though emotion and poetics constitute scholarly treason, it is heresy put to good use. And it is heresy I continue to attempt to commit in the “BEING HERE” of my own scholarly reflection.

BEING THERE:

“Threshold”

Marianna Torgovnick (1990) says, “What is clear now is that the West’s fascination with the primitive has to do with its own crisis of identity, with its own need to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe” (p. 96).

This flirting with the exotic “Other” becomes abusive in its objectifying salacious condescension.

A story is not just a story, writes Trihn (1989). Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can’t simply be stopped at someone’s request.
BEING HERE:

Autoethnography


Autoethnography is further informed by research on oral and personal narratives in performance and communication studies, situating the sociopolitically inscribed body as a central site of meaning making (Alexander, 2000; Bauman, 1986; Dailey, 1998; Fine, 1984; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998; Langellier, 1989, 1998, 1999; Langellier & Peterson, 1992; Madison, 1993; Minister, 1991; Park-Fuller, 2000; Pelias, 1999). Performance studies scholar Kristin Langellier’s work has been foundational in the knowledge construction of personal narratives providing theoretically fecund grounding for autoethnographic performance. “Personal narrative performance gives shape to social relations, but because such relations are multiple, polysemic, complexly interconnected, and contradictory, it can do so only in unstable and destabilizing ways for narrator and audience . . . a story of the body told through the body which makes cultural conflict concrete” (Langellier, 1999, p. 208).

More than a decade of cultural and autobiographical studies has extensively problematized narrative representation of hegemonized voices (Anzuldua, 1990; James & Busia, 1993; Jerome & Satin, 1999; Jones, 1997; Morago & Anzuldua, 1983; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Simpson, 1996; Smith, 1993). Mary Louis Pratt (1986) argues that autoethnography originates as a discourse from the margins of dominant culture—at which academe is
central—identifying the material, political, and transformational dimensions of representational politics. Informed by recent work in autobiography, autoethnographic methods recognize the reflections and refractions of multiple selves in contexts that arguably transform the authorial “I” to an existential “we.”

The dynamic and dialectical relation of the text and body emerge as a major theme in autoethnographic praxes. In the fieldwork, writing, and performing of autoethnography, text and body are redefined, their boundaries blurring dialectically (Conquergood, 1991). The living body/subjective self of the researcher is recognized as a salient part of the research process, and sociohistorical implications of the researcher are reflected upon “to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual” (Denzin, 1997, p. xv). Ethnographer Ruth Behar (1997), working from the writings of George Devereux asserts, “What happens within the observer must be made known, Devereux insisted, if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood” (p. 6). The researcher, in context, interacting with others becomes the subject of research, blurring distinctions of personal and social, self and other (Conquergood, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Richardson, 1992), and reevaluating the “dialectics of self and culture” (Neuman, 1996, p. 193). “Experience, discourse, and self-understanding,” writes Trihn Minh-ha (1991), “collide against larger cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and age” (p. 157).

The autoethnographic text emerges from the researcher’s bodily standpoint as she is continually recognizing and interpreting the residue traces of culture inscribed upon her hide from interacting with others in contexts. This corporeally textual orientation rejects the notion that “lived experience can only be represented indirectly, through quotations from field notes, observations or interviews” (Denzin, 1992, p. 20). In autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns.

Autoethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one’s positionality as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their constructions of self, and their interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Goodall, 1998). This has certainly been the case for me in making critical, political, and personal sense of my experiences with sexual assault, grief, mental illness, and White privilege (Spry, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001). Performing autoethnography has allowed me to position myself as active agent with narrative authority over many hegemonizing dominant cultural myths that restricted my social freedom and personal development, also causing me to realize how my Whiteness and class membership can restrict the social freedom and personal development of others.
BEING THERE:

“Threshold”

Performing artist Carlos Nakai believes that White people have forgotten their stories.
I would say,
it’s not that we have forgotten our stories,
but rather,
we don’t want to hear them.
We do not believe them.
They do not constitute . . . knowledge.
They do not compute.

The kinds of stories Nakai refers to,
no matter how well written, argued, and performed,
do not stratify,
ratify,
and phallosize
the study of human experience.
Rather, these “unbelievable” stories
stand in multivocal contrast
to the work of
academic colonizers
who still purport a realist agenda
for direct access to Reality.

BEING HERE:

Autoethnographic texts reveal the fractures, sutures, and seams of self interacting with others in the context of researching lived experience. In interpreting the autoethnographic text, readers feel/sense the fractures in their own communicative lives, and like Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectual, create efficacy and healing in their own communal lives. Thirteen years after I was sexually assaulted, profound healing began when I started to rewrite that experience as a woman with strength and agency rather than accepting the victimage discourse of sexual assault embedded in our phallocentric language—and, thus, value—systems (Spry, 1995). This kind of transformative and efficacious potential for researcher, researched, and reader/audience is a primary goal of effective autoethnography in print and performance.
So, what is effective autoethnography? What constitutes a good autoethnography? First, as in any evaluation of any literary genre, the writing must be well crafted and, “capable of being respected by critics of literature as well as by social scientists” (Denzin, 1997, p. 200). Mediocre writing in any venue lacks the ability to transform readers and transport them into a place where they are motivated to look back upon their own personally political identity construction. Second, good autoethnography must be emotionally engaging (Behar, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Ronai, 1992), as well as critically self-reflexive of one’s sociopolitical interactivity. Goodall (1998) argues that “good autoethnography strives to use relational language and styles to create purposeful dialogue between the reader and the author. This dialogue proceeds through close, personal identification—and recognition of difference—of the reader’s experiences, thoughts, and emotions with those of the author” (p. 7).

Reflecting on the subjective self in context with others is the scholarly sagaciousness offered by autoethnography. Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory. “The tale being told,” writes Denzin (1992), “should reflect back on, be entangled in, and critique this current historical moment and its discontents” (p. 25). The researcher and text must make a persuasive argument, tell a good story, be a convincing “I-witness.” Geertz (1988) is clear on this point:

This issue, negotiating the passage from what one has been through “out there” to what one says “back here,” is not psychological in character. It is literary. It arises for anyone who adopts what one may call, in a serious pun, the I-witnessing approach to the construction of cultural descriptions. . . . [It] is to pose for yourself a distinctive sort of text-building problem: rendering your account credible through rendering your person so . . . . To become a convincing “I-witness,” one must, so it seems, first become a convincing “I.” (pp. 78-79)

Being a “convincing I” is not simply about literary self-exposure. And here I address those who rest upon the tired relativist argument that auto-anything in scholarship is about a nonevaluative, anything-goes, self-therapizing, sans theory, reason, or logic. In her book The Vulnerable Observer Ruth Behar (1997) addresses this posture:

Efforts at self-revelation flop not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and the observed.

Vulnerability doesn’t mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake. (pp. 13-14)
A reader of autoethnographic texts must be moved emotionally and critically. Such movement does not occur without literary craft, persuasive logic, and personal/cultural thick description. Goodall (1998) argues good autoethnography “completely dissolves any idea of distance, doesn’t produce ‘findings,’ isn’t generalizable, and only has credibility when self-reflexive, and authority when richly vulnerable. . . . When it is done well, we can learn previously unspoken, unknown things about culture and communication from it” (p. 2). Autoethnography is a felt-text that does not occur without rhetorical and literary discipline, as well as the courage needed to be vulnerable in rendering scholarship . . . to step out from behind the curtain and reveal the individual at the controls of academic-Oz.

**BEING THERE:**

“**Threshold**” An ending.

Gingrich-Philbrook (1998) says, “The story recognizes and exploits the ascetic quality of our faith in reality as a place one may dwell, a faith that demands constant avowals from [T]he [F]aithful among us, even though they will never come to the end of these acts, and must live their lives always avowing and avowing and avowing . . .” (p. 299, capitalizations mine).

Knowledge Masters and their (post)colonizers practice verisimilitudinal violence when any of its “primitives” begin to speak “unnaturally,” not following the Straight -and -Narrow context-free universal yardstick of Reality.

There is danger “Being Here,” when writing of “Being There” involves speaking in multivocal tongues and shifting cultural shapes.
BEING HERE:

Dialogical Performance and Performativity

As any shaman will tell you, shapeshifting is a risky business, takes a lot of energy, and is enormously affected by the surroundings. When I performed “Threshold” at an academic conference, I felt I was shifting forms from scholar to primitive. The sometimes poetic voice of performed autoethnography can surely be heard by academics as an irrational story spoken in a misbegotten tongue. But my truth is, that I am more alive with the sagacity of knowledge, and my ability to communicate it, when I shift into these shapes and speak in these tongues. “Performance helps me see,” writes Madison (1999), “It illuminates like good theory. It orders the world and lets the world loose” (p. 109).

In the next section, BEING THERE constitutes “An Eating Outing: Spectacle, Desire, and Consumption,” an autoethnography focusing upon my experience with anorexia. I first performed this at a communication ethnography preconference near Chicago in 1999.

BEING THERE:

An Eating Outing

In much of my early life I often felt like I was calling to myself. Speaking from subject “I” to a disembodied “you-self.” Caught in the middle between Richard Schechner’s (1988) not-me and not-not-me. As if I were outside my body trying to get in, homeless outside my skin.

I have often felt like I was speaking from outside of my body in my professional and personal lives. In fact, for me, academia has always been about speaking from a disembodied head. And because I often felt like I was calling out to my othered self, I never questioned the implications of a disembodying discourse. The body in academe is rather like the headless horseman galloping wildly and uncontrollably to somewhere, driven by profane and unruly emotion, while the head—holder of the Mind—is enshrined under glass in the halls of academe.

In calling to myself through the performance of autoethnography, someone, someone from inside my body, finally, gingerly, began to call back. Embodying theory about anorexia nervosa through performance allows me to enter the uninhabitable corporeal terrain of my 16-year-old body, and to problematize the context in which the anorexia thrived. Theory helps me name the experiences interred in the body, whereas performance helps me to
reinhabit my body, immersing myself into those scary spaces—introducing me to myself—so that the semantic expression of autoethnographic practice reflects the somatic experience of the sociocultured body.

I want to enter the terrain of consumption, desire, and the denial of those carnivorous experiences within my own body. And I want to do it here with you in performance. Because it is here, “in performance,” Ann Cooper Albright (1997) writes, that “the audience is forced to deal directly with the history of that body in conjunction with the history of their own bodies” (p. 121).

**BEING HERE:**

In the process of performance, the performer engages the text of another—oral or written by self or other—dialogically, meaning the performer approaches the text/other with a commitment to be challenged, changed, embraced, and interrogated in the performance process (Conquergood, 1985). The purpose of dialogical performance is to embody an intimate understanding of self’s engagement with another within a specific sociocultural context. In autoethnographic performance self is other. Dialogical engagement in performance encourages the performer to interrogate the political and ideological contexts and power relations between self and other, and self as other. Ronald J. Pelias (1991) writes, “The dialogic process allows performers to present to the community others for consideration. In doing so, performers do not take the place of others. Instead they are engaged in a shared conversation in which they speak, not for, but with, the community” (p. 151). The performer asks herself, “As I seek to embody this text, how does my own cultural situatedness (i.e., standpoint theory) motivate my performance choices?” Socioculturally reflexive critique is at the heart of ethical intimate dialogical performance.

In his article, “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions in the Ethnography of Performance,” Dwight Conquergood (1985) maps the moral and ethical pitfalls possible in ethnographic performance. He articulates dialogical performance as an ethical performance approach that “struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. Dialogical performance is a way of understanding the intersections of self, other, and context passionately and reflexively. It offers a critical methodology that emphasizes knowledge in the body, offering the researcher an enfleshed epistemology and ontology.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) writes, “Through the performance process, what is normally sealed up inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of social life, is drawn forth” (p. 13).
BEING THERE:

An Eating Outing

So, felt-sensing the corporeal terrains of anorexia.
I removed my virginity when I was 15. It was planned. I wanted to get rid of it. It wasn’t a particularly pleasant experience. He was 16 and neither of us were very sure about how what went where. For me, it was an attempt to enter the body I was calling out to. I wanted her to know that this entering was evidence of her desirability. I wanted her to know that because she had denied her desire for food, that this boy-man’s consumption of her was proof that she was a spectacle worthy of consumption and desire.

My mom was a strikingly beautiful woman. Rather a cross between Lucille Ball and Marilyn Monroe. She was crystal clear about the specticality of femininity. She talked of face-lifts, worked hard to maintain her tiny waist, and her sense of fashion was cultivated and impeccable. Her frustration with my pre-15-year-old chubby body came from the knowledge that personally controlling the social gaze upon one’s body meant having control over the inevitable specticalization of one’s body. A model of Gramsci’s “organic intellectual,” my mother spent much of her life intricately observing class and gender pastiche. She grew up poor in a family of 11. Her insistence on my thinness wasn’t the result of some debutante-induced sensibility of maintaining social standing through my appearance. Her concern came from critical self-reflection upon her own experience of rising out of poverty, moving amongst, and becoming a member of the upper-middle class.

For my mother, being thin and attractive was not about vanity, it was about achievement, it was about looking well bred, it was about maintaining one’s control over cultural surveillance. Like Carol Spitzack (1993) in her article “The Spectacle of Anorexia Nervosa,” my mother could have told you that “the inhabitants of poorly presented bodies were expected to take corrective action, realigning bodily aesthetics and motility with cultural images of beauty” (p. 2). She knew that “the presentation of femininity demands evidence of surveillance, beginning around the time of puberty and extending past middle age” (p. 2). She knew and wanted me to know that judgments of my attractiveness would be based, at least in part, on my “finesse in giving pleasure to those who are placed in the position of observer,” Spitzack continues, “a woman embodies the positions of spectator and spectacle simultaneously” (p. 2).

Eliminating my virginity was a way for me to gain some control over my body.

I wanted there to be a tangible reason for my pleasing others by refusing food.
Upon turning 15, I began a regimented regulation of food intake. In the morning I would have a half a piece of toast, at lunch I would eat a half a twinkie, and at dinner I would eat the vegetable, some meat, and a bite of the potatoes with nothing on them. Mom always said that it's not the potatoes, but what you put on them that are fattening. After dinner I would walk to the country club and work out hard for at least an hour. Depending on how much I had eaten that day, I would then sit in the sauna. I remember feeling the heat of the sauna burning the inside of my nose, and knowing that if I could stand that, I would probably lose another "good pound."

This workout occurred everyday along with dance classes and, yes, cheerleading practice, another hotbed of voluntary starvation. Kathy Davis (1997) argues that "embodied theory" must engage the relationships between the "symbolic and the material, between representations of the body and embodiment as experience or social practice in concrete social, cultural and historical contexts" (p. 15). Theory and the body are always and already integrated. Voluntary starvation is a terribly concrete social practice.

**BEING HERE:**

The performance of autoethnography corporeally manifests the dialogical praxis of critical theory and the performing body. Langellier’s notion of performativity plaitsthe theoretical grounding, ethical implications, and disciplinary rigor needed for quality autoethnographic performance. Langellier (1999) argues that the performative turn in contemporary society and scholarship "responds to twin conditions of bodiless voices, for example, in ethnographic writing; and voiceless bodies who desire to resist the colonizing powers of discourse" (p. 126). Langellier draws a distinction between performance, "a term used to describe a certain type of particularly involved and dramatized oral narrative" (p. 127), which "implies the transgressive desire of agency and action" (p. 129), and performativity, which requires the performer of personal narrative to identify and critique the power relations rooted in the sociohistorical contexts of discourse that are occurring in the act of performing personal stories.

The social context within which the autoethnographic performance is presented adds a further critical layer to the doing and witnessing of the performance. In “Dancing Bodies and the Stories They Tell,” Ann Cooper Albright (1997) argues that the face-to-face interaction of performance “is an infinitely more intense and uncomfortable experience that demands that the audience engage with their own cultural autobiographies” (p. 121). Whether performing autoethnography at an academic conference, a community gathering on social issues, or a paid theatrical gig, audience engagement and response to these performances are intensely personal, diverse, and substantial.
BEING THERE:

In no other context is the requirement for “evidence of surveillance” and embodying cultural determinants made so manifest as in the world of dance. I began ballet at 7 years old but became serious about it around the age of 15, which is when my anorexia was peaking. Ballet and anorexia, a volatile, yet common combination. In fact, I don’t think you can have one without the other and be successful in dance. I was in the dance program at Michigan State University during my first year of college and was a member of one of their traveling repertory companies. Our ballet teacher was this tall, thin, stern and stately dancer out of New York City. She was tall and gaunt and took no crap. She was the overlord of our bodies. It was her gaze that we needed to satisfy. Maintaining the bone-jutting, taut-muscledd dancer’s body was right in tune with the anorexic’s agenda. Spitzack (1993) writes, “A willingness to place oneself onstage voluntarily and to invite assessment are necessary elements in the preservation of [anorexia]” (p. 6). And who better to police our gendered performances than a thin, stark, professional dance drill sargent—the body of the anorexic’s dream: thin, controlled, legitimate.

See, here’s how the drill went. One day—and this was typical for a company dance class—we were at the bar doing a regular ballet warm up. Absolute concentration on controlling the body is the goal. Our teacher, who I will call Ms. Frank, walks up and down the row of black leotarded and pink-legged bodies. In one hand she holds kind of a pointing staff that she would use to tap on our bodies to indicate the need for correction in alignment, turn out, or position. In her other hand she has the pad of pink slips, better known by their grisly name: “fat slips.” Our pulses would all but stop when she would bring out the fat slips.

She stopped, standing about 6 feet from the line, scribbled something on the pad, and gave it to a woman about seven bodies down the row from me. See, after you received three fat slips, you were asked to leave the class and the company. You were kicked out. Your body was analyzed and found wanting, weak, undisciplined. In ballet, one works to achieve lightness, the illusion of weightlessness, which is why I would pop at least one dexatrim every morning after dance class and no breakfast.

BEING HERE:

This work has literally saved my life by providing me the means to claim reflexive agency in my interactions with others in contexts. In autoethnographic performance, the body is like a cultural billboard for people to read and interpret in the context of their own experience. Performing autoethnography provides a space for the emancipation of the voice and body in academic dis-
course through breaking the boundaries of stylistic form, and by reintroducing the body to the mind in the process of living research. For me, this emancipation is manifested in two ways. First, performing autoethnography can emancipate the scholarly voice from the monostylistic confines of academic discourse. The opening up of stylistic form in academic writing provides the opportunity for a diversity of content. Second, performing autoethnography provides space for the living, experiencing, and researching body to be seen and felt. It is not that our bodies haven’t been in our work, rather, they have been shrouded in our research by dualistic separations of Mind and Body. We have been expected to accept the myth of the researcher as a detached head—the object of Thought, Rationality, and Reason—floating from research site to research site thinking and speaking, while its profane counterpart, the Body, lurks unseen, unruly, and uncontrollable in the shadows of the Great Halls of the Academy. The Body has become the hysterical and embarrassing relative, a “shut in” in the academy’s ivory tower.

Emancipating the Scholarly Voice

As a woman’s feet are bound in the unnatural form of the high heel, so are her voices and the voices of “othereds” bound by the monoform of academese. Langellier (1998) writes, “The voice needs a body which personal narrative furnishes. From social life, a complementary movement applies: the body needs a voice to resist the colonizing powers of discourse… Personal narrative responds to both the wreckage and the reflexivity of postmodern times when master narratives disintegrate” (p. 207). Autoethnographic performance creates a space for the detached voice and the “profane” body to dialogue reintegrating the head and the heart into academic writing, and challenging the construction of master narratives.

BEING THERE:

Dancers are experts in the theatre of gender. We learn early on, as does any great female gender actor, to be acutely sensitive to the wishes of others, that our body, and its worthiness is contingent upon external judgment. Ms. Frank, like my mom, was simply informing us of our gender performance acumen. For any lapses in training, there must be clear and swift reprimand. If one did not take corrective action of one’s body after the second “slip,” then clearly, there was a flaw in her internal surveillance system.

