

WRITING

A Method of Inquiry

◆ Laurel Richardson

The writer's object is—or should be—to hold the reader's attention. . . . I want the reader to turn the page and keep on turning to the end.

Barbara Tuchman, *New York Times*, February 2, 1989

In the spirit of affectionate irreverence toward qualitative research, I consider writing as a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.

Writing as a method of inquiry departs from standard social science practices. It offers an ad-

ditional—or alternative—research practice. In standard social scientific discourse, methods for acquiring data are distinct from the writing of the research report, the latter presumed to be an unproblematic activity, a transparent report about the world studied. When we view writing as a *method*, however, we experience “language-in-use,” how we “word the world” into existence (Rose, 1992). And then we “reword” the world, erase the computer screen, check the thesaurus, move a paragraph, again and again. This “worded world” never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying. Writing as a method of

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inquiry honors and encourages the trying, recognizing it as embryonic to the full-fledged attention to the significance of language.

Writing as a method of inquiry, then, provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science. Writing as method does not take writing for granted, but offers multiple ways to learn to do it, and to nurture the writer.

I have composed this chapter into two *equally* important, but differently formatted, sections. I emphasize the *equally* because the first section, an essay, has rhetorical advantages over its later-born sib. In the first section, "Writing in Contexts," I position myself as a reader/writer of qualitative research. Then, I discuss (a) the historical roots of social scientific writing, including its dependence upon metaphor and prescribed writing formats; (b) the postmodernist possibilities for qualitative writing, including creative analytic practices and their ethnographic products; and (c) the future of ethnography. In the second section, "Writing Practices," I offer a compendium of writing suggestions and exercises.

Necessarily, the chapter reflects my own process and preferences. I encourage researchers to explore their own processes and preferences through writing. Writing from our Selves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged.

♦ *Writing in Contexts*

I have a confession to make. For 30 years, I had yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies. Countless numbers of texts I abandoned half read, half scanned. I would order a new book with great anticipation—the topic was one I was interested in, the author was someone I wanted to read—

only to find the text boring. It was not that the writing was complex and difficult, but that it suffered from acute and chronic passivity: passive-voiced author, passive "subjects." "Coming out" to colleagues and students about my secret displeasure with much of qualitative writing, I found a community of like-minded discontents. Undergraduates, graduates, and colleagues alike say they have found much of qualitative writing—yes—boring.

We have a serious problem: Research topics are riveting and research valuable, but qualitative books are underread. Unlike quantitative work, which can be interpreted through its tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text. Just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to its "plot summary," qualitative research is not contained in its abstracts. Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading.

Qualitative work could be reaching wide and diverse audiences, not just devotees of individual topics or authors. It seems foolish at best, and narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read and not making a difference to anything but the author's career. Can something be done? That is the question that drives this chapter: How do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference? One way to create those texts is to turn our attention to writing as a method of inquiry.

I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it. I was taught, however, as perhaps you were, too, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points were organized and outlined. No surprise, this static writing model coheres with mechanistic scientism and quantitative research. But, I will argue, this static writing model is itself a sociohistorical invention that reifies the static social world imagined by our 19th-century foreparents. The model has serious problems: It ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process; it undermines the confidence of beginning qualitative researchers because their experience of research is inconsistent with the writing model;

and it contributes to the flotilla of qualitative writing that is simply not interesting to read because adherence to the model requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants.

Qualitative researchers commonly speak of the importance of the individual researcher's skills and aptitudes. The researcher—rather than the survey, the questionnaire, or the census tape—is the “instrument.” The more honed the researcher, the better the possibility of excellent research. Students are taught to be open, to observe, listen, question, and participate. Yet they are taught to conceptualize writing as “writing-up” the research, rather than as an open place, a method of discovery. Promulgating “writing-up” validates a mechanistic model of writing, shutting down the creativity and sensibilities of the individual writer/researcher.

One reason, then, that some of our texts may be boring is that our sense of Self is diminished as we are homogenized through professional socialization, rewards, and punishments. Homogenization occurs through the suppression of individual voices and the acceptance of the omniscient voice of science as if it were our own. How do we put ourselves in our own texts, and with what consequences? How do we nurture our own individuality and at the same time lay claim to “knowing” something? These are both philosophically and practically difficult problems.

Historical Contexts: Writing Conventions

Language is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the Self. Producing “things” always involves value—what to produce, what to name the productions, and what the relationship between the producers and the named things will be. Writing “things” is no exception. No textual staging is ever innocent (including this one). Styles of writing are neither fixed nor neutral but reflect the historically shifting domination of particular schools or paradigms. Social scientific writing, like all

other forms of writing, is a sociohistorical construction, and, therefore, mutable.

Since the 17th century, the world of writing has been divided into two separate kinds: literary and scientific. Literature, from the 17th century onward, was associated with fiction, rhetoric, and subjectivity, whereas science was associated with fact, “plain language,” and objectivity (Clifford, 1986, p. 5). Fiction was “false” because it invented reality, unlike science, which was “true” because it purportedly “reported” “objective” reality in an unambiguous voice.

