

# Emerging Voices: Encounters with Reflexivity

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Tomie Hahn, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, conducts research on a wide range of topics including: Japanese traditional performing arts, Monster Truck rallies, issues of identity and creative expression of multiracial individuals, and relationships of technology and culture; interactive dance/movement performance; and gestural control and extended human/computer interface in the performing arts.

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the power of voice and the nature of reflexivity in feminist ethnography starting with a definition of reflexivity, a brief historical context, and closing with several mini-case studies, including Japanese traditional dance; Monster Truck rallies; and the Deep Listening community.

## Résumé

Cet article se concentre sur le pouvoir de la voix et sur la nature de la réflexivité dans une ethnographie féministe commençant avec une définition de la réflexivité, un bref contexte historique, et finissant avec plusieurs mini études de cas, y compris la danse traditionnelle japonaise, les rallyes Monster Truck et la communauté Deep Listening.

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## Conversations in Mirrors

WARNING: With the topic of reflexivity, I am laying myself bare before you as a subject of testing. I have an enormous dilemma and I'm wondering if you can help me sort it out.

Hmm...let me start again...

ONE has a dilemma. And ONE wonders if you can help ONE sort it out.

No, no, that's won't do at all...

You see, I am situated inside of me, I see, hear, taste, smell, and think from this me. When I take me out to do fieldwork, me always tags along.

That's a problem.

Then there's the most difficult stage. After returning from fieldwork, a truly visceral and sensually engrossing experience, there is a synthesis period where I'm expected to write from a voice where "she"/me is absent, or at the very least, out of the way. But I wondered if my personal voice could really persist invisibly in the margins.

Does this sound familiar? Does this sound like a brief history of women in text?...To be reserved or unnoticeable? We have been caught between the objective vs. qualitative research crossfire. Problem is, both sides have positive methodological models, and both have pitfalls.

Hmmm.

This essay focuses on the power of voice and the nature of reflexivity in feminist ethnography starting with a definition of reflexivity, a brief historical context, and closing with several mini-case studies, including Japanese traditional dance; Monster Truck rallies; the Deep Listening community and Pauline Oliveros. I take

liberties in the narrative style to illuminate how words can evoke the power of intimate voice, the diversity of experience, and the humanity found in vulnerable fieldwork experiences (Behar 1996). I believe it is nearly impossible to write completely devoid of reflexivity. Each research project calls for a particular methodological approach, some quite reflexive and others less so. This essay is a conversation in mirrors acknowledging the multiple voices that emerge - academic talking heads, voices from the field, commentary, and my voice as your guide.

Some definitions of reflexivity: a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference, and/or group self-reference, self-knowledge of self-knowledge. Reflexive ethnography or research refers to a product that acknowledges the identity of the researcher and the effect of her presence on the resulting work. The lens through which we view others is turned back on ourselves. I must state strongly that ethnographic reflexivity does not shift the primary focus on the ethnographer, but rather acknowledges his/her point of view. The focus of ethnography needs to be on the people we meet and places we experience. Reflexivity in action moves beyond the mere appearance of self-reference in text. In acknowledging one's presence in the field, reflexivity can emerge as a theoretical stance that critiques the relationship between researcher, her identity, and the community members she studies. How we write about the people we meet is vital, for it exposes process. An author's voice always provides a point of view - whether reflexive or attempting to be impartial; from a distance or close up; written with a jovial tone or scholar-speak. Let's take a look at reflexivity as a mode of revealing a point of view...

Charlotte Davies proposes categories of reflexivity and begins with two: individual and collective (Davies 1999). Individual reflexivity refers to the ethnographer's identity, her methodology and treatment

of the final product. Collective reflexivity considers the reflexive process that exists within the sub-culture that an ethnographer is studying - such as Geertz's study of a Balinese cockfight as "a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973, 448). Then there is the endless spiral of theoretical reflexivities, the ethnographer turning the lens back on herself, watching herself theorizing reflexively, and the theory reflecting both the subject, herself, and the reflexivity in the theory. What a mess.