She was lax in suppressing her desire for consumption.
She was lax in her performance of desire for other’s consumption.
She was lax in meeting the challenge of femininity: to regulate her body performances according to cultural dictates.
BEING HERE:

When doing autoethnography, my voice often comes on to the page in poetic ("nonscholarly") form. Autoethnographic performance in print is often governed by how the words manifest themselves through voice and movement in performance. Movement, spatial shifts, and vocal and physical breaths somatically transmute the semantics of the performed word. The autoethnographic performance process turns the internally somatic into the externally semantic. My reading of embodied sociotextual pelts becomes the written semantic interpretation of my own somatic experience “at once asserting the somatic reality of experience while also foregrounding its discursive nature” (Albright, 1997, p. 120). Denzin (1997) adds, “Poetry, and the personal narrative, become tools for reflexive knowledge” (p. 212).

Translating the lived intersections of self, other, time, and space into autoethnographic performance has allowed me to integrate my personal, professional, and political voice. For me, the integration of selves in my life/work has resulted in what I can only term an open agency. Though I have always felt a good measure of agency in the world, it was a voice constrained by a power-over orientation, motivated by competitive ambition, fear, and insecurity. Success meant grafting the skins of patriarchy on my body by feeling powerful—"on top" and "in control"—in comparison to those I perceived as powerless. But the high heels pinched. The pantyhose compressed. The power suits made dancing impossible.

Critically reflecting upon my place in time with others through autoethnographic performance research has made me feel power with rather than power over my self and others. I began to hear my own scholarly voice, where truth and reality are not fixed categories, where self-reflexive critique is sanctioned, and where heresy is viewed as liberatory. Trihn (1991) argues that a responsible, reflexive autoethnographic text “announces its own politics and evidences a political consciousness. It interrogates the realities it represents. It invokes the teller’s story in the history that is told” (p. 188). My voice feels powerful when it is engendering power with others. I am better able to engage the lived experience of myself with others. I am more comfortable in the often conflictual and unfamiliar spaces one inhabits in ethnographic research. I am more comfortable with my self as other.

The following autoethnography stems from the same project as “Threshold”—the continuing research project with Machi (Mapuche shaman in the Chilean Andes) focusing on the efficacious performative dimensions of Mapuche healing rituals. This passage generated from field notes illustrates my struggle to remain an open agent practicing power with my coresearchers. It also illustrates the necessity of critical reflection on power structures within any ethnographic research context. This text was first performed at the Petit jean Performance Festival in Arkansas in 1999.
BEING THERE:

“The Camera”
I requested
and was given
a handheld videocam from the Dean’s Office
specifically for this trip.
I am finding the camera very invasive generally.
It invades my participation in ritual.
It invades my relationship with the women traveling.

Yet,
Machi Luzclara and Machi Quinturay
welcome its presence
as providing a record of the Mapuche people in a time of intense transition.

The camera is operating for me as a barrier.
It is a “Master’s Tool.”
It is a third eye with a patriarchal gaze
that looks outward instead of in,
seeking to observe rather than immerse.

And yet, am I not sounding like the petulant privileged professor putting her own
personal and vocational process before the Machi who invited her here? This film is
what will get us the half mil’ PBS grant Machi Luzclara wants,
which will get thousands of dollars to the Machi
who live,
most of them,
in abject poverty,
not giving a damn
where they are placed on the hyphen
by the “cultural elite.”
But still, I long to pitch this techno eyeball over the side of the mountain and SEE
with my third eye how it becomes one with the gravel!

Clearly, I have yet to use the camera with the self-reflexive forte of Trihn.

BEING HERE:

An autoethnographic voice can interrogate the politics that structure the personal, yet it must still struggle within the language that represents dominant politics. “Fears of reprisal and the lack of an experimental language” Park-Fuller (2000) writes, “can work to inhibit the sharing of transgressive experience” (p. 24). Speaking and embodying the politically transgressive through experimental linguistic forms (i.e. autoethnography, sociopoetics, performance scripts) can result in a lack of publications. Goodall (1998) con-
tinues to advocate for the multivocality of form and content in academic journals when he writes about the transgressive composition of autoethnography, "One of the most ‘disturbing’ characteristics of autoethnography is that its prose style or poetic is at odds with the clear scholarly preference for an impersonal, nonemotional, unrhetorically charming, idiom of representation” (p. 6). The impersonal, nonemotional, and unrhetorically charming representation of self in academia—and beyond—was something I was glad to be rid of. The ontological and epistemological knowledge that my body claimed would not be articulated in the rigid linguistic constructs and stylistic forms of the academic journal. My experience of “Being There” would simply not jibe with the scholarly writing methods of “Being Here.” “Ethnography . . . involve[s] owning up to the fact that, like quantum mechanics or the Italian opera, it is a work of the imagination” (Geertz, 1988, p. 140).

Ironically, although anthropological heretics such as Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, George Marcus, and others had boldly articulated the “crisis of representation” in pre-Malinowskian ethnography, there had been little recognition of the equally hegemonizing crisis of representation in the White male proctored academic writing and publishing structures. “Like other cultural groups,” writes Laurel Richardson (1992), “academics fail to recognize their practices as cultural/political choices, much less see how they are personally affected by those choices” (p. 126). These linguistic structures and publishing gatekeepers promote an erasure of the body from the process and product of research.

BEING THERE:

Segments from “From Goldilocks to Dreadlocks: Racializing Bodies,” first performed at the Performance Studies International Conference in Tempe, AZ, 2000.

“Dreadful Beginnings”

In February of last year, my mammogram came back with some spots, some stains, some irregularities. Two of my mom’s sisters died of breast cancer, and my mom died of ovarian. After 3 weeks of more and varied mammograms, Tom, Dick, and Harry decided that “my breasts were clean.”

I trace my desire for dreadlocks to the year after my 10-year-old son was born. I had always told myself that 50, 50 years old would be the right time for dreads, an age of wisdom and sagacity, the dreads would be an earned crown of cronedom.
But the mammogram shifted something. The x-ray exposed them just below the surface of my skins. Seeing that the jig was up,
Having been revealed by modern radiation,
these ancient roots,
these radical risomes
began sprouting snakish saplings
these shrieking snakes of Medusa
these killing and kissing coils of Kali
these wild roots of Baba Yaga
just began growing out out out
of my head
one day.

Their time had come.
And as they emerged, they evoked many comments from any peoples. A most interesting theme of comments emerged from White women:
“Tami, aren’t you afraid of offending Black people by wearing dreads?” “I mean, what will they think?”
“Isn’t you ‘taking something away’ from Black people by growing my dreads?”
As if I could
As if I were in racial drag.
As if I were drag racing
to the finished line of an essentialized, homogenized Blackness.

But what began to emerge for me
where essentialized, homogenized images of Whiteness.
And I began to see the ways
that I had been living much of my life
In White racial drag.

BEING HERE:

Emancipating the Body from the Shadows

When the body is erased in the process(ing) of scholarship, knowledge situated within the body is unavailable. Enfleshed knowledge is restricted by linguistic patterns of positivist dualism—mind/body, objective/subjective—that fix the body as an entity incapable of literacy. This has particular implications for women as they have been historically and culturally connected to conceptualizations of the body as an emotionally unruly and profane entity. Yet, despite decades of cogently radical critiques of positivist dualism, we still sever the body from academic scholarship. In problematizing the cultural
and historical concepts and practices of the body and literacy, Carolyn Marvin (1994) writes, “A mark of literate competence is skill in disguising or erasing the contribution of one’s own body to the process of textual production and practice. A mark of literate power is the freedom to command other bodies for textual display or concealment, as the occasion warrants” (p. 129).

The shadowed body common in academic discourse is of great significance to the performative ethnographic researcher. Conquergood (1991) notes, “Ethnography’s distinctive research method... privileges the body as a site of knowing... Ethnography is an embodied practice; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing” (p. 180). The sociopolitics of body representation are widely articulated across disciplines. The female and/or non-White body is erased from public and political areas, thus reducing women’s and/or non-White’s experiences to “special interests,” meaning their bodies are of marginal concern in the body politic. Moira Gatens (1997) essay, “Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic” cogently articulates this argument in relation to language. Gatens writes, “Women who step outside their allotted place in the body politic are frequently abused with terms like: harpy, virago, vixen, bitch, shrew; terms that make it clear that if she attempts to speak from the political body about the political body, her speech is not recognized as human speech” (p. 84). It is cause for hope that work like Gatens’ has and continues to be published. However, when will academic discourse reflect the integration of the body in research rather than publishing rhetoric about it?

Coaxing the body from the shadows of academe and consciously integrating it into the process and production of knowledge requires that we view knowledge in the context of the body from which it is generated. I must be ready to walk the talk of my scholarship by putting my politically marked body on the lines of the printed text. This kind of embodied methodology is—and should feel—risky. Goodall’s (1998) take on autoethnographic scholarship reflects this vulnerable conviction:

It should be dangerous. It should mess with your mind. It should open locks, provide pathways, offer a language capable of inspiring personal, social, and institutional liberation. I think it should help people think and behave differently, if they choose to. Writing that doesn’t do that isn’t very good writing.

Which is why I have such a difficult time finishing most of the essays I read in most so-called scholarly journals. (p. 5)

Whenever my work messes with my mind, I suppose that I am on to some thing, some truth among many, that others may also find useful. When my body vibrates with the gravitational pull of another body’s version of reality, I know that I need to release my own gravitational hold on reality and dialogically engage this other time and space. That is not narcissism or engagement in “wannabe” participant-observation with “natives”; it is about embodying and critically evaluating the complex impulses of communica-
tion. “It is not a question of going native,” states Geertz (1988), “It is a question of living a multiplex life; sailing at once in several seas” (p. 77).

The autoethnographic performance seeks to embody the polyphonic intertextuality of people in contexts. Performing autoethnography gives us what Madison (1993, 1999) might refer to as “performing theory/embodied writing.” Ideologies and experiences are made manifest through performance by replacing the rigor mortis of the written with fully embodied social critique. Such flesh to flesh scholarship motivates the labor of critical self-reflexivity and invigorates the concept and process(ing) of knowledge. With all of our theorizing about the body, we seldom theorize body to body, a flesh to flesh theorizing. Madison (1999) argues for the “felt-sensing meeting between theory, writing, and performing” (p. 107). Felt-sensing is not part of the Mind over Body rational world paradigm upon which academe was founded. Felt-sensing requires vulnerability, allowing one’s self to be pushed and pulled in the dialectic whirl of discursive bodies.

Representing the discursive performing body on the page requires an enfleshed methodology, and surely, an expansion of form in academic writing. Embodied writing must be able to reflect the corporeal and material presence of the body that generated the text in performance. Emancipating the body from its erasure in academic scholarship would, necessarily, affect stylistic form. When I performed “Ode to the Absent Phallus,” dealing with being sexually assaulted, my purpose was to relocate my body as a powerful agent rather than an assaulted object. Much of that narrative agency is located in the presence of my body in performance. A print form that does not represent this materiality potentially suffocates this mode of agency. Consequently, the published version of this text is in poetic form, which seeks to reflect the critical agency of the corporeal agent, the living body in performance (Spry, 1998).

In performed autoethnography, the research artist is the existential nexus upon which the research rotates, deviates, and gyrates presenting through performance critical self-reflexive analysis of her own experiences of dissonance and discovery with others. This perspective on scholarship requires the researcher to access her complexity of passion and desire for living, and to articulate these embodied critical passions in any number of scholarly discursive forms. The embodied autoethnographic text is a story reflecting the research artist’s collaboration with people, culture, and time. It is generated in the liminal spaces between experience and language, between the known and the unknown, between the somatic and semantic. The text and the body that generates it cannot be separated. Surely, they never have been. Postcolonial writing has not brought the body back, it has exposed and politicized its presence.

Like Turner’s (1982, 1987) concept of flow, the polyphonic voice/body processes of cultural/identity representation activated in performance are mobile, playful, and dynamic; “Identity is more like a performance in process
than a postulate, premise, or originary principle” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 185). Flesh to flesh methodologies stand in multifigured contrast to fixed Truthseeking methods.

Dancing Bodies/Poetic Voices of Academic Renewal

Enacting the embodied method of autoethnography, I have learned to believe in myself when a story moves into my body and grows stronger with critical self-reflection, even if—and especially when—it causes my body to transgress into the dance of an academic heretic. Critical analysis is a tool I learned in academe; and when turning this tool back upon it, the academy can be a space filled with passionate revelation and critical polyphonic dialogue.

Human experience is chaotic and messy, requiring a pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods that critically turn texts back upon themselves in the constant emancipation of meanings. “These texts, however, are not just subjective accounts of experience,” writes Denzin (1997), “they attempt to reflexively map multiple discourses that occur in a given social space” (p. xvii). Autoethnographic performance is the convergence of the “autobiographic impulse” and the “ethnographic moment” represented through movement and language in performance. A compelling performance—like a copious ethnography—does not purport to reveal the essential representation of a text, nor should it, as Wallace Bacon (1979) reminds, reveal only the performer’s agenda or skill. A fine autoethnographic performance reveals a substantive sophisticated weave of a performer’s textual analysis, her contextual analysis, and her somatic acumen, thereby presenting critical self-reflexive analysis of her own experiences of dissonance and discovery with others. Autoethnographic performance can provide a space for the emancipation of the voice and body from homogenizing knowledge production and academic discourse structures, thereby articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity. Reality is always and already a social construction. Autobiographical performance makes us acutely conscious of how we I-witness our own reality constructions. Interpreting culture through the self-reflections and cultural refractions of identity is a defining feature of autoethnographic performance.

Autoethnography contributes to the burgeoning methodological possibilities of representing human action. It is one tool among many designed to work in the fields, unseating the privileged scholar from the desk in the Master’s House, and de-exoticizing the non-White-male-objective scholar from the realms of the academically othered. And it is a method that calls upon the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy.

I end with a passage from field notes in Chile. Though I am describing embodied liminality (Turner, 1982) experienced in the Andes working with
Chilean and Mapuche shaman, the passage has a haunting resonance with the researching body in academe:

**BEING THERE:**

**December 4, 1997**

We are here ... in San Hose’, Chile—50 miles south of Santiago. I am in the cabin that we will stay in the night before ascending the mountain ... on horseback ... 17,000 feet up ... into the Andean mountain wilderness. I have showered, done Tai Chi, tried to ground ... I am literally upside down on this side of the earth from where I have been all of my life. I am spinning and vibrating inside. I am shimmering inside as if light is trying to break through. I am shaking and shifting inside as if my shape is about to change.

Trihn (1991) helps. “A reality is not a mere crossing from one border to another. ... Reality involves the crossing of an indeterminate number of border-lines, one that remains multiple in its hyphenation” (p. 107).

Indeed.

My shaking is the liminal shifting betwixt and between hyphens, Shaping that I am and am not in control of. Shifting into something that is not me and is not-not me. Shaking at the ‘checkpoint.” Wondering and worrying if here— I will pass customs.
NOTES

1. NCA stands for the National Communication Association. It is a primary academic conference for presenting research in Communication Studies.

2. See also the special issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly, 20* (2000) edited by Craig Gingrich-Philbrook devoted to “The Personal and Political in Solo Performance.”

3. This was a preconference to the National Communication Association Convention in Chicago, Illinois, in November of 1999.

4. Luzclara’s story of emergence into shamanic work can be found in her autobiographical essay in 1984’s *Ancient Patterns in Contemporary Women’s Lives*, Freedom, CA: Snakepower.

REFERENCES


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The "Unfinished Story": Narratively Analyzing Collective Action Frames in Social Movements

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In this article, the author proposes the “unfinished story” as an interesting and useful narrative-based method for understanding the processes of constructing collective action frames in social movements based on his research in the Walpole Island First Nation. A medium that works within a narrative structure, the “unfinished story” provides insight into how interpretive devices embody a radically self-reflexive identity the author calls the Ecological Native. He discusses the steps involved and some influential experiences in the field. More radical next steps are discussed in the concluding section.

The personal narrative is a qualitative research technique that utilizes participants’ stories of their personal experiences as an information base for research. Denzin (1989b) refers to these tales as "self-stories...told by an individual in the context of a specific set of experiences" (p. 186)...“in an effort to form an understanding and interpretation of a particular phenomenon” (1989a, p. 27).

Understood in this way, stories have great potential for connecting the historical conditions for dissent with the individuals’ current position in the social structure. Stories are important to getting like-minded people actively recruited in the efforts to solve a grievance. bell hooks (1991) writes of story in this way, calling it an especially compelling device for framing grievances as legitimate. She writes, “‘The longing to tell one’s story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release’” (1991, p. 1038). To me hooks’s point can be linked to social movement in that collective action involves many people who are very keen to escape the trajectory of the past by rewriting the contemporary story of intolerable conditions.

In this article, I describe my use of the “unfinished story” as a narrative-based method that enhances the understanding of the process of mobilizing social movement participants via collective action frames. The unfinished story method involves the researcher narrating an open-ended, “hypothetical situation” that is offered in exchange for the interviewee’s help in its comple-
The unfinished story is informed by residents' comments on the issues being examined, informal conversations with insiders, the relevant local literature, and themes emerging from preliminary "on-site" fieldwork observations. Explaining to the interviewees that the end of the narration is not the end of the story supports the asking of several questions that are answered in order to finish this story. The result is the cocreation of a context for discussing the possibilities and constraints for collective action.

The backdrop for this article is research I conducted in the Walpole Island First Nation in southwestern Ontario, Canada. I was investigating the ways that the First Nation community mobilized to protect itself from the harm associated with several petrochemical companies that were discharging their toxins into the adjacent St. Clair River, which flows along the community's boundaries. In the research, I examined the community's formation of a "sustainability" collective action frame (later understood more completely as "sustainability/ ecological Native"). In this way too, the unfinished story has the ability to foster expansive, imaginative, reflective and especially projective thinking.2

Madelaine, a traditionalist and mother of four, provides an example of this textual representation. I asked her to explain her willingness to extend her local involvement to the wider environmental justice movement. This question was salient because the treatment of Native people in Canada would certainly justify reluctance, if not unwillingness to do so.

I think the world community needs to look towards a Native perspective in terms of respect for creation, all the plants and animals—all the environment. They need to look to Native people for guidance to maintain the environment and live with the creation rather than thinking of living on top of the creation: Creation is created for man and everything else is below. The world community could learn from Native people the perspective of being part of the environment and living with it.

The cultural basis for her answer is the fact that the people of Walpole Island see themselves as role models according to the Seventh Fire prophecy. This prophecy foresaw that Native people would lose control over their destiny, but it also foresaw the return of Native power after seven generations of oppression. In the context of the unfinished story, Madelaine retraces for me the community’s journey to reinvigorate what was left of the trail marked by the Seventh Fire. This rebirth of Native power is, ironically, made possible by the environmental destruction that threatens the planet. In other words, oppression and suffering bind the human and nonhuman residents of Walpole Island. The point for this article is that members of the Walpole Island First Nation could imagine themselves as narrator and bring themselves into being by playing narrator.

The concept of a collective action frame focuses on how the interpretive devices of individual participants and the ideological frames of a social movement take form (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 207). Collective action frames
are story-like, an analysis of both the source of a grievance and its amelioration.
The purpose is to mine a constituency, partisans whose perceptions resonate with the aggrieved. Poletta (1998, p. 420-421) concurs, boldly stating that stories make collective action frames more concrete by offering a set of meanings that attract adherents by explaining both the sources of and solutions to perceived injustices. The overarching function of the collective action frame is to communicate a meta-message in terms that will engage outside sympathy. In a community-based movement, it illuminates the role of evocative aspects of culture to motivate collective action (Valocchi, 1999, p. 60). Obviously, the higher the degree of frame resonance, the greater the effectiveness of mobilizing peoples who are members of the social movement (Benford, 1993).

