

# AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

## *Making the Personal Political*

Stacy Holman Jones

*The next moment in qualitative inquiry will be one at which the practices of qualitative research finally move, without hesitation or encumbrance, from the personal to the political.*

—Norman Denzin,  
"Aesthetics and the Practices of Qualitative Inquiry," 2000, p. 261

*We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life. . . . [Stories] give theory flesh and breath.*

—Minnie Bruce Pratt, *S/HE*, 1995, p. 22

*I think theater is primarily a site for liberation stories and a sweaty laboratory to model possible strategies for empowerment.*

—Tim Miller,  
"Solo Performing as Call to Arms," 2002, para. 3

**T**his is a chapter about the personal text as critical intervention in social, political, and cultural life. Please do not read it alone.

This chapter is more than a little utopian in its call to disrupt, produce, and imagine a breakthrough in—and not a respite from—the way things are and perhaps should be (Ricoeur, 1986, pp. 265–266). It cannot stand alone in the world.

This is a chapter about how looking at the world from a specific, perspectival, and limited vantage point can tell, teach, and put people in motion. It is about autoethnography as a radical democratic politics—a politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change (Reinelt, 1998, p. 286). It does not act alone.

This is a chapter about how a personal text can move writers and readers, subjects and objects, tellers and listeners into this space of dialogue, debate, and change. It does not speak alone.

This chapter is meant for more than one voice, for more than personal release and discovery, and for more than the pleasures of the text. It is not a text alone.

This chapter is meant for public display, for an audience. It is not meant to be left alone.

This chapter is an ensemble piece. It asks that you read it with other texts, in other contexts, and with others. It asks for a performance, one in which we might discover that our autoethnographic texts are not alone. It is a performance that asks how our personal accounts count.

## ■ TURNING TO NARRATIVE: CRISES, HISTORIES, AND MOVEMENTS

### Demanding a Response

"Don't read this until you steady yourself. This isn't just the third essay on the list of assigned reading for next week. It will make you cringe. It will haunt you. It will change you."

This is what I said to friends in my team ethnography graduate course at California State University, Sacramento.<sup>1</sup> It was, for me, a novel course in many ways: We were working together as a research team; we were writing Van Maanen's (1988) realist, impressionist, and confessional tales; and we were creating a text together as a class.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of the creativity and camaraderie we experienced in this course, Ronai's (1995) "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account" altered us and the way in which we approached our work. In the essay, Ronai juxtaposed reflections on being sexually abused as a child with an argument for a layered account—a telling that creates a "continuous dialectic of experience, emerging from the multitude of reflexive voices that simultaneously produce and interpret . . . text[s]" (p. 396).

"Multiple Reflections" is autoethnography, although I did not know it then. Ronai (1995)

offered up her own terrifying experience in the name of saying something startling and intricate about sexual abuse and the force and import of her scholarly and personal efforts to make sense of this experience. Ronai's story had a powerful effect on me. My thinking—about sexual abuse, about writing and scholarship, about the power of texts—shifted. Her language and story accomplished something that, up until that point, I had believed to be the business of music, novels, and film; they invited me into a lived felt experience. I could not stand outside of her words at safe remove. Ronai's story demanded that I respond and react. I marveled at the beauty of her language. I talked about her essay with my colleagues and listened as they recounted their own experiences of sexual abuse. I was enraged about what happened to Ronai and to my friends.

This is the story of my first encounter with autoethnography as a communication scholar. Of course, I had been experiencing autoethnographic texts all my life—in Raymond Carver's short stories, Sylvia Plath's poetry, Milan Kundera's novels, and Billie Holiday's singing. Until I read "Multiple Reflections," however, I did not make the connection between what these works and acts accomplished and what I believed scholarship to be about.

### Autoethnography Is . . .

A balancing act. Autoethnography and writing about autoethnography, that is.<sup>3</sup> Autoethnography works to hold self and culture together, albeit not in equilibrium or stasis. Autoethnography writes a world in a state of flux and movement—between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement. It creates charged moments of clarity, connection, and change.

Writing about autoethnography is also a balancing act. In a handbook chapter that wants to move theory and method to action, what do I leave in and leave out? How do I balance *telling* (about autoethnography's history, methods, responsibilities, and possibilities) with *showing* (doing the work of autoethnography here on these pages)? How much of my self do I put in and leave out?

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I begin with another sort of balancing act, sifting through books and essays, looking for words that others have used to describe the doing of autoethnography. Autoethnography is . . .

“research, writing, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection . . . [and] claims the conventions of literary writing.” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix)

“a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts.” (Spry, 2001, p. 710)

“texts [that] democratize the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in a tension with dominant expressions of discursive power.” (Neumann, 1996, p. 189)

Soon, however, I find myself wanting to bend the rules, to reinscribe words about other endeavors—autobiographies, personal narratives, memoirs, short fiction, performances—as defining moments for autoethnography. I tell myself that this is not a selfish impulse—wanting beautiful phrases of other origins for autoethnography—because autoethnography is not a practice alone in the world. Autoethnography does have a story, one that was told in loving detail by Reed-Danahay (1997, pp. 4–9), Ellis and Bochner (2000, pp. 739–743), and Neumann (1996, pp. 188–193), among others. But because autoethnography is what Geertz (1983) referred to as a blurred genre, it overlaps with, and is indebted to, research and writing practices in anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication (for these histories, see Denzin, 1997, pp. 203–207; Ellis, 2004, pp. 12–18; Neumann, 1996, pp. 193–195), to say nothing of our favorite storytellers, poets, and musicians.

And so I allow words about other sorts of personal texts to make themselves heard in the dance of my fingers on the keys. Autoethnography is . . .

“a catastrophic encounter, a moment of vulnerability and ambiguity that is sensuous, embodied, and profoundly implicated in the social and ideological

structures of their lifeworlds.” (Marilyn Brownstein, quoted in Grumet, 2001, p. 177)

“the kind [of art] that takes you deeper inside yourself and ultimately out again.” (Friedwald, 1996, p. 126)

“storytelling [that] can change the world.” (Wade Davis, quoted in Chadwick, 2003).

Taking these words as a point of departure, I create my own responses to the call: Autoethnography is . . .

Setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation . . . and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives.

Making a text present. Demanding attention and participation. Implicating all involved. Refusing closure or categorization.

Witnessing experience and testifying about power without foreclosure—of pleasure, of difference, of efficacy.

Believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts *is* to change the world.

I return to the books balanced on my lap. I keep looking, unsatisfied with my textual portrait. It feels tentative and unfinished. And perhaps it should be. I decide on one final entry because it says something I have not managed to put into my collected words. Autoethnography is . . .

“[a] performance text . . . turning inward waiting to be staged.” (Denzin, 1997, p. 199)

I decide to stop here, knowing that this is not the end of a story about autoethnography, only a beginning. I return to my own story of autoethnographic history and my encounter with Ronai’s (1995) story. More than creating connections and shifts in my thinking, more than inspiring both

rage and desire, this story also signals a crisis, one that began long before Ronai's story or my reading of it and one that continues as we speak, as we write and are written on these pages and on the stages of our experience.

### ■ CRISIS

It is a triple crisis, a triple threat, a triple crown of thorns: representation, legitimation, and praxis. These crises, which mark and coincide with a turn toward interpretive, qualitative, narrative, and critical inquiry in the human disciplines, are summoned in an oft-recited line in a familiar play: How much does a scholar know, how does she know it, and what can she do with this knowledge in the world?<sup>4</sup>

The idea of a triple crisis implies that it is something new and something different. But these crises are not new (Denzin, 1997, p. 203). Crisis itself is not new. It is simply the result of forces in conflict, the dramatic nature of human action, and the choices (conscious and unconscious) we make in a world full of possibilities (Pelias, 1992, p. 7). The drama of representation, legitimation, and praxis is part of an ongoing dialogue between self and world about questions of ontology, epistemology, method, and praxis: What is the nature of knowing, what is the relationship between knower and known, how do we share what we know and with what effect? What makes this triple crisis feel urgent is the ways in which this dialogue has increasingly questioned the stability and coherence of our lives as we live and tell about them. This dialogue asks how, in lifeworlds that are partial, fragmented, and constituted and mediated by language, we can tell or read our stories as neutral, privileged, or in any way complete. In answering these questions, we have looked to the personal, concrete, and mundane details of experience as a window to understanding the relationships between self and other or between individual and community. We use the contingent and skeptical languages of poststructuralism and postmodernism (among others) to tell and understand our lives and our world,

hoping to confront questions of "self, place, [and] power" in ways that are more satisfying and—*yes*—more subversive than in previous performances (Neumann, 1996, p. 195; see also Denzin, 1997; Reinelt, 1998, p. 285).

A crisis is a turning point, a moment when conflict must be dealt with even if we cannot resolve it. It is a tension that opens a space of indeterminacy, threatens to destabilize social structures, and enables a creative uncertainty (Reinelt, 1998, p. 284). Interpretive, qualitative, narrative, and critical inquiry have had many such moments, all of which led to shifts in genres and methods. We have traveled from . . .

the impossibility of careful, faithful, and authoritative cataloguing of an exotic other . . .

to partial, reflexive, and local narrative accounts . . .

to texts that work to create a space for an ethics committed to dialogue.