Where does all of this self-examination come from? For centuries, medical scientists were rigorously scrutinized for experimenting on themselves, a process coined "auto-experimentation." By practising on themselves they could avoid medical restrictions concerning experimentation on human subjects. However, the psychological and physical effects scientists endured in auto-experiments jeopardized their ability to record and analyze data. This topic seemed so far-fetched that horror and comedy films have popularized the theme, from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, to *The Fly*, to *The Nutty Professor*.

In the social sciences reflexive texts were equated with amateur travel journals or diaries. Anthropological work prior to the 1960s endeavored to be a science, carrying out research as objectively as possible. Inclusion of the researcher's opinions, difficulties, personal views or vulnerabilities was considered to be a self-absorbed and narcissistic practice not worthy of research. Work that referenced the anthropologist was suddenly not research. It is fascinating to read early writings and attempt to find the ethnographer in the field, as well as the negotiations and politics at play. The seemingly objective stance often reads as dispassionate and detached. Early works that dared to include personal narratives cautiously inserted them in classic arrival stories - the

ethnographer's first experiences at the field site. Davies notes the irony in this, stating that, "the point of arrival is precisely when the interaction is likely to be most superficial and open to misinterpretation" (Davies 1999, 11).

By no means is reflexivity solely a feminist framework - however, reflexivity thrived and became a powerful voice under her watch. In the late 1960s, acknowledgment of the dominant discourses of research, political agendas, and close observation of colonial expansion created an environment suitable for self-criticism as a theoretical methodology. Feminism, arising from the Women's Liberation Movement, critiqued previous paradigms (modernist, positivist, Enlightenment, for example) that defined research and the methodologies that supported these structures. What topics were suitable for research came into question, and feminists were at the front line urging under-represented peoples to be included (such as women, ethnic minorities, and voices from the gay/lesbian community) as the subject of study. But it was soon realized that merely adding the under-represented to the chronicles would not remedy the larger issue: previously employed theoretical models were unsuitable. Research and analysis needed to be redefined.

Beyond what/who to study, this postmodern movement would question "how" the methodological praxis of the past influenced their ethnographies. Feminists searched for alternative methodologies and perspectives to break from established (patriarchal) paradigms. Vicki Kirby questions, "What is at stake in anthropology's refusal to engage those modes of feminism that do include such critical analysis? Whose definitions authorize and limit the field of political engagement in this way, and what issues remain muted as a consequence?" (Kirby 1993, 127) But what practices were offered in this postmodern setting?

Problematising the very ways of knowing

became a focus, leading to a diversity of methods focused on experiential knowledge. Judith Okely writes, "There is a need for more explicit recognition of fieldwork as personal experience instead of sacrificing it to a false notion of scientific objectivity" (1996). Shulamit Reinharz offered a methodology she called "experiential analysis" (1983, 167). Her methodology promoted personal experience as a valid approach that could be analyzed and incorporated into alternative/feminist, ethnographic work. Including personal experience as a sanctioned component of research naturally led to writing styles that would disclose the identity of the researcher, for how could one write about the reality of personal experience without revealing one's self?

Since the early 1970s reflexivity in ethnographic practice and writing developed considerably (Reed-Danahay 1997). The inclusion of the ethnographer's personal voice emerged as a common force - a trend - in text. A reflexive, interpretive voice emerged. The presence of the ethnographer in text was now included as a means of revealing the very interpretive lens delivering the ethnographic reality of the site and people. Feminists favored self-disclosure in ethnological research, precisely because it exposed the political dynamics of the research methodologies via the authorial voice. The politics of representation came into the spotlight. Reflexivity had the ability to disclose the vulnerabilities of ethnographic practice - the intuitive nature of ethnographic work, the collection of "data," analysis, interpretation, and representation.