The way that the collective action frame might be thought of as a shorthand descriptor of the way in which a community comes to draw on its own features (e.g., being Native and therefore ecological). I concur, storytelling—especially as a nonnative seeking insight into one Native community—made it possible to explore the roots of grievances, explanations and opposition, and the emergence of collective activity. Protest or education initiatives involve the constant push and pull of constituent values. These values are given meaning when compared to other ways of living and thinking, other stories. I am positing that comparing stories illuminate differences between alternatives especially counter-hegemonic ones that posit Native people generally as powerful, distinct, and relevant. Indeed, collective action was made a more attractive possibility to constituents because it is instantiated by the salience of a unique, community-based, collective identity. Walpole’s “we-ness” is coherent and strong, at once local but also deeply historical and geographically encompassing (VanWynsberghe, 1997). A young, female, land claims researcher named Marnie attests to this.

The people from the First Nation have got connections with the land and we are caretakers of the land. To ignore that the land molds you and your people, particularly when you’re talking about people who have been here for hundreds if not thousands of years, means that you are ignoring something very fundamental. We don’t want to own it, but we want to protect it.

The unfinished story technique provided a medium for this comment. More important for me, comments such as these alerted me to the fact that support for collective action in Walpole was more likely to be the case when it is consistent with a Native identity that represented and protected nature. This identity is identified by what van Wyck (1997) calls the “attainment of deep ecological consciousness” and “an absence of a boundary between humans and Nature” (p. 96). Because of its hypothetical qualities, the unfinished story also provides a comfort zone in which to discuss this identity, a very controversial topic, without compelling either the interviewer or interviewee to judge or critique. Three years after leaving the field, I also learned to appreciate, via the intersubjective nature of the unfinished story technique, how the
politically astute “sustainable Native” subtext was a much larger part of the story and the collective action frame.

CREATING AN UNFINISHED STORY

I originally came to Walpole armed with 20, open-ended questions. I circulated these questions among a few locals asking for feedback. Many, many changes were suggested, including the complete removal of 5 questions. Of those 5, 2 indirectly sought information that necessitated the respondent’s evaluation of their identity in terms of ethnicity (e.g., Has your interest in the environment had an effect on how you think about the history or culture of Walpole Island?). More tellingly, 2 of the challenged questions sought commentary on other community members (e.g., Does your interest in the environment influence your views of other members of the Walpole Island community?). The reason for the lack of support for these questions was simple: Fostering dialogue that led to identity being purely defined by ethnicity was not acceptable and I needed to focus on the particularities that defined Walpole. One brief community story illustrates why this sentiment was conveyed. In this story, a botanist is out in the forests of Walpole and comes upon an elder. The botanist, naïve and audacious, interrogates the elder as to why he is there. My reading of this point was that my being there was the product of permission and the desire to exchange knowledge for the purposes of fostering understanding and support in the interests of community-based ways of knowing.

One particular event dovetailed with these criticisms and led to my employing the “unfinished story.” A local priest, Reverend Jacobs, who although serving in a nearby community, was born and raised on Walpole Island, listened to my account of the responses that I had received to my 20 questions, probably anticipating all of them. He then explained that despite the fact that extensive missionary activity had adversely affected the community, for example, Walpole has a number of residential school “survivors,” there was still tremendous denominationally based faith. In addition, the still powerful oral tradition in most Native cultures was also salient. He talked too about Sunday school and the use of parables for the purposes of instructing children. His point, create a process that allows the interviewee to complete a story by drawing on their individual perception, experience, and wisdom. What I gained was an intersubjective process that offered respondents an opportunity to clarify and express their position at a moment when their consciousness is potentially piqued or heightened by a combination of what was taking place in their community and my interest. The fact that I was a non-Native researcher interested in documenting the power of certain concepts (i.e., collective action frames) in the Walpole Island community was also important.
Having decided on this method, I jotted down thoughts on scraps of paper. What escaped consciousness was the effort to configure my identity in the field using the unfinished story. For example, one contained the following thoughts: “I will always think of this beautiful land where I lived for a short while” and another, “When I think of the community that is part of this land, I will return to a story that I can never finish.” Underneath this writing I later asked myself three questions: Should Walpole be mentioned? Should the story be finished? How detailed a story is necessary? Two short comments about how my identity, vis-à-vis Walpole Island and its residents, shaped these thoughts and questions. First, Walpole-as-place had put its indelible stamp on me, and I reasoned that identity needed to acknowledge “place.” Second and related, I was thinking that I would have liked to inscribe the contours of the landscape onto the page (i.e., the text itself) so that my feeling could receive instantiation.

The content of an unfinished story could, of course, vary across projects. Here, for example, is an abridged version of the unfinished story that I read aloud to interviewees:

There once was a [fill in with description but not the name of the person being interviewed] who lived in this small island community. This community has a very deep, rich history of which the residents of this community are very proud. This history reflects a unique group of people who believe that there are many things that are responsible for this community. One of these things is the beautiful natural world that surrounds it. There are blue waters and tall stands of straight trees. There is an abundance of flowers and plants that are bright and colorful. Many types of fish, birds, and other animals call this home. These things provide members of the community with many opportunities to make a living. There have been many struggles to maintain this community in the past. Today this [fill in with description of the person being interviewed] is one of a group of people who are involved in a new struggle. This struggle is to save the natural surroundings because outsiders have used this community as a dumping ground. In addition, some of the residents of this community have started to pay less respect to the natural world.

The unfinished story, a thinly veiled description of Walpole Island, was a respectful way to communicate the desire to exchange views equitably and ethically. I take seriously the fact that respondents often closed their eyes both in listening and in considering their responses, as an indication of interviewees’ interest. The inclusion of elements that make the community under study recognizable, while allowing for some distance from the “real,” made it plausible but not so explicit as to essentially force neighbors to comment on one another. This is an important consideration, especially when families coexisted for hundreds of years despite concerted efforts to divide neighbors to force people off reserve and into mainstream society. This includes, but is not limited to, the allocation of specific parcels of land on the reserve to some families only. This led to an unequal distribution of income and wealth among community members. The point is that values making reluctant any criticism
or blame protects against greater internal strife than already exists. The unfin-
ished story is a medium for respecting these decisions. These considerations,
among others, were based on the comments of two or three respondents who
acted as pretests. The pool out of which these folks were kind enough to con-
tribute also generated a list of potential interviewees for me; namely those
individuals who were acknowledged community environmental activists of
one kind or another.

The full storytelling/interview process is delivered informally to inter-
viewees, and the “interview” is recorded for transcription at a later date. As
mentioned, the interviewees “finish the story” based on their responses to
probing questions that will help the researcher complete the story. The replies
form the primary data that can be analyzed in its full context. I, for example,
would then proceed to ask six basic questions that structured the interviews:

1. Why would the person in the story care about the natural world?
2. Why would the person in the story make an effort to make the community aware
   of the lack of respect being given to the natural world?
3. How can the person in the story fix problems connected to a lack of respect for
   the natural world?
4. Why would the person in the story want to preserve the natural world of this
   community?
5. Why should the community in this story be made aware of the need to respect
   the natural world?
6. What should the community in this story do to fix any problems—to protect their
   natural world?

It is important to note that these questions were distillations of resident
comments on ones that I had created very early in my research (more on this a
little later). Nevertheless, I recognize the existence of a controlling structure to
these six questions that is contrary to the codesign objective and harmful to
the power and innovative nature of the unfinished story.

ON INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND
THE UNFINISHED STORY

The utility of the unfinished story as medium for disclosing information
on the contents of collective action frames is the topic of the next section.
Before going there, it must be understood how I see this exchange as changing
my ideas about the beneficial possibilities of intersubjectivity. My ideas on
intersubjectivity were Prussian; I believed that people did intersubjectivity by
constructing meanings while interacting. So, although I was attuned to the
antiauthoritative stance of postmodern thought, I had not found its focus on
“unshared” language particularly liberating nor its apolitical orientation
anything but conservative. Considering the construction of meaning in the
context of the unfinished story, I saw it as a shared symbolic activity with intersubjective properties that elicited information on the reconstitution of identity. Jackson (1998, p. 23) nicely captures the significance of these notions of intersubjectivity in the context of stories. It is especially useful here because he does so in the context of seeing stories as trajectories that are willfully impressed but not imposed upon our social interactions. The possibility of reconfiguring one’s identity is actually fostered by interaction because the trajectory is actively decoupled in the course of exchange.

Life stories emerge in the course of intersubjective life, intersubjectivity is a site of conflicting will and intention. Accordingly, the life stories that individuals bring to a relationship are metamorphized in the course of that relationship. Stories enable people to renegotiate retrospectively their relation with others, recovering a sense of self and of voice that was momentarily taken from them.

What the unfinished story method also adds, and this is a generally positive but also somewhat traumatic contribution, is a possibility that the researchers’ own self-identity will be destabilized. My role in the community and in the unfinished story was as the Other, an outsider helping interviewees become “knowing subjects” on the currency of their identity. To put it another way, the interviewee assessed my reaction to what was being said. The intersubjective nature of the unfinished story includes traces of this assessment. Exposure to such traces promotes the idea that intersubjectivity is a theorizing activity that contributes to the construction of a collective action frame by offering a guiding image of how things are now and might be improved in the future. This is consistent with Lemert’s (1993, p. 1-24) suggestions that for those without credentials, stories are both mode of theorizing and a basic survival skill. To pursue an understanding of the extent to which theorizing was indeed about survival, in the context of my work it is necessary to turn to the radically self-reflexive identity of the Ecological Native.

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ECOLOGICAL NATIVE

The unfinished story sessions are infused by the oppositional power of Native people’s relationship to the nonhuman world as it has been stereotyped. In brief, what others (Buege, 1996; Redford, 1991) have called “the ecologically noble savage” can be seen in its being enacted in argument for autonomous control of Walpole by its Native population. The power of this exchange exists because people can go on to live the histories they claim. And although Sider (1993) relates that history is largely a cognitive feat, what matters to Walpole residents is embodied experience. As innate “ecological stewards,” community members have recognized that at this moment, in the 100-year
history of the mainstream environmental movement, they can partially counteract a history of oppression by focusing on a “new” history that involves collective action. My being on Walpole and my asking the questions I did in the manner I chose to do so all speak to this judgment.

Two responses are memorable and illustrative. Ned openly questioned the community’s image of itself as coincident with the “ecological Native/sustainable community” stereotype, implying that Walpole Island residents have lost their unique Native qualities and are, therefore, at risk of assimilating to Whites. As a traditional healer and respected community member, Ned sees the past as a source of strength that bridges historical assets and contemporary needs by shaping a hybrid identity:

We are fighting a white man, and we have to fight him using white man’s rules. We need to learn these things. He can only think like a white man but we can think like an Indian and like a white man. Then we can start using those things that were given to us. We have to do something and not be afraid to do it because everybody is depending on it. The whole Great Lakes basin, not only Natives, but also white people and black people, everybody.

According to this quote (from the closing summation of an unfinished story interview), the Native identity is a knowing Native self based on special knowledge that is only available from the unique position of being Native in the late 20th century. This admission is fundamental to understanding the role of collective identity in social movements as well as the particular power of cultural antecedents to Native resistance. I believe, and this line of reasoning is not necessarily applicable to the residents of Walpole, that such radical reflexivity gains power as it is voiced.

On the other hand, Georgina, confident in both her and the community’s special ability to understand the nonhuman world, expresses how hard it is to move beyond her cultural comfort zone to the point at which one is able to understand the kinds of values that lead to polluted rivers.

All Natives have a special bond. I’ve grown up with it and it is natural to me. I have always had that responsibility as a woman, as a grandmother. It’s not something that was given to me, it has been my role since the day that I was born. I only know one way and I don’t know about Western science. I can only talk about who I am and my life as a community member. I think that all Native people protect, and it has always been their job. The Western way of politics is kind of awkward. Sometimes it doesn’t make sense because they are going to spill anyway; they [the corporations] have their minds made up.

These two responses supply the collective action frame with the following facts. White, corporate forces are responsible for the “pollution problem,” and more generally, are insatiable, desensitizing, and dislocating. These forces of homogeneity are attempting to redefine the river as part of the community as a “place.” They are at war with local organizing metaphors such as the phantasmagoric Thunderbird who, with a violent flap of its wings, is said
to have cultivated the deep but narrow channels that constitute the delta on
which Walpole Island rests. In other words, among the detritus that corporate
forces leave in its wake are both traditional and contemporary cultural
responses to the nonhuman world.

In opposition to this, the two respondents called on tradition, on what one
community member referred to as the “things that were given to us”—gifts
whose mention is designed to mobilize collective action via a deep connec-
tion to place. Part of this tradition calls for the continued relationship that
Walpolers and other Native peoples enjoy with the nonhuman world in defi-
ance of modern cultural currents. The key to the process of merging tradition
with current exigencies is what Sider (1993) describes as the “capacity of a
dominated people to attack their domination precisely in its own terms and
with its own symbols” (p. 99). The corresponding identity evolves from a cri-
tique of domination, an inequity that is the result of a larger modernist project
that causes anguish through violent disturbances to the natural world.

Nonnatives can relate. Hale (1995, p. 435) draws on Francis (1992) in relat-
ing the connections among contemporary social structure, environmental
despoliation, and the currency of Nativeness. Feeling an absence of the sacred
in modern life, many non-Natives look to Indian culture for values absent in
their own lives. The environmental movement has given a boost to this new
image by adopting the Indian as symbolic of a culture that lives in harmony
with the natural world. This is the new vanishing American, the Indian as
spiritual and environmental guru, threatened by the forces of consumer
culture.

The point that matters here is that the unfinished story provides a medium
for radically self-reflexive collective identity that was being projected in the
interests of a community-based social movement. This identity is historically
grounded in a fierce historical struggle to maintain community cultural
autonomy, acquire respect, and gain equality. I consider it radical for two rea-
sons. First, this identity reflects elements of what Trigger (1996) refers to as
“genuine traditional aboriginal notions regarding appropriate human rela-
tions with land and natural resources” (p. 65). The aspect of being Native is
self-consciously invoked according to an ancient, Native, cultural framework
that extracts values with roots embedded in interview references to “time
immemorial,” the “beginning of time,” and “always.” Second and related,
non-Native conceptions of Native people’s organic and intimate relationship
with the environment have been internalized as a source of oppositional
power for Native people (Hornborg, 1994; Nagle, 1996; Sider, 1993). In other
words, interviewees’ relationships to a nonhuman environment as an identi-
ty provide a background for demanding protection of the environment. This
“we-ness” is articulated around an emerging awareness of community expert-
tise and, cognizant of the potential for translating this knowledge into a politi-
cal strategy, calls for social action. The motivation behind the desire for funda-
mentally different forms of social and cultural relations is a deep respect for the nonhuman world.

My claim then is this: Community-based, collaborative efforts to cultivate resonance can be demonstrated in my work by tracing the development of the “sustainability/ ecological Native” collective action frame via the unfinished story. Refining a collective action frame in a way that resonates with the values and beliefs of Walpole Island culture protects Walpole Island’s natural and social heritage. The unfinished story permits moments of insight into points where “framing efforts strike a responsive chord” and forge solidarity (Snow & Benford 1988, p. 198).

Underneath this solidarity is the social compact of self-identity, fostered by the process of inventing or renewing traditions in the context of a social movement. It is reflective of self in society and constructive vis-à-vis maintaining or, in this case, changing the status quo. Through what was said via the unfinished story, the possibility for Walpole residents to use the new status of Native people as a strategic political move was revealed. The unfinished story is an intersubjective research moment promulgating the positive facets of radical self-reflexivity and voicing alternative prospect and scenarios via collective action.

ON THE POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE WORK

This article recognizes, considers, and provides the mechanisms for implementing a useful expilatory technique called the unfinished story. Additional features would have made this technique better. Relinquishing the control of this article to the authors who defined the storytelling aspects of this article would have been congruent with the collaborative environment that I was trying to create. Consistent with the desire to level power differences might have led to my allowing residents to construct the unfinished story themselves, the questions that brought it to completion, or both. The coauthorship of its write-up is another possibility. In addition, although I hope some trace of its existence is still in Walpole I did take the story with me, both figuratively and literally. Another shortcoming of this article is the limited effort to locate myself in the process, especially in terms of my own self-identity as it has been affected.

Nonetheless, particularly in its critical and theoretical self-reflective capacity, the unfinished story surpasses the standard question and answer format. In the research discussed in this article, the respondent becomes a narrator and a co-designer of the content, albeit to only a certain extent. In sum, the critical distance and self-assurance that other researchers have—researchers whose interpretations were guided by conceptual frameworks that defined the possible ways of knowing—was absent and this is good.
I am sure that the charge that I sought solace in theory can be leveled nonetheless, but if I did, it certainly did not have the same power in the field. The process of finding proof that indigenous Walpole Island traditions support social movement activity was a bit of a strawman and it could have made it possible to hide behind the theory. However, I wanted to conduct what I now understand to be “empowering research”: inquiry on, for, and with the people being researched. I wanted to engage in advocacy—to be committed to the participant’s position. Doing so meant confronting my naïve and unconscious portrayal of Walpole Island through a preexisting, Euro-Canadian model. Most simply, the environmentally astute activities of Native populations predate theory and my negotiated position in the research is to provide a stronger foundation for discovering how Walpole Island can teach other communities about the process of becoming politically astute about non-native theories about Native life. The unfinished story explained my role and assisted me in fulfilling it. It also allowed community members to mine the niche in the mainstream imagination reserved for the “indigenous environmentalist.” Valuing the exchange of stories rather than the “uncovering” of facts is familiar practice in Walpole. It deserves greater familiarity with researchers interested in collective action frames via the projection of oneself into a dialogue about how society “ought to look.”

NOTES

1. I recognize that my concern with collective identity and collective action is largely the product of my seeing the individualistic properties of Western culture as sponsoring faceless and nonliving forces. For Walpole Island residents, these concepts are not the likely starting place for expressing concerns about toxins in the water.
2. It is noteworthy that Walpolers had far less trouble with this idea than I, the product of my uncertainties about personal experiences having authority.

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Robert VanWynsberge completed a Ph.D. in sociology at the Bowling Green State University in 1997. His research has ranged from core social scientific theory and qualitative methods to specialty research interests in Native environmental justice, social movement organizations, personal narrative, critical thinking and service learning. He is currently a professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the Sustainable Development Research Institute of the University of British Columbia.
Analyzing the Researcher’s Work in Generating Data: The Case of Complaints

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This article investigates the researcher’s work in the coproduction (or not) of complaint sequences in research interviews. Using a conversation analytic approach, we show how the interviewer’s management of complaint sequences in a research setting is consequential for subsequent talk and thus directly affects the data generated. In the examples shown here, researchers sharing cocategorial incumbency with respondents may well provide spaces for research participants to formulate complaints. This article examines sequences of talk surrounding complaints to show how researchers generate complaints (or not) and handle unsafe complaints. Researchers are able to provoke specific types of accounts from respondents, whereas their respondents may actively resist the researchers’ direction. For researchers using the interview as a method of data generation, examination of complaint sequences and how these appear in interview data provides insight into how interview talk is coproduced and managed within a socially situated setting.

Researchers within the social sciences commonly utilize interviews as a means of data generation to investigate problems (Briggs, 1986). Indeed, Briggs (1986, p. 1) claims that it is estimated that 90% of all social science investigations use interview data. The ubiquitous use of interviews in the media has also been noted by Silverman (1993, p. 96; 1997, p. 248), writing about the Interview Society in which we are constantly bombarded with newspaper, radio, and television interviews claiming to enlighten us about the private lives of others. Atkinson and Silverman (1997, pp. 309-310) argue that within this Interview Society, researchers adopting an unreflective and uncritical approach to the use of interviews may well have a “spurious sense of stability, authenticity, and security” in their reliance on this form of data generation. Silverman (1993 cited in 1997) notes that the interview has become “central to making sense of our lives” (p. 248), and admits that his
“heart sinks” whenever he reads “yet another ‘open-ended’ interview study claiming to tell it like it is” (1997, p. 249).