During the 18th century, assaults upon literature intensified. John Locke cautioned adults to forgo figurative language lest the “conduit” between “things” and “thought” be obstructed. David Hume depicted poets as professional liars. Jeremy Bentham proposed that the ideal language would be one without words, only unambiguous symbols. Samuel Johnson's dictionary sought to fix “univocal meanings in perpetuity, much like the univocal meanings of standard arithmetic terms” (Levine, 1985, p. 4).

Into this linguistic world the Marquis de Condorcet introduced the term *social science*. He contended that “knowledge of the truth” would be “easy and error almost impossible” if one adopted precise language about moral and social issues (quoted in Levine, 1985, p. 6). By the 19th century, literature and science stood as two separate domains. Literature was aligned with “art” and “culture”; it contained the values of “taste, aesthetics, ethics, humanity, and morality” (Clifford, 1986, p. 6) and the rights to metaphoric and ambiguous language. Given to science was the belief that its words were objective, precise, unambiguous, noncontextual, and nonmetaphoric.

But because literary writing was taking a second seat to science in importance, status, impact, and truth value, some literary writers attempted to make literature a part of science. By the late 19th century, “realism” dominated both science and fiction writing (Clough, 1992). Honoré de Balzac spearheaded the realism movement in literature. He viewed society as an “historical organism” with “social species” akin to “zoological species.” Writers deserving of praise, he contended, must investigate “the reasons or causes”

of "social effects"—the "first principles" upon which society is based (Balzac, 1842/1965, pp. 247-249). For Balzac, the novel was an "instrument of scientific inquiry" (Crawford, 1951, p. 7). Following Balzac's lead, Emile Zola argued for "naturalism" in literature. In his famous essay "The Novel as Social Science," he argued that the "return to nature, the naturalistic evolution which marks the century, drives little by little all the manifestation of human intelligence into the same scientific path." Literature is to be "governed by science" (Zola, 1880/1965, p. 271).

As the 20th century unfolded, the relationships between social scientific writing and literary writing grew in complexity. The presumed solid demarcations between "fact" and "fiction" and between "true" and "imagined" were blurred. The blurring was most hotly debated around writing for the public—or journalism. In what Tom Wolfe dubbed the "new journalism," writers consciously blurred the boundaries between "fact" and "fiction" and consciously made themselves the center of the story. (For an excellent extended discussion of the new journalism, see Denzin, 1997, chap. 5.)

New journalists also encroached upon ethnography's province, borrowing its methods and reporting social and cultural life not as "reporters," but as social analysts. Joining those trespassers were fiction writers such as Truman Capote, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer. Professors of literature awakened and reawakened interest in novels by minority and postcolonial writers by positioning them as "ethnographic novels"—narratives that tell about cultures through characters (see Ba, 1987; Hurston, 1942/1991).

By the 1970s, "crossovers" between writing forms spawned the naming of oxymoronic genres: "creative nonfiction," "faction," "ethnographic fiction," the "nonfiction novel," and "true fiction." By 1980, the novelist E. L. Doctorow would assert, "There is no longer any such things as fiction or nonfiction, there is only narrative" (quoted in Fishkin, 1985, p. 7).

Despite the actual blurring of genres, and despite our contemporary understanding that all

writing is narrative writing, I would contend that there is still one major difference separating fiction from science writing. The difference is not whether the text *really* is fiction or nonfiction, but the claim the author makes for the text. Claiming to write "fiction" is different from claiming to write "science" in terms of the audience one seeks, the impact one might have on different publics, and how one expects "truth claims" to be evaluated. These differences should not be overlooked or minimized.

Whenever there are changes in writing styles and formats, we can expect intellectual interest in documenting and tracing those changes. Today, scholars in a host of disciplines are tracing the relationships between scientific and literary writing and are deconstructing the differences between them (see Agger, 1989; Brodkey, 1987; Brown, 1977; Clough, 1992; Edmondson, 1984; Mishler, 1989; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987; Simons, 1990). Their deconstructive analyses concretely show how all disciplines have their own sets of literary devices—not necessarily *fiction writing* devices—and rhetorical appeals such as probability tables, archival records, and first-person accounts.

Each social science writing convention could be discussed at length, but I will address here only (a) metaphor and (b) writing format. I choose these conventions because they are omnipresent, and because I believe they are good sites for experimenting with writing as a method of inquiry (see the section headed "Writing Practices").

Metaphor

Metaphor, a literary device, is the backbone of social science writing. Like the spine, it bears weight, permits movement, is buried beneath the surface, and links parts together into a functional, coherent whole. As this metaphor about metaphor suggests, the essence of metaphor is experiencing and understanding one thing in terms of another. This is accomplished through comparison (e.g., "My love is like a green, green toad") or analogy (e.g. "the evening of life").

Social scientific writing uses metaphors at every "level." Social science depends upon a deep epistemic code regarding the way "that knowledge and understanding in general are figured" (Shapiro, 1985-1986, p. 198). Metaphors external to a particular piece of research prefigure the analysis with a "truth-value" code belonging to another domain (Jameson, 1981). For example, the use of *enlighten* for knowledge is a light-based metaphor, what Derrida (1982) refers to as the heliocentric view of knowledge, the passive receipt of rays. Immanent in such metaphors are philosophical and value commitments so entrenched and familiar that they can do their partisan work in the guise of neutrality, passing as literal.