Feminists were keenly aware of research (from practice to product) as a construct and believed that exposing this idea would present new dialogues. Reflexivity became one avenue for disclosing the experiences, interpretive lenses, and even political agendas of ethnographers. Some proposed action research methods - collaborations with "informants" to

serve their communities - with hopes to balance hierarchical dynamics (Wolf 1996). Others encouraged "native" ethnographies that would problematize insider/outsider dichotomies.

Again, reflexivity is not an exclusively feminist practice. In the words of a colleague, "I would argue that while 'doing reflexivity' doesn't automatically make you a feminist, it would certainly be strange to be doing reflexivity and NOT be a feminist."

Feminists have proposed "feminist ethnography" and remind us to take heed of the various dilemmas found in fieldwork (Bell, Caplan, and Karim 1993; Oakley 1981; Wolf 1996). I need to point out that many branches, or waves, of feminism arose (that I am unable to detail here) and developed conflicting opinions about methodology and writing within the feminist community. In *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing*, Laurie Finke states:

During the 1980s, feminist criticism was marked by an often contentious split between those pragmatically committed to the recovery of the woman writer and, with her, something usually called women's experience, and those concerned to explore the implications for feminism of postmodern theories that question the legitimacy of such constructs as the author and experience. (1992, 1)

This is the climate in which many of us were raised. Anyone receiving their ethnographic training-wheels post-1975 falls into a reflexivity camp, a 1980s reflexivity-glam trend. We learned that including ourselves was all right, but we were also cautioned that reflexivity creates potential obstacles such as self-absorption, presumptuous navel gazing, loss of clarity between self and other, and the politics of "going native." So, with all its hazards how can we proceed

reflexively?

In an attempt to widen the palette of experiential expression in their ethnographies, feminists experimented with the formal text, including drawings, dreams, performance, poems and other narratives long considered "non-objective" data. In many ways such experimentation redefined ethnographic practice, if not ethnography itself. In *Seize the Dance! BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance* Michelle Kisliuk included a poem she wrote while in the field in Centrafique. Here is an excerpt:

To Ndanga and Back

A stream to wash in.  
On my way I displace three blue  
Birds of paradise.  
Through soapy hair  
A monkey eyes me from above.

BaAka children run singing down the path  
To the stream,  
Leaving tiny raffia skirts  
Perched on bushes.

At midnight I wake to a mother's  
Heart crying mourning songs.  
Later, sprawled on her daughter's grave:  
Ame na wa na mawa, mawa na mwana wa  
mou  
"I die of pitypain, pitypain for child mine."

Milk still drips. (Kisliuk 1998, 44)

Kisliuk's poems expanded my reading of her experiences. They capture personal moments that invite us to imagine being there with her, to "hear" the BaAka language, and visualize the lush scene. There is

no mistake that the text is Kisliuk's voice and interpretation. Her reflexive identity is present, emotional, creative and keenly observant.

The discipline of Performance Studies has pushed the definition of presentation to another level. The public presentations by Deena Burton come to mind - where Burton literally danced to her pre-recorded talks on such topics as identity, presence or the nature of Indonesian performance. She actively performed reflexive ethnography. Kisliuk and Burton's work are only two examples of how ethnographers have challenged the boundaries of creative art and ethnography. They evoke vulnerable, even fragile moments from the field. They are obvious targets for scrutiny as well.

In her book of essays *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, Ruth Behar reveals the diversity of vulnerabilities encountered by anthropologists and writes:

Anthropology...is the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing left to us at the end of the twentieth century. As a mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place, anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability. (1996, 5)

As a practice, reflexivity leaves us exposed and vulnerable. Behar's essay "The Vulnerable Observer" provides examples of vulnerable moments exposed by reflexivity, and cautions, "Vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake" (15). I wondered, how does reflexivity and

vulnerability come about?

A common misconception is that reflexivity arises at the writing-up stage. The process begins at the very consideration of the field site or during fieldwork. I realized some aspect of this early in my planning and selection of my field site, but the intensity of the reflexive encounters I faced in the next ten years were unexpected. In the following section I offer three case studies as examples of how reflexivity can breathe life into text.