In the current moment . . .

we confront the impossibility of representing lived experience by troubling the link between life and text . . .

we develop (and question the development of) criteria for understanding and evaluating the work we do to narrate the conditions of our lives . . .

we resolve to do work that makes a difference by writing the social imaginary in inciteful and revolutionary ways.<sup>5</sup>

We rise to the challenge of movement. . . .

### ■ MOVEMENT

Even though I was able to place "Multiple Reflections" within the larger context of turns and movements in interpretive, qualitative, narrative, and critical inquiry, I did not know what to do with the rage I felt on the day I read Ronai's (1995) essay. I looked for a place to put my anger, a way to assuage it, and a means to act on it without

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forgetting or dismissing it. In her chapter in the second edition of this *Handbook*, Olesen (2000) wrote, "Rage is not enough" (p. 215). Olesen's challenge—to me, to you—is to move from rage to "progressive political action, to theory and method that connect politics, pedagogy, and ethics to action in the world" (N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, personal communication, September 23, 2002).

This is a challenge that autoethnographers have been working to meet slowly and incrementally. It is the challenge of creating texts that unfold in the intersubjective space of individual and community and that embrace tactics for both *knowing* and *showing* (Jackson, 1998; Kemp, 1998, p. 116). Responding to this challenge means asking questions about the following:

- How knowledge, experience, meaning, and resistance are expressed by embodied, tacit, intonational, gestural, improvisational, coexperiential, and covert means (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146). Autoethnographic texts focus on how subordinated people use deliberately subtle and opaque forms of communication—forms that are not textual or visual—to express their thoughts, feelings, and desires by performing these practices on the page and on stage (Daly & Rogers, 2001; Jones, 1997a; Stewart, 1996).

- How emotions are important to understanding and theorizing the relationship among self, power, and culture. Autoethnographic texts focus on creating a palpable emotional experience as it connects to, and separates from, other ways of knowing, being, and acting in/on the world (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 1997, 1995; Jago, 2002; Spry, 2001).

- How body and voice are inseparable from mind and thought as well as how bodies and voices move and are privileged (and are restricted and marked) in very particular and political ways. Autoethnographic texts seek to invoke the corporeal, sensuous, and political nature of experience rather than collapse text into embodiment or politics into language play (Alexander, 2000; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1997; Jackson, 1998; Jones, 1997b; Pineau, 2000; Stoller, 1997).

- How selves are constructed, disclosed, and implicated in the telling of personal narratives as well as how these narratives move in and change the contexts of their telling.<sup>6</sup> Texts aspire to purposeful and tension-filled "self-investigation" of an author's (and a reader's) role in a context, a situation, or a social world. Such self-investigation generates what Gornick (2001) termed "self-implication," that is, seeing "one's own part in the situation"—particularly "one's own frightened or cowardly or self-deceived part" (pp. 35–36)—in creating the dynamic and movement of a text (see also Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 2002; Garrick, 2001; Hartnett, 1998; Langellier, 1999; Park-Fuller, 2000; Spry, 2000; Vickers, 2002).

- How stories help us to create, interpret, and change our social, cultural, political, and personal lives. Autoethnographic texts point out not only the necessity of narrative in our world but also the power of narrative to reveal and revise that world, even when we struggle for words, when we fail to find them, or when the unspeakable is invoked but not silent (Bochner, 2001; Denzin, 2000; Hartnett, 1999; Lockford, 2002; Neumann, 1996; Pelias, 2002; Richardson, 1997).

These questions challenge us to create work that acts through, in, and on the world and to shift our focus from representation to presentation, from the rehearsal of new ways of being to their performance. These questions posit the challenge of *movement*—to talk and share in new and difficult ways, to think and rethink our positions and commitments, to push through resistance in search of hope (Becker, 2000, pp. 523, 541–542). Responding to these questions has led me and others to turn to performance. In making this turn, we must consider how the practices of autoethnography are informed by a rich history in performance, a history that needs to be written into accounts of autoethnographic theory and practices (Denzin, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Our abiding interest in performance ethnography, performative writing, and personal performance narratives is telling. These endeavors point to how personal stories become a means for interpreting

the past, translating and transforming contexts, and envisioning a future.

## ■ TURNING TO PERFORMANCE: LETTERS OF/FOR/ON CHANGE

### The Impossibility of Iser

I went to the University of Texas at Austin to study organizational culture and to learn more about ethnography, writing, and scholarship. When I looked through the graduate course offerings in the Department of Communication, I kept coming back to a course titled Reading and Performing. I was intrigued. I wanted to learn about performance studies, and I wanted to explore theories and practices of reading. But performing? I was not sure I was ready for that.

The professor<sup>7</sup> encouraged me to come to the first class to see what it was all about, and so I did. The material was compelling, the students were engaging, and the professor was witty and commanding. But what about the performances? My last—and only—performance experience was playing the baby Jesus in the church Christmas pageant. I was not sure whether I should stay, but I knew I wanted to stay. Then the professor began assigning reading reports, and I began to sweat. And then it was my turn. He looked at me and said, “Well, I don’t *know* you, but you look like a nice person. I am assigning you Wolfgang Iser because *he* is a nice person.”

I had to stay. I had to report on Iser. It is what a nice person would do. I read *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (Iser, 1993), and I understood that Iser was talking about reading and also about writing and performing. He stated,

The impossibility of being present to ourselves becomes our possibility to play ourselves out to the fullness that knows no bounds, because no matter how vast the range, none of the possibilities will “make us tick.” This impossibility suggests a purpose for literary staging. . . . Literature becomes a panorama of what is possible, because it is not hedged in by either the limitations or the

considerations that determine the institutionalized organizations within which human life otherwise takes its course. (p. xviii)

As I wrote my report, I kept coming back to this passage because it speaks to the fertile space within which we confront the impossibility of full or complete knowledge (of self, of others, and of the relationships between the two). Because we cannot know, write, or stage it “all,” we are free to create a vision of what is possible. Reading Iser, I was convinced that texts both written and read might engage and exceed these constraints in liberatory ways. I was also convinced that performance offered a possibility for realizing this goal.

### Performance Rising

Conquergood (1991) traced the rise of performance in ethnographic research<sup>8</sup> and writing in his essay, “Rethinking Ethnography.”<sup>9</sup> He tracked the turn to performance to Victor Turner’s characterization of humankind as *homo performans*—humanity as performer—“a culture-inventing, social-performing, self-making, and self-transforming creature” (p. 187). Turner’s move to link ethnography with performance as a lived and living practice accomplishes four goals. First, it turns our attention to how bodies and voices are situated in contexts—in and of “time, place, and history” (p. 187). Second, the performative turn moves researchers and researched toward a relationship of embodied “intimate involvement and engagement of ‘coactivity’ or co-performance with historically situated, named, ‘unique individuals’” (p. 187; see also Kisliuk, 2002, pp. 105–106). Third, performance-centered ethnography points up the visual, linguistic, and textual bias of Western civilization and redirects our attention to an aural, bodily, and postmodern expression of culture and lifeworld, fieldwork and writing (Conquergood, 1991, p. 189; see also Tyler, 1986). Fourth, in highlighting the “polysemic” and constitutive nature of social life and cultural performances, the performance paradigm asks us to focus on how texts can be created, communicated,

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and most notably critiqued on multiple levels (Conquergood, 1991, p. 189).

Conquergood<sup>10</sup> (1991) was not suggesting that ethnography abandon text or field in favor of performance; rather, he was suggesting that we use performance as a metaphor, means, and method for thinking about and sharing what is lost and left out of our fieldwork and our texts as well as thinking about how performance complements, alters, supplements, and critiques these texts (p. 191).<sup>11</sup>

### Ekphrastic Criticism

A thief drives to the museum in his black van. The night watchman says, Sorry, closed, you have to come back tomorrow.

The thief sticks the point of his knife in the guard's ear.

I haven't got all evening, he says, I need some art.

Art is for pleasure, the guard says, not possession, you can't have something, and then the duct tape is going across his mouth.

Don't worry, the thief says, we're both on the same side.

He finds the Dutch Masters and goes right for a Vermeer:

"Girl Writing a Letter." The thief knows what he's doing.

He has a Ph.D. He slices the canvas on one edge from

the shelf holding the salad bowls right down to the

square of sunlight on the black and white checked floor.

The girl doesn't hear this, she's too absorbed in writing

her letter, she doesn't notice him until too late.<sup>12</sup>

I chose Carpenter's (1993) "Girl Writing a Letter" for my first performance for Reading and Performing. I chose this poem because it is smart and funny and has a happy ending. I thought these things, that is, until I began to work on the

performance. There were too many characters, too many stories, too many voices and attitudes to attend to all at once. But it was too late. I stayed the course. I reported on Iser. Now I had to perform.

I finished my performance of "Girl Writing a Letter," and the professor was silent. I waited, my heart pulsing in my head. He walked to the chalkboard and wrote "Ekphrastic." Ekphrastic? What does that mean? Was it good? Awful? He explained that ekphrastic works, such as my poem, are meditations on others' creative acts (Scott, 1994, p. xi), usually texts considering a visual or aural work of art. Think John Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." Ekphrastic texts attempt to invoke "the picture-making capacity of words in poems" (Krieger, 1992, p. 1).

After this brief lesson, the professor moved on, inviting the next performance. I was left to wonder—about the poem, about the performance, about ekphrasis. Later that week, I saw my professor in the hallway outside of his office. He said, "Nice work the other day. Great poem. Great performance. I thought you said you weren't a performer."