Theoretical schemata are always situated in complex, systematic metaphors. Consider the following statements about theory (examples inspired by Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 46):

- What is the *foundation* of your theory?
- Your theory needs *support*.
- Your position is *shaky*.
- Your argument is *falling apart*.
- Let's *construct* an argument.
- The *form* of your argument needs *buttressing*.
- Given your *framework*, no wonder your argument *fell apart*.

The italicized words express our customary, unconscious use of the metaphor "Theory is architecture." The metaphor, moreover, structures the actions we take in theorizing and what we believe constitutes theory. We try to *build* a theoretical *structure*, which we then experience as a *structure*, which has a *form* and a *foundation*, which we then experience as an *edifice*, sometimes quite *grand*, sometimes in need of *shoring up*, and sometimes in need of *dismantling*, or, more recently, *deconstructing*.

Historically, theory constructors have *deployed* combative metaphors. *Sport*, *game*, and *war* are common ones. These metaphoric schemes do not resonate with many women's interests, and, in addition, they have contributed to an academic intellectual culture of hos-

tility, argumentativeness, and confrontation. In the 1970s, feminist researchers introduced and acted upon a different metaphor: "Theory is story." Not only is the personal the political, the personal is the grounding for theory. With the new metaphor for their work, many feminists altered their research and writing practices; women talking about their experience, narrativizing their lives, telling individual and collective stories became understood as women *theorizing* their lives. The boundary between "narrative" and "analysis" dissolved.

Metaphors are everywhere. Consider *functionalism*, *role theory*, *game theory*, *dramaturgical analogy*, *organicism*, *social evolutionism*, *the social system*, *ecology*, *labeling theory*, *equilibrium*, *human capital*, *resource mobilization*, *ethnic insurgency*, *developing countries*, *stratification* and *significance* tests. Metaphors organize social scientific work and affect the interpretations of the "facts"; indeed, facts are interpretable ("make sense") only in terms of their place within a metaphoric structure. The "sense making" is always value constituting—making sense in a particular way, privileging one ordering of the "facts" over others.

Writing Format

In addition to the metaphoric basis of social scientific writing, there are prescribed writing formats: How we are expected to write affects what we can write about. The referencing system in social science, for example, discourages the use of footnotes, a place for secondary arguments, novel conjectures, and related ideas. Knowledge is constituted as "focused," "problem" (hypothesis) centered, "linear," straightforward. Other thoughts are extraneous. Inductively accomplished research is to be reported deductively; the argument is to be abstracted in 150 words or less; and researchers are to identify explicitly with a theoretical label. Each of these conventions favors—creates and sustains—a particular vision of what constitutes knowledge. The conventions hold tremendous material and symbolic power over social scientists. Using them increases the probability of one's work be-

ing accepted into "core" social science journals, but they are not *prima facie* evidence of greater—or lesser—truth value or significance than social science writing using other conventions.

Additional social science writing conventions have governed ethnographies. Needful of distinguishing their work from travelers' and missionaries' reports as well as from imaginative writing, ethnographers adopted an impersonal, third-person voice to explain "observed phenomena" and to trumpet the authenticity of their representations (see Tedlock, Chapter 17, this volume). John Van Maanen (1988) identifies four conventions used in traditional ethnographies, or "realist tales": (a) *experiential author(ity)*, where the author exists only in the preface to establish "I was there" and "I am a researcher" credentials; (b) *documentary style*, or a plethora of concrete, particular details that presume to represent the typical activity, pattern, culture member; (c) *the culture member's point of view*, putatively presented through quotations, explanations, syntax, cultural clichés, and so on; and (d) *interpretive omnipotence* of the ethnographer. Many of the classic books in the social sciences are realist tales. These include Kai Erikson's *Everything in Its Path* (1976), William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner* (1967), and Carol Stack's *All Our Kin* (1974).

Other genres of qualitative writing—such as texts based on life histories or in-depth interviews—have their own sets of traditional conventions (see Mishler, 1989; Richardson, 1990). In these qualitative texts, researchers establish their credentials in the introductory or methods section; they write the body of the text as though the document and quotation snippets are naturally present, valid, reliable, and fully representative, rather than selected, pruned, and spruced up by the author for their textual appearance. As in cultural ethnographies, the assumption of *scientific authority* is rhetorically displayed in these other qualitative texts. Examples of conventional "life story" texts include Lillian Rubin's *Worlds of Pain* (1976), Sharon Kaufman's *The Ageless Self* (1986), and my own *The New Other Woman* (Richardson, 1985).

Postmodernist Context

We are fortunate, now, to be working in a postmodernist climate (see Agger, 1990; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1986, 1991, 1995; Hutcheon, 1988; Lehman, 1991; Lyotard, 1984; Nicholson, 1990; Turner & Bruner, 1986), a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side by side. The core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But it does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique.

