

Part 2: The Scholarly Self

Part 2 consists of five parts:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Curiosity and courage
- 3) An auto/ethnographic approach to inquiry
- 4) Doubts about auto/ethnography
- 5) Reflecting upon auto/ethnography as a method of writing

Part 2 examines the scope and nature of personalized methods for research inquiry in response to the research problem and research question.

1) Introduction

The ways that research findings and interpretations are communicated has been undergoing significant changes in recent decades as a result of the postmodern critique of the representational neutrality of social science research; epistemological challenges to traditional dissemination forms; and the broadening social, cultural, political, and pedagogical concerns of education researchers, among other factors (Voithofer, 2005). As a result of these changes, the discourses that define what it means to be a scholar, educator, student, or researcher have shifted and continue to be in motion. According to Voithofer (2005):

the portrayal of this movement demands evolving forms of representation...Arts-based researchers in education have worked at the borders of academic, aesthetic, and representational design resources in order to connect the embodied and emotional experiences of learning with larger social and cultural contexts...One illustration of this can be seen in developing theories about how to design the representation of voice through multiple media. Voice can be described as a channel of communication that personalizes and contextualizes the representation of verbal, textual, and mediated information in space and time (i.e., embodies it). Using descriptors such as tone, volume,

pitch, silence, cadence, rhythm, inflection, expressiveness, and emotion, the design of the representation of voice presents a unique opportunity for new media researchers (p. 9-10).

Auto/ethnography and performance offer illustrations of how the approach in research and the scope and nature of research resources can guide the design of voice in new media. With its origins in the crisis of representation in anthropology, auto/ethnography is attentive to situating the researcher's voice among those that are relevant to the evolution of a study, including participant, reviewer, editor, and reader voices (Voithofer, 2005). Informed by "research on oral and personal narratives in performance and communication studies, situating the socio-politically inscribed body as a central site of meaning" (Spry, 2001, p. 710), auto/ethnography is one way for new media researchers to situate technotexts in time and space (Voithofer, 2005).

1) Curiosity and courage

My mindset has prioritized *curiosity* as I have collected and read a wide range of literature and other data during the process of inquiry. I have always been asking---what's out there, and what's in here? Curiosity is what best describes the nature of my approach to literature in the scholarly domain. But, the selection, inclusion, and use of literary and other sources data in my inquiry are not necessarily random, nor are my impressions or decisions determined *a priori*. My approach has given no preconceived or predetermined position of privilege to a text-based or any other source; each artifact and idea is initially treated as a source of data, with all sources being considered as equals at the outset. This approach recognizes that

important connections can emerge by surprise, and that resonant meaning is not necessarily guaranteed by strategic planning. This is an emergent study, one that does not set out to test an existing theory *per se*; so it is not known at the outset which sources of data will eventually (or will not) turn out to be relevant to the inquiry. In some cases, an important connection and meaning can be drawn upon from a first reading or encounter; in other cases, tiny or substantive yet rich systemic connections and meanings emerge over time; while in other cases there will be promising sources that make no significant impact upon my emerging understanding about the problem and therefore are not further considered. I consider this to be an open approach to inquiry.

As *curiosity* describes my approach to the collection and interpretation of data (described in further detail in Chapter 2), *courage* describes my methodological approach to this dissertation. Courage is a personal, psychological, spiritual, and essential virtue that guides my method of inquiry, including my willingness to be informed through systemic connections that are not imitative of conventional understanding. Expressed in a personalized way, I submit my thoughts in prose:

Courage (by Anthony Collins)

Forward movement through an onslaught of obfuscation, resistance and doubt

Overcoming the anxious ambience of existential nothingness

Thriving in an uncharted forest where there are no well-worn paths.