"I'm not."

"You are a performer."

I spent the next several weeks reading and thinking about performance, texts, and ekphrasis. Although it is typically the domain of the poet and literary scholar, ekphrasis describes our attempts to translate and transmute an experience to text and text to experience. Ekphrasis "breathes words into the mute picture; it makes pictures out of the suspended words of its text. It is as much about urgency as it is about rest, as much voyage as interlude" (Scott, 1994, p. xii). And what happens when we perform an ekphrastic text? What happens when we perform the artist performing the artist, repeating the act of connection and creation, breaking that experience out of one form and context and remaking it in another? Perhaps we create a critical ekphrasis, a performance that moves through *mimesis* (imitation) and *poiesis* (creation) to *kinesis* (movement) (Conquergood, 1992, p. 84).<sup>13</sup>

## Inventory

I was hooked. I changed parties and turned to performance studies. I enrolled in Performance History, Autobiography, and Performance and in Performance Ethnography. On the first day of Performance Ethnography, the professor<sup>14</sup> asked students to pair up and said, "Without speaking, write three observations or assumptions about your partner and then discuss."

There were an odd number of students, so I was paired with the professor. I wrote, "Sings well, writes poetry, believes in reincarnation." She wrote, "Married or in a committed relationship, precise and particular, doesn't relax easily." We shared our lists and laughed over the entries. Some of them were on target, and others were not. But each item on our lists spoke to our projections, our hopes, things we wanted for ourselves, and things we did not want.

At the end of class, the professor asked us to do a self-inventory, answering questions about our physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, artistic, and artifactual selves:

What are three of your typical gestures?

When you cried last, what was it about?

What spiritual activities do you engage in each day?

What was the last book you read that was not assigned for a class?

In what activities are you the most creative?

How do you typically adorn your body?

Answering these questions and others, I thought about how performance ethnography is an inventory of both self and other, an act of interpretation and a performance of that assessment, and a journey through imitation and creation into movement. I wondered where this journey would take me.

## Doing Bodies Doing Culture

Jones (2002) wrote that performance ethnography is "most simply, how culture is done in the body" (p. 7). The process of creating and staging

performance ethnography, however, is not simply placing, and then playing, bodies in cultures. Rather, performance ethnography seeks to *implicate* researchers and audiences by creating an experience that brings together theory and praxis in complicated, contradictory, and meaningful ways.

Performance ethnography is grounded in two primary ideas: (a) that our identities and daily practices are a series of performance choices (conscious and unconscious) that we improvise within cultural and social guidelines and (b) that we learn through participation or through performance (p. 7; see also Denzin, 2003, pp. 14–16). Performance ethnography can take many forms, ranging from recreating cultural performances for audiences invested and interested in understanding, preserving, and/or challenging particular identities and ways of life (Conquergood, 1985, 1994) to presenting individual (autoethnographic) experiences as a means for pointing up the subjective and situated nature of identity, fieldwork, and cultural interpretation (Jones, 1996; Spry, 2001). Performance ethnography can also be presented in various ways, ranging from traditionally "theatrical" settings complete with fourth-wall conventions (in which the audience observes the action on stage) to installations and scenes in which audience members are invited/compelled to participate in the creation of the performance. Whatever the form or process, performance ethnographies seek to "explore bodily knowing, to stretch the ways in which ethnography might share knowledge of a culture, and to puzzle through the ethical and political dilemmas of fieldwork and representation" (Jones, 2002, p. 7). Jones (2002) asserted that performance ethnography achieves these goals by focusing on four principles: (a) creating a specific context for the performance, (b) working in collaboration with and being accountable to a fieldwork community, (c) highlighting the performer's "situated and interested role" in the interpretation of culture, and (d) providing a multitude of perspectives that audience members must actively synthesize (pp. 8–9).

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accountability, subjectivity, and multivocality, that is, if we create work that is both “community-based and community active” (Kisliuk, 2002, p. 116). We must be willing not only to implicate our audiences but also to incite them to participate, to act, and to take risks.

### Girl Writing (another) Letter

During the second semester of my Ph.D. program, insomnia came to live with me. I would lie in bed with my mind racing. I rehashed rehearsals and classroom conversations. I wondered whether I had paid the electric bill. I agonized over who or what to choose as my subject for Performance Ethnography. I considered sites and contexts as well as organizations and individuals, but nothing seemed right. I changed positions, tried to focus on the hum of the air conditioner and the steady pulse of the highway traffic, and then fell into a shallow sleep and dreamed of my grandfather.

A few months before insomnia came to stay, my grandfather had died. I was in the heat of my first semester at Texas when my mother called to tell me. My grandfather had spent the past 2 years mourning the death of my grandmother, and a heart attack had rescued him from living alone without her.

I did not go to the funeral. My mother convinced me to stay in school. That was where my grandfather had wanted me, where he was proud of me. Months later, my sleepless nights began and ended with dreams of my grandfather and the hazy edges of my un-lived grief. One night after my eyes flew open to greet the red glare of 2 o'clock, I decided that I had had enough. I decided that I would meet my grandfather in the space he cared about most and to live my grief at school in Performance Ethnography. I got up and composed another letter—another poem for performance.

*Dear Grandpa*

I didn't hear you leave.

I was too busy writing,

your college girl,

never noticing until too late.

Grandma phoned from her hospital bed  
asked me to look in on you.

Said last night you were hit by a car,  
walking home in the rain.

I drive to you teeth clenched.

Fear works the doorbell and

twists into my breathing

until I hear you call over barking dogs.

The door opens and you shrink in its frame.

Angry bruises glow violent beneath pale skin,  
your left eye pinched shut against the pain.

My own vision blurs as we embrace.

You don't want to see a doctor, don't want  
to lie down, don't want to rest.

You need to get to the hospital, to her.

You've been gone too long.

I take you to her, but say I can't stay.

That's right, I'm your college girl.

I watch you touch her face and stroke her hair.

I am furious you don't want to live without her.

I tell you both good-bye, not knowing

this is the last time, not knowing

I left you together. Is this how you wanted it?

I didn't hear you leave.

I wove this letter into a performance that included my grandfather's letters to me, family photos, reflections on his life and death, and arguments for the performance of grief.<sup>15</sup> I used monologue, epic, and “everyday life” performance techniques to show my grandfather, myself, and the process of performing an other (Hopper, 1993; Stucky, 1993). I felt closer to my grandfather; more in tune with his presence in my life, dreams, and grief; and proud to share both with an audience.

This performance was my response to the project of performance ethnography. It was my

subjective and vulnerable experience. It did not produce “findings”; it was not generalizable outside of asking audience members to recall and reinhabit their own moments of grieving (Goodall, 2000, p. 2). It generated whatever credibility it earned out of my fumbling attempts to make sense of my loss. This is a hallmark of autoethnography and autoethnographic performance—speaking in and through experiences that are unspeakable as well as inhabiting and animating the struggle for words and often our failure to find them (A. Bochner & C. Ellis, personal communication, September 6, 2003). These are risky performances for all involved, and not only because they testify to the spaces of failure, silence, and loss. They are risky because in the rush to identification, empathy, and our desire for an “authentic” experience, audiences and performers can give and receive testimony in ways that move too quickly from a connected yet distinctive “you” and “me” to an unquestioned and violent “we” (Salverson, 2001, p. 124; see also Diamond, 1992). This collapsing of me into you and you into me can work to shut down engagement and responsibility. It can fail to recognize the ethical move required to make autoethnography and autoethnographic performances “a doorway, an instrument of encounter, a place of public and private negotiations—where the goal is not just to empathize, but to *attend*” (Salverson, 2001, p. 125, emphasis added). My performance of my grief for my grandfather stopped short of asking my audience and myself to take a greater risk, to move through *mimesis* (reflection) to *poiesis* (creation) and *kinesis* (movement). That performance—the performance of critique and change—required another letter.

### Connecting

I flew to St. Louis, Missouri, and met an old friend. We drove into a new territory, with her convertible twisting and winding into the state park, where we breathed in the scents of pine and sunlight. We were there for a conference on performative writing. We collected there to share the work—the words—we believed to be performative

writing. I was nervous, tentative, and unsure. Should *I* be here? Should it be someone else instead? Of course. I felt guilty about leaving work on a dissertation about torch singing as a feminist performance practice. Should I be *here*? Should I be at home writing—focused on finishing—instead? Of course. But I was here to listen, to read my words, and to experience. And I knew that when we embody stories and identities, there is always danger and always risk,<sup>16</sup> so I went.

We began by talking about performative writing. What is it? How do we know it? What does it aspire to be? How do we judge? What does performance have to do with it? We talked and questioned and made notes, never deciding but instead piling on detail and nuance. Performative writing . . .

“[is a] kind of writing where the body and the spoken word, performance practice and theory, the personal and the scholarly, come together.” (Miller & Pelias, 2001, p. v)

“requires faith that language inked on a page can ‘do’ as well as ‘be.’” (Stucky, 2001, p. vii)

“depends upon the performative body believing in language.” (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2001, p. vii)

“creates a performance, rather than describes one.” (Barthes, 1977, p. 114)

The hurried and rich discussion left me breathless and nervous. Did my words embody a belief in the power of language? Move beyond the pages of their inscription? Invoke, conjure, and create a new world? As much as the warm atmosphere and kind eyes of the participants told me to relax—to enjoy this performance—I was afraid of how my work would be read, heard, and judged.