### Case Study I - Dancing Selves

One of my field sites illustrates a case of Davies' individual reflexivity. I started studying Japanese traditional dance in Tokyo at the age of four. When it came time to select a research site for my dissertation, it seemed a logical choice. I set out to comprehend dance transmission as a process of gaining embodied cultural knowledge. Dance classes were now a part of something called "participant observation," and, although the familiar dance studio setting had not physically changed, my own impression of it had transformed. The studio was now a "field site" and I was considering the moving body as a site within this field. My headmaster, Tachibana Yoshie, understood that I was conducting research. However, upon arrival she expected (demanded) me to leave my notes and video camera and participate in dance lessons. "OK, that's participant-observation," I thought. After several weeks my body (or personal field site) had learned many exhausting lessons, from dance, social negotiations, and ethnographic etiquette.

These lessons of the body both enriched and problematized my ethnographic pursuits. While the body clearly stood center stage as a dancer's expressive medium, my primary question remained: how is movement transmitted and embodied? But the analysis of a process proved to be elusive; the art form and

transmission left no trace, no "concrete" object to grasp. Further, my own body often held the knowledge that I yearned to articulate. My field site eerily appeared and disappeared before me, in time, and as me. I soon realized that those dancing around me were in fact my field sites, and my own body a terrain to survey. Now that's reflexivity with big neon signs, I realized. The experience of my body receiving dance knowledge was vital to the work. How could I possibly write about the embodiment of a tradition without "me"? I felt caught between the objective and qualitative research crossfire. The issues were intimate yet political, and I came to understand how "the personal is political."

One of the clearest examples of reflexivity presented itself to me during fieldwork in Tokyo. My fieldnotes capture one moment:

Mid-way through my lesson today Lemoto (headmaster) ceased to guide me through the piece step by step. She darted from one side of me to the other as I danced - tapped me on the elbow; then a bit more firmly on my left shoulder; used her foot to push my left foot closer to my right during a pose; and then, suddenly disappeared from sight. I felt her completely envelop me from behind. She held onto my hands and danced the next phrase herself. I experienced her dance through my own body, and I became a bunraku puppet. A jolt of realization spanned my limbs and torso. The immediacy of actually feeling her dance that phrase conveyed much more than watching her steps in time and space. (Hahn, forthcoming)

Touch is used in Japanese dance as an active, direct means of teaching dance. Teachers sometimes use

touch to correct dance movement and to convey a kinesthetic "feel" for how a movement is shaped in space by the body. As my fieldnotes above intimate, the experience of guidance via touch conveys the fundamentals of movement, yet transcends the pragmatic lessons of the body to a deeper level of understanding dance, the body, and self. The immediacy of physical contact reveals a multi-dimensional field of body messages between dancers. Crossing the boundary of personal space, the intimate nature of touch forms relationships, connections, between teacher and student. I could not have imagined or comprehended the essence of teaching via touch without full participant observation. I could not have come to a realization of who I am - my body/self, relative to my teacher - in quite the same way without the immediacy of physical contact.

Touch is a profoundly reflexive experience. It is an interaction that demonstrates physical boundaries, yet also implies the relative relationships between the body and other. Touch imparts a breadth of information beyond what words can convey. Learning dance through touch vividly manifests reflexivity in action. Perhaps more than any other sensory parameter, the incorporation of touch in lessons reveals corporeality - a sense of the personal body and its physical boundaries. Touch situates the body. The skin not only forms the physical liminality of each individual, it locates the body within a context, as a context (a sense of the body's interior versus exterior), and it can distinguish a variety of tactile qualities to help individuals derive meaning from the outside world. Anthony Synnott states, "Touching and the skin are (therefore) social and physical phenomenon, which can not be separated: the physical is the social and visa versa" (Synnott 1993, 157). I find that reflexivity exists at the instant of touch, where the immediacy of direct contact informs me of my physical and social place. I

comprehend corporeality as a dancer and as a member of a social system. Instances of tactile transmission reveal the social, political (who touches who, where, and why) and personal dynamics of a pedagogical system (Hahn, forthcoming).