The postmodernist context of *doubt*, then, distrusts all methods equally. No method has a privileged status. The superiority of "science" over "literature"—or, from another vantage point, "literature" over "science"—is challenged. But a postmodernist position does allow us to know "something" without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing. In some ways, "knowing" is easier, however, because postmodernism recognizes the situational limitations of the knower. Qualitative writers are off the hook, so to speak. They don't have to try to play God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal, atemporal general knowledge; they can eschew the questionable metanarrative of scientific objectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers, subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it.

A particular kind of postmodernist thinking that I have found especially helpful is *post-structuralism* (for an overview, see Weedon, 1987; for application of the perspective in a research setting, see Davies, 1994). Poststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organization, and power. The centerpiece is language. Language does not "reflect" social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality. Differ-

ent languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our *subjectivity*, is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration and struggle.

Language is not the result of one's individuality; rather, language constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific. What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them. For example, being hit by one's spouse is differently experienced if it is thought of within the discourse of "normal marriage," "husbands' rights," or "wife battering." If a woman sees male violence as "normal" or a "husband's right," then she is unlikely to see it as "wife battering," an illegitimate use of power that should not be tolerated. Similarly, when a man is exposed to the discourse of "childhood sexual abuse," he may recategorize and remember his own traumatic childhood experiences. Experience and memory are thus open to contradictory interpretations governed by social interests and prevailing discourses. The individual is both site and subject of these discursive struggles for identity and for remaking memory. Because individuals are subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, their subjectivity is shifting and contradictory, not stable, fixed, rigid.

Poststructuralism thus points to the *continual cocreation of Self and social science*: Each is known through the other. Knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges. Poststructuralism, then, permits—nay, invites—no, incites—us to reflect upon our method and explore new ways of knowing.

Specifically, poststructuralism suggests two important things to qualitative writers: First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times; and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which we say every-

thing at once to everyone. Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of "science writing" on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche: Writing is validated as a method of knowing.

Creative Analytic Practices: CAP Ethnography

In the wake of postmodernist—including poststructuralist, feminist, queer, and critical race theory—critiques of traditional qualitative writing practices, qualitative work now appears in multiple venues in different forms. Science-writing prose is not held sacrosanct. The ethnographic genre has been blurred, enlarged, altered to include poetry, drama, conversations, readers' theater, and so on. These ethnographies are like each other in that they are produced through *creative analytic practices*. I have settled upon calling this class of ethnographies *creative analytic practice ethnography*, or *CAP ethnography*. This label can include new work, future work, and older work, wherever the author has moved outside conventional social scientific writing.

I know that any concept or acronym is problematic, subject to critique. Yet the more I thought about what to name these genre-breaking ethnographies, the more I liked the complex metaphoric resonances of the acronym CAP. The English word *cap* comes from the Latin for head, *caput*. Using "head" to signal ethnographic breaching work can help break down the mind/body duality. The "head" is both mind and body and more, too. Producers of CAP ethnography are using their "heads." The products, although mediated throughout the body, cannot manifest without "headwork."

Cap—both noun (product) and verb (process)—has multiple common and idiomatic meanings and associations, some of which refract the playfulness of the genre: a rounded head covering; a special head covering indicating occupation or membership in a particular group; the top of a building, or fungus; a small explosive charge; any of several sizes of writing paper; putting the final touches on; lying on top of; surpassing, outdoing. And then there are the other associated words from the Latin root, such as

capillary and *capital(ism)*, which humble and contextualize the labor.

The practices that produce CAP ethnography are *both* creative and analytic. Those holding the dinosaurian belief that "creative" and "analytic" are contradictory and incompatible modes are standing in the path of a meteor. They are doomed for extinction. Witness the evolution, proliferation, and diversity of new ethnographic "species" during the past two decades.

Here is but a sampling of the many "species" of CAP ethnography: *autoethnography* (Behar, 1993, 1996; Bruner, 1996; Church, 1995; Ellis, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Frank, 1995; Geertz, 1988; Gerla, 1995; Goetting & Fenstermaker, 1995; Karp, 1996; Kondo, 1990; Krieger, 1991, 1996; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994; McMahon, 1996; Shostak, 1996; Slobin, 1995; Steedman, 1986; Yu, 1997; Zola, 1982), *fiction-stories* (Cherry, 1995; Diversi, 1998a, 1998b; Frohock, 1992; Richardson & Lockridge, 1998; Rinehart, 1998; Shelton, 1995; Sparkes, 1997; Stewart, 1989; Williams, 1991; Wilson, 1965; Wolf, 1992), *poetry* (Baff, 1997; Brady, 1991; Diamond, 1982; Glesne, 1997; Norum, in press; Patai, 1988; Prattis, 1985; Richardson, 1992a), *drama* (Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Paget, 1990; Richardson, 1993, 1996a; Richardson & Lockridge, 1991), *performance texts* (Denzin, 1997; McCall & Becker, 1990; Mienziakowski, 1996; Richardson, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), *polyvocal texts* (see Butler & Rosenblum, 1991; Daly & Dienhart, 1998; Krieger, 1983; Pandolfo, 1997; Schneider, 1991), *readers' theater* (see Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995), *responsive readings* (see Richardson, 1992b), *aphorisms* (Rose, 1992, 1993), *comedy and satire* (see Barley, 1986, 1988), *visual presentations* (see Harper, 1987; Jacobs, 1984; McCall, Gammel, & Taylor, 1994), *allegory* (Lawton, 1997, pp. 193-214), *conversation* (see Ellis & Bochner, 1996b; Richardson & Lockridge, 1998), *layered accounts* (Jago, 1996; Ronai, 1992, 1995), *writing-stories* (see Lawton, 1997; Richardson, 1995, 1997; St. Pierre, 1997a, 1997b), and *mixed genres* (see Angrosino, 1998; Brown,