Silverman (1997) and Atkinson and Silverman (1997) have questioned the romanticized view of interview accounts as representing authentic and direct contact with interviewees’ realities. This is echoed in Holstein and Gubrium’s (1995, p. 2) proposal for the “active interview.” These authors argue against the notion that “those who are curious about another person’s feelings, thoughts, or experiences” merely need “to ask the right questions” and the other’s “reality” will be theirs. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) argue that taking this position toward the examination of interview data ignores the complexity of the interview as a socially situated site for coconstructed accounts. Instead, the interviewer is left in the position of pursuing common sense accounts through the minimization of possible problems, such as “bias, error, misunderstanding, or misdirection” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 3).

This common-sense approach to interviews, Baker (1997, pp. 130-131) states, seeks to “investigate ‘interiors’ (states of mind) or ‘exteriors’ (descriptions of social settings) through a representational view of language.” Some researchers have sought to investigate interview data in different ways. For example, Baker (1997, 2000) has examined the use of membership categorization devices in interview data. Briggs (1986, p. 27) has advocated for methodological reform in the use of interviews and demonstrates how this might be achieved. According to Briggs (1986, p. 4), discussion of the interview setting should be included in the analysis, for by excluding it, “we have cleverly circumvented the need to examine our own role in the research process.”

In this article, we employ Holstein and Gubrium’s (1995, 1997) notion of the active interview, in which the interview respondent is viewed as an active subject employing a stock of knowledge, which they liken to “several different shifting vessels of answers” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 31), and the interviewer is viewed as active in corresponding ways. In using this analogy, Holstein and Gubrium note that it is not only a matter of shifting vessels but the simultaneous production of new vessels. The complex contents of the respondent’s stock of knowledge are intertwined with the identities partaking in the interview. (p. 31)

Utilizing excerpts from interview transcripts, we show in fine detail how the researcher and her respondent organize their talk to coproduce these shifting vessels of answers. Specifically, by employing a conversation analytic approach to data analysis, we investigate the occurrence (or not) of complaint sequences in a research setting. Here, we explicate the sequential organization of the talk, thereby illuminating the researcher’s role, and the detail of how shifting and new “vessels of answers” are made possible. As Scheurich (1995) has noted in his critique of Mishler’s (1986) postpositivist account of research interviews,
the “reality” of interviews is much more ambiguous, relative, and unknowable than Mishler assumes. Some of what occurs in an interview is verbal. Some is nonverbal. Some occurs only within the mind of each participant (interviewer or interviewee) but it may affect the entire interview. Sometimes the participants are jointly constructing meaning, but at other times, one of them may be resisting joint constructions. Sometimes the interviewee cannot find the right words to express herself or himself and, therefore, will compromise her or his meaning for the sake of expediency. (p. 244)

We wish to explore some of the ambiguities and resistances that occur in interview interaction. Although the tools we employ in our discussion cannot access the interior states of participants’ minds, we argue that this method of ethnomethodological analysis can view anew the “world-known-in-common” (Silverman, 1997, p. 250).

The implications of the work we undertake to demonstrate here are three-fold. First, we argue that the utilization of a conversation analytic approach to the analysis of interview transcripts effectively highlights how researchers provide interactional cues regarding the accounts that any interview respondent provides. Several questions concern us. How do researchers assist in the production of the speaking subject in interview settings? What conversational actions are subsequently produced? How might these be analyzed? In our investigation of these questions, we hope to produce an alternative reading to that provided by other forms of analysis (such as thematic or narrative analysis). Second, this type of analysis highlights some of the methodological and analytical issues surrounding the interview as a method of data generation discussed earlier (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Briggs, 1986; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 1997; Scheurich, 1995; Silverman, 1993, 1997). What this analysis contributes is one possible tool for researchers wishing to confront these issues by analyzing the interviewer’s contribution to the production of descriptive accounts. Third, this type of analysis offers researchers and readers an opportunity to reflect on and trouble various forms of analyses utilized in the social sciences and the ensuing representations found in interview studies.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Methods of analyzing data generated from research interviews have been well documented (see for example, Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Wolcott, 1994). A growing body of work utilizes the tools of conversation analysis to analyze data derived from research interviews (Baker, 1983; Rapley & Antaki, 1998). Baker (1997) points out three underlying principles in adopting an ethnomethodological approach to interview data. The use of conversation analysis in examining specific sequences of talk produced in research settings follows from such an approach.
Interviewing is understood as an interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge, including their knowledge about how members of categories routinely speak; (2) questions are a central part of the data and cannot be viewed as neutral invitations to speak—rather, they shape how and as a member of which categories the respondents should speak; (3) interview responses are treated as accounts more than reports—that is they are understood as the work of accounting by a member of a category for activities attached to that category. (p. 131)

In this article, we apply these three principles in explicating the work of the researcher in the production and management of complaints in research settings that use both interview and conversational formats. Transcript excerpts in this article are derived from two discrete data sets: a study of itinerant music teachers’ work conducted in Australia (Roulston, 2000a) and a study of language learning by English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers in the United States (Liljestrom, 2000). In each of these sets of data, complaint sequences were common.

We treat complaints as the focus of analytic interest for two reasons. First, as researchers, we (the first and third authors) neither consciously sought, nor anticipated the production of complaints as part of our respective research projects. However, examination of the data showed that such sequences were not only present, but ubiquitous. Therefore, it is of interest to us to examine further the production of such sequences. Rather than glossing over complaint sequences or omitting them altogether from the research report, we argue that it is beneficial to examine how such sequences might take place within the researcher’s work of generating data. Here, we do not treat complaint sequences as simply descriptive reports but moral accounts of worlds “known in common and taken for granted” (Schutz, cited by Garfinkel, 1967, p. 37). In this case, the worlds referred to are that of the music teacher and the second language learner residing in a foreign country. Second, we see the production of complaints by speakers as a form of moral accounting about the world—in such sequences of talk, speakers claim knowledge of the world as it is, and as it should or could be.

In the examples presented in this article the researchers’ cocategorial incumbency with respondents provides the basis to locate possible problematic matters within the research topics (here, music teachers’ work, and second language learning), and thus generates possible “spaces for complaint” in interview talk. The cocategorial incumbency of the researcher—of a group shared by the respondent—is significant to the talk constructed by speakers. In each of the cases considered in this article, the researcher brings to the research setting her knowledge and understanding regarding the topic of inquiry. It is hardly surprising then, that in transcriptions of talk presented here, the researcher is keenly aware of “potential problem areas” of respondents.

Our analysis centers on each researcher’s work in the generation of such complaint sequences via questions, formulations, assessments and chal-
Challenges. How does an interviewer generate the conditions for a particular activity—in this case, complaining? How do speakers invite, enter into, or avoid the conversational work of doing complaints? More broadly, our analysis addresses the question of how an interviewer is involved in the coproduction of some activity or phenomenon later noticeable in the data.

**THE RESEARCH INTERVIEW AS A SITE FOR THE GENERATION OF COMPLAINTS**

An investigation of how complaint sequences are formulated and managed within research interviews by speakers sharing cocategorial status has been accomplished elsewhere (Roulston, 2000b). A researcher sharing cocategorial status with her interviewees—as was the case in this research—is in a position in which she may be credited with the competence to adjudicate which matters are legitimately complainable. In the present article, we examine in detail the researcher’s work in the generation (or not) and management of complaints. We do this by way of four examples.

**DATA GENERATION**

Excerpts 1 and 2 presented here are drawn from audiotaped research interviews with two primary school music teachers from the case study phase of a 3-year project examining the work of itinerant primary music teachers in Queensland, Australia. The case study interviews were unstructured and wide-ranging, and as can be seen in the transcripts below, more informal and conversational in nature than many interviews. They may be better described as “research conversations,” although the asymmetrical interviewing format remains visible in the one-way issuing of questions.

Excerpts 3 and 4 are drawn from audiotaped research interviews with two South American students attending a language program in a university setting in the southern United States. The study was a 1-year project examining the factors affecting language acquisition of adult students. Again, the interviews were semistructured and open-ended with the purpose of eliciting detailed accounts related to attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about the students’ language learning. We begin our analyses with the assumption that the interviews from which these transcripts are excerpted are socially situated occasions in which speakers negotiate identities, display knowledge of cultural worlds, and characterize talk to jointly build a body of research knowledge. The production of complaints is, in these studies, part of each of these concurrent activities.
1. The Researcher Sets the Scene for a Complaint

In the first example examined below, we investigate how the researcher sets the scene for a subsequent complaint from her informant. This concerns the arrangements for the provision of noncontact time (NCT) for classroom primary teachers currently extant in Queensland schools. In general, music teachers are providers of 30 minutes of the mandated 2-hour weekly allotment of NCT for classroom teachers.³

Excerpt 1: “The Biggest Thing About This That I Hate”

At the point at which the following segment begins, the researcher and her informant, Tony,⁴ had been discussing his rehearsals for one of the two school concerts in which this music teacher had been involved in the week prior to the interview.

(1) [MSACC5/310-320/8.12.97]⁵

1. R did you get (. ) did you have (. ) a dress rehearsal for that? or
2. T yeah=
3. R =yeah=
4. T =yeah we went out on the Wednesday
5. R mm
6. T and we had an all day rehearsal [where the two grades would come out at a time on
7. R [yeah
8. T [the bus and we’d run through the item twice=
9. R [yeah
10. =yeah=
11. T =then they’d get on the bus and go back and another [two grades ‘ud come out and
12. R [yeah
13. T then um we’d (1.0) that was out there on Wednesday on the Thurs-
14. in the under covered area run right through to practise and then the Friday night we
did it
15. R yeah so you didn’t have run into problems with non-contact time
16. and stuff? they just
17. (. ) [didn’t worry about it?
18. T [well no (. ) no the teachers here didn’t worry didn’t complain
19. about it
20. R yeah mm
21. T so (. ) I was probably pretty lucky with that
22. R yeah
This section of talk begins with a straightforward query for information from Tony by the researcher. Tony’s account is produced from lines 4 through 15, with continuers (such as *yeah* and *mm*) supplied by the researcher. At lines 16 to 17, the researcher’s questions concerning Tony’s account introduce the notion of “problems,” through the assumption that classroom teachers’ assistance with concert rehearsals conflicts with the provision of NCT through specialist lessons. By asking Tony if he had any problems with these arrangements, the researcher is calling on Tony to provide an account of a possibility that he did not introduce in his account from lines 4 through 15. Here, the researcher has utilized her knowledge as a music teacher to propose that there could have been difficulties. Although Tony’s response indicates that in this instance he did not have problems, he does take up the notion of the provision of NCT as a problematic matter. This may be seen in the introduction of “complaint” as an issue—which he was probably pretty lucky to avoid. In this excerpt, especially at lines 16 and 17, the researcher has provided a space for Tony to make a complaint about NCT in relation to concert preparation—in essence, she has invited a complaint that is not supplied by her respondent. However, although Tony does not have grounds for a complaint in regard to concert preparation, at line 22 he embarks on an extended complaint sequence that locates the provision of NCT as a central concern in his work.

(2)

22. T but just that’s that’s the big thing that’s the biggest thing about
23. R [non-contact time
24. T it’s just yeah it’s non-contact time=
25. R =yeah=
26. T =you feel guilty if you’re sick you feel guilty you know it just makes ya
27. R they don’t replace †you when you’re away?
28. T they †don’t
29. R they should †though
30. T they don’t because they can’t †get anyone else that’s the thing
31. R [oh OK yeah
32. T they just can’t like the librarian went on long service leave he basically had to find
33. replacements at each school
34. (2.0)
35. R mm

Tony’s complaint relates to the problems created when provision of classroom teachers’ NCT is missed because of his absence from school. In Tony’s account, he feels guilty for being sick and missing classroom teachers’ NCT. At line 27, the researcher requests further information as to why Tony is not replaced when he is absent from school. It is clear in the following utterances that Tony’s explanation for his nonreplacement during absences is insuffi-
cient for the researcher (for example, “they should though,” line 29). At this point, the researcher is utilizing her professional knowledge as an experienced music teacher to inform her respondent about how his work should transpire. However, Tony’s experience does not match that put forward by the researcher (“they don’t because they can’t get anyone else that’s the thing”, line 30), and he holds to his account by providing a further example to support his complaint. At line 32, Tony begins an account concerning the librarian who had to find his own replacement teacher to take his long service leave. This example is used by Tony to convince the researcher that in his situation, specialist teachers are not replaced during absences.

At line 37, the researcher once again requests further information in regard to Tony’s situation. In her question at this point—that Tony should find his own replacement teacher when absent from school—there is a clear assumption that this is clearly a questionable matter requiring further account.

(3)

36. T he had to find replacements (1.0) so that like that’s the department’s job
37. R who (. ) what not the principal the teacher them selves
38. T yeah the teacher the teacher themselves had to oh they probably put it on the principal
39. but the principal=
40. R =yeah=
41. T =sort of said you know went up to the librarian and said look who do you know (. )
42. he had to rely on (. ) that (. ) see but that’s me with me see I hardly know anyone=
43. R =yeah=
44. T =and if they said to me find you gotta find another music person=
45. R =yeah=
46. T =so that was the thing that’s why I didn’t bother with this ten week Kodály course
47. because I knew that they’d do the same thing they’d say well you’ve gotta find someone to fill in for ten weeks and where would you find another music teacher

Tony provides a further account by elaborating on his example of the librarian (lines 36-42). Here Tony has taken the librarian’s experience as indicative of his own situation and applied it to himself. At this point in the interview, Tony describes how he has concluded that he will not be able to access a professional development course because of the difficulties inherent in finding one’s own replacement teacher (lines 46-48). Because Tony knows few music teachers and would be unable to find a replacement if absent, he cannot even consider participating in the 10-week professional development course for music teachers.
It appears here that Tony has little access to information regarding other avenues of action. Indeed, the researcher takes on the role of an “experienced teacher” advising a “novice teacher” in lines 49 to 51 by suggesting that a music adviser could be a possible source of information in regard to substitute music teachers.

(4)

49. R so there’s no sort of music person within this cluster (.) to to organise that kind of
50. T =I don’t know=
51. R =stuff like in Met East there’s someone who does that and well (.) I know they’ve
52. actually changed the regions now so they [won’t be called that any more
53. T [yeah
54. R but someone does ↑it (1.0) -hmm
55. T I’ve got (.) if they do I don’t know=
56. R =yeah=
57. T =no one’s told me and I hav- I spose I haven’t really asked anyone
but=
58. R =yeah=
59. T I just sort of thought well (.) they just haven’t bothered if they do
they just (.) if they
60. do they just get an ordinary teacher to take your class

In this first analysis, we have shown that the particular report that is subsequently generated from Tony’s complaint sequence (lines 22, 24, 26) was made possible by the interviewer’s “scene-setting” (lines 16-17). The analysis presented here displays some insight into the ways in which a researcher with insider information may provoke a complaint and elicit further accounts concerning conditions of work that might otherwise not have been related. In subsequent talk, the researcher’s professional knowledge enables her to challenge her respondent’s accounts which leads her respondent to produce further examples to convince his interlocutor of the “reality” of his experience. However, although a researcher drawing on professional knowledge may show a sensitivity to problematic areas—in this case, with respect to working conditions—and provoke complaint sequences, this need not be the case. In our analysis of further transcript excerpts, we show how a researcher’s attempts to extract complaints are unsuccessful.

2. The Researcher Fails to Generate Complaints

In this next section we analyze extracts of talk that concern a performance event involving Sussex State School, with which music teacher Paige Latter was involved during the 1997 school year. The Anzac Day ceremony was but
one of the numerous performance events in which Paige was involved during 1997. As with all teachers in the study, the researcher had been a witness to multiple aspects of Paige’s work, so was familiar with the events and people described. Excerpt 2 is taken from an audi taping conversation that took place during a visit made by the researcher to Sussex State School at the beginning of May. This account took place after the Anzac Day ceremony that the principal had organized for the local community. At the ceremony, the Sussex Senior Choir combined with the choir from the local Hadley High School was to sing at the Anzac Day ceremony hosted by the local Returned Servicemen’s League (RSL).

As was noted earlier in this article, the research interview is “understood as an interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge, including their knowledge about how members of categories routinely speak” (Baker, 1997, p. 131). This point applies in interviews between strangers but even more so in interviews undertaken as part of a long-term ethnographic study that involves a relationship being built and maintained. The point is not to try to erase such a relationship from research conversations but to look carefully at how the products of the interviews (for example, insights into the work of music teaching) are also products of the relationship.

Excerpt 2: A Very Supportive Principal

In this excerpt, the initial talk concerns an upcoming performance of the senior choir at a regional choral festival. At Line 1, the researcher is locating details of the performance time so that she can attend the event. However, Paige ignores the researcher’s question concerning an adjudicator and initiates a topic switch away from details concerning the choral festival to the topic of the principal, Graeme.

(5) [CSPS4/2.5.97]

1. R um (.) let me see (.) so what time does it start nine o’clock?
2. P [um I’ll be there earlier
3. R [have they got an adjudicator for that?
4. P Graeme’s been
5. (1.0)
6. R who who’s that?
7. P Graeme the principal=

Having attracted the researcher’s attention to her topic (line 6), Paige proceeds to provide further information in regard to Graeme.

(6)

9. P =he’s really involved in this now hhh- heh
10. R in [the festival]?
At line 9, Paige provides a statement that legitimizes her introduction of Graeme as a topic of discussion here—'he’s really involved in this now'. That the researcher has heard Paige’s statement as a topic requiring further account is evident at line 10, at which time she provides a number of questions to locate the context and meaning of this statement. Having taken Paige’s announcement of Graeme’s involvement in her life as pertaining to performances and extracurricular activities, the researcher proposes three ways in which Graeme’s involvement might occur—in the choral festival, in the choir, or with the planning of performances (lines 10, 12, 14). The researcher’s responses indicate that she has heard Paige’s self-selected topic as a “puzzle” requiring further account—she subsequently undertakes a search for the precise nature of the principal’s involvement in extracurricular work. Paige’s response to the researcher’s proposals is to discount each in turn and begin an account concerning Graeme’s support of her preparations for the Anzac Day performance that has occurred some days earlier. Here, the researcher has provided Paige with the opportunity to discuss further aspects of Graeme’s involvement in the festival, the choir or the planning of performances (lines 10, 12, 14). However, Paige uses this invitation to provide a lengthy account of the principal’s support for her work as exemplified in his assistance with preparation for the Anzac Day performance.

Later, at lines 32 and 34, the researcher moves to quantify the time commitment of Paige’s involvement in the Anzac Day ceremony, and in doing so, invites Paige to complain. Paige, whose concern is not with the time taken for either morning rehearsals, or with attending the Anzac Day ceremony, rejects this invitation. Rather than complaining, Paige provides an assurance that not only did she enjoy participating in the Anzac Day performance, she is glad that she did. Paige’s responses indicate that her allocation of time in the organization of the Anzac Day performance (both with rehearsals and on Anzac Day) is not an issue of concern. In fact, the Anzac Day performance is not a chore for Paige, but something that she both enjoyed doing, and in which she was glad to be involved.

(7)
35. P oh (1.0) there was there was um
36. (1.0)
37. David7 it finished at (nine) thirty
38. P yeah I was home by ten
39. R oh OK yeah
40. P um I I enjoyed doing [it I'm glad I did it um

At line 42, Paige returns to her original account of the Thursday rehearsals (introduced at line 16), this time adding further information. In this retelling of the earlier account (lines 28-31, not shown here), Graeme is portrayed as having attended the rehearsals for the Anzac Day ceremony, shown enthusiasm for the sound produced by the choirs, and collected the students from the high school after the rehearsal (lines 43-44).