It has been important for me to write about my experience learning Japanese dance from a reflexive standpoint, not only because my body was gaining dance knowledge but because I was simultaneously grappling with my biracial identity - physically, conceptually, and socially. Because the body is the art form in dance, being of half Japanese descent unsettles clear notions of identity, not only of me as dancer, but of the genre which is called "Japanese dance." Biraciality is performed when I take the stage. During fieldwork my biracial identity further complicated matters, I am an insider and outsider to this culture and tradition - not a "native" yet not a stranger. While my complex peripheral existence deeply influenced my ethnographic research, it also problematized the emic/etic research dichotomy. I found that the exigencies needed to convey embodiment in dance and the situated body in fieldwork required I comprehend and voice my multiple "other" perspectives (Mendoza 2000; Motzafi-Haller 1997). I pondered, where do I fit into the larger scene and maintain my biracial identity - as performer, as ethnographer, as feminist?

I have seriously taken heed of Lila Abu-Lughod's reflections on ethnography, particularly since I am one of the "halfies" writing ethnography that she refers to, defining them as "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage" (1991, 137). She notes the problematic nature of halfie and feminist ethnographic perspectives - "when they present the Other they are presenting themselves, they speak with a complex awareness of and investment in reception. Both halfie and feminist anthropologists are forced to

confront squarely the politics and ethics of their representations. There are no easy solutions to their dilemmas" (142). For me, the reflexive approach to fieldwork, analysis and writing emerged as a path to comprehend the complexity of embodying the halfie-performer-researcher and impart it to others. Was this disruptive and painful, you ask? You bet.

Abu-Lughod proposed strategies in which to write "against culture," or disturb the problematic construct of anthropological discourse built upon cultural difference - through creating "ethnographies of the particular": "By focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness" (1991, 154). It had not occurred to me that dancing and researching Japanese dance would be considered subversive, but I realized that the very biracial spin I pose (perhaps impose) by my presence already skews the dynamics of homogeneity and coherence. I needed to find a voice to impart the embodiment of dance knowledge - the field site that is physical, that is me. I found that social, personal, and political dynamics of corporeality could not be stripped from the body and, for this ethnographic project, reflexivity served as a vital process for me to unravel the embodied complexities of transmission. For the next two case studies, reflexivity would not be as central to my core project. Instead, reflexive moments would arise to remind me of the lenses I held as an observer.

#### Case study 2 - Deep Listening

My current conversations and interviews with American composer Pauline Oliveros have revealed what Davies referred to as the second mode of reflexivity: "collective reflexivity." Deep Listening is a practice that Pauline Oliveros has developed over fifty years. A striking international community of Deep Listeners, or

"DLers," has grown around her, a group dedicated to deepen awareness about the world and themselves primarily through the art of listening practices. One of the unique characteristics of the Deep Listening (DL) practice is its commitment to flexibility. While there are numerous DL exercises created by Oliveros, she encourages practitioners to make the practice their own, and to explore new paths for insight.

Collective reflexivity is manifest on several levels within the community. It is embodied in the very practice of Deep Listening - the development of awareness and orientation. It is also present as a story or process DLers repeat for themselves about themselves via the DL-list and regular gatherings and retreats. These messages are simultaneously self-revealing and political. Oliveros often says that she is "always listening," "always practicing (Deep Listening)." This awareness is not only applied to music in a concert hall, but to her attention to sound in every moment - awake or asleep. Before a silent sitting session Oliveros will suggest a phrase such as "I return to the field of sound" as a way to draw back the wandering busy mind while meditating. One only needs to spend an hour with her to observe that the sensibility of focused awareness is embodied in her movements, articulations, keen awareness and focus. The practice is also evident in other ways, such as devotion to a non-critical approach; a respect for others, despite differences; a respect for one's self; and the politics DL arouses. I have noticed how the DL community functions as a fictive family - fascinating, particularly since they are spread across the globe and rely on the online DL-list, performances, gatherings, and a yearly retreat attended by only a small sub-group.