1991; Church, 1999; Davies, 1989; Dorst, 1989; Fine, 1992; hooks, 1990; Jipson & Paley, 1997; Jones, 1998; Lather, 1991; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Lee, 1996; Linden, 1992; Pfohl, 1992; Richardson, 1997; Rose, 1989; Stoller, 1989; Trinh, 1989; Ulmer, 1989; Visweswaran, 1994; Walkerdine, 1990; Williams, 1991; Wolf, 1992).

For more than a decade, what I am calling CAP ethnography has been labeled *experimental* or *alternative* (see Van Maanen, 1995). Unintentionally, however, those labels have reinscribed traditional ethnographic practices as the standard, the known, accepted, preferred, tried-and-true mode of doing and representing qualitative research. I believe that reinscription is now unnecessary, false, and deleterious. CAP ethnographies are not alternative or experimental; they are in and of themselves valid and desirable representations of the social. Into the foreseeable future, these ethnographies may indeed be the most valid and desirable representations, for they invite people in; they open spaces for thinking about the social that elude us now.

CAP ethnography displays the *writing process* and the *writing product* as deeply intertwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production or the method of knowing. Because all research—traditional and CAP ethnography—is now produced within the broader postmodernist climate of "doubt," readers (and reviewers) want and deserve to know how the researcher claims to know. How does the author position the Self as a knower and teller? These questions engage intertwined problems of subjectivity, authority, authorship, reflexivity, and process on the one hand and representational form on the other.

Postmodernism claims that writing is always partial, local, and situational, and that our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it—but only partially present, for in our writing we repress parts of ourselves, too. Working from that premise frees us to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and retell. There is no such thing as "getting it right"—

only “getting it” differently contoured and nuanced. When using creative analytic practices, ethnographers learn about their topics and about themselves that which was unknowable and unimaginable using conventional analytic procedures, metaphors, and writing formats. Even if one chooses to write an article in a conventional form, trying on different modes of writing is a practical and powerful way to expand one’s interpretive skills, raise one’s consciousness, and bring a fresh perspective to one’s research.

It is beyond this chapter’s scope for me to outline or comment here on the scores of new ethnographic practices and forms. And it is far beyond that scope for me to discuss practices that exceed the written page—performance pieces, readers’ theater, museum displays, choreographed research findings, fine-art representations, hypertexts, and so on—although I welcome these additions to the qualitative repertoire. Instead, I will address a class of genres that deploy literary devices to re-create lived experience and evoke emotional responses. I call these *evocative representations*. I resist providing the reader with snippets from these forms, because snippets will not do them justice. I will describe some texts, but I have no desire to valorize a new canon. Again, *process* rather than *product* is the purpose of this chapter.

Evocative forms display interpretive frameworks that demand analysis of themselves as cultural products and as methods for rendering the social. Evocative representations are a striking way of seeing through and beyond social scientific naturalisms. Casting social science into evocative forms reveals the rhetoric and the underlying labor of the production, as well as social science’s potential as a human endeavor, because evocative writing touches us where we live, in our bodies. Through it we can experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation. Trying out evocative forms, we relate differently to our material; we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we

struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties.

One form of evocative writing is *autoethnography*. (This topic is fully covered by Ellis & Bochner in Chapter 28 of this volume; see also Fine et al., Chapter 4.) Autoethnographies are highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural. The power of these narratives depends upon their rhetorical staging as “true stories,” stories about events that really happened to the writers. In telling these stories, the writers call upon such fiction-writing techniques as dramatic recall, strong imagery, fleshed-out characters, unusual phrasings, puns, subtexts, allusions, flashbacks and flashforwards, tone shifts, synecdoche, dialogue, and interior monologue. Through these techniques, the writers construct sequences of events, or “plots,” holding back on interpretation, asking readers to “relive” the events emotionally, with the writers. These narratives seek to meet literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest. Some narratives of the Self are staged as imaginative renderings; others are staged as personal essays, striving for honesty, revelation, the “larger picture.” In either case, autoethnographers are somewhat relieved of the problem of speaking for the “Other,” because they are the “Other” in their texts.

Related to autoethnography without necessarily invoking the writing strategies mentioned above are narratives about the writing process itself. I call these *writing-stories* (Richardson, 1997). These are narratives about contexts in which the writing is produced. They situate the author’s writing in other parts of the author’s life, such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties, and personal history. They offer critical reflexivity about the writing-self in different contexts as a valuable creative analytic practice. They evoke new questions about the self and the subject; they remind us that our work is grounded, contextual, and rhizomatic. They can evoke deeper parts of the Self, heal

wounds, enhance the sense of self—or even alter one's sense of identity.