Reading, reception, and judgment—conversations about why and how to evaluate alternative auto/ethnographic work abound.<sup>17</sup> For example, Richardson (2000) offered five criteria that she uses when reviewing what she calls creative analytic practices (CAP) ethnography: (a) substantive contribution to an understanding of social life, (b) aesthetic merit, (c) reflexivity, (d) emotional and intellectual impact, and (e) a clear

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expression of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of reality (p. 937). Using Richardson's and others' models, I have developed a list of actions and accomplishments that I look for in my work and in the work of others. They are changing. They are generated in the doing of this writing rather than outside or prior to it:

■ *Participation as reciprocity.* How well does the work construct participation of authors/readers and performers/audiences as a *reciprocal* relationship marked by mutual responsibility and obligation (Elam, 1997, p. 78; hooks, 1995, p. 221)?

■ *Partiality, reflexivity, and citationality as strategies for dialogue (and not “mastery”).* How well does the work present a partial and self-referential tale that connects with other stories, ideas, discourses, and contexts (e.g., personal, theoretical, ideological, cultural) as a means of creating a dialogue among “authors, readers, and subjects written/read” (Pollock, 1998, p. 80; see also Denzin, 1997, pp. 224–227; Lather, 2001, p. 216; Richardson, 1997, p. 91)?

■ *Dialogue as a space of debate and negotiation.* How well does the work create a space for and engage in meaningful dialogue among different bodies, hearts, and minds (Conquergood, 1985, p. 9; Denzin, 1997, p. 247)?

■ *Personal narrative and storytelling as an obligation to critique.* How do narrative and story enact an ethical obligation to critique subject positions, acts, and received notions of expertise and justice within and outside of the work (Conquergood, 2002, p. 152; Denzin, 1997, p. 200; Langelier, 1999, 128–131)?

■ *Evocation and emotion as incitements to action.* How well does the work create a plausible and visceral lifeworld and charged emotional atmosphere as an incitement to act within and outside the context of the work (Bochner, 2000, p. 271; Denzin, 1997, p. 209)?

■ *Engaged embodiment as a condition for change.* How does the work place/embody/interrogate/intervene in experience in ways that make

political action and change possible in and outside of the work? In other words, how does the work “make writing *do*” (Diamond, 1996, p. 2; Pollock, 1998, pp. 95–96)?

I brought these actions and accomplishments with me to the gathering on performative writing. As the first author/performer began, I heard them sound and reverberate on his tongue and in his words and through his story. I heard them sound and reverberate as we listened to each other that weekend, writing and telling and remaking selves in the words on our pages, in our mouths, on our bodies, and in the room with the green window on the world.<sup>18</sup>

### (Re)Making the Self

Miller (1998)<sup>19</sup> maintained that the gathering interest in autobiographical performance has much to do with a shift in performance studies from aesthetic performance to “a more integral paradigm for explaining, critiquing, and experiencing how contemporary life is lived” (p. 318). This shift, like the move toward interpretive, qualitative, narrative, and critical inquiry in other human disciplines, was precipitated by a rethinking of the relationships among texts, performers, audiences, and contexts; a proliferation in the number and nature of communication technologies; and a postmodern decentering of the authority, autonomy, and stability of institutions, subjectivities, and texts (pp. 319–320). Out of this shift emerged an emphasis on personal narrative as a situated, fluid, and emotionally and intellectually charged *engagement* of self and other (performer and witness) made possible in the “evolving, revelatory dance between performer and spectator” (Miller, 1995, p. 49). In such exchanges, audiences and performers (often composed of people who are classified by virtue of race, class, age, sexual preference, gender identity, and experience as “others”) create and constitute a shared history and, thus, break into and diminish their marginalization. These performances create highly personal encounters within an increasingly impersonal public sphere.

Autobiographical performances provide an opportunity to “educate, empower, and emancipate” (Langellier, 1999, p. 129). Langellier (1999) located a means of mitigating and complicating the “either/or” logic of celebration (resistance) and suspicion (dominance) within personal narrative performance, specifically in the interaction between performance and performativity. Langellier asserted that “stories are made, not found” in performances that mediate between experience and story, between the doing and the done (p. 128; see also Denzin, 2003, p. 10).

These distinctions between experience and story, between the doing and the done, rely on a notion of performativity that states that a life story—an identity—is not something an author/performer “elects to do, but . . . [rather] is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes an effect of the very subject it appears to express” (Butler, 1991, p. 24). Performativity points to how identities, and thus life stories, are not easily adopted or changed (as a role taken on by an actor) but instead accrue “gradually, yet [do] not attach [themselves] to some blank, some actor cast in a play she’s not yet read; [such identities] come into being by virtue of being performed” (Solomon, 1997, p. 169). That is, life stories are created and recreated in the moments of their telling.

Performativity points to the impossibility of separating our life stories from the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are created and the ways in which performance as a site of dialogue and negotiation is itself a contested space (Diamond, 1996, p. 2). Langellier (1999) wrote,

Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded. . . . This is why personal narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities left out of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense. (p. 129)

The challenge is to consider how particular performances of personal stories “need performativity to comprehend [their] constitutive

effects” as well as how performativity “relies upon performance to show itself” (Langellier, 1999, p. 136). In the iterative and unstable move between performance and performativity, “questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable” (Diamond, 1996, p. 4). It is a discussion that moves discourse to storytelling performance, from autonomous texts to situated practices, from received storylines to emergent dramas with numerous possible “endings,” and from omniscient narrators to a proliferation of unreliable reflexive voices. It is a discussion that creates and challenges social relations “within the performance event and perhaps even beyond it” (Langellier, 1999, p. 132; see also Denzin, 2003, pp. 10–11).

Performative writing brings the performance–performativity dynamic to the moment of texting in which identities and experiences are constructed, interpreted, and changed. It occurs when we encounter the page with the intention of entering into a discussion marked by contest and negotiation, embodied knowledge and vociferous exchange, emotional and intellectual charge. It occurs when we invite an audience into dialogue as we write, speak, and perform the words on the page, in our mouths, on our bodies, and in the world. Because the performance–performativity dynamic asserts that performances are inseparable from performers and that performativity is inseparable from politics, autobiographical performance, personal narrative, and performative auto/ethnography enmesh the personal within the political and the political within the personal in ways that can, do, and must matter.

### A Love Letter

It was my turn. I moved from my seat on the floor and into the chair beneath the window. All eyes—expectant and encouraging—were on me. I took a breath and began a story about torch singers and ghosts.

On the flight from Detroit to Paris, I read about the Edith Piaf Museum in the guidebook:

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Paris. Open by appointment 1–6 p.m. Closed Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and bank holidays. Private museum in an apartment. Memorabilia of the singer. China collection. Free.

I circle the phone number. I turn the dog-eared page. I close my eyes and begin listening for Piaf as she haunts Paris, as she haunts me, a present history singing her invisibility. . . .

I arrive at the apartment museum at 1 p.m. Melissa accompanies me as translator. The proprietor, Bernard Marchois, invites us in. Standing immediately in front of us is a black-and-white cardboard cutout of Piaf. Marchois tells us that the cutout was created as a lobby display for one of her last concerts at the Paris Olympia. He smiles. This is a life-sized portrait, he says. He puts his arm around the cardboard statue. He is not a tall man, but Edith looks like a tiny bird under his arm—yes, a sparrow.

He shows us into the sitting room, and Melissa and I look around. This place, like all of the others, is packed tight with Piaf memorabilia. These are *her* things—her records, her jewelry, her hastily scrawled letters, her black dress, her china. We sit on a couch. (Is it hers? Did she sit here?) Marchois pulls up a chair. Melissa explains that we’re interested in hearing about Piaf’s performances, about Piaf the woman. He nods and smiles. I ask him to tell us how they met. Melissa asks again, in French. He laughs. He explains that he met Piaf when he was a teenager. An older couple—friends of the family—invited him to see Piaf at the Olympia. Before the show, the couple took Marchois backstage to meet her. He was disappointed. She was frail and plain. She looked like a cleaning lady.

“Surprised?” she asked.

Marchois nodded sheepishly.

She laughed a round, full laugh. “You come back and see me after the show, eh?”

He was sure he had seen enough, but he nodded again.

“The show was electrifying. By the end of the show, I was smitten. I could barely contain my excitement

as we made our way backstage. When we entered the dressing room, she turned that lightning smile on me.”

“So, what do you think of me now?”

“She saw everything in my eyes.”

She laughed. “Come,” she said, and she pulled me into her embrace.

Marchois’s eyes glisten. He sighs. He says they were friends, never lovers. He says she loved life, loved to laugh and play music, loved to sing. He says her songs were full of heartache, but that heartache was never hopeless. It was simply part of the equation of living. Her songs were signposts of the places she was in between—spaces of contradiction, tension, and immanent possibilities.<sup>20</sup> He says she loved sharing these places, these wounds of feeling. He says, again, she loved life.

I see the cardboard likeness of Piaf in the next room. I see the picture of Marchois with his arm around her—not the life-sized photo but [rather] what is pressing in from the other side of the image displayed within her tiny frame.<sup>21</sup> I see him sitting here, in an apartment filled with her teacups and earrings and stationery. I glance down at my notebook. My next question is, “Why do this? Why invite strangers into your home to talk about Edith Piaf?” I look up at him and I have my answer. He is an amateur, a careful collector of memories. He does this so that he might breathe life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look.<sup>22</sup> He lives among her things because looking at them and showing them to others is his lover’s discourse.<sup>23</sup> He is writing ghost stories in a language of commonplace things that take on an immense power.<sup>24</sup> And with each day, with each conversation, he proclaims his love and writes his memories anew.