At line 68, the researcher asks if the principal at her second school, Canning, knew about the rehearsals in which Paige was already involved on Thursday morning. This question invites Paige to complain about the lack of coordination between her two principals. However, Paige does not take this issue further, indicating that it is of no importance to her. Although she is unclear whether the Canning principal knew about the Anzac Day arrangements with which she was involved at Sussex (lines 68-73), she is clear about her assessment of Graeme’s involvement in them. At line 72, the researcher’s proposal “they don’t really coordinate with one another” once again invites Paige to complain about her two principals’ lack of negotiation over her work arrangements. However, after Paige provides agreement for the researcher’s proposal, she immediately switches the topic back to her story of Graeme’s support for her work. According to Paige, it “was very supportive” of him to come for 15 minutes of the rehearsal and then walk the choir back to school (lines 74-77).
fifteen minutes of the practice and then walking the kids back here
At line 80, the researcher pursues her original line of questioning initiated in lines 10 through 14—that is, the principal’s involvement in the organization of extracurricular activities—by asking Paige if Graeme has mentioned a local eisteddfod (music competition).

80. R has he mentioned the eisteddfod?
81. P the Caxton Eisteddfod?
82. R yeah
83. P no he hasn’t mentioned that
84. R [well it’s in May anyway so
85. P [it’s ( )
86. R and I’d say that the entries have closed now so you don’t have to worry about that one
87. P oh no
88. R but the [Sussex?
89. P [I would just say no anyway
90. R what about Sussex

Once again Paige presents a disavowal and reasserts her position as one in which she is in control of her production of performances (line 89, 91, 93, 95-96). Any “over-doing” of performances is Paige’s own responsibility (lines 95-96). Here, the researcher’s line of reasoning is both understood and rejected by Paige who notes that far from being forced into producing performances, she is given a choice about what she will do.

91. P see he does give me I do feel like I’m given a I am given a choice
92. R yeah oh OK that’s good
93. P yeah I don’t feel
94. (2.0)
95. P I don’t feel under pressure for like what I have to do except that I’m stupid enough
to say yes to a lot of things=
96. R =yeah=
98. P =so really=
99. R =yeah yeah=
100. P =”he’s probably got me anyway”

While Paige maintains that she is not under pressure from her principal for what she has to do, she also notes that her own willingness to be involved
plays directly into the hands of whatever plans the principal might have (lines 95-96, 98, 100). Responding to the researcher’s earlier questions regarding one of two local eisteddfods (lines 88, 90), Paige notes that she will probably participate not because she is under any compulsion to do so but because she desires to do so.

(12)

103. P Sussex Eisteddfod yes I [may go in that
104. R [that’s that’s third term isn’t it
105. P yeah I’ve been in that before
106. R yeah
107. (1.0)
108. P “I like doing that”

Throughout this talk, the researcher is faced with a seeming contradiction. To this point, she has taken Paige’s announcement that “Graeme is really involved in my life” (seen at lines 9-11) as an indication that this is in some way problematic. Yet, the researcher has been unable to locate either a problem, or indeed a complainable matter. For, in the arrangement of the Anzac Day performance as portrayed by Paige, Graeme’s support in rehearsal arrangements appears to be nothing short of exemplary.

At line 110, the researcher invites a possible troubles-telling (Jefferson, 1988) from Paige with her request for an account regarding how Paige feels pressured. In this section of talk, Paige compares her experience working with Graeme to that of working with the previous Sussex principal, Dylan. Paige’s initial assessment of the previous principal as being “just supportive” is downgraded over a number of utterances to the point where she concedes that “I guess there wasn’t support”. This is in contrast to Graeme, who has provided the necessary financial support to sponsor a visiting conductor for a weekend workshop. This three-step downgrade of how supportive Dylan was shows how, in the course of conversational interaction, assessments are revisable (see lines 114, 116, 118 below). Conversational environments for the production of assessments provide for this revision in ways that highly structured interviews and questionnaires do not. Furthermore, the production of the contrast is Paige’s work—not the interviewer’s—and it arises out of the free-flowing talk.

(13)

110. R mm so in what way do you feel pressured by it?
111. P I just feel this expectation see I’ve never had a principal who’s had high
112. expectations=
113. R =yeah=

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114. P =Dylan just (.) Dylan was just supportive of the [really not even su- I mean he was
115. R [yeah
116. supportive kind of (.) you know?=
117. R =yeah=
118. P there was no pressure there was no sense of there was no I guess really there wasn’t
119. support and no um no um there’s lots of support here (.) I’ve got this guy coming out
120. ((Paige continues with an account of the upcoming Saturday workshop for the senior choir with a visiting conductor which she has arranged with Graeme’s support))

Except for the fact that Paige feels that Graeme has “high expectations” (lines 111-112) of both her and her students, in this talk there appears to be no cause for complaint. It is evident in these extracts of the talk that Paige’s purpose in her announcement found at the beginning of Excerpt 2—that “Graeme the principal he’s really involved in this now”—is not to produce a complainable matter. What then, does Paige accomplish in her talk?

Paige repeatedly rejects the researcher’s proposals of performances and/or the principal’s power to arrange performances on her behalf as potentially problematic and complainable issues. Here Paige provides a portrayal of a principal who is actively supportive of her work together with a self-portrayal of a music teacher who is keen and willing to undertake the work of performance. Her only candidate as a problematic issue is one of high expectations—hardly a complainable matter for a keen and competent teacher. In this portrayal, whereas Paige’s previous principal showed little support for her work, and she felt under no pressure to perform, Graeme’s tangible support for her work presents her with an opportunity to produce performances befitting of high expectations.

3. The Researcher’s Questions Generate a Complaint

In the third example, we investigate how the researcher, as a second language learner and international student, provokes a complaint from her respondent, Manuel, also a second language learner and international student. At line 1 below, the researcher formulates a question concerning whether Manuel feels like he has “integrated into the American culture.” This question is immediately followed by hesitation from her respondent. These kinds of pauses have been found to commonly occur prior to disagreements (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 70).
Excerpt 3: “They are superficial”

(14) [11.99]

1. R do you feel like (.) you’re (.) getting integrated into the American culture now?
2. M mmm=
3. R =after being here for long?
4. M just a little bit=
5. R =just a ′ little bit? heh heh heh ok hhh-
6. M ′just a little bit′
7. (1.0)
8. R mm ″hm

The researcher’s repetition of Manuel’s utterance as a question followed by laughter at line 5 indicates receptivity to the implications of her respondent’s utterances at lines 2 and 4. That is, Manuel clearly does not, at this point, claim that he has integrated into American culture. At line 9, Manuel begins a description of ‘some friends’ who have “weird” conversations in which he is not interested (lines 9-19). Throughout this section, the researcher supports her respondent’s account with continuers (such as mm):

(15)

9 M I met some friends
10. (2.0)
11. M from here
12. R mm hmmm
13. M and (.) they’re so funny
14. R yeah?
15. M but (.) sometimes they talk (.) I mean their conversations are so (.) weird
16. R mm hm
17. M ′hhh I me(h)an they talk about (.) many different things but (.) I don’t care about it
18. R mm
19. M but it’s culture they like to talk about it

Here, Manuel portrays himself as distanced from his friends, who talk about “weird” (line 15) things in which he is not interested (line 17). At line 19, Manuel sums up his point by noting that his friends’ weird talk is the culture (referred to at line 1 by the researcher). Thus far, Manuel’s account functions as a justification for why he does not feel at home with American culture. At this point, the researcher might well have accepted Manuel’s account for his lack of fit with American culture. However, in succeeding questions, she pursues a further account from Manuel regarding the cultural differences between the United States and his country of origin (lines 20, 22). Manuel pro-
ceeds to provide a list of exemplar talk over lines 23 and 25 through 27 to illustrate the differences between the cultures that he has indicated in earlier talk (lines 9-19).

(16)

20. R you wouldn’t talk about that in [South America]?
21. M it’s not important
22. R no what kind of things? can you give an example?
23. M like u:::h(1.0) like u:::h how he ⌈dress
24. R mm hm
25. M he has money? (. ) he’s interesting she is beautiful she’s interesting
( ) she’s ugly
26. I don’t care about her ( ) she d- she doesn’t have the money or a big
 car or whatever ( ) we
don’t care about him
27. (5.0)
28. M we n- never talk about that in [South America]
29. R no
30. M just
31. (4.0)
32. M I don’t we don’t care about that
33. R “no”
34. M and some of ( ) some of my friends ( ) I don’t care about that ( ) and
 most of the people ( )
don’t care about it
35. (2.0)
36. M but I think here I met ( ) I have met many people from many differ-
 ent places ( ) they a-
 they always think about it
37. 38.
39.

In Manuel’s portrayal, his American friends judge others according to super-
ficial attributes (such as appearance, money, or material possessions), some-
thing that does not occur in his home country (lines 29, 33, 35-36). Here,
Manuel has effectively produced a contrast structure to highlight his com-
plaint about American culture. This contrast structure is formulated with
Extreme Case Formulations (ECFs) (Pomerantz, 1986) seen in line 29 (“we n-
ever talk about that”) and line 39 (“they always think about it”). Along with
contrast structures (Roulston, 2000b), ECFs have been found to be employed
in the formulation of complaint sequences (Pomerantz, 1986).

Throughout this sequence, the researcher provides few response tokens
and little support for Manuel’s account. The silences throughout this section
indicate that Manuel’s complaint has possibly been heard as unsafe by the
researcher (Roulston, 2000b). Indeed, Manuel provides an alternative
account at lines 41 and 43 below. Here, he downgrades the complaint, and
notes that he himself might be at fault for “meeting the wrong people” (line 41).
However, Manuel follows this with an additional complaint over lines 43
through 49 about the immaturity of “those people that I have met” (line 43).
38. M but I think here I met (.) I have met many people from many different places (.) they a-
39. they always think about it
40. (2.0)
41. M I don’t know if I (.) if I (.) if I’m meeting the wrong peo[ple or wha(h) it but
42. R [heh heh heh -hhh
43. M it’s a common between all those people that I have met
44. (2.0)
45. M they are superficial
46. (2.0)
47. M teenagers (1.0) not teenagers I mean people like twenty-two years old
48. R mm hm
49. M twenty-three
50. (3.0)

Once again, the researcher requests more specific information concerning his claims about American culture as expressed in the talk of his friends. Manuel’s response is to produce an explanation that acts as a strong claim and summation of his prior utterances. His assertion here is formulated in the strongest possible terms, once again using ECFs (see arrowed line).

51. R why do you think that is? why do you think they would be interested in that kind of
52. superficial thing?
53. M because
54. (3.0)
55. M → here every here (.) money is everywhere everybody has money (.) and they can credit
56. cards and they can buy what they want (.) they don’t pay for it yet
57. R “heh heh”
58. M hhh- they
59. R that would be nice heh heh “if you didn’t have to”
60. M yeah but (.) they care about superficial how you look like and what you really have in
61. your heart and your mind they care about what you wear (.) and what you have or how
62. you look like ( ) (good) person

The researcher does not take these claims seriously (lines 57, 59), and in addition to laughing, produces a facetious response to Manuel’s utterance. As Edwards (2000) has noted, ECFs are “factually brittle, in that an extreme or universalizing statement . . . risks easy refutation by a single exception,
invites being taken nonliterally, and may be treated as an index of the speaker’s attitude (subjectivity) rather than as a straightforward description of the world” (p. 352). In spite of the lack of support by the researcher, Manuel persists with his complaint at lines 60 through 62, providing a moral upshot. Here, Americans are portrayed as caring about superficial attributes of individuals as opposed to inner qualities. The implication in this talk is that there is a distinct—and unbridgeable gap—between the culture of his home country and that of the United States.

In this sequence, we have shown how the researcher can, by her questions, instigate a complaint sequence. In this instance, her questioning of the respondent’s versions of affairs and her request for a specific example (lines 20, 22) eventuates in him formulating a complaint sequence that is maintained when she requests him to provide an opinion as to why this might be the case (lines 51-52).

4. The Researcher Generates a Repaired Complaint

The excerpt below follows a series of complaints in which another South American student, Alfredo, provides a justification for why he does not have American friends and has not to this point immersed himself in American culture (this being a recommended strategy to language learners in the program he is taking). Here, Alfredo produces a dramatic story that he later employs as evidence for why he cannot socialize with Americans, whom he describes as “very ignorant” (line 21) in much of their behavior. In this instance, the complaint has not been initiated by the researcher, but follows a string of such complaints about American culture (concerning lack of family life and materialistic lifestyle). In this talk, Alfredo formulates a contrast structure in which he delineates the moral superiority of his home country’s culture (in which caring for family and friends is of primary importance) over American culture (in which caring for material pursuits is fundamental). In the sequence included here, Alfredo makes a specific complaint concerning lack of manners to illustrate his larger point—that his homeland’s culture is superior to that of the United States.

Excerpt 4: “And They Think the US Is the World”

(19) [11.99]

1. A last two weeks ago (.) I was (.) in the downtown (1.5)
2. I was sitting in a bar (.) drinking something (.) and two
3. guys were next to me (.) and they were drunk (.) and one
4. guy (.) took the other guy from from the here ((indicates forehead))
5. you know? I::: LOVE YA YOU ARE MY FRIEND they hit
6. each other with their with their=
7. R =forehead=
8. A = with their forehead three times [very hard and the fourth time he
9. R [oh my God
10. A he hit the other guy in the nose and he broke his nose
11. and he begun to to=
12. R =bleed?=
13. A =yes and and blode in all his face and when he saw that he took the
14. beer and he put it there all his beer in the nose and he
15. did that and he said HAHHAHHAH my friend where he when I

The researcher in this sequence shows her appreciation for Alfredo’s story at line 9, and assists him at line 12 by providing a sentence completion. Below, Alfredo provides the moral upshot of his story—that is, a complaint regarding the uncivilized behavior of Americans. In this account, they are “not very fashionable” (lines 19-20), “they don’t have good mothers good education” (line 19-20), and “very ignorant” in “their acting” (lines 21-22).

(20)

16. A saw that I I I I cannot understand why this country is the first
country?
17. in the world? you know because some many times many times
18. about my idea about American people is they are not very (.)
19. fashionable not very they they don’t have good
mothers=
20. R =mm=
21. A =good education you know so they are very ignorant
22. in many [many of their acting and also
23. R [mm mm hm mm
24. (3.0)

From lines 25-32 (not shown here) Alfredo elaborates on his claim that Americans are ignorant by proposing their lack of knowledge regarding his home country.

(21)

33. A =they don’t know wh- what language is speaking but (here)
34. they do not they just know about the US
35. R mm
36. A and they think the US is the world
37. R mm you don’t feel like they’re open minded and
38. A yes
39. R mm hmm

The researcher responds to Alfredo’s complaint by downgrading it substantially through her formulation at line 37. Rather than take up Alfredo’s pro-
posal of Americans being ignorant and bad-mannered, she rather formulates this as lack of open-mindedness ("you don’t feel like they’re open minded"). Although this utterance is phrased as a question, there is no concomitant rise in intonation. Rather than agree with her respondent, the researcher challenges Alfredo to agree with her formulation of his prior talk. Alfredo provides agreement to the researcher’s proposal at line 40, and then proceeds to reformulate his complaint. In this section of talk, shown below, Americans who are “not open minded” are no longer the subject of complaint, but rather, institutional features of American culture. In this talk, Americans appear as faultless individuals—victims of nation-wide problems (such as poor schooling and lack of family life)—for which they are not to blame.

(22)

40. A yes sometimes they try they try to [be friendly with foreign
    people
41. R [mm uh huh [mm
42. A but it’s not their fault (.) it’s not their fault
43. R mm mm hm
44. A maybe the the problem is their tk educational [program in the
    US
45. R [mm
46. A they don’t receive a good education in
47. R elementary [and high school
48. A [in the elementaria high school maybe they have to
49. improve their history and geography
50. R mm hmm
51. A about other countries not only about the US so it’s not their
52. fault and and also (2.0) their parents never have time to [to teach
53. R [mm mm mm
54. A good [moral good moral they they never go to to eat together=
55. R [mm mm
56. R =mm
57. A in the house with the mother the children and you have to use
    the spoon
58. like that and you have to get the knife like that and [they they don’t
    have
59. R [mm
60. A [that they they just eat pizza sandwich or hamburger every night
61. R [mm [h
62. A because the mother is very tired to very tired to prepare
    something=
63. R =mm hmm=
64. =and they used to eat in the high in their in their school their
    parents
65. eat near the office and the mother near the job too= 
In this sequence of talk, the researcher’s formulation of Alfredo’s prior complaint sequence has resulted in substantial reformulation of the complaint. Here we see that Alfredo’s previous complaint concerning Americans as “ignorant” has been transformed into an account of Americans as ignorant for good reason. In this account, Americans are unable to learn good manners from their parents in the home (because families do not eat together) or in schools (due to a poor education system). Whereas Alfredo had previously used his story of two drunken friends in a bar to illustrate his moral point that Americans are bad mannered and ignorant, the researcher’s formulation at line 37 has provoked an account of Americans as “not-to-be-blamed” due to circumstances beyond their control. Alfredo’s sensitivity to the researcher’s hearing of his talk as morally accountable is displayed much later. After a lengthy sequence of talk in which he provides detailed accounts of the dietary preferences in his homeland (“good” food such as rice, beef, vegetables, and soup) as compared to that in America (“bad” food such as pizza and hamburgers), he provides a moral upshot of his talk as illustrative of cultural differences.

In contrast to his earlier assessment of Americans as “very ignorant” in much of their behavior, Alfredo has repaired his account to that of merely “cultural difference.” In his utterance in lines 157 and 158, he provides this as support for his claim that this is perhaps why he does not feel “real comfortable” in American culture.

In this excerpt, we have shown how the researcher’s formulation of a respondent’s talk may result in considerable repair of a position displayed in
CONCLUSIONS

In these analyses, it becomes apparent that the participants are actively engaged in a collaborative process in which meanings are constantly being negotiated and agreed upon. Dingwall (1997) points out that an interview respondent is concerned to demonstrate “his or her competence as a member of whatever community is invoked by the interview topic” (p. 59). The socially constructed data are “created by the self-presentation of the respondent and whatever interactional cues have been given off by the interviewer about the acceptability or otherwise of the accounts being presented” (Dingwall, 1997, p. 59). Through the use of questions, formulations, assessments and acknowledgment tokens, a researcher shows his or her ongoing work in the process of data generation. As we have shown in this article, a researcher may provide the necessary space for a complaint (Excerpt 1); request justification for an account, thereby producing a complaint (Excerpt 3); or challenge a complaint, provoking its withdrawal and reformulation (Excerpt 4). However, at times a researcher’s expectations for a particular type of account may not match that produced by the respondent. In the case of Excerpt 2, the respondent skillfully manages to counter any invitations to complain. These are merely four possible actions among a multitude. We present this examination of the interactional work of researchers in sequences surrounding complaints in research interviews by way of example to illustrate the finely tuned and turn-by-turn work in the doing of any conversational activity. Further research could investigate the researcher’s work in the production of other conversational activities such as lists (Jefferson, 1990), troubles tellings (Jefferson, 1984, 1988) or atrocity tales (Dingwall, 1977).

The excerpts of talk examined here show how a researcher is able to test a complainable matter gleaned from other informants with other research participants with more (as in the first example of noncontact time), or less success (as in the second example of principals’ involvement in extracurricular work). As a member of the very group whom she is interviewing (for example, a second language learner), she may also be seen by her respondents as a possible recipient of complaints concerning an issue taken to be shared in common (such as cultural difference). As both Drew (1998, pp. 323-324) and Sacks (1992, vol. 2, p. 296) have noted, speakers actively choose recipients for complaints. This is a significant feature for the talk analyzed here. It is difficult to imagine, for example, Manuel and Alfredo producing the talk seen in Excerpts 3 and 4 in this article with an American interviewer. These speakers’ talk is designed specifically for a particular kind of interviewer—in this case,
one who is also a second language learner, and international student. (See Ryen & Silverman, 2000, p. 119, for a further example and discussion of a “recipient-designed activity.”)

Use of an ethnomethodological approach and the analytic tools of CA reveal how particular descriptions concerning any given topic are generated in a research interview. In the first example, we showed how it is possible for a complaint to be generated from an account in which there was initially no complainable matter. In the second example, we show how a researcher might work repeatedly to generate a complaint, yet still not succeed. By not complying with invitations to complain, we see the interview respondent here displaying a strong sense of agency. This serves in turn to provide stronger evidence for the respondent’s views than if such noncompliance were not elicited. In the third example, we show how a researcher may generate a complaint through her pursuit of an example to illustrate prior (noncomplaining) talk. Finally, through formulation of her respondent’s talk, a researcher might provoke a complaint to be substantially reformulated (as in the fourth example).