This chapter describes my methods and methodology, including my courageous commitment to inquiry through auto/ethnographic writing has facilitated expression in its many forms--- physical, moral, social, creative. The assertion of courage is what makes possible the emergence

of other virtues such as honesty, integrity, commitment, and diligence (May, 1975). The word, courage, comes from the same stem as the French word, 'coeur', that signifies 'heart'. Courage is not necessarily the absence of fear, but is a heartfelt action in the face of adversity, based upon one's beliefs, values, principles, or morals. Curiosity and courage are two virtues that describe my approach and method of inquiry.

2) An auto/ethnographic approach to inquiry

I am a participant and observer in this research, seeking to understand the convergence of personal experience with explanatory context that emerges from others. Systemic connections, sources of fact, truth, aesthetic beauty, or any other descriptive category of data are non-predictable in their origin and can emerge from anywhere, including the *self*. Quantum physics teaches about the impossibility of separating the manner in which a phenomenon is explained from the personal equation of the experimenter, the *self*, who has informed the explanation (Wheatley, 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write:

various labels define the qualitative research process including theory, analysis, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who (knowingly or unknowingly) speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective (p. 29).

Using the *self* as the central or sole point of inquiry can be described as an alternative perspective about scholarly inquiry, an approach that is diametrically opposite to conventional norms (Tierney, 1998, p. 66).

Scholars are regularly advised to keep *self* and any trace of emotions out of their scholarly work because this is viewed as compromising the credibility of the work and the scholar. Up to the present time, the conventional approach is to present a logical progression of knowledge and opinions through evidence and systematic thought, carefully following an introduction-body-conclusion template, albeit without any expression of emotion. In this light, Charmaz and Mitchell (1997) argue that scholarly writers are expected to stay on the sidelines and keep their voices out of their writings----“the proper voice is no voice at all” (p. 194). From the alternative perspective, scholars argue that the techniques and criteria used in the conventional approach to ensure reliability, validity and other verification measures should be questioned; and that judgment about alternative forms of scholarship activity, including work in the field of film and digital media, should not necessarily be based upon traditional criteria used to judge qualitative investigations (Holt, 2003; Garratt and Hodkinson, 1999; Sparks, 2000; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers, 2002).

Auto/ethnography is a method and philosophical perspective that prioritizes knowing about *self*, while also allowing for the recognition of other people's thoughts and experiences. Reed-Danahay (1997) explains the interconnection and meaning of auto/ethnography as a composite term: auto (*self*), ethno (culture), graphy (the research process), and suggests that auto/ethnography transcends the dichotomy of *self* and social group, the *self*/society split, and constitutes a form of writing that is simultaneously about one's societal group and one's *self*. Auto/ethnography is a qualitative approach to research inquiry that synthesizes ethnography and autobiography, reflecting a postmodern tendency to position the *self* and subjectivity in relation to what is being studied. Auto/ethnography calls into question the purported objectivity of conventional methods because it enables a confrontation with dominant forms of representation

and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders (Reed-Danahay, 1997, Chang, 2008; Van Maanen, 1988). Auto/ethnography is a personalized, evocative and first-person form of scholarly writing that connects, represents and uses the dual aspects of person/*self* within a cultural and social context, but also allows for an array of emotions and self-conscious reflections to emerge and be revealed (Holt, 2003). Auto/ethnography is an authentic, boundary-crossing approach for conveying the multiple natures of *self*-hood and opens up a new way of writing about social life, one that is based upon the assumption that the insider's voice and perspective is more true than that of the outsider (Reed-Danahay, 1997, Chang, 2008; Van Maanen, 1988).

I am writing from my personal perspective as I locate my *self* within a social, cultural and intellectual milieu. Richardson (1995) has given a special name to the specific approach of writing and inquiry that I intend to use---a 'writing story'. What has motivated me to expend so much effort toward a writing story, writing with the use of proprioceptive methods (Metcalf and Tobin, 2002), confessional, impressionistic, auto/ethnographic way? Of what value or merit or difference is this personalized approach to my scholarly activities, in contrast to any other approach? Knowledge and reflection about *self* as the sole source of data remains an off limits and no-go area for inquiry in academic contexts, with scant chance of recognition---and very likely to generate skepticism and controversy---so why bother taking such a risk when recognition and reward are unlikely? Is the intrinsic reward guaranteed and enticing? On the other hand, what is so offensive, un-scholarly and problematic about using self as the focal point for inquiry? How is it possible to move forward by writing in a scholarly way while remaining true to an introspective *self*? Can scholarly writing be meaningful, expressive and defiant in the face of the hegemonic ethic to conform, verify, and assent to the status quo? As is now obvious,