We leave the museum and walk toward the Metro station. Melissa asks if I got what I wanted. I say, Yes. No. I’m not sure, and maybe that’s the point. I came to Paris looking for the real Edith Piaf, and I’m leaving with her ghost.

Melissa stops. Why do this? Why follow her ghost around Paris?

I have my answer: Because following a ghost is about making contact, and that contact changes you.<sup>25</sup>

Later, when I sit down to write this story of my encounter with Piaf and her ghost, I feel her watching over my shoulder as I move my fingers along the keys, always with me, the questioning, critical ghost of my text. She leaves wounds of feeling on my language; never hopeless, just part of living. My stories are love letters, invitations to hear the unspoken, unheard voices of the singer and myself.

### Performing Possibilities

I finished my story, and the audience was still and silent. Then the discussion began, pulling my story and me into a new performance. We talked of rhythm and thick description, theory and practice, haunting and writing. I was challenged and energized by our conversation. I envisioned new possibilities for my story and for the power of narrative to inscribe and embody a horizon of movement. I left the chair under the window and returned to my place on the floor.

I flew home from the conference and spent a few days writing and reading about performance, personal narrative, and performativity. I made note of what Madison (1998a) stated about the “performance of possibilities,” that is, the “active, creative work that weaves the life of the mind with being mindful of life, of ‘merging text and world,’ of critically traversing the margin *and* the center, of opening more and different paths for enlivening relations and spaces” (p. 277).

Performances of possibilities are created in the momentum of movement from silence to voice and from margin to center. They provide a gathering place for narratives that seek change in “systems and processes that limit possibilities” (Madison, 1998a, p. 279). The space and movement of performances of possibilities are infused with the responsibility to ethically engage with selves and others in ways that do not forestall or foreclose dialogue. Performances of possibilities provide both the means and the method for an alterative, alternative ethnography. They are, to

use Sandoval’s (2000) description, subjunctive; they join together the possible and what is, they provide the medium “through which difference both arises and is undone; [they] join together through *movement*” (p. 180).

Then I returned to my dissertation, my love letter to torch singing. I brought these questions with me to my writing.

### Intimate Provocation

Madison’s questions link the personal with the political and suggest how the turn toward performative narratives and narrative performances creates a politically efficacious poetics in and through movement (see also Conquergood, 2002; Langellier, 1999; Hartnett, 1998; Jones, 2002; Spry, 2001).

The lessons and challenges for autoethnography in the turn toward performance, performative writing, and personal narrative are clear. Autoethnographic texts are personal stories that are both constitutive and performative. They are charged exchanges of presence or “mutual presentness” (Dolan, 1993, p. 151). They are love letters—processes and productions of desire—for recognition, for engagement, and for change. Tedlock (1991) characterized the ethnographer’s process as that of an amateur, which derives from the Latin *amatus* or “to love” (p. 82). Written and experienced in this way, autoethnography becomes an intimate provocation, a critical ekphrasis, a story of and with movement.

But like all stories, my account is partial, fragmented, and situated in the texts and contexts of my own learning, interpretations, and practices. Rather than end here in the intersections and interactive possibilities of narrative and performance, I want to tell you one more story, invent one more history, invoke one more discussion of the intricacies of theory and praxis. I want to tell you about socially resistive performance as a site and means of intimate provocation. I want to ask you to consider the place of autoethnography in this story.

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## ■ TURNING AGAIN: PERFORMING SOCIAL RESISTANCE

### Watching and Writing

When I was young—4 and 5 and 6 years old—I loved staying over on Saturday nights with my grandparents. I relished staying up late nights and having their undivided attention. But most of all, I loved watching *The Lawrence Welk Show*. My grandmother marveled at my fixation on the set. At first, she thought it was the bubbles that held my attention, but I watched everything—the musical numbers, the singers, the dancing. I clapped in time with the movement of Bobby and Sissy. I clapped in time with my grandfather's typewriter click-clacking in the other room.

My grandmother would call him in to see my performance, and the typing—the writing of letters, histories, and wild fictions—would stop. My grandfather would stroll into the living room to watch me. He would smile and pick me up, swinging me high over his head and onto his shoulders. He would hold my hands and spin me in time to Bobby and Sissy's waltz, swing, or foxtrot. And when the number was over, he would return me to my spot on the floor in front of the television and then return to his typewriter.

Out of sight, he would place his fingers on the keys and furiously tap out his own rhythm, vision, and story. And I would return to the dancing, the music, the singing, and the bubbles.

### Hopeful Openness

First, consider several ideas about theater and social change:

- That art does not mirror or transcend experience but rather is a means for creating and experiencing the world
- That what happens in a performance can influence, and can *change*, what happens in the world
- That the performer-spectator relationship is not fixed but rather malleable—that a spectator can be an active agent (e.g., cocreator, participant) *in*

a performance rather than a passive consumer of a performance

- That performance creates a space in which participants not only glimpse who and what they are and desire but also come into contact with different identities, positions, and desires
- That such encounters can demand and facilitate response and action

Now, imagine these ideas as they are played out on stages and street corners, in lecture halls, and in coffee shops. Can you see and hear these performances? Can you imagine that each “models a hopeful openness to the diverse possibilities of democracy” (Dolan, 2001b, p. 2)?

Wait. Do not answer yet. I want to tell you one more story.

Performance has long been a site and means for negotiating social, cultural, and political dialogue (for two historical accounts of this process in different contexts, see Denning, 1997, and Scott, 1990). In the United States, activist theater has coalesced around social movements such as the labor movement of the 1930s, the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the AIDS activism of the 1980s (Cohen-Cruz, 2001, p. 95). The associations between social movements and activist performance, however, are opportunistic, tenuous, and changing. Such associations do not adequately describe the changing nature of social change theater. Instead, as Cohen-Cruz (2001) proposed, movements in the form and function of activist performance correspond to shifts in the ways in which performance posits the performer-audience-text-context relationship.<sup>26</sup>

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the conditions for activist theater were ripe. Actors formed radical collectives that produced both realist drama and original work. The goals of these “actor-based, movement-linked” companies “were plain: get the United States out of Vietnam, enforce equal rights for all people regardless of race or ethnicity, boycott grapes” (Cohen-Cruz, 2001, p. 98). Although techniques were many, much of this work drew on Bertolt Brecht's concept of epic theater—performances

that create a distinction among—and distance between—actor and character, text and context. Epic theater asks audiences to critically engage with and evaluate the performance and its social implications rather than get swept away in the emotional and nonevaluative force of theater-as-entertainment. Distinction and distance are what make theater an occasion for enlightened and involved citizenship as well as a powerful site and means for breaking into and refiguring our world (Brecht, 1957/1998, p. 125).

As the national movements with which these performances were allied began to fracture and shift, socially resistant performance also began to change (Cohen-Cruz, 2001, p. 99). Performers turned their attention to issues in their own communities and began to grapple with the need to express not only solidarity and unity but also the intricacies of identity, difference, and identification (pp. 98–99). During the 1980s, identity politics (e.g., efforts focused specifically on gay rights or gender equality) emphasized personal storytelling and creating an environment and process in which community members could participate in performances. Whereas 1960s “political theater was more consistently radical in *content*, community-based theater is more consistently radical in, and focused on, *process*” (p. 100, emphasis added). The force and power of this work inheres in creating reciprocity among artists and community members, linking the personal with the political, and instigating specific, local actions. Working with untrained participants meant that community-based theater relied heavily on workshops for developing and rehearsing performances. Workshop techniques, such as those developed by Augusto Boal, facilitated this process. Boal (1979/1985), whose work draws and builds on Brechtian principles, outlined several techniques to assist community members in creating “theater [as] a rehearsal for revolution” (p. 122). Whereas Brecht advocated a critically active spectator, Boal asserted that spectators must learn to become “spect-actors” and, as such, to actively participate in the unfolding drama on stage. In so doing, spect-actors train themselves for real action in the world (p. 122).

Participants did learn to become active participants on stage and in the world. They benefited from the performance in definable and material ways. Challenges surrounding the need to balance aesthetic concerns with the sharing of experience, the splintering effects of identity-based dialogues, and the need to connect local action to larger contexts precipitated a shift from community-based performance to theater and civic dialogue (Cohen-Cruz, 2001, p. 104). Theater and civic dialogue is focused on realigning and reconnecting the politics surrounding gender, race, class, and sexuality (among other identities and positions) in a way that does not obfuscate or collapse differences but instead puts these identities and positions in conflict and conversation with one another around an issue of civic importance (Dolan, 2001a, p. 90). The goal of civic dialogue performance is to “engage the public more fully with contemporary issues” (p. 106). As such, civic dialogue returns to the broad social, cultural, and political contexts and issues “reminiscent of 1960s theater, but from multiple perspectives” (p. 106). Civic dialogue performance is inspired and informed by an impetus to involve audiences in the wake of actual events to create critical engagement (hooks, 1995, p. 214).