One possible response to the findings presented in this article is to instruct interviewers not to converse with their informants, or provide formulations or assessments of preceding talk. Certainly, if one takes a phenomenological approach to interviewing (cf. Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989), this is a potential strategy for researchers. However in extended ethnographic studies, such an approach may be difficult to sustain. Exclusion of conversational formats of talk by researchers in informal settings would likely result in “wooden” interviews, because respondents seek direction from interlocutors as to the nature and topic of talk.

Rather than take a positivist approach to the research interview that requires that researchers need only be “properly trained” to uncover and/or recover the hidden meanings of interview respondents, we aim in this article to demonstrate an alternative approach to data analysis. Scheurich (1995) has critiqued both positivist and postpositivist views of research interviewing arguing instead for a postmodernist perspective that views the interview interaction as “fundamentally indeterminate” (p. 249). Scheurich (1995, p. 249) argues that in analysis, rather than create a false order in the representation of the “radical, indeterminate ambiguity or openness that lies at the heart of the interview interaction,” researchers should (a) “highlight the baggage” they bring to the interview, and (b) “foreground the open indeterminacy of the interview interaction” (p. 250). Highlighting the baggage and witnessing how co-incumbents speak of things allows the analyst to view anew the “world-known-in-common” (Silverman, 1997, p. 250).

In this article, we have demonstrated one alternative approach to the analysis of interview talk. Through the analysis of turn-by-turn interaction, the baggage brought to the interview by the researcher is immediately high-
lighted. Furthermore, this approach to data analysis provides one way of investigating the shifting, complex, and indeterminate nature of interview talk. This analysis of talk teaches us that interviewers and interview respondents actively coproduce data as materials for analysis in research projects. The approach we have used instructs us as researchers and readers to reflect carefully on the representation of interview accounts found in the social sciences, and more widely in our Interview Society (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Here we have shown some of the complexities surrounding the production of speaking participants and the difficulties inherent in treating accounts as authentic and stable descriptions of “states of minds” and the world “out there.”

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Victoria, November 29 to December 2, 1999, and the 14th Annual conference on Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies, January 12-14, 2001, Athens, Georgia.

Transcription conventions used as follows:

| Teacher | T (Tony) |
| Researcher | R |
| ( ) | words spoken, not audible |
| ( ) | transcriber’s description |
| [ ] | two speakers’ talk overlaps at this point |
| = | no interval between turns |
| ? | interrogative intonation |
| (2.0) | pause timed in seconds |
| () | small untimed pause |
| th::en | prolonged sound |
| why | emphasis |
| YES | louder sound to surrounding talk |
| heh heh | laughter |
| the(h)n | word spoken in laughing voice |
| -hhh | in breath |
| hhh- | out breath |
| ‘little’ | softer sound to surrounding talk |
| -really | rising intonation |

2. Overviews of conversation analysis may be found in Goodwin and Heritage (1990), Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), Psathas (1995), and ten Have (1999).

3. See Roulston (1999) for further details concerning the implementation of NCT.

4. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

5. Transcription conventions appear in Note 1 of the article.
6. Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Day is a national day of commemoration for the sacrifice of armed servicemen and servicewomen observed annually on April 25th.

7. Paige’s student teacher.

8. Canning was the second of two schools that Paige taught at each week.

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Memory-Work: The Method

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Memory-work is a social constructionist and feminist research method that was developed in Germany by Frigga Haug and others explicitly to bridge the gap between theory and experience. It provides a way of exploring the process whereby individual women become part of society, and the ways in which women themselves participate in that process of socialization. It is a group method, involving always the collective analysis of individual written memories. It is feminist in being explicitly liberationist in its intent. The use of memory-work as a method in feminist social research has become well established in Australia and New Zealand. Increasingly, its use as a qualitative research method has come to challenge conventional mainstream research practices. However, for feminist researchers too, the method brings with it many fascinating dilemmas and issues of both a theoretical and methodological nature. This article identifies some of those issues.

Memory-work was developed by German feminists and socialists Frigga Haug and others and published in Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory (1987). The members of the collective had a history of involvement in the Women’s Liberation Movement with Frigga Haug among the founders of the Socialist Women’s Association (Sozialistischer Frauenbund). The women also worked with the independent Marxist journal Das Argument. An achievement for the women at Das Argument was the establishment of an autonomous women’s editorial board as a result of their concern at the few women contributors to the journal and the tangential way in which women’s issues had been addressed. The women’s aim was that of “reconstructing scientific work along feminist lines, and that of remodeling Marxism to open up a place within it for issues concerning women” (Haug et al., 1987, p. 23).

The collective’s first attempts at memory-work are presented in Volume 1 of Frauenformen (Women’s Forms) where the group researched feminine socialization. This work continued with further research into sexuality as a form of socialization. The latter, Sexualisierung: Frauenformen 2, published in 1983, is the original German version of Female Sexualisation. The English translation was published 4 years later, with Frigga Haug as principal author. Haug also discussed the method in Beyond Female Masochism: Memory-Work and Politics (1992).
In the mid-1980s, Haug spent some time at Macquarie University in Sydney as a visiting scholar and introduced the concept of memory-work. During that time, a number of women became very excited about the potential use of the method and began to try it out. In particular, June Crawford, Susan Kippax, Jenny Onyx, Una Gault, and Pam Benton, also known as the SPUJJ collective, conducted a 4-year study of the social construction of emotion, using the method, resulting in the book *Emotion and Gender* (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992). In the process, they developed, modified, and documented the method further. This group was more explicit in the procedure of the method than Haug et al. (1987) had been. It seems that most of those in Australia and New Zealand who have used the method have, in addition to referring to Haug et al. (1987), turned to the rules/guidelines as presented by Crawford et al. (1992).

Crawford et al. (1992) explained, “The underlying theory is that subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self” (p. 37). The construction of self at any moment plays an important part in how the event is constructed. Because the self is socially constructed through reflection, Haug et al. (1987) used memories as their initial data, hence the name of the method. Memory-work has the benefit of enabling the researcher to tap into the past. As Haug et al. argued, “everything remembered constitutes a relevant trace—precisely because it is remembered for the formation of identity” (p. 50). Crawford et al. (1992) referred to this act of reflection as one’s self engaging with one’s memories, having a conversation with them and responding to them. As argued by Shotter (1984), it is through memory that “past specificaly activities are linked to current specifiability—which makes for intentionality, and gives a ‘directionality’ to mental activities” (p. 208). Shotter’s argument for human agency is based on the ability of humans to reflect. To quote Haug et al. (1987),

The very notion that our own past experience may offer some insight into the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing relations, thereby themselves reproducing a social formation, itself contains an implicit argument for a particular methodology. If we refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures, or to the social relations within which we have formed us, if we search instead for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our past experience, then the usual mode of social-scientific research, in which individuals figure exclusively as objects of the process of research, has to be abandoned. . . . Since however we are concerned here with the possible means whereby human beings may themselves assume control, and thus with the potential prospect of liberation, our research itself must be seen as an intervention into existing practices. (pp. 34-35)

The method is thus explicitly liberationist in its intent. Haug et al. (1987) stressed the active participation of individuals in the “socialization” process. They emphasized, “The question we want to raise is thus an empirical one; it
is the 'how' of lived feminine practice” (p. 33). In the process of answering that question, it is possible to reassess and reconstitute the feminine self within current social practices.

Memory-work is a feminist social constructionist method in that it breaks down the barriers between the subject and object of research. Everyday experience is the basis of knowledge. Crawford et al. (1992) explained, “This collapsing of the subject and object of research, the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’, constitutes or sets aside a space where the experiential can be placed in relation to the theoretical” (p. 41). The academic researcher positions herself with the group and becomes a member of the research group. The researched became researchers, thus eliminating the hierarchy of “experimenter” and “subject.” Haug et al. (1987) referred to the participants as coresearchers. They defended their commitment to subjectivity against criticisms that such findings cannot be generalizable.

Since it is as individuals that we interpret and suffer our lives, our experiences appear unique and thus of no value for scientific analysis. The mass character of social processes is obliterated within the concept of individuality. Yet we believe that the notion of the uniqueness of experience and of the various ways in which it is consciously assessed is a fiction. The number of possibilities for action open to us is radically limited. We live according to a whole series of imperatives: social pressures, natural limitations, the imperative of economic survival, the given conditions of history and culture. Human beings produce their lives collectively. It is within the domain of collective production that individual experience becomes possible. If therefore a given experience is possible, it is also subject to universalization. What we perceive as ‘personal’ ways of adapting to the social are also potentially generalizable modes of appropriation. (Haug et al., 1987, p. 43)

THE METHOD

There are 3 phases of the method in its basic form. In Phase 1 the individual’s reflections indicate the processes of constructions. Phase 2 involves a collective examination of the memories in which the memories are theorized and new meanings result. The essence of Phase 2 is the collective searching for common understanding, with the method allowing for the social nature of the construction of the memories to be realized. These first two phases reflect a duality of process such that

The two foci of memory-work capture something of the duality of self. The self talking with itself is phase 1 and responding to itself as others respond to it is phase 2 (Crawford et al., 1992, p. 40).

However, the order of the two phases do not imply that the individual construction is logically or temporally prior to the social. At all times the interpretation of meaning is neither subjective nor objective but intersubjective.
Human agents are also social beings, persons. Indeed, their agency depends on them being social beings as Crawford et al. (1992) explained,

The meanings of actions are not found in the actor’s head but in the common meanings which she/he negotiates in interaction with others—both then at the time of the episode and now in reflection. The memories of events are collectively reappraised. Memory-work makes it possible to put the agent, the actor, back into psychology—in both method and theory—without falling into psychological individualism. (p. 53)

The following is a description of the procedural steps as used by Crawford et al. (1992). The procedure has been subsequently adopted by most, but not all subsequent work in Australia and New Zealand.

*Phase 1* concerns the writing of a memory. The five basic rules (from Haug et al., 1987) are as follows:

1. Write 1 to 2 pages about a particular episode, action, or event (referred to by researchers as a *trigger* or *cue*).

   The writing of the memory has a number of benefits. It provides a discipline for the group, the group remembers more through writing and it gives the everyday experiences of life a status, which is considered of particular importance for women.

2. Write in the third person using a pseudonym.

   The advantage of writing in the third person is that the participant can create personal distance, and view the memory from the outside. This helps to avoid justification of the experience.

3. Write in as much detail as possible, including even what might be considered to be trivial or inconsequential.

   By asking for the trivial, it is hoped to avoid an evaluation by the participants of what was important or unimportant. Such an evaluation might well be socially defined.

4. Describe the experience, do not import interpretation, explanation, or biography.

   Interpretation smoothes over the rough edges and covers up the absences and inconsistencies that are crucial elements of the analysis. The selection of a suitable trigger topic is vital, but difficult. In particular, a conventional topic is likely to produce a conventional, well-rehearsed response. The trick is to produce the more jagged stuff of personal lived experience.

*Phase 2* also proceeds through a set procedure (as identified in Crawford et al., 1992, p. 49):
1. Each memory-work group member expresses opinions and ideas about each written memory in turn.

2. The collective looks for similarities and differences between the memories. The group members look for continuous elements among the memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent. Each member should question particularly those aspects of the events that do not appear amenable to comparison, without resorting to biography.

3. Each member identifies cliches, generalisations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor, etc. This is one way of identifying the markers of the “taken-for-granted” social explication of the meaning of recurring events.

4. The group discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings, and images about the topic, again as a way of identifying the common social explication of meaning around the topic.

5. The group also examines what is not written in the memories (but that might be expected to be). Silences are sometimes eloquent pointers to issues of deep significance but are painful or particularly problematic to the author.

6. The memory may be rewritten.

This collective analysis aims to uncover the common social understanding of each event, the social meanings embodied in the actions described in the written accounts, and how these meanings are arrived:

The collective reflection and examination may suggest revising the interpretation of the common patterns, and the analysis proceeds by moving from individual memories to the cross-sectional analysis and back again in a recursive fashion. … In this way the method is reflexive. It generates data and at the same time points to modes of action for the co-researchers. (Crawford et al., 1992, p. 49)

In Phase 3, the material provided from both the written memories and the collective discussion of them, is further theorized. This phase is essentially a recursive process, in which the insights concerning the “common sense” of each set of memories is related back to the earlier discussions and to theoretical discussions within the wider academic literature. Phase 3 is usually done by one of the coresearchers as an individual (academic) exercise, though with drafts of this process subject to further discussion by other members of the collective.

**RECENT APPLICATION OF THE METHOD**

Memory-work is growing in popularity as a research method by those seeking a method that fits with a social constructionist, feminist paradigm. Some have taken it further into a postmodern paradigm. Although aware of the method’s use in the United States (e.g., Kaufman, Montgomery, Ewing, Hyle, & Self, 1995) and Europe (e.g., Laitinen & Tihonen, 1990; Schratz, 1996; Schratz, Walker, and Schratz-Hadwich, 1995; Sironen, 1994) as well as the original work in Germany, the focus here is on developments in Australia and
New Zealand. Those using the method come from diverse disciplines and fields of study, such as sociology, psychology, education, nursing, tourism studies, leisure studies, management, and marketing. The method has primarily been used in higher degree research, most notably, doctoral work, although some women have used the method in nondegree research and a handful have employed it for teaching purposes.


While the above researchers have been committed to the basic ideology and tenets of memory-work, the various disciplinary bases, subject areas, and approaches of the researchers have meant various adaptations of the method. One such variation is collective biography. Davies et al. (2001) explained the term collective biography as follows:

It is “biographical” in that it draws on memories of the lives of particular individuals. It is “collective” in that the process through which the stories are told and written and analyzed is one which reveals the ways in which we were (and are) collectively produced as (sometimes) coherent subjects, experiencing ourselves as “individual” and “autonomous.” Through the processes of talking and listening, of writing and rewriting, the edges that mark off the texts of ourselves, one from the other, are blurred. (p. 169)
Haug et al. (1987) have avoided a method that is “autobiographical” or “biographical” considering such an approach implies a logical development of the individual from childhood into adulthood, however, others have found the term useful. Gannon (in press) explains,

The term, “collective biography” is useful because it both describes the method of working with personal stories and the oxymoronic implication of the phrase foregrounds the tension between the individual and the collective that is both the crux of the method and the source of its dilemmas.

In her alternative theorizing of collective biography, Davies (1994) has developed four phases. Preceding the collection of the written memories, is a phase in which the group chooses a topic and then discusses it in terms of everyday “cultural knowledges” and personal remembered stories. In this first phase of “talking story,” submerged or forgotten stories and details often emerge through the process of the collective oral storytelling. Often these stories, those which take the teller by surprise, subsequently become the written memories rather than those familiar ones that were initially recalled.

Haug et al. (1987) acknowledged, in the original text, that memory-work could be/should be developed further.

The diversity of our methods, the numerous objections raised in the course of our work with the stories, and the varied nature of our attempts at resolution, seemed to suggest that there might well be no single, “true” method that is alone appropriate to this kind of work. What we need is imagination. We can, perhaps, say quite decisively that the very heterogeneity of everyday life demands similarly heterogeneous methods if it is to be understood. (p. 70)

SOME ISSUES

The above outline of the method itself glosses over the many issues that arise in its use. Some of these were explored in detail by Haug et al. (1987), or by the SPUIJ collective (Crawford et al., 1992). Other issues have become more problematic in subsequent applications of the method. These have lead to other modifications in the method.

The method requires the active engagement of all members of the group. As Haug et al. (1987) noted, “Indeed memory-work is only possible if the subject and object of research are one and the same person. Even notions of `subject’ and `object’ had to be problematized in our work, amongst other reasons because they posit both as fixed and knowable entities, neither of which is subject to change” (p. 35). The process of research is a collective one, with joint and collective responsibility for the outcome. However this collective process creates several dilemmas.

One dilemma concerns the paradox of the uniquely personal written memories that are nonetheless “potentially generalizable modes of appropri-
ation." It raises the question of the status of the individual’s construction when that is challenged and reconstituted by the collective analysis. Must there be a consensus in Phase 2? If the author of the memory refuses such intersubjective analysis of her experience, how is the collective to handle such refusal? More important, the issue is that of respecting diversity in the social construction process, as well as commonality (see Stephenson, 2001a; Koutroulis, 2001). Stephenson (2001a) is concerned that the emphasis on the “collective subject” has lead to an “overemphasis on identifying commonalities between group members’ positions and ideas, at the expense of interrogating difference.”

The collective process that assigns joint responsibility for the outcome, itself has clear roots in the feminist admonition against the objectification of women’s experience, and the appropriation of that experience by male researchers. However, the very act of requiring joint “ownership” of the process, also places potential limits on its effectiveness as a research methodology. In the work of Haug et al. (1987), all members of the collective were social researchers, professionals, or students. The women had come to Das Argument either through the Socialist Women’s Association in Germany or through courses on Marx’s Capital at the Free University in West Berlin. Thus they were all highly educated and politically active women. Similarly, the SPUJJ collective consisted of highly educated Australian academic women. The SPUJJ collective did, in addition to its own work, facilitate the establishment of other memory-work groups, for the purpose of incorporating those memories and collective discussions into Phase 3 analyses. However, the question remains: To what extent is it possible for a group of nonacademic women to meaningfully share ownership in the process? And what if one of those women (as in Frigga Haug’s case) claims authorship of the resulting publication?

In practice, it is usually one particular researcher who uses the method for purposes of gaining a qualification, or in order to publish a paper. There is a host of practical, theoretical, and ethical issues attached to this situation. What then is the motivation of other members of the collective? If they are trying to “please the researcher,” does this affect the quality of the material? How is their contribution adequately represented? If the material is genuinely collective, how can one person claim ownership as a necessary condition for the award of a research degree? If the individual researcher is primarily involved at Phase 3, how does she integrate the material from Phases 1 and 2? (See for example, Cadman et al., 2001; Ingleton, 2001). Gannon (in press) created new poetic texts to resolve the methodological dilemma.

The method relies on memories. Memories are notoriously unreliable. This has been pointed out as a major methodological flaw, by positivist researchers. Those using the method are less concerned about this charge. As Crawford et al. (1992) note,
The memories are true memories, that is, they are memories and not inventions or fantasies. Whether the memories accurately represent past events or not, however, is irrelevant; the process of construction of the meanings of those events is the focus on memory-work. (p. 51)

Although the product of memory-work is clearly “subjective” rather than “objective,” the collective process of analyses ensures that the meanings derived are “intersubjective.” Although the intersubjective analysis of memories may be fully justifiable within a postmodern or social constructionist paradigm, the arguments are not so convincing to positivist or traditional editors and reviewers. What is the appropriate format and arena for the publication of memory-work studies?

Other issues have emerged as the method is transposed to other contexts and used for other purposes. Some of these issues have both practical as well as theoretical importance. For example, how can/should the method be used with participants of different ages (Small, 2001), or with working class women or with women from different cultural backgrounds? Does the method work differently for feminist and nonfeminist groups of women? Does the method always have the potential to liberate? How do the group dynamics affect the collective theorizing? Can men use the method as effectively as women, and if so, are we still talking about a feminist method? Is there a limit to the kind of trigger that can be used in eliciting memories? Are there dangers in using memory-work with highly sensitive material, or traumatized individuals? Farrar (2001) in particular, identifies the limits of deconstructing painful and personal material.

The development of memory-work was specifically liberationist in its intent. That is, it provides the opportunity for women to “refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures” (Haug et al., 1987). Yet, the method itself has generated a set of rules of application. Johnston (2001) explores participants’ layered memories, which represent what she calls “the texture of the everyday.” She claims that “Many of these layered stories can be seen as evidence of the everydayness of crisis, and of the frightening power of ‘the general training in the normality of heteronomy’—the normality of external control, of other people’s rules” (p. 36). She sees a possible contradiction in how we go about doing memory-work with its own set of rules and the strength of the method that is supposed to help us explore the normality, including other people’s rules. Perhaps we are simply exchanging one form of heteronomy for another.