In *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (1997), I make extensive use of writing-stories to contextualize 10 years of my sociological work, creating a text more congruent with poststructural understandings of the situated nature of knowledge. Putting my papers and essays in the chronological order in which they were conceptualized, I sorted them into two piles—"keeper" and "reject." When I reread my first keeper—a presidential address to the North Central Sociological Association—memories of being patronized, marginalized, and punished by my department chair and dean reemerged. I stayed with those memories and wrote a writing-story about the disjunction between my departmental life and my disciplinary reputation. Writing the story was not emotionally easy; in the writing I was reliving horrific experiences, but writing it released the anger and pain. Many academics who read that story recognize it as congruent with their experiences, their untold stories.

I worked chronologically through the keeper pile, rereading and then writing the writing-story evoked by the rereading. Different facets, different contexts. Some stories required checking my journals and files, but most did not. Some stories were painful and took an interminable length of time to write, but writing them loosened their shadow hold on me. Other stories are joyful and remind me of the good fortunes I have in friends, colleagues, family.

Writing-stories sensitize us to the potential consequences of all of our writing by bringing home—inside our homes and workplaces—the ethics of representation. Writing-stories are not about people and cultures "out there"—ethnographic subjects (or objects)—they are about ourselves, our work spaces, disciplines, friends, and families. What can we say? With what consequences? Writing-stories bring the danger and poignancy of ethnographic representation up close and personal.

Each writing-story offers its writer an opportunity to make a situated and pragmatic ethical decision about whether and where to publish

the story. For the most part, I have found no ethical problem in publishing stories that reflect the abuse of power by administrators; I consider the damage done by them far greater than any discomfort my stories might cause them. In contrast, I feel constraint when writing about my family members. Anything I have published about them, I have checked out with them; in the case of more distant family members, I have changed their names and identifying characteristics. Some of my recent writing I will not publish for a while because it would be too costly to me and my familial relations to do so.

Graduate students have found the idea of the writing-story useful for thinking through and writing about their research experiences. Some use the writing-story as an alternative or supplement to the traditional methods chapter and, as Judith Lawton (1997) has done, to link the narratives of those they have researched.

Yet to be developed as a subgenre of writing-stories are what we might call *microprocess writing-stories* (see also Meloy, 1993). Who has not looked at the computer screen, read a paragraph he or she has written, and then chosen to alter it? Who has not had their subsequent writing affected by what they have already written? How does the process of writing passages and reading them back to yourself "open new questions and issues that feed back and emanate from the earlier passages?" (A. P. Bochner, personal communication, May 10, 1998). How is a changed Self evoked through the hands-on/eyes-on feedback process?

Related to this subgenre is computer technology and the textual page layout: typefaces, font sizes, split pages, boxed inserts, running bottom text, images, frames. How are choices made? With what impact on the producer and the reader? How does the ease of manipulating page formats and typographical style contribute to—or distract from—the evocativeness of the text? Authors' discoveries about their topics and themselves? These are questions looking for writing-stories.

Unlike the two forms discussed above, an evocative form about which there is an extensive literature is *ethnographic fiction* (see Banks & Banks, 1998). (For a more extended discus-

sion of this and other narrative forms, see Tedlock, Chapter 17, this volume.) "Fiction writing," according to novelist Ernest Lockridge (personal communication, 1998), "is using the imagination to discover and embody truth." Social science writers who claim that their work is fiction privilege their imaginations, seeking to express their visions of social scientific "truth." Usually they encase their stories—whether about themselves or a group or culture—in settings they have studied ethnographically; they display cultural norms through their characters. In addition to the techniques used by self-narrators (see above), ethnographic fiction writers might draw upon devices such as alternative points of view, deep characterization, third-person voice, and the omniscient narrator. (I do not think any ethnographic fiction writers, yet, write from the point of view of the unreliable narrator; see Lockridge, 1987.)

There are some advantages and some disadvantages to claiming one's ethnographic writing is fiction. Staging qualitative research as fiction frees the author from some constraints, protects the author from criminal or other charges, and may protect the identities of those studied. But competing in the publishing world of "literary fiction" is very difficult. Few succeed. Moreover, if one's desire is to effect social change through one's research, fiction is a rhetorically poor writing strategy. Policy makers prefer materials that claim to be not "non-fiction" even, but "true research."

Another evocative form is *poetic representation*. A poem, as Robert Frost articulates it, is "the shortest emotional distance between two points"—the speaker and the reader. Writing sociological interviews as poetry, for example, displays the role of the *prose trope* in constituting knowledge. When we read or hear poetry, we are continually nudged into recognizing that the text has been constructed. But all texts are constructed—prose ones, too; therefore, poetry helps problematize reliability, validity, transparency, and "truth."

Writing "data" as poetic representations reveals the constraining belief that the purpose of a social science text is to convey information as

facts or themes or notions existing independent of the contexts in which they were found or produced—as if the story we have recorded, transcribed, edited, and written up in prose snippets is the one and only true one: a "science" story. Standard prose writing conceals the handprint of the sociologist who produced the final written text.