Whereas the techniques of both Brecht and Boal formed the cornerstone for much theater practice in movement- and community-based theater, civic dialogue theater embraces a fluid and opportunistic approach to performative paradigms and styles (hooks, 1995, p. 219). Civic dialogue performance also takes advantage of the multiple sites available for engagement—live theater and street performance, television and the Internet, dance parties and spectacles (Orenstein, 2001, pp. 149–150). These performances must, as Orenstein (2001) asserted, “appeal to a broad audience by offering frameworks for protest that leave room for individual creativity and by eschewing overly restrictive or exclusive ideologies” (p. 151).

What lessons does this history offer for autoethnography? First, it provides another context for the turn to performance, performative writing, and personal performance narratives in interpretive, qualitative, critical, and narrative

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inquiry. Second, this history traces the movement between and among art and politics, individual and community, representation and participation. In the shifts toward reflexivity, inclusion, personal stories, local actions, multiple perspectives, and civic dialogue, social protest theater demonstrates how paradigms and techniques can be used in the service of making art matter and generating action in the world. Social protest theater’s history also speaks to how the stories *we* tell can and do reflect back on, become entangled in, and critique this current historical moment and its discontents (Denzin, 1997, p. 200).

### Journalist . . . Artist

When I got a little older, my Saturday night stays with my grandparents in the company of Lawrence Welk were extended to weeklong visits over summer vacation. I would visit them at their lake house, with its screened porch, sloping lawn, and dense stand of trees. Inside the house, there was a guest bedroom with a white iron twin bed, just for me. There was my grandmother’s electric organ, with its waltz, foxtrot, and bossa nova accompaniment. There were shelves of books and stacks of board games—Monopoly, Scrabble, and Parcheesi. There were all of these things to keep my hands and mind busy, and after 20 minutes or so I would whine that there was absolutely nothing to do.

I would start wondering how much longer it would be until my parents came to pick me up.

I would sprawl on the couch and sulk.

I would wander into the kitchen and watch my grandmother peeling potatoes. I would watch her so intently that she would turn around and ask, “What’s the matter?”

“I’m bored.”

“Do you want to read?”

“No.”

“Want to go outside and play?”

“Nope.”

“Want Grandpa to play Scrabble with you?”

“No.”

“Well then, dear, what do you want to do?”

And I would stare back at her, expressionless, until she would shrug and return to the potatoes.

We enacted this scene nearly every day during my visits. And then one day, my grandmother turned to me and said, “Why don’t you write something?”

“What?” I had not heard that one before.

“Why don’t you pretend you’re a reporter and you’re going to write a story for the evening edition of the paper?”

“But I don’t know how to be a reporter.”

“I’ll show you.”

And with that, my grandmother set off to look for my reporter’s costume. She gave me a small pad and pencil. She gave me an old hat of my grandfather’s. She wrote “Press” on a slip of paper and stuck it in the hatband. Then she said, “Why don’t you interview Grandpa for your story?”

At least I think that is what she said. I was already looking for my grandfather.

He was sitting at the dining room table, staring at his typewriter. His hands were clasped behind his head. He was reading the newly typed sheet in front of him, silently mouthing the words. He looked up from his work and said, “Well, who is this?”

“I’m a reporter and I’m here to interview you for the evening edition!”

“Sure. Pull up a chair. Care for a drink?”

“Can’t. I’m on the job.”

“Very well, then. What can I do for you?”

I asked my grandfather how old he was, how much he weighed, and how tall he was.

I asked about his favorite color, record, and book. I asked him why he loved Grandma and whether he wished he could live forever. I asked him why he sat at his typewriter all afternoon and into the darkness, typing. He said that he was writing stories.

“Stories about what?”

“Stories about what I see when I close my eyes and listen very, very carefully.”

“Listen to what?”

“To the radio. To the mourning doves. To you playing the organ. To the beating of my own heart.”

He smiled and asked me whether I had any other questions. I said, “No, that does it.” He went back to staring at the page and reading his words to himself. And then he put his fingers on the keys and began typing.

I stayed there, very still in my chair and wrote down the things I noticed about my grandfather as he worked—the way his glasses glinted when the light hit them, the way his right hand would raise up from the keys and push the return key and land back on the keys in one fluid motion, the way he smiled at being watched and documented.

I worked on my story for several days. When I was done, my grandmother pasted it onto a large sheet of construction paper. Both of my grandparents said that they liked my story very much.

The story I wrote at my grandparents' house that summer did not come out of nowhere. I intended to write it. I donned the costume of a reporter and played the role as I remembered it—watching carefully, asking questions, and writing things down. I do not recall how the story went, but I do know that it was about my grandfather's performance as an artist—as a writer. It was my attempt to document music, movement, and the beating of his heart. And although I did not know it then, this story was my attempt to write a text that enacted the very art it sought to inscribe.

### On Location

The “documentary idea” in solo performance, as Kalb (2001) put it, is to give an audience the impression of having been there “*on location*” (p. 20, emphasis added). For Kalb, the actual fact of being there is not as important as the rhetorical power of solo performance to generate “powerful topical narratives that are not easily dismissed or second-guessed, and for performance circumstances” in which Brecht’s epic theater<sup>27</sup> “becomes a living concept again because the reality of the performer-researcher has been made an active part of the art” (p. 16). Documentary solo performance subscribes to an inherent duplicity—of fact and fiction, imagination and realism, objectivity and partisanship—that “recognizes the audience’s sophistication regarding stories” (p. 22). It is this duplicity, along with a performer’s ability to bridge and exploit the possibilities inherent in the move between documentary realism and fictionalization, that makes a performance compelling.

Anna Deavere Smith’s performances *Fires in the Mirror* (regarding the 1991 riots in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, following the death of a black boy struck by a rabbi’s motorcade and the retaliatory stabbing of a Jewish student) and *Twilight: Los Angeles* (regarding the 1992 riots in Los Angeles following the acquittal of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King) offer striking examples of the duplicity of solo documentary performance.<sup>28</sup> Smith constructed these performances by interviewing people directly and indirectly involved in the events and delivered, “verbatim, their words and the essence of their physical beings in characterizations which fall somewhere between caricature, Brechtian epic gestures, and mimicry” (Reinelt, 1996, p. 609). Reinelt (1996) characterized Smith’s performance technique as “a bridge that makes the unlikely seem connected. She ghosts her portraits with her own persona, signifying sympathy, fairness, and also her own subject position” (p. 615). Reinelt argued<sup>29</sup> that, in filtering the voices of (many) others through her own voice and oscillating between identification and difference,

Smith needs to have it both ways. . . . She needs to be identified as both journalist and artist. In a sense, Smith dares to speak [for others] . . . *not* because she is objective, fair-minded, and even-handed, but because she demonstrates the process of bridging difference, seeking information and understanding, and finessing questions of identity. Since the audience is positioned in the direct address sequences to “be” Smith, they are positioned to experience the activity of bridging, working with difference. This effect is the most radical element of Smith’s work—it engages the spectator in radical political activity to the extent that the spectator grapples with this epistemological process. (p. 615)

Smith’s work enacts this bridging in the performance of personal stories. Rather than use these stories as a mirror for a subject’s or an audience’s unexamined experience, Smith’s solo performances “turn the mirror into a political tool” (Kalb, 2001, p. 23; see also Dolan, 2001a, p. 89; Kondo, 2000). Smith noted, “My project is about . . . the gap between . . . the performer and the other

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and . . . the gap between the performer and the text" (quoted in Capo and Langellier, 1994, p. 68). By remaining critically present in her portrayal of others and their stories, Smith brings the performative to her performance. She eschews politically disengaged, reductive, and static *representation(s)* of events and participants in favor of work that *presents*—creates—a "generative engagement between performer and audience" in the negotiation among stories, selves, texts, and contexts (Salverson, 2001, p. 123). She moves through *mimesis* to *poiesis* and *kinesis*.

What happens when performers present their own stories? Solo performers often offer their personal stories as testimony about "real" events. Audiences witness such testimony and, as such, become implicated in the encounters. As Hughes and Román (1998) noted,

When we attend a solo piece it's knowing that there is a good chance the performer is also the writer and the stories we will hear "really happened." There is some level of safety that disappears for the audience: we can't hide behind "it's only art." (p. 4; see also Miller, 1995)

Personal narrative performances deny any easy distinction between "art" and "life." Such performances retain their performative, political power in and through the ways in which they foreground the constitutive and shifting nature of giving testimony and witnessing. Rather than present experience as authentic (true) and untouchable (immune to critical commentary), solo performers create intimate provocations in which they testify and audiences bear witness to their stories (Gray & Sinding, 2002).