We would argue that memory-work, the method, has demonstrated considerable strength and application in a range of research sites well beyond its original focus. The method has matured to a point at which a critical reflection of its strengths and limitation is needed. Those who have chosen to use the method have been constantly challenged by the very principles that underpin it. Cadman et al. (2001), a collective of 11 women who employed memory-work to study memory-work, highlighted how they managed the key princi-
ples of memory-work and explained their uncertainties and dilemmas as evidence of their own subjectification.

In dealing with these issues, those who have employed the method have at times modified the method’s use but always come to a deeper appreciation of its potential. This potential can perhaps best be summarized in the words of Davies (1994). In memory-work, researchers “spin the web of themselves and find themselves in the act of that spinning, in the process of making sense out of the cultural threads through which lives are made” (Davies, 1994, p. 83).

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(Re)presenting the Collective Girl: A Poetic Approach to a Methodological Dilemma

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This article identifies the salient characteristics of collective memory work and collective biography research. Methodological dilemmas that can arise in the course of the research are identified and an argument is made in favor of imagination and creativity as essential elements of any effective response. Particular reference is made to a collective biography project completed by the author where she (re)presented the collective texts in the form of poetry.

In recent years, feminist researchers in diverse locations and disciplines have worked with methodologies based on the original collective memory work presented as Female Sexualisation by Frigga Haug and her colleagues (1987). In this article, I begin by locating my own work within a strand of collective memory work that is also called collective biography by its practitioners. My own use of the methodology has been within a larger study of feminist writing practices and thus has entailed an acute sensitivity to issues of power and authority. To a degree, power disparities are inherent in all academic contexts and therefore always impact on the work of the collective memory researcher. Further to this, in my own project, particular methodological dilemmas emerged relating to how I could ethically present, or rather represent, the texts produced by workshop participants in my own thesis, after the workshops were over and the participants had dispersed. Additionally, questions about exactly what “collective” might mean, or might not mean, in a written text became important for my analysis. Although my particular interests led me to write collective poetry, this article argues that creativity and imagination in applying collective memory work are essential and potentially enriching for the field.

COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY AND/OR COLLECTIVE MEMORY WORK

Diverse feminist researchers, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, have grounded their work in the methodology revealed and named as mem-
ory-work in Female Sexualisation (Haug et al., 1987). Yet, despite our sense of common “genealogy,” there are fundamental debates amongst us. One of the major differences concerns terminology. Researchers who have worked with Bronwyn Davies (1992, 1994, 2000) and Barbara Kamler (1995, 1996), mostly within faculties of education, tend to use the term collective biography as well as memory-work for the method. As Davies et al. (2001) explain,

It is “biographical” in that it draws on memories of the lives of particular individuals. It is “collective” in that the process through which the stories are told and written and analyzed is one which reveals the ways in which we were (and are) collectively produced as (sometimes) coherent subjects, experiencing ourselves as “individual” and “autonomous.” Through the processes of talking and listening, of writing and rewriting, the edges that mark off the texts of ourselves, one from the other, are blurred. (p. 169)

Researchers who have worked closely with Crawford and the other writers of Emotion and Gender (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992), or with the material from this text, tend to exclusively name the method as “memory-work” and to be wary of the label “collective biography.” In Female Sexualisation, Haug and her colleagues (1987) note how the word biography in its everyday sense of a usually coherent “life story,” implies a humanist individual whose life unfolds in a more or less rational way, an “untenable proposition” that assumes that “actions follow one another logically, that adult human beings are more or less contained within children, that external events produce little more than minor modifications” (1987, p. 46). Despite this caution, for me, the term collective biography, is useful because it both describes the method of working with personal stories and the oxymoronic implication of the phrase foregrounds the tension between the individual and the collective that is both the crux of the method and the source of its dilemmas.

Other differences between researchers relate to the degree to which the method in practice is explicitly delineated and to the particular details of these descriptions of methodology. Variations emerged within subsequent work because Haug and her colleagues (1987) explicitly resisted any prescriptive demarcation of the method:

The diversity of our methods, the numerous objections raised in the course of our work with the stories, and the varied nature of our attempts at resolution, seemed to suggest that there might well be no single, “true” method that is alone appropriate to this kind of work. What we need is imagination. We can, perhaps, say quite decisively that the very heterogeneity of everyday life demands similarly heterogeneous methods if it is to be understood. (Haug et al., 1987, pp. 70-71)

Haug and her colleagues (1987) stressed that their book was only a beginning, it should be read as a “preliminary outline worth taking further” (1987, p. 32). Those who have taken up this invitation have produced carefully detailed formulations of memory-work in their own texts. In Emotion and Gender,
Crawford and her colleagues (1987) described the method they developed as entailing three phases, briefly they are the following:

First, the collection of written memories according to certain rules. Second, the collective analysis of those written memories, there is also a third phase in which there is further reappraisal; a reappraisal of the memories and their analysis in the context of a range of theories from academic disciplines. (Crawford et al., 1992, p. 43)

Alternatively, in Poststructural Theory and Classroom Practice, Bronwyn Davies (1994, p. 84) describes a four phase model. Preceding the production of written memories is a collective oral storytelling phase around the selected topic. During this phase, details and half-forgotten stories emerge as the stories told spark off one another and the participants discuss the stories “in terms of everyday ‘cultural knowledges’” (1994, p. 84). Extracts from theoretical and/or fictional texts may also be used as starting points in the first phase (Davies et al., 2001). The fourth and final phase of Davies’ (1994) model involves further discussion of the stories and their rewriting where necessary to strip away “rationalisations, explanations, justifications, judgments” until “the final version of each story ‘might have been true for anyone living in that particular culture and taking up that culture as their own’” (p. 84). However, as this phase is recursive, it can be seen as multiple, as Davies (1994, pp. 85-90) illustrates with the “bathhouse” story, which was rewritten and represented to the group many times before it was accepted by the writer and other members of the group. Other models delineate slightly different descriptions, and use different numbering/naming conventions, for the phases that emerge in their particular research contexts (Farrar, 2000; Renew, 1994).

METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

Regardless of the model preferred, there is of course another phase, after the workshop is over, when the data emanating from the workshop is written up by researcher or researchers into an article, or as part of a thesis or manuscript, or in some other form for presentation or publication. Although collective memory work has been written collectively right to publication phase (Crawford et al., 1992; Davies et al., 1997, 2001), more often the final author is singular, particularly when she is producing research in the context of academic credentialling. The rest of this article deals specifically with this context: The participants in the workshop phase are not involved in the “production for publication” phase, rather a single author has sole responsibility. Regardless of the grammatical voice I use in the remainder of this article, the experiences of “the researcher” described are primarily my own and reflect the context of my research into transgressive and feminist writing practices.
Although issues of power do arise for the convener in the course of a collective memory-writing workshop, critical issues of power also emerge in the privacy of the researcher’s own study/analytical space. When the explicit intention of the research is to develop collective knowledge through an inclusive process of writing and analyzing memories in a group, the lone writer in her study later can feel like a fraud. At this point she sits surrounded by “collective texts” that still look like individual texts, even though they may have been (re)written to reflect the collective sensibility of the group, and even though they have been already analyzed by the collective. She knows she can (and must) use these texts selectively, both because she is working to a word limit and because she must use these texts to construct and develop her argument. Yet, using them selectively can feel like a subversion of the very collectivity that has been the goal of the whole exercise. Tension arises at the very moment when a feminist practice—collective biography/memory work—is subsumed into patriarchal discourses—academic practices that venerate, and demand, an individual author. This methodological cul de sac requires imagination. In the remainder of this article, I use the details of my own research project, and the particular resolution I developed to overcome methodological dilemmas, as one example of the serendipitous and creative responses that can enrich the field of collective memory research.

**CREATIVE RESPONSES**

After my own experiences as thesis writer of “bottle-necks, dead ends and running on the spot” (Haug et al., 1987, p. 71), I finally authorized myself to take up an interventionist position in relation to the texts, to “play with them,” and created new poetic texts from the body of memory stories produced within the group. As the focus of the project was a study of women’s transgressive writing practices, the creative intervention I made as researcher/thesis writer into the texts was compatible with the particular project. The resulting texts were distributed to participants and discussed and the ethical issues entailed in the process were explored in detail in the thesis.

My first venture into convening a collective biography group involved forming a women’s writing group specifically for this purpose from amongst a group of women whom I had originally met in several creative writing groups and who had become friends. Unlike the other writing groups we had been in, this time we developed the topics by consensus each week, pursuing themes that emerged through our discussions and stories. We read and discussed extracts from various texts about collective biography/memory work methodology and also read a few literary texts, such as poems, but our discussion focused on the written memories. After our writing group meetings ended, I was left with the data, consisting of transcripts of recorded discussion and written memories, and the rest of the project was perceived as my
responsibility (as indeed it was). When it came to analysis beyond what we had already undertaken collectively in our sometimes ruthless interrogations of the memories, I was paralyzed by the weight of my responsibility. Selective representation of the memories seemed ethically impossible, so was analysis of the memories beyond what we had achieved in the collective setting. Any attempt to use the texts seemed to contravene feminist principles of equity and collectivity that I had wanted to underpin my work. In my first attempts at analysis, I found it almost impossible to resist familiar humanist perspectives on the individual. In the workshops, we had worked with stories that resonated deeply with all of us. We had carefully located these texts in the sociocultural, temporal, and geographic contexts that made them possible and recognizable to all of us. Yet, outside of the collective sensibility, they slid back into individual stories of “inner triumph over the surrounding conditions” (Haug et al., 1987, pp. 222-223).

Eventually, applying strategies derived from the work of Laurel Richardson (1997), I resolved my dilemma by positioning myself differently in relation to the workshop texts. I envisioned myself as an “artisan” and used the memory texts as raw materials to construct new texts, collective poems stripped back, or “crystallized” from the individual prose of the memory stories. For Richardson (1997), who constructed poetry from interview transcripts, poetry is by its nature quite different from other texts as poetic “literary devices such as sound patterns, rhythms, imagery, and page layout” create texts that are “emotionally and morally charged,” that “concretize emotions, feelings and moods” (p. 180). Poetry, relatively free of the corset of written textual convention, is less linear than other texts and in the pauses and gaps can leave moments where readers can insert our own lived experience and our various selves to create embodied knowledges.

In “Louisa May’s Story of her Life,” Richardson (1997, pp. 131-134) reshaped 36 pages of interview transcripts into a poem about one woman’s experience of single motherhood. She used Louisa May’s “voice, diction and tone” (1997, p. 142). She made decisions about which of Louisa May’s words were crucial to her story and where to place pauses to create the rhythm of natural speech. Richardson suggests that poetry represents lived embodied experience more effectively than other modes of writing (1997, pp. 143, 166), allowing readers a vicarious entry into lived experience that is not available in other available modes of writing/research. Poetic representation “joins emotional and intellectual labors” (1997, p. 166), using a feminist process of “knowing/telling” that can describe “lived experiences that are unspeakable in the ‘father’s voice’, the voice of objectivity; flattened worlds” (Richardson, 1997, p. 166).

I decided—quite arbitrarily—to use only and all of the memory texts from the first 2 weeks of our workshops for my own work. I used these texts as the raw material to construct two poems about the life/lives of a “collective girl.” The second of these poems, “Isolation,” is reproduced below. The wording of
this poem was extracted directly from the written stories but whittled down to central images, phrases, and elements that had been insistent in our discussions. The syntax, wording, and rhythm of each writer’s contribution is preserved in each section of the collective poem yet the voice of “the girl” is also a single voice. One line so captured the collective sense of the varied experiences and our discussions of those stories that it became a refrain repeated through the poem.

ISOLATION

Isolation (as she now sees it)
is an emotional
not a geographical
state of being.

She first has the dream at eleven—
she stands at the top of red carpeted stairs,
thick wooden balustrade to the right,
carved wooden doors at the bottom,
framing a white Ford Customline

Her mother and the new husband wait
by the car (in the dream
she is five again)

She runs down the stairs
in her best pink dress, her
little feet flying

On the third last stair
she trips, falls
in slow motion over and over and down,
an endless falling

When she looks up the car is gone
and during the fall thoughts flood her:
how stupid
how clumsy to stumble
could you blame them for driving off?

They leave her there (again)
in the home alone
to the huge metallic wards
and the nameless children
Dormitories with two long rows
of identical grey beds
someone crying in the dark
spiders in the tap water
tripe with white sauce and onions
pants pulled down, beaten,
in front of the assembly—
in the prison for children with no parents

The girls walked to school
in a line,
past iron gates
another large building
“That is where you will go
when you get older”
No, it wasn’t possible, she
had a mother . . . somewhere

Isolation (as she now sees it)
is an emotional
not a geographical
state of being.

Biggest snowfall since 1961—
like a daydream, staring
at the snow, the nothingness,
its pure whiteness

Looking straight into the sun
then into the snow—little
yellow fairies dance
on the white surface

Whap—an icy snowball sting,
tears on her round red cheeks
Ricky Santiago and Pepito, her cousin—
the boys are laughing at her

Igloo building, alone,
behind the old green shed, away
from everyone else
Granpa’s snow shovel
digging
climbing
pushing
packing the snow in tightly
jumping on it
laying her soft round body over it
digging digging digging
inside she pokes a hole out for a window

The whole afternoon alone
and safe inside
watching her breath
warm fingers
face thawing

Voices outside
(be totally still, be totally silent)
the walls cave in, her face
is buried, choking snow fills
her throat, creeps up her nostrils—
the boys are laughing at her

Isolation (as she now sees it)
is an emotional
not a geographical
state of being.

In real life
men and boys don’t behave
like in Jackie magazine—
they’re always watching her

On the stairs—her mother’s lover
stops her, asks her to kiss him.
She lives in fear

At the local pool,
(the last time she went swimming there)—
a fat/strong boy-man grabs at
her crotch, her small breasts,
hurts her

On her push bike, cycling
to visit her friend,
one perfect day—
in the lay-by at the Bluebell woods
a truck driver walks
into the road to stop her,
“Come into the woods, little girl”

She peddles past, so fast,
heart pounding

She retreats to
her room, leaves the house only
to visit the library

She memorises great speeches
from Shakespeare,
acts them out in her room;
studies Egyptology,
leaves cryptic notes
folded in sweet tins
in window-seats
as historical documents;
learns the constellations
of the northern hemisphere off by heart,
goes up on the roof
to watch the stars;
listens to Don McLean and David Cassidy
on her sister’s record player,
she’s in love with them.

She braves it out,
is appallingly rude and hurtful
to everyone,
desperate for friends
utterly unable to speak
about it

_____________________

Isolation (as she now sees it)
is an emotional
not a geographical
state of being.

_____________________

Another Friday night
in her town,
she exercises
to erase her insomnia
On her bicycle
rhythmic breathing
changing crosswinds,
even tension,
the bicycle hums a tune
on the spokes,
16 kms round trip,
sun hanging
in orange suspense until 10pm

She drops in to the bar—
couples upstairs,
singles downstairs—
Black Sabbath
and beer

She remains single,
her ex-boyfriend
tells all comers
she is (still) his girl.

She straps on roller skates
swings her arms
sparks fly
as she gets up to speed

She skates home and goes for a run,
stops back in at the party—
a god-awful stench
(rum and vomit)
by the front door
otherwise
everyone is in exactly the same place
the music is the same
the conversations

At home she does yoga
to relax
so she can sleep
alternate nasal breath, shoulder stand, wheel, shooting bow, reclining warrior, the plough, headstand

She lies on the carpet, groans—
still can't sleep,
and such a long summer
Isolation (as she now sees it)
is an emotional
not a geographical
state of being.

You had to have
a boyfriend—
or you didn’t really exist

She didn’t recognize this
at first because
she wasn’t without one
(at the start, when
they first moved there
and she was a
novelty)

In between bleary boozy weekends
she studied hard,
she had two lives

Her boyfriend and she would talk sometimes
about the future—
she could go away to teachers’ college,
come home on weekends,
when she graduated
she would get a job locally,
they would marry and live on his farm

Sometimes, often,
they couldn’t talk because
they’d be so drunk

Sometimes they’d hit each other,
but it was all a blur—
at least they knew
they loved each other

When she didn’t have
a boyfriend any more—
nealy everyone
stopped talking to her,
she studied hard
then school finished & she left . . .
The collective girl of this poem is made up from the memories of women who grew up in big cities and in small towns, whose ages range across a decade and who were located in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Nevertheless, there are strong commonalities in their stories. The isolation experienced by the collective girl is as emotional as it is geographic. Although every experience she recounts occurs in a scenario populated by many other people, she is alone and mostly she is silent. Her memories are deeply embodied: She tumbles over and over, suffocates as snow fills her mouth and nostrils, peddles away as fast as her little legs will take her, exercises frenetically in a futile attempt to exhaust herself, remembers traces of violence through a haze of alcohol. The individual embodied memories of isolation were painful and remembered as immobilizing but as we wended our way through the complex emotional webs of the stories, moments of resistance emerged. Although these moments were often identified in our discussions, they became more transparent in the written texts through the process of crystallization into poetic form.

Increasing women’s opportunities for agency is an explicit aim of collective memory work and collective biography. Haug (Haug et al., 1987) makes this clear in the opening paragraph to her section on memory work:

Our object in this book is women’s capacity—or incapacity—for action and for happiness. It involves a study of the structures, the relations within which women live and the ways in which they gain a grip on them. (p. 33)

The text of the Isolation poem weaves a stronger fabric than was possible with separate stories. The threads are made up from the complex structures and social relations within which the girl grows up and which she coconstructs. The poem shows that although she is seriously restricted in each context, she nevertheless finds creative strategies to help her wriggle a larger space for herself within these constraints.

Within and despite her silence, the collective girl invents powerful strategies of resistance based in a dogged optimism that a different (better) future is possible. In the moments described in this poem, the growing girl is caught in traps set by the wider society, traps determined largely by gender—the single mother puts her child in an orphanage until she returns with “the new husband,” boys bully the fat little girl, men and boys become sexual predators of the pubescent girl, and the young woman exists socially only as an appendage to a man. She has no allies in her social/emotional isolation. In the moments recounted in the poem, the girl experiences herself as utterly alone in her difference from those around her. This collective girl resists these traps through creative exercise of her intellect, her body, and her imagination—she memorizes speeches from Shakespeare, she studies, she watches fairies dancing in the sun, she exercises frenetically. As she grows, she takes on social/emotional isolation as her embodied subjectified state, simultaneously mastering the strategies that make it bearable whilst she submits to the isolation
forced on her by situations and people over which she has no control. She bides her time constructively and creatively until she can leave these impossible situations, and eventually she does.

In the context of a larger study of transgressive and feminist writing practices (Gannon, 1999), collective poetry devised as a response to a methodological dilemma in research, drew together various strands of my work in interesting ways. The fragment of that study presented here demonstrates that the collective girl constructed in my (re)presentation of the collective biography texts provides another entry point for analysis of “female sexualization,” for exploring the “process that produces the insertion of women into, and their subordination within, determinate social practices” (Haug, 1987, p. 33) and for locating the strategies of resistance and moments of agency that enable the girl to resist, subvert, and to wait for opportunities to act.

CONCLUSION

Collective memory work is a fluid and powerful research methodology. Collective memory-work enables the researchers to begin to recognize “the conditions of possibility for inventing something new, of seeing afresh, of creatively moving beyond the already known” (Davies et al., 2001). In her approach to writing up collective memory work, the researcher herself must also move beyond the already known. Acute awareness of the ethical and methodological dilemmas entailed in collective memory research and a creative imagination can lead to new and enriching approaches to academic writing and to the methodology itself.