I am keen to follow a problem-posing model as my mind is bursting with thoughts and lines of inquiry (Freire, 1998). Therefore, I have followed an auto/ethnographic approach for inquiry and expression, through my own writing story.

I am not intending to denigrate the value of conventional scholarship with its various approaches and methods; but I do intend to clear a pathway that facilitates the recognition of a new approach and method for scholarly work. In contrast to the traditional and conventional approach that emphasizes empirical truth, I have employed a personalized and *self*-reflective approach in my scholarly writing. I am imagining and seeking a form of expressive writing that is open to more than one authority, one that is not so reliant upon claims of absolute correctness or insistent upon canonical subservience to authority in order to justify its interpretive stance. I have sought a way to articulate my knowledge and awareness through a form of storytelling, in a semi-formal way that would be expected of a doctoral dissertation, yet in a way that also reflects or expresses my thoughts, feelings and perceptions. I am seeking and am requiring a new form of writing, one that is less reliant upon the hegemony of conventional expectations (van Maanen, 1988, 1990).

As a painter uses various materials---oils, brushes and a canvas---to convey what is known, seen, heard, sensed, or felt, I intend to express myself through words, metaphors, phrasing, imagery, and most critically, the expansive recall of personal experiences (Van Maanen, 1988). Van Maanen (1988) has shown that “confessional and impressionistic tales” are comparative with the “necessarily imaginative” form of highly personalized, innovative, unposed and figurative paintings labeled as “impressionist” that emerged in the West during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (p. 101-102). Using this analogy, as an auto/ethnographic writer and through my use of an auto/ethnographic approach, I am producing an impressionistic and

confessional writing story that personalizes and represents my perceptions, interpretations, and recollections while extending the scope of inquiry and reflection to include various other methods for critical analysis and qualitative scholarly inquiry as the need and circumstance arises---phenomenological, semiotic, symbolic, linguistic, semantic, literary, grounded, textual, philosophical, and hermeneutic (van Maanen, 1988).

A personalized work can be considered valid as a form of scholarship if it evokes in the reader a feeling that the experience is authentic, believable, and possible (Ellis, 1995). An auto/ethnographic approach to scholarly writing and reflection, one method within a myriad of personalized approaches and methods, is intended for the building of knowledge and the conveyance of understanding. The approach of auto/ethnography has provided a means to address the scope and nature of issues relating to my inquiry in this dissertation, but magnifies the potential for problems that can be expected when one shifts research methods away from convention and more towards a personalized approach. The traditional and conventional expectation for objectivity is perceived to be unmet because auto/ethnography is a value-laden approach located a zenith point away from such the norm. Auto/ethnography can be loosely, yet accurately, labeled as a qualitative research method, and I have opted to tell my story by using a qualitative and personalized approach, distinct from quantitative methods because it requires a close look at everyday life of the *self*, as I inhabit the borders within my social and professional milieu.

3) Doubts about auto/ethnography

Doubts have been raised about auto/ethnography, including whether or not it is a proper form of scholarship action, and whether or not it is convincingly authentic or worthwhile (van

Maanen, 1988). Auto/ethnographies have been described as being touchy-feely, self-indulgent, too introspective, too narcissistic, insufficiently theoretical, and not properly grounded to be credibly considered as a form of scholarly writing (Holt, 2003; Coffey, 1999; Sparkes, 2002). The ethnographic approach has been characterized by intellectual restlessness, uncertainty and discomfort as the practitioner occupies:

...a literary borderland somewhere between writers who reach for very general audiences and those who reach for a specialized few. To the generalists, ethnography often seems pinched and inelegant, its standards stiff and restrictive. To the specialists, the same writing may seem imprecise and unfocused, its standards loose and unfathomable. Versions of these borderland skirmishes are played out within ethnographic circles as well (van Maanen, 1988 pp. ix-xi).