Robbie McCauley is a performer who writes, directs, and performs personal narrative, making explicit the social conditions in which her stories are situated (Whyte, 1993, p. 282). In telling personal narratives, McCauley "intends that her onlookers . . . , in witnessing the experiences she invokes in her performances, will begin to understand their own implication in the situations that she presents" (p. 282). In her work *Sally's Rape: The Whole Story*, McCauley explores how her own

story is shaped by the stories of others, including her "great-great-grandmother Sally, a slave on the Monticello estate of Thomas Jefferson" (p. 280).<sup>30</sup> The work includes a scene in which McCauley stands naked on an auction block. Her white partner Jeannie Hutchins<sup>31</sup> instructs the audience to create the scene of a slave market by chanting "Bid 'em in, bid 'em in." McCauley performs a monologue in which the voice of Sally and her own voice are intertwined as her body is examined and violated. Whyte (1993) described her experience of this scene:

For the onlooker there is an awe-ful fascination in this representation of the slave auction, this scene of victimage. The pleasure of looking at the naked body of the black woman is . . . made guilty by the awareness of being inescapably positioned as a potential buyer in the slave market. . . . Similarly, whether or not you join the chanting you are trapped by the sympathetic magic of sound which reanimates the past, and no matter how much you tell yourself you had nothing to do with this scene, you are made vicariously complicit in the auction system that McCauley's staging represents. (p. 278)

McCauley's work illustrates the ways in which giving testimony and witnessing can and must be situated in larger contexts and shared histories. Her performances ask audiences and performers to come together differently and deeply "without collapsing either the 'I' or the 'other' into a totalizing 'we'" (Salverson, 2001, p. 120). McCauley taps into the vulnerability required to tell personal stories to move audiences past simple, essentialist identification and toward a generative engagement with their differences. She noted, "When you engage your vulnerability around . . . issues that are both political and personal, then you can have something powerful happen between people" (quoted in Becker, 2000, p. 530).

Where does bridging the political and personal in solo performance move (and leave) performers and audiences? Hughes and Román (1998) wrote,

"The personal is political" remain[s] a vital challenge for solo performers. . . . Consequently, few

performance artists—no matter how skilled or funny—intend to simply entertain; they mean to provoke, to raise questions, to implicate their audiences. (pp. 8–9)

Thus, the idea of being *on location* as a solo performer means using personal stories to create “calculated disturbances” in social, cultural, and political networks of power (Lane, 2002, p. 61). Writer, performer, and director Tim Miller commented on the exacting nature of these disturbances: “The whole reason for being an artist in this particular realm (performance) . . . is to respond quickly, effectively, and surgically to what you want to do” (quoted in Burnham, 1998, p. 35).

Miller’s solo performances focus on gay rights and identities as these issues are reflected in/through the critical lens of his personal experience. His recent work *Glory Box* protests the failure of immigration laws to recognize gay and lesbian relationships, using the experience of his own relationship with his Australian Scottish partner. Writing about his experience traveling in the United States and performing *Glory Box*, Miller (2002) noted,

I am trying to make my case to the communities I engage that this violence and injustice against lesbian and gay couples must stop. . . . I think theater is primarily a site for liberation stories and a sweaty laboratory to model possible strategies for empowerment. (para. 4)

For Miller, these strategies include explicit calls to action both within and outside of the performance. In each community in which he performs, Miller joins forces with national and local organizations invested in an issue, encourages community members to lobby their congressional representatives, asks audience members to sign petitions that support changes in legislation, and uses the performance as a catalyst for media coverage that will raise awareness about the issue (para. 7–11).

In addition to this “nuts-and-bolts activism,” Miller asks his audience to engage in the more individual work of consciousness raising, which he terms “emotional and psychic . . . adjustments.”

For example, Miller’s performance asks straight audience members to acknowledge their heterosexual privilege and asks gay and lesbian audience members to recognize the institutional and symbolic degradation of their lives (para. 12). In both its activist and consciousness-raising impulses, Miller’s work “retains a personal and political investment that blurs the borders between public and private” (Dolan, 2001a, p. 114).

By taking their stories on location and using the duplicity of artistry and journalism, expert testimony and witnessing, solo performers teach us how to create, enact, and incite performances full of possibilities.

### Torch Stories

In my dream, I see my grandfather on my university campus. I am walking to the library when I see him. He is reading a newspaper in the coffee shop. I call to him, and he looks up from the pages. He stands and waves, and when I reach him we embrace. He buys me a cup of coffee, and we settle in for a long talk.

He says, “What are you writing about?”

“I’m writing about how we are called to participate in music, in texts. I’m writing about torch singing as a sounding of personal and political desire.”

He raises his eyebrows. “Really?”

“I guess what I’m really doing is writing a series of stories about torch singing.”

He nods. “That sounds like fun.”

“It is.”

We turn our attention to our coffee and other topics, although I keep the conversation about writing torch stories going in my head. They are stories about what happens in between binaries, stories about what occurs between participation and provocation, emotion and politics, subject and object, body and voice, intended meaning and literal meaning, form and function, monologue and dialogue, connection and distance, conclusions and possibilities. They are stories that begin with the idea that performance, because it is imbricated in a culture and vast spiral of relationships, is necessarily and thoroughly *political* (Colleran &

Spencer, 1999). Miller’s performance asks straight audience members to acknowledge their heterosexual privilege and asks gay and lesbian audience members to recognize the institutional and symbolic degradation of their lives (para. 12). In both its activist and consciousness-raising impulses, Miller’s work “retains a personal and political investment that blurs the borders between public and private” (Dolan, 2001a, p. 114).

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Spencer, 1998, p. 1). They are stories that look into the gaps and contradictions between a modernist/realist perspective on performance that imagines that “stable meanings can . . . be ‘shared’ between author and reader, actor and audience, stage and auditorium” and a postmodern/anti-realist approach that deconstructs the “process of meaning-making itself” (Kershaw, 1999, p. 12).

Because of this, torch stories are stories that ask what happens when I try to understand performance by straddling the fence—with one foot planted in the realm of uncovering and celebrating difference, multiple subject positions, and ideological and political pluralism and with the other foot firmly placed inside the possibility of a community experience, a shared sense of agency, and concerted action directed at social change. They are, just as important, stories that ask what happens when audiences engage with texts that are overtly resistant not in form or content but rather in their activity as a subtle and indirect voicing (Holderness, 1992, p. 10). They are stories that want to have it both ways, to say that it depends.

In the gaps and fissures of cultural production and politics, these stories create, to use theater scholar Kershaw’s (1999) term, a source of *freedom*. This freedom is doubled—“not just freedom from oppression, repression, [and] exploitation . . . but also freedom to *reach beyond* existing systems of formalized power, freedom to create currently unimaginable forms of association and action” (p. 18). The freedom found in performance—found in telling stories—creates a resistive and transgressive radicalism.

Kershaw (1999) preferred “radical” to “political” because “radical has no necessary ideological tendency. . . . It gestures . . . towards kinds of freedom that currently cannot be envisaged” (p. 18). These stories also “invite an ideological investment that it cannot itself determine”; they are a “performative process in need of direction” (p. 20). *One* direction that readers and audience members might take is to actively engage what Brecht (1957/1998) termed a “complex seeing” and hearing that allows for multiple perspectives within the tangle of identifications and difference

without forgetting the need to expose systems of oppression or the desire to find new ways of being in the world (p. 44). Even so, the source and object of these desires vary; they depend on readers’ and audience members’ perspectives and ideological investments. These stories promise a performative field of dreams—if you want to hear a critique, it will come.

Because these stories create an open and indeterminate space for interpretation and action, tracing their political efficacy is something like tracking the movement of an unspoken idea. The accounts, ideas, and explanations that these stories contain are points of contact, although they do not connect in a direct route or on a logical course. They are spaces of hope—*destinations* that can be arrived at from any number of locations.

“About these stories you’re writing,” my grandfather says, pulling me back into the conversation. “Does anything radical happen in them?”<sup>32</sup>

“Well, I think so. Yes.”

“Tell me.”

#### ■ PERFORMATIVE PRAXIS: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A POLITICS (FULL) OF POSSIBILITY

I began this chapter asking you to consider how our autoethnographic texts do not stand, speak, or act alone; are not texts alone; and do not want to be left alone. I wanted to create a noisy and fractious dialogue on and about personal stories, performance, and social change. I wanted to stage this dialogue in and through the flesh and breath of my own experience. I wanted to create a text that shows—performs—a writing practice that tries to respond to the crisis of praxis. I wanted to engage you in a conversation that says and does something about autoethnography. I wanted to suggest how we make our personal accounts count.

I want to close by asking you to keep this conversation going in your own texts, contexts, and praxes. I want you to take this conversation into the next turn, crisis, and moment in autoethnography and to move your work, “without hesitation or encumbrance from the personal to the political”

(Denzin, 2000, p. 261). Drawing on the lessons that the turn toward personal narrative and performance has taught us, write your stories as they are constructed in and through the stories of others. Look at the intersections in the work of personal storytellers, performance ethnographers, and social protest performers described in this chapter and elsewhere as examples of how you might radically contextualize your texts and your subjectivity; embody personal and community accountability; attend to connection without collapsing or foreclosing debate, dialogue, and difference; move people to understand their world and its oppressions in new ways; and create the possibility of resistance, hope, and—yes—freedom (Denzin, 2003, pp. 33, 268). Ask how your texts can create and constitute social action—how your words can make a *difference* in and outside of individual processes of knowing and coming to know—and then *write* them and *share* them (B. Alexander, personal communication, August 2003). This, I believe, is the future of autoethnography. It is the challenge of telling and showing, to borrow from Ellis (2000), stories that are not only necessary but also full of possibilities (p. 275). In the spirit of moving into this future, I want to challenge you to do the following:

- *Recognize the power of the in-between.* Recognize the power of having it “both ways,” of insisting on the interaction of message and aesthetics, process and product, the individual and the social. Recall how the crises, turns, and movements in and toward narrative, performance, and social protest theater are generated in the radical possibilities that exist in these in-betweens. Make work that “struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 145).