NOTE


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Less than an hour from my house is a town called Half Moon Bay, where a big sweep of white-sand beach shaped like a sliver of a half moon gently embraces a broad cove of blue sea. When the fog lifts, the sun shines through, glinting off the glassy, blue-green water and the long, curved, white inviting beach, producing a feeling of peacefulness. Half Moon Bay is the name of the bay and of the town, but for me, it really means a direction, a place of mind and heart. It means a drive down along the coast to an area that’s centered on Half Moon Bay but that lies mostly north and south of it. Often, I have driven a route that goes first through Pacifica, where the sky opens out over the ocean, then to Montara, that broad beach just past the rocky cliffs of Devil’s Slide, where cars sometimes fall to the sea and rocks sometimes fall from above causing the road to be closed down. I pass nurseries and smell the fertilizer used on the fields of brussel sprouts and I stop only sometimes at Half Moon Bay, a town once full of farmers and old people in trailers and now full of families and professional people and condos and jumbo homes. On the main street of Half Moon Bay, more and more, there are pricey shops where tourists go. I remember Half Moon Bay from a time when there was almost no downtown and no reason to stop there.

I drive farther on to San Gregorio and Pescadero, where the beaches seem to extend forever, backed by high, tan sandstone cliffs. I feel totally alone when walking the beach here in the fog, caught between the cliffs and the sea. I sometimes drive farther to Ano Nuevo, a piece of shrubby overgrown land that juts out into the ocean. Elephant seals come ashore to molt and breed and are visible farther out at sea, hanging out of the windows of a deserted house on an abandoned island. Sometimes I drive as far south as Davenport, a cement-factory town that’s ashen gray beside the green sea and where an organic juice factory built recently operates at night with eerie orange and blue lights on. It stands on a cliff beside the sea looking out into nowhere.

I have been driving this section of the coast, walking the beaches, and visiting the forested state parks farther inland for 23 years now. Often I go quite regularly. I have gone on my birthday, on Thanksgiving, on weekdays and weekends, at all hours of the day and night. Even when living half across the
country, I have come back here to visit, always feeling that when I reach the
ocean, I will know what my pulse is. I will know how I feel. I will be in touch
with my own inner freedom. Yet in recent years, my drive along this coast has
troubled me. I have difficulty dealing with the changes in the landscape—the
new houses, the many more people. When I see them, I feel that I am erased,
that no one cares, that time has passed me by. I feel that violence has been
done to me and to what is mine, or to what used to be mine, for this coast is not
really mine any longer. It belongs to other people who are making it theirs.

As I drive now, I try to see the beauty of the shoreline amidst the new
jumbo homes they have built on the hillsides, amidst the commuter traffic
across Route 92—the one main road that links this part of the coast to the near-
est inland freeway—amidst the mothers and kids playing on the once empty
beaches, amidst the condos and the crowds come to see the elephant seals at
Ano Nuevo. I stop at San Gregorio at a coastside store and see the shaggy-
haired young men hanging out at the bar, talking about the tunnel that could
be built through the hills to further link this coast to civilization, talking about
real estate and part-time jobs clearing lots and building houses. They talk
while the country music plays on the bar stereo, and it’s old country music
and a revamped old country store, and the bar’s on one side of a big, wood-
floored room and they are listening to the Allman Brothers’ “Peaceful Easy
Feeling.” The nostalgia is thick here, the irony hard to miss—what’s peaceful?
Who’s easy? Whose place is this?

I see the cars pulled up in the small town of Pescadero at a brown wood-
shingled restaurant where it used to be only locals and beat-up hippie types
came, people tired from a day at the beach, young people in jeans and full of
sand who had been camping, men who had been out working coming in for
morning coffee. I see the BMWs, Jaguars, and Lexuses that are now parked
routinely in front of the restaurant and the women customers in jewelry and
neat clothes inside sitting at the tables. The food seems much the same,
though it’s probably better—artichoke soup, greasy seafood (or it used to be
greasy), fresh bread. I sit at the gray formica-topped counter near the kitchen,
sip my soup, and try to feel again as I once did the very first time I came here—
the first time I was offered artichoke soup. I look around at the people in the
pine-paneled restaurant and I see, in my mind, “my coast” being gobbled up
more and more each year, being overrun, and I feel I have nowhere to turn.

As I drive on, I feel that I am looking through a haze and I try to ignore
these people with their new wealth, these people who I feel don’t belong, who
are making this area theirs and changing it in the process, who make assump-
tions about what they can do—that they can choose to live here, for instance,
a choice I never felt I could make. It was not where my job was, it was too far
away; it was part of the countryside, a place to visit, to appropriate in my fan-
tasy—in my play life, my imagination—but not to appropriate, in fact, not to
build a house in, to live in permanently, not to use in that way. But that is what
they’ve done. They have made it into a life-style choice. Each time I hear of
someone who has moved to Half Moon Bay, I cringe. I feel hurt, angry, pained, and confused. I feel, “They shouldn’t. It’s not right. I couldn’t.”

On my drive now, I find I must focus through my own pain and resentment in order to see the sun glinting on the water and the roll of the hills. I focus my vision narrowly to avoid seeing the large boxy houses, the invasion of the new people. But then, my own past also keeps invading, inserting itself into my vision. My trip is littered with my own inner memories as well as with the outer structures of others.

I did not always come to this coast. At first, I was afraid to come here. From where I lived inland, the ride took me over expanses of hills on winding roads. I would get dizzy and lose my bearings. Then the lush green valley and wide hills of San Gregorio would open out and I could see the sea. The first woman who took me here raised my fears. For her, the true experience of the coast was a wilderness experience and too wild for me. She always seemed to be pointing to something beyond me, something I could not do or be. When I was with her, I often felt inadequate. I felt alone and afraid and not brave enough or sturdy enough to walk the beach. But I do remember a walk on the beach at Pescadero with her in the fog once when I was not scared. That was after we parted. Only after our relationship was over was I able to feel more relaxed about this coast.

My next lover treated these beaches like home. She had been married on one of the beaches down toward Ano Nuevo. I always imagined it was a hippie wedding with women in long dresses and people bringing food in baskets. She thought nothing of coming over here at night in the dark on impulse, driving the winding roads quickly through the hills. The darkness and the speed frightened me. She was the one who first took me to the restaurant in Pescadero and told me that people came for the artichoke soup and the pies. She made coming to these beaches seem normal and natural for me, like an ordinary part of life. Other people I then knew, who worked at the bookstore where I did an hour inland, also often came over to the beaches. When someone was missing from the bookstore because they had broken up or just were moody, they were probably out here. That bookstore group was a community.

When I moved to the Midwest the next year, my mailing address, for a while, was in El Granada, a town just north of Half Moon Bay, care of a man I knew from the bookstore who lived in Menlo Park but who took his mail over here, because he had friends here.

When I drive the coast now, I am often back in those earlier times. As I near San Gregorio, I remember that some people from the bookstore later bought half the ownership in the San Gregorio Country Store, which is why it stocks lots of books. I often stop by the San Gregorio store and go in and look sideways for people I once knew, wanting not to be recognized by them, but wanting to see that part of my past is still there. The last time I was in, I stood in the back in an aisle surrounded by tall, dark wooden shelves full of cowboy clothing and enameled metal cookware and I overheard one of the owners up
He was talking with a woman at the bar about taking a vacation in Ireland and other international trips. It was a far cry from the old bookstore culture of low-paid clerks who went to the local beaches.

I am saying that this coast is full of contradictions for me. It was not always what it is for me now. It never really was an ideal. It used to be unfamiliar. It scared me, belonged to other people, was foggy, windy, and far away, and a challenge. Gradually, I began making it mine through many visits back. On each trip, I came here as if to find out what was true and good in my life. When the woman I have lived with now for 16 years and I were first getting to know each other, our first daytime date was a trip to the ocean where we had lunch and threw a frisbee. It mattered a great deal to us to find that we each liked the beach. On our ride back, we waited for a long time for gas at a pump beside a coastside restaurant with large blue windows facing toward the sea. That restaurant is gone now, but in my mind I see it clearly, and I see a pink and gray decorated hippie school bus that was parked in front of us for that long half hour while we waited.

My younger brother made this coast his, too. I found out only after his death that his favorite place to go in the whole world was the small flat town of Pescadero. I often imagine him there still, walking around with his camera. He liked to take pictures of nothing happening, of small town Americana, of empty tables set with old silverware and thick round plates in all-night restaurants, of the plain things in life, always in black and white. My brother died 11 years ago; his death was a probable suicide; he was hit by a train. Last winter, to mark the date of his death—he died on a Monday after Thanksgiving—the Tuesday after, I drove down to Pescadero. I wanted to walk through the flat town with its few grid streets and see what my brother once saw and liked, then have lunch at the brown-shingled Pescaderos restaurant, sit at the counter, order soup, and think about my brother. I wanted his death not to be in vain.

But I thought I would stop first at the Pescadero Marsh, a wildlife preserve just off the coast highway near the town where I had heard there were wintering birds. I doubted my brother had been there, but I wanted to see the birds, and I went because I have found the places where birds live to be reassuring—tranquil, overlooked, out-of-the way natural places, especially the low wetlands. I had never been to the Pescadero Marsh before, and I was anxious about my trip down. Would there be birds? Would the coast be beautiful? Would it be too much changed? Would thinking about my brother upset me? How much of my past would come flooding back to me this time—those old lovers on the beaches, the time I collected sand dollars on the beach before moving to the Southwest. I thought I would take one as a present to the woman I was going to stay with in Albuquerque while finding a place to live. I never gave it to her, but I did drive cross-country with that sand dollar in the front seat of my car reminding me of where I came from.
It was a foggy morning and an overcast day as I drove down the coast highway to remember my brother. The fog lifted as I neared the marsh. I parked my car in a beach parking lot and walked along the shore. The wind was severe; the ocean was a deep blue with many white-capped waves. I walked on the beach for a long time, then climbed over driftwood, under a bridge, over large rocks, up through ice plant and sand dunes covered with scrubby green vegetation. Then I paused and looked back at the bridge over the inlet to the marsh and remembered that bridge was a narrow flat wooden bridge rather than the large arching concrete structure it was now. I remembered a Sunday morning 20 years ago when I came here and the sun was very warm and I felt alone but very good and I walked the beach until I reached the driftwood, then turned back. I think I felt good because there was a woman I was looking forward to being close with at that time, although it did not work out in the end.

I now climbed to the top of a large sand dune and looked inland toward a broad wooded hillside in the distance that seemed to bound the marsh on the inland edge. The marsh that spread out before me seemed just a mass of low-lying reeds, dirt, some trees, patches of still water, and a larger more open pond farther back. I began to walk along a path leading deeper into the marsh toward the big hillside. The ocean, the highway, the bridge all receded behind me. The air became quite still, but it was very noisy. The racket was caused, I soon gathered, by thousands of ducks—black, green, brown, yellow—moving about amongst the tall brown and green rushes and the waterways. The ducks took to the air frightened and flew away when I stepped near them. I saw egrets—big white birds with broad flapping white wings that make them look like angels as they fly. This marsh was teeming with life. I stood and watched, fascinated.

I had never known there was a marsh here. I had seen a pond to the side of the highway but had ignored it. For 20 years, I ignored it and simply walked on the beach from one end to the other and back. I never thought going inland would be worth it. Now I wondered what all the ducks were doing here. I thought there were probably people who could tell the different kinds of ducks from one another. I wished I was one of those people. I wanted there to be more big birds—herons and egrets—and fewer ducks. The big birds were more dramatic and easier for me to see. But the point was that I was now engaged, debating my past less than which birds I liked. I walked farther into the marsh and was amazed at the extent of it. Half of Pescadero, it seemed to me, was taken up by this marsh. It was set in a broad basin between the sea and the town. It was big enough so that small boats moved around on parts of it farther from me, although near me no boats were allowed, only the reeds and birds.

This was another world—wild, protected, a sanctuary full of clattering ducks, with paths for people overgrown with brush, an occasional bench,
signs saying keep off the regrowing vegetation. Eucalyptus trees seemed to emerge from the bog as I walked and poison oak was everywhere and those tall brown reeds in which were hidden so many kinds of birds. I walked farther in on the path and saw a Great Blue heron with a big gray body and long legs standing near me. I stared at it for a long time through my binoculars and it stared at me. I felt I had found a special place where I could go. I thought my brother had not been here, that he had only been in town, although I did not really know. But this big marsh seemed too unruly for him, too noisy. He was where it was quiet. This was my place. I was the only one here. I started to get very warm and suddenly I felt very tired and an hour-and-a-half after I’d come, I walked out of the Pescadero Marsh. I climbed over the dunes, under the bridge, and walked back along the beach to my car. Then I drove into the tiny town of Pescadero as I had planned.

I had lunch—soup and bread—in the by now nearly empty restaurant with its dark pine-paneled walls and its glowing formica counter. Then I took a walk through the flat streets of my brother’s town. I did not know exactly where he had gone or what he had liked and I felt frustrated that I could not know. As I walked, I kept looking around for what he had seen and wondering. I passed an elementary school. He liked small kids. Maybe he liked that school. I passed small, square wooden houses set back in deep front yards that were planted with a few flowers and spread with children’s play things, or odd statuaries. The landscape was very flat, the scale low. I passed a blacksmith’s shop in a dark, weathered barnlike building. I began feeling that I was invading other people’s worlds, and when I kept failing to know what my brother saw, I headed back. The sky was clouding over.

Then I turned down a street to the side where I saw a small, old graveyard on a slight hillside. Thin white tombstones were set behind a low wrought-iron fence on green grass. I thought my brother must have gone there. He liked things like graveyards. I had always wanted to tell him to go to Colma and Daly City, the graveyard capital of this area where the rolling hills are full of tombs for miles. I thought he’d enjoy walking around there. But I never had told him.

I turned back without going into the small, delicate white Pescadero cemetery and walking around among the plaques. I continued back to the commercial street of town, bought a loaf of sourdough bread in a grocery, a jar of ollalieberry jam in the restaurant, and started home. As I drove out toward the main coast highway, I passed the big basin where the Pescadero Marsh lay. I knew it was there but it was hardly distinguishable.

A couple of months later, I took my lover down with me to see the marsh. We parked by the beach, climbed under the bridge and over the dunes and reached the path where the reeds and wetlands stretched out before us, but the marsh was silent. There were no ducks. There was no overwhelming clatter. No birds flew away as soon as I stepped near them. The sky was blue, the feeling peaceful but invigorating. It was a beautiful, but quiet, empty marsh
that day. What I had seen a mere 2 months earlier was no longer there. How easy it is to miss the noise of those quiet places. I tried to explain, to tell my lover what was missing, but really it was missing only for me. No marsh, no tree will ever be what it once was, no lost brother regained. These things are hard to share. Yet that boisterous marsh is there; the coast around Half Moon Bay stretches long and uninterrupted by the sea; my brother who liked all-night restaurants and who lured me down to Pescadero to take a look around again is still very present in my mind. These are some of the pieces I put back in place. These are some of the images I paint the world with.

THE SHAPE OF TIME

Longer than a blink, round on wheels of the wagon,
Yet sharp in the splitting of sparked fingers through
The blue haze that swallows the mountains of México
On the horizon of the afternoon, you show yourself
For what you are, for what we know you to be: Impostor.

You stay long in the rivers of song and the night calls
Of coyotes but turn round again in the face of the clock,
Mothers to be, and the spinout spirals of dust devils,
Circling the moment while lovers on the hillside decide
To ride the leaf downwind or to rise as one with the condor.

I have seen you long in jail, short in the hangman’s noose,
Masquerading as candy in the child’s piñata, collapsing
In the charge of the bull, swifiting in the matador’s sting,
Carving in the browlines of viejos and mules, straining
In the tumplines of water bearers and miners in the mine.

I have caught you waiting in the blade of the bandit
And the eye of the panther, slowing on tortoise trails
And the wings of eagles, resting under hats at Matamoros,
Harboring hope in the hidden wet of deep cut arroyos,
Racing on the rails of the Union Pacific and the Santa Fe.

But what shape have you now, in the whisk of prayers
Beneath this cactus cross, in the heat and the haze of God
On this dry lake of life? What shape have you now?
Show yourself for what you are, for what you will be:
Nukufetau Island, Tuvalu, November 10, 1968

FIELDWORK PASTICHE

Different we are but nonetheless same  
Even when appearing to be stuck in between  
For I am a you, you are a me, we are a we

Different we are on your shore of two names  
One when by sea is the way that you reach  
The other by land to the same exact beach

Different we are when you climb up the palm  
With high sky desire and a rope on your feet  
Or strip off nut covers with very strong teeth

In between when you dance in *fatele* heat  
For ancestors I think are plainly not mine  
Or at least not the case for a very long time

In between in the muddle of words we share  
Three names for chief in your islander slang  
Others I bring from my study of Danang

One when you eat cakes from blood of the pig  
When you smile and say set out nothing for me  
Because you and I know what else it could be

One in our hunger for kinship and feasts  
For peppered perfume on the pandanus tree  
For tellers of tales that keep us from sleep

One in the blood we shed on coral rock reefs  
In the sweat we make with paddles in hand  
In the prints we make on sea dampened sand

We are many and one, some this, some that  
Not all and not none, a *bricoleur*’s dream  
Of culture combined sometimes on a seam
United States/México, July 11, 2001

BORDER WORK

Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, California. One way. Tijuana, Baja, California, to Matamoros, Tamaulipas, plus that extra mileage to the beach on the Gulf of México. The other way. In between are more badges than you can find at an international scout jamboree: state police, local police, county sheriffs, border patrol, agricultural inspectors, INS in more ways than one; if you know how to look or want to find by just causing trouble, ATF, FBI, CIA, EPA, even the IRS; all sorts of Federales, not to mention Policía, subdivided by town and state, some of whom are and some of whom are not self-appointed. Did I mention the National Guard just doing field exercises on land and in the air? Did someone once say to Humphrey Bogart, “Badges? We don’t need no stinking badges!”? Where is that man now, when we really need him? Stuck on celluloid in Hollywood. He could be here on the border, patrolling cultures to make sure they stick to each other more, cross freely into the peaks and valleys of each other’s lives and lands, and send some badges packing. But he was a bandit. Wanted the gold, all the gold. So he and his compadres would fit right into border traffic and all the legal and illegal commerce that takes place behind the signs and the shanties: gangs for gold, gringos for gold, gold for gangs and gringos, gold for Mexican gringos, gold for American gringos, for Mexicanos, Mestizos, Norteños, and Tex-Mexers; gold turned to happy heads for chicos, chicas, cholo-punks, chopper riders, and low-riders with hairnets; for brokers, truckers, bankers, cracklers, hookers, housewives, hackers, and hijackers, all in the chase, swirling around in the giant sucking sound, made not by NAFTA going south but by the jet-powered whoosh of white stuff going north, vacuumed up the collective nostrils of Los Estados Unidos twenty square truckloads at a time. White gold, Mamacita, good shit for breaking through the border of blocking badges, both ways; for helping a throwaway society sniff more to make more to sell more to dump more to sniff more, here and there; for putting yet another foot of poverty and stench on the heap of the Tijuana city dump, already full beyond the canyon where it began; for creating one more need for more badges, more supervisors of badges; for increased patrols between Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Presidio, and Eagle Pass; for cracking further the cracks in the cultures that built this barbed wire snake of a border between them. But who cares? Cerveza, por favor. Estamos sentado aqiu. We’re not going anywhere. Show me your badge. I’ll show you mine. Let’s talk about coyotes. Coyotes never sleep. More beer. The snake cuts but always bends. Me vale madre, jovem. More talk. I hear Tijuana gets hot this time of year. Me vale madre. So what?
Ivan Brady is distinguished teaching professor and chair of anthropology at SUNY Oswego. His special interests include ethnography, ethnopoetics, semiotics, and the philosophy of science. His poetry has appeared in various books and journals, including Reflections: The Anthropological Muse (edited by I. Prattis, 1985), the Neuroanthropology Network Newsletter, Pendulum, Anthropology and Humanism (Quarterly), Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies, and Qualitative Inquiry. The work presented here is part of his forthcoming book, The Time at Darwin's Reef.
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