These criticisms provide political justification for the marginalization of auto-ethnographic writing and other forms of unconventional scholarship.

Even within the general field of ethnography itself, its own practitioners have represented themselves as marginal natives (Freilich, 1970), or professional strangers (Agar, 1980) who, as self-reliant loners (Lofland, 1974) or self-denying emissaries (Boon, 1982) who work to bring forth their ethnographic accounts in writing (von Maanen, 1988). Doubts have been raised in what has been regarded as the:

...excess of anti-methodological, 'anything goes', romantic postmodernism that is associated with qualitative research methods such as auto-ethnographic writing, with assertions that the results are more fiction than fact, not in accord with facts, low quality, stereotypical and too close to common sense to be constituted as credible research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 13).

Holt (2003) has written an auto/ethnographic essay that illustrates the problems facing auto/ethnographic writing in an academic setting. Some sections of his paper include a dialogue between himself and two reviewers of a research paper that he has written in auto/ethnographic style---the reviewer is actually a composite version of several reviewers of his work as he attempted to get his work published (excerpted):

Reviewer: It is generally not wise to conduct a study of self...It would be difficult to classify this manuscript as 'true' research even after a revision.

Holt: The genre of auto/ethnography is based on, and designed for, the use of self. Without the self there could be no auto/ethnography. You are dismissing the entire methodology rather than critiquing this particular investigation...

Reviewer: Certain scientific tenets must be adhered to. The manuscript should be grounded within a theoretical framework. We cannot publish good stories in an academic journal.

Methodological procedures and data analysis must be clearly explained and supported with references. You failed to comply with these demands in such a manner that your work could be replicated.

Holt: How could someone else replicate work based upon my personal experience?

Reviewer: That is exactly why this material is not of publishable quality!

The dialogue sequence by Holt (2003) demonstrates the gap that exists in traditional academia, between acceptance and alienation, for the practice and practitioners of auto/ethnographic writing. The gap is rooted in the perception that theoretical concepts are not reliably emergent or apparent in a writing story of self, and that auto/ethnographic writing does not enhance the rigor of qualitative investigation (Holt, 2003).

4) Reflecting upon auto/ethnography as a method of writing

As an auto/ethnographic writer I am engaged in a process of remembering, reflecting, and expressing. As discussed in Chapter 1, perceptions and memories of phenomena in my life are the outcomes of pattern recognition by the brain. Auto/ethnographic writing is a form of creative expression from a scholarly perspective, albeit with a different point of view and unique form of representation than a conventional qualitative and quantitative approach. What is auto/ethnographic is original, personal and arguably categorized as scholarly; but it also must be asked, why is artistic, scholarly or professional, by faculty in the field of film and digital media not openly recognized and accepted as scholarly work in higher education? What does creativity have to do with scholarly work, if anything? The common view is that creativity is antithetical to traditional conventional notions of what is expected in the process and output of scientific research, representing a perilous venture into the realm of subjectivity. Creativity is commonly perceived as a mysterious gift that is only bestowed to a chosen few, like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Mark Twain, or Pablo Picasso, and not a characteristic of the neo-realist ontology. I hold a different view, one that advocates creativity can be related to scholarly work, and is skill that can be learned, nurtured and improved.