- *Stage impossible encounters.* Create texts that stage what Cohen-Cruz (2001) termed “impossible encounters” in their “capacity to bring people in contact with ideas, situations, or others that appear to be totally different” (p. 105). Use these encounters as occasions to negotiate a debate and dialogue

about issues of importance to you and the world. Remember that, as McCauley stated, “Dialogue is an act. . . . It is not before or after the act. Saying the words, allowing the dialogue, making dialogue happen is an act, a useful act in the moment” (quoted in Mahone, 1994, p. 213).

- *Contextualize giving testimony and witnessing.* Perform the testimony and witnessing of personal stories in, through, and with larger social contexts. Consider that when we bring our texts to contexts, we can make work that constitutes a first step toward social change. Strive to make work that “might act as a doorway, an instrument of encounter, a place of public and private negotiations” (Salverson, 2001, p. 125) where the goal is to witness “within the context of the meeting with the person who testifies” (p. 121).

- *Create disturbances.* Value texts that “mean to provoke, to raise questions, [and] to implicate” authors and audiences, texts that create disturbances (Hughes & Román, 1998, p. 9). Capitalize on the complicity wrought in writing and reading autoethnographic texts—in how, when we place our lives and bodies in the texts that we create, engage, and perform, they are “no longer just our own; for better or worse they have become part of a community experience” (Nudd, Schriver, & Galloway, 2001, p. 113). Write texts that insist that to be there—on location—“is to be implicated” (p. 115).

- *Make texts of an explicit nature.* Respond to the need to be explicit in moving your readers and audiences intellectually, emotionally, and toward concerted social, cultural, and political action. Use your texts to “stage arguments, to embody knowledge and politics, to open a community to itself and the world in ways that are dangerous, visceral, compelling, and moving” (Dolan, 2001a, p. 62). Ask not only whether your texts are moving but also *how* they create movement and toward what *ends?* (Salverson, 2001, p. 122, emphasis added).

These are your challenges, and they are my own. In a handbook chapter that wants to move

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theory and method to action, it is the charge to make the personal political in your work and in my own. Will the chapter on autoethnography in the next edition of this handbook ask whether there is a place for autoethnography in our conversations about a radical democratic politics, a poetics of change, or a performance of possibilities? Will this chapter end with this query, or will it constitute a beginning, an opening into a conversation about where we have been and how far we have come—in being willing and able to say that we are in a moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts is to change the world?

#### ▣ EPILOGUE: THERE ARE LIVING FORCES IN POETRY

You deal in dangerous and intimate  
provocations.

Yelling "Change!" in crowded theaters, com-  
mitting efficacy to writing  
believing that  
there are living forces in . . . poetry.<sup>33</sup>

You take your politics personally  
and make the personal political.  
You stake your life story on re-presenting, not  
imitating;  
bringing movement, not mirrors, to reality.

You understand how  
theater, art, text, experience is what  
we make of it  
and we are made by that making.<sup>34</sup>

You play the imaginary  
line between artist and activist.  
You give flesh and breath to the theory  
that there are countless ways  
of making do . . . and getting through.<sup>35</sup>

Is there a place for autoethnography in this  
poem?  
You tell me.

#### ▣ NOTES

1. Titled "Communication Studies 298: Colloquium in Communication," this special topics course was designed and taught by my mentor, Nick Trujillo, as a team ethnography course that focuses on studies of organizational culture. Trujillo (2003) discussed this course and others in his essay, "Reflections on a Career in Academia." See also my essay, "What We Save: A Bricolage On/About Team Ethnography" (Holman Jones, 2003).

2. This text was published as "Fragments of Self at the Postmodern Bar" by Communication Studies 298 (1997).

3. This section has an obvious debt, and owes a sincere thanks, to Pelias's (1999) "Performance Is" (pp. 109–111).

4. For a discussion of how these questions anticipate the crises of representation, legitimation, and praxis, see Denzin (1997, pp. 3–14) and Lather (1993, pp. 673–674).

5. For a summary of these responses, see Denzin (1997, pp. 16–21).

6. The interest in personal narratives as auto/ethnographic texts owes a clear debt to the long-standing practice of telling personal stories among women anthropologists and the traditions and conventions of feminist ethnography. See, for example, Abu-Lughod (1990), Gordon (1988), Tedlock (2000), and Visweswaran (1997).

7. Paul Gray was the director of graduate studies and professor of performance studies at the University of Texas, Austin when I began my Ph.D. studies there in 1996. Reading and Performing was the first of several courses I took with him. Gray was the first (but certainly not the only) faculty member to encourage my interest in both performance and performing. He is an astute critic, powerful intellect, and enthusiastic mentor, and he is a teacher to whom I am happily indebted.

8. Ethnography is both a method for studying performance (projects that focus on the performance practices of particular individuals and cultures [Conquergood, 1992; Jackson, 1993; Jones, 2002; Madison, 1998b]) and a performance practice in its own right (a means of sharing the results of fieldwork [Gray, 2003; Mienczakowski & Morgan, 1993; Paget, 1995; Welker & Goodall, 1997]).

9. In Conquergood's (1991) essay, he explored four themes generated in and through the "deep epistemological, methodological, and ethical

self-questioning” of the crisis of representation and an increased emphasis on critical approaches and theory.

10. Conquergood and Turner are not alone here. Clifford Geertz, Dell Hymes, Erving Goffman, Richard Bauman, Kenneth Burke, and other anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists, and linguists all are interested and involved in the performative turn (Stucky & Wimmer, 2002, pp. 12–13; see also Denzin, 1997, pp. 102–104).

11. This is adapted from Conquergood (1991), who wrote, “I want to think about performance as a complement, alternative, supplement, and critique of inscribed texts” (p. 191).

12. Carpenter (1993, p. 125).

13. I am drawing on Conquergood’s (1992) description of the “varying meanings of the key word ‘performance’ as it has emerged with increasing prominence in cultural studies. This critical genealogy can be traced from performance as mimesis to poiesis to kinesis, performance as imitation, construction, dynamism” (pp. 83–84).

14. Joni Jones taught Performance Ethnography. Her work on performance and identity in the academy and her fieldwork with the Yoruba in Nigeria are central to the discussion and practice of performance ethnography and are an inspiration for my own work. Jones directed my dissertation, an ethnographic and performative study of torch singing. This work bears the mark and trace of her thoughtful, sincere, and challenging guidance.

15. This performance was my response to the assignment designed by Joni Jones. This assignment asked us to create what Pineau (2002) described as the use of performance as methodology (p. 50). She wrote, “Performance methodology means learning by doing and might include any experiential approach that asks students to struggle bodily with course content” (p. 50; see also Alexander, 1999).

16. I am referencing Langellier’s (1999) essay in which she wrote, “When personal narrative performance materializes performativity—when a narrator embodies identity and experience—there is always danger and risk” (p. 129).

17. I have found touchstones in Conquergood (1985, 1991, 2002), Denzin (1997), Lather (1993, 2001), Lincoln (1990), Pollock (1998), Richardson (2000), and Stewart (1996); see also Bochner (2000); Clough (2000); and Ellis (2000).

18. The conference was titled the Giant City Conference on Performative Writing and took place in April 2001 at Giant City Park in Makanda, Illinois. Each

writer presented his or her work “under a small window that opened to the green woods” (Miller & Pelias, 2001, p. v). In this passage, I make reference to the “green window” (as the conference proceedings came to be titled) and to the piece shared by Gingrich-Philbrook (2001) that began this work.

19. I had the pleasure of taking courses titled *Performing Autobiography and Writing and Performance Art* with Lynn Miller while I attended the University of Texas as well as of having her help on my dissertation committee. Miller’s passion for and knowledge about autobiographical performance has influenced my work and informed my understanding of how and why personal narrative performance matters in autoethnography.

20. Scott (1990, p. xii).

21. Gordon (1997, p. 107).

22. Gordon (1997, p. 22).

23. Barthes (1977/1978).

24. Carver (2001) wrote, “It’s possible, in a poem or short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring—with immense, even startling power” (p. 89).

25. Gordon (1997, p. 22).

26. The shifts in form and process discussed here do not correspond neatly or entirely to chronological or sequential logic. The social protest theater strategies I describe (following Jan Cohen-Cruz) are not mutually exclusive, and all of these techniques are used in contemporary performance.

27. Kalb (2001) focused specifically on Brecht’s notion of *Verfremdung* (alienation) in which audiences are encouraged to move beyond simple identification (empathy) with characters to a critical orientation in which actors are separate from characters and context is clearly connected to the text being presented.

28. See also Kalb’s (2001) discussion of Marc Wolf, Danny Hoch, and Sarah Jones.

29. Reinelt (1996) was commenting on both the stage performance and video of *Fires in the Mirror*, produced for American Playhouse.

30. Whyte (1993) noted that McCauley’s great-great-grandmother was not Sally Hemings, although Whyte pointed out that McCauley’s performance “plays on the similarities between the lives of these two Sallies and those of other women slaves” (p. 292).

31. Portions of *Sally’s Rape* were based on conversations with Hutchins about race, class, gender, history, and contexts. See Becker (2000, p. 520).

32. This asserted the performance—anything ra (p. 218).

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32. This is drawn from Kershaw (1999), who asserted that the questions we should ask about performance—and I would include stories—are “Has anything radical happened?” and “How was it done?” (p. 218).
33. Artaud (1958, p. 85).
34. Nudd, Schriver, and Galloway (2001, p. 15).
35. DeCerteau (1984, p. 29).

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