When people talk, moreover, whether as conversants, storytellers, informants, or interviewees, their speech is closer to poetry than it is to sociological prose (Tedlock, 1983). Writing up interviews as poems, honoring the speaker's pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms, and so on, may actually better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting in prose snippets. Further, poetic devices—rhythms, silences, spaces, breath points, alliterations, meter, cadence, assonance, rhyme, and off-rhyme—engage the listener's body, even if the mind resists and denies. "Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe. It is as if forces we can lay claim to in no other way become present to us in sensuous form" (DeShazer, 1986, p. 138). Settling words together in new configurations lets us hear, see, and *feel* the world in new dimensions. Poetry is thus a *practical* and *powerful* method for analyzing social worlds.

"Louisa May's Story of Her Life" is an example of poetic construction that challenges epistemological assumptions (Richardson, 1997). It is a 5-page narrative poem I created from a 36-page transcript of my in-depth interview with "Louisa May," an unwed mother. In writing Louisa May's story, I drew upon both scientific and literary criteria. This was a greater literary challenge than a sociological one because Louisa May used no images or sensory words and very few idioms. The poem, therefore, had to build upon other poetic devices, such as repetition, pauses, meter, rhyme, and off-rhyme. Without putting words in her mouth, which would violate my sociological sensibilities, I used her voice, diction, hill-southern rhythms, and tone. I wrote her life—as she told it to me—as a historically situated exemplar of sense making. Her life, as she speaks it, is a "normal one." The political

subtext, as I wrote it, is "Mother Courage in America."

Ethnographic drama is another evocative way of shaping an experience without losing the experience. It can blend realist, fictional, and poetic techniques; it can reconstruct the "sense" of an event from multiple "as-lived" perspectives; it can allow all the conflicting "voices" to be heard, relieving the researcher of having to be judge and arbiter (Davies et al., 1997; Johnston, 1997); and it can give voice to what is unspoken but present, for example, "cancer" as portrayed in Paget's (1990) ethnographic drama or abortion as in Ellis and Bochner's (1992) drama. When the material to be displayed is intractable, unruly, multisited, and emotionally laden, drama is more likely to recapture the experience than is standard writing.

Constructing drama raises the postmodern debates about "oral" and "written" texts. Which comes first? Which one should be (is) privileged, and with what consequences? Why the bifurcation between "oral" and "written"? Originating in the lived experience, encoded as field notes, transformed into an ethnographic play, performed, taped-recorded, and then re-edited for publication, the printed script might well be fancied the definitive or "valid" version, particularly to those who privilege the published over the "original," the performance, or even the lived experience. What happens if we accept this validity claim? Dramatic construction provides multiple sites of invention and potential contestation for validity, the blurring of oral and written texts, rhetorical moves, ethical dilemmas, and authority/authorship. It doesn't just "talk about" these issues, *it is* these issues (see Davies et al., 1997; Johnston, 1997; Richardson, 1997).

A last evocative form to consider is *mixed genres*. The scholar draws freely in his or her productions from literary, artistic, and scientific genres, often breaking the boundaries of each of those as well. In these productions, the scholar might have different "takes" on the same topic, what I think of as a postmodernist deconstruction of triangulation.

In traditionally staged research, we valorize "triangulation." (For discussion of triangulation

as method, see Denzin, 1978; Flick, 1998. For an application, see Statham, Richardson, & Cook, 1991). In triangulation, a researcher deploys "different methods"—such as interviews, census data, and documents—to "validate" findings. These methods, however, carry the *same domain* assumptions, including the assumption that there is a "fixed point" or "object" that can be triangulated. But in postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate; we *crystallize*. We recognize that there are far more than "three sides" from which to approach the world.

I propose that the central imaginary for "validity" for postmodernist texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization. In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be *both* waves *and* particles.

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity" (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

The construction and reception of the narrative poem mentioned above, "Louisa May's Story of Her Life" (Richardson, 1997), is emblematic of crystallization. That work generated alternate theories and perspectives for writing and for living, deconstructed traditional notions of validity, glancingly touching some projects, lighting others. My life has been deeply altered through the research and writing of the poem, and "Louisa May" has touched wide and

diverse audiences, even inspiring some to change their research and writing practices.

In one section of *Fields of Play* (1997), I tell two interwoven stories of "writing illegitimacy": Louisa May's story and the research story—its production, dissemination, reception, and consequences for me. There are multiple illegitimacies in the stories: a child out of wedlock; poetic representation of research findings; a feminine voice in social sciences; ethnographic research on ethnographers and dramatic representation of that research; emotional presence of the writer; and work *jouissance*.

I had thought the research story was complete, not necessarily the only story that could be told, but one that reflected fairly, honestly, and sincerely what my research experiences have been. I still believe that. But missing from the research story, I came to realize, were the personal, biographical experiences that led me to author such a story.

The idea of "illegitimacy," I have come to acknowledge, has had a compelling hold on me. In my research journal I wrote, "My career in the social sciences might be viewed as one long adventure into illegitimacies." I asked myself, Why am I drawn to constructing "texts of illegitimacy," including the text of my academic life? What is this struggle I have with the academy—being in it and against it at the same time? How is my story like and unlike the stories of others struggling to make sense of themselves, to retrieve suppressed selves, to act ethically?