All written descriptions can be described as forms of interpretation about what is known, and in this way my auto/ethnographic writing can be described as a way that I write, interpret and express what I have learned in a scholarly yet personalized way. Auto/ethnographic writing is used primarily when research inquiry intends to discern the primacy of self, personal feelings, attitudes and perceptions within the contexts of an external phenomenon or situation. In the case of my dissertation, the phenomenon or situation is the process of evaluating faculty performance that appears film and digital media. My use of an auto/ethnographic approach in writing is

descriptive, fictional and experiential. It is a written gathering of observations, conversations or written interviews; and an artistic work that constitutes the basis of my inquiry and research. It has always been done with a primary aim to determine what is the meaning and essence of involvement for the individual who is experiencing the situation under study. The main assumption in auto/ethnography is that writing is a philosophical approach and method that contains an essence of truth, and that reflective writing and its emerging meaning are the data. From the perspective of auto/ethnographic inquiry, my intention is to learn from my first-hand experiences as I have faced the power structures and linear systems of academic institutions. Participants in this project have also undergone the process of applying for promotion of academic rank on the basis of creative work in film, video and/or digital media---and my work describes and analyzes the significance of our experiences, prejudices, historical contexts, and other understandings that are emergent.

My auto/ethnographic writing story is intended to demonstrate to myself, and to any reader with an inclination to read my work, that I am able to produce, in writing, an evocative auto/ethnographic account about my personal knowledge, understanding, experiences, perceptions, feelings and inclinations that are emerging and present in my life at this time---as a doctoral student deeply immersed in the process of dissertation research and writing, as a practicing filmmaker and artist working on the margins of the profession, and as a full-time professor in a college of fine arts and design in the Arabian Gulf, not to mention a husband and father of three children, ages 16, 14, and 6. In essence, I am a person experiencing the push and pull of life forces while seeking deeper levels of knowledge and awareness, hoping to facilitate greater intrinsic motivation for future action. As a professional in higher education, I seek meaningful acknowledgement and recognition in my workplace; as an artist-filmmaker-scholar I

seek more knowledge, skill and understanding that empowers productivity, change, future action and new possibilities for creative expression; and as a man I seek seeking a lasting sense of well being in life. Such a tall order cannot be realized or satisfied with just one project, but I am focusing this paper upon my interest in auto/ethnographic writing and exploring its relevance and usefulness as I complete my writing story and the process of work on my doctoral dissertation.

The conventional expected outcome for scholarly research is the discovery of empirical evidence that supports a conclusion. Empiricism as a value indicator does not fit or rightly describe my theoretical and personal intermix of postmodern sensibilities, is not consistent with my personal approach to the literature (and the topic), nor does it accurately describe the scope and nature of how artistic, scholarly or professional work in the field of film and digital media is realized. “Modern empirical methods in the social and educational sciences are largely predicated on the eye as giving truth” (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 20). And yet, as Fischman (2001) notes, education research has, by and large, eschewed the study (and corresponding epistemological debates) surrounding visual culture. This paradox has led to research methodologies that translate visuals into text (e.g., through coding), while generally avoiding the study of the perception and reception of visual culture and downplaying the epistemological consequences of word–image relationships in both the collection of data and the reporting of research results (Voithofer, 2005). As quantitative methods make perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and thoughts visible through statistics, and qualitative methods engage in naturalistic studies of human processes that are directly visible through the eye, “looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined” (Jenks, 1995, p. 1).

In contrast to empiricism, as a filmmaker and a doctoral dissertation scholar, or scholarly scriptor (Barthes, 1977), I openly strive to imagine alternative conclusions and unstructured

perspectives, a diversity of conclusions, departing from the tautologies of circular logic that are inherent to the traditions and conventions of empiricism. I do not automatically assume the future will be like the past, nor do I believe that what was known yesterday will be the same as I what I know today, or what I will know tomorrow will mirror what I knew before. When watching a film or any time-based work in digital media, as in other expressive form of output, the viewer is not just a consumer of a pre-determined, unilateral message. Meaning is connoted and denoted in the mind of each viewer/audience member, and the film adds or detracts from the notions that the viewer has created (Barthes, 1977; Moriarty, 1991). My writing expects that the reader will make meanings that diverge from mine---a writerly approach, in contrast to writing that is intended to be a unilateral voice---a readerly approach (Barthes, 1977). My approach in this inquiry has been qualitative rather than quantitative, deductive rather than empirical, *writerly* rather than *readerly*.