During an iChat conversation with Pauline, we exchanged several minutes of extreme facial expressions between us - no words, just spontaneous giggles with smiles, grimaces and yogic lion stretches. This activity was not unusual for us, but to my surprise Pauline emailed me photo "grabs" from our chat with the email subject line: mugs (Figure 14). While not the most flattering depiction of either one of us, I believe this



Figure 14. "mugs"- Pauline Oliveros and Tomie Hahn on iChat. Graphic snapshot by Pauline Oliveros.

picture displays a marvelous case of an "informant's" own urging for a display of the relational dynamics of our work (Regarding perspectives on relational autonomy, self, and feminism see Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000). This was a multi-layered moment of reflexivity prompted by Pauline herself. While completely unexpected, the image captures a typical moment of our playful exchange that portrays our close relationship. Set before me in such a graphic manner, the computer-monitor-as-mirror reflected the collaborative nature of our work. When I asked Pauline for permission to include it with this essay she said yes and beamed a wild face. Printing it in this journal illustrates vulnerability in action.

### Case Study 3 - Realizing Monster Trucks

The third ethnographic case is from my research on Monster Truck rallies. Great, now I'm far away from anything that will raise reflexivity, I thought to myself, since this arena was completely foreign to me. On September 10, 1999 I interviewed Scott Pontbriand, builder and driver of "Undertaker," a Monster Truck anthropomorphizing the pro-wrestler Undertaker. When I asked him what it felt like to fly such an extreme vehicle he said:

Well, you know you work on the truck for, hey, forty hours making sure everything's ready to go, the bolts and everything. When you get in the truck, as soon as you're in there...you just kinda, I don't know, I kinda zone out into my own little world and I'm at one with the truck. You know, there's not a part on the truck that I'm not aware of at any given moment when I'm in it. I mean, you become one with it, you know?...When you're flying up in the air, you know, RA-A-AA!!! [making a motion with his arms outstretched skyward] You get up in the air and it's like, you know there's times when you're up there and it's like, "Okay, I know I just jumped, but when am I going to land? [laughs] am I going to land?" You get that w-o-n-der while you're up there and wondering the outcome and, I know pretty much as soon as the rear wheels leave the cars, I know pretty much what's going to happen. I know what the truck's going to do at that point. And it's a RUSH! [laughs] You know?...yeah, it's good, that's what drives you to do it, yeah. And like I said, every jump is different, every time is different.

Just for the record, Pontbriand had no idea of my background in Japanese performing traditions or meditation. Was this re-re-reflexivity, flying Monster-Truck-style back in my face?...perhaps his reading of me, reading him, reading me? This could be trouble, I thought to myself.

My initial experiences with Monster Trucks pushed my sensory modes to the extreme, but after a number of years conducting fieldwork, interviewing builders and attending rallies, I had become somewhat desensitized. On one very particular afternoon, as I watched a 10,000-pound truck fly twenty feet into the air, an overwhelming realization came to mind. Why was I here, purposefully watching such truly extreme, staged crashes? Five years prior I had lost my mother in a violent car crash - and yet here I was in this extreme arena. It was only after I had witnessed countless crashes in an "entertainment" arena that this realization arose. My desire to be desensitized and heal was woven into my selection of this field site, although my conscious mind had not acknowledged it until this event. This "crash" realization emerged from the long-range fieldwork process and had been idling quietly at the intersection of the extreme event and my personal history. I felt bewildered, as if I had walked straight into a carnival maze of reflexive mirrors.

### Authorial Voices

I must reiterate that each research project sits in a different location on the continuum of qualitative vs. more objective research methodologies. Reflexivity will arise in varying degrees in our work, and I believe that each project calls for a unique approach, or methodology of reflexivity. Also, each ethnographer has a different level of comfort with reflexive disclosure. In an extraordinary collection of essays, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Barz and Cooley 1997), a variety of dilemmas from the

field are unpacked - each case imparting a different approach and a different reflexive voice to convey experiences in the field.

Deborah Wong's ethnography, *Sounding the Center: History and Aesthetics in Thai Buddhist Performance*, illustrates a particular kind of reflexive approach. While Wong's voice is clearly present throughout the book, she limits the degree that she imposes herself, and acknowledges:

I decided to write myself into this book but not to make myself the protagonist, as this would be entirely inappropriate for my subject matter. The reader will encounter the ritual through my experiences, but I do not believe the wai khruu (a Thai ritual) is the place for deeply reflexive writing. At what point can contemporary critical theory violate the belief system on which it is brought to bear? The ethnographic and authorial voice has been thoroughly problematized since the 1980s; I acknowledge the imprimatur of that work on my own even as I decide that this book is about my experiences but not about me.

(2001, xxv)

Wong is right to advise us of the perils of blindly following critical theory trends without due cause. We need to deeply consider the people we are studying and align our practices to particular ethnographic needs. While reflexivity is a process of reflection on ourselves as ethnographers, the work is not about us. Ethnography is about the community of people we learn from. Knowledge of the variety of reflexivities that might arise and influence our work can only strengthen our contributions regarding the nature of fieldwork, our selves and the cultures that we study. I believe that we must all be cautious, yet not so self-

conscious about reflexivity that it becomes a straightjacket that prevents us from reaching for the pen, keyboard or research itself.

There are other concerns. Considering vulnerable writing, Behar provided: "When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably. A different set of problems and predicaments arise which would never surface in response to more detached writing. What is the writer's responsibility to those who are moved by her writing?" (1996, 16). I have experienced surprising reactions to my conference presentations ranging from supportive and moving to confrontational. A flurry of stories always billows up, each risk-taking and vulnerable events in themselves. These reactions concern me as they did Behar - if we encourage vulnerability, then what is our responsibility once the chaos of emotions, exposure, scrutiny, and other responses are unleashed? I can only speak for myself - vulnerable writing has heightened my awareness and, rephrasing Behar, it took me somewhere I couldn't otherwise get to.

#### Parting Thoughts

One of the most valuable contributions of feminist reflexivity over the years is the establishment of a clear identity in authorial voice, revealing the politics and power dynamics of voice, issues of self, and "a hierarchy of voices" (Denzin 1989) present in our ethnographies. If we are able to reveal and monitor our vulnerabilities, the dynamics of power and control issues that play out in ethnographic practice can be incorporated as part of the work, rather than a superficial element buried under specific data extracted from the field. I believe that the presentation, or display, of identity in ethnographic narrative can utilize the researcher's self, the complex process of comprehending the relationship of self to other, and the embodied knowledge of the participant-observer-

researcher, as a resource within the research. It is an enormous challenge for the feminist researcher to personally maintain an inner compass that guides her consciousness of the variety of voices in the research mix and the complexity of embodying multiple identities (Hahn 2004); to negotiate the relationship of self/other; to comprehend these identities in relational spirals from the center to peripheral; and to find ways to responsibly broadcast the narratives of her research with a balanced degree of self-reflexivity appropriate for that project. It's difficult and often painful work.

I consider ethnography as a dialogical process and product that problematizes the nature of self and other. How can we position ourselves in text, relative to the established debates and dominant discourses of our time? In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler asks: "What kinds of cultural practices produce subversive discontinuity and dissonance among sex, gender, and desire and call into question their alleged relations?" (1990, ix) I want to know...can we expose our various identities? conduct experiments in the basement like the Nutty Professor and dare to offer them openly as experiments in methodologies? offer insights into our psychological lives? contribute our vulnerabilities to a new discourse? create new ethnographic formats in this digital age? I personally believe that it is our responsibility as feminists, artists, performers, and writers to find new and creative methodologies and narratives to produce "subversive discontinuities and dissonances" of established discourse patterns. Reflecting back on ourselves in the work can offer a deeply humbling point of view that reveals the humanity of our work.

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