Refracting "illegitimacy" through allusions, glimpses, extended views, I came to write a personal essay, "Vespers," the final essay in *Fields of Play*. "Vespers" located my academic life in childhood experiences and memories; it deepened my knowledge of myself and has resonated with others' experiences in academia. In turn, the writing of "Vespers" has refracted, again, giving me desire, strength, and enough self-knowledge to narrativize other memories and experiences—to give myself agency, to construct myself anew, for better or for worse.

We also see this crystallization process in several recent mixed-genre books. Margery

Wolf, in *A Thrice-Told Tale* (1992), takes the same event and tells it as fictional story, field notes, and a social scientific paper. John Stewart, in *Drinkers, Drummers and Decent Folk* (1989), writes poetry, fiction, ethnographic accounts, and field notes about Village Trinidad. In *School-girl Fictions* (1990), Valerie Walkerdine develops/displays the theme that "masculinity and femininity are fictions which take on the status of fact" (p. xiii) by incorporating into the book journal entries, poems, essays, photographs of herself, drawings, cartoons, and annotated transcripts. Ruth Linden's *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (1992) intertwines autobiography, academic writing, and survivors' stories in a Helen Hooven Santmyer Prize in Women's Studies book, which was her dissertation. John Van Maanen's *Tales from the Field* (1988) presents his research on police as realist, confessional, and impressionist narratives. Patti Lather and Chris Smithies's *Troubling the Angels: Women Living With HIV/AIDS* (1997) displays high theory, researchers' stories, women's support group transcripts, and historical and medical information, using innovative text layouts. John Dorst's *The Written Suburb* (1989) presents a geographic site as site, image, idea, discourse, and an assemblage of texts. Stephen Pfohl's *Death at the Parasite Cafe* (1992) employs collage strategies and synchronic juxtapositions, blurring critical theory and militant art forms.

In some mixed-genre productions, the writer/artist roams freely around topics, breaking our sense of the externality of topics, developing our sense of how topic and self are twin constructed. Susan Krieger's *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form* (1991) is a superb example. The book is "design oriented," reflecting Krieger's attachment to Pueblo potters and Georgia O'Keeffe, and, as she says, it "looks more like a pot or a painting than a hypothesis" (p. 120). Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Woman Native Other* (1989) breaks down writing conventions within each of the essays that constitute the book, mixing poetry, self-reflection, feminist criticism, photographs, and quotations to help readers experience postcoloniality. In *I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Libera-*

tion (1994), Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot uses fiction-writing techniques and self-reflexivity to tell stories of being Afro-American and professional. Anthologies also reflect these mixed genres. My own book *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (1997) in its entirety tells the story of my intellectual and political struggles in academia through personal essays, dramas, poems, writing-stories, e-mail messages, and sociology articles. Anthologies also present mixed genres. Some examples are Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner's *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (1996a), Ellis and Mich el Flaherty's *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (1992), Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon's *Women Writing Culture* (1995). The book series *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, and the journal *Qualitative Inquiry* mix genres in their pages.

Whither and Whence?

The contemporary postmodernist context in which we work as qualitative researchers is a propitious one. It provides an opportunity for us to review, critique, and re-vision writing. Although we are freer to present our texts in a variety of forms to diverse audiences, we have different constraints arising from self-consciousness about claims to authorship, authority, truth, validity, reliability. Self-reflexivity brings to consciousness some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing. Truth claims are less easily validated now; desires to speak "for" others are suspect. The greater freedom to experiment with textual form, however, does not guarantee a better product. The opportunities for writing worthy texts—books and articles that are "good reads"—are multiple, exciting, and demanding. But the work is harder. The guarantees are fewer. There is a lot more for us to think about.

One thing for us to think about is whether writing CAP ethnography for publication is a luxury open only to those who have academic sinecure. Are the tenured doing a disservice to students by introducing them to these different forms of writing? Will teaching students hereticisms "deskill" them? Alienate them from

their discipline? (Would we ask these questions about students' learning a second language?) A related issue is, if students are taught writing as inquiry, what criteria should be brought to bear upon their work? These are heady ethical, pedagogical, aesthetic, and practical questions. I struggle with them in my teaching, writing, and collegial discussions. I have no definitive answers, but I do have some thoughts on the issues.

Writing is a process of discovery. My purpose is not to turn us into poets, novelists, or dramatists—few of us will write well enough to succeed in those competitive fields. Most of us, like Poe, will be at best only almost poets. Rather, my intention is to encourage individuals to accept and nurture their own voices. The researcher's self-knowledge and knowledge of the topic develop through experimentation with point of view, tone, texture, sequencing, metaphor, and so on. Another skill, another language—the student's own—is added to the student's repertoire. The science-writing enterprise is demystified. The deepened understanding of a Self deepens the text. Even the analysis paralysis that afflicts some readers of postmodernism is attenuated when writers view their work as process rather than as definitive representation.

Students will not lose the language of science when they learn to write in other ways, any more than students who learn a second language lose their first (Y. S. Lincoln, personal communication, 1998). Rather, acquiring a second language enriches students in two ways: It gains them entry into a new culture and literature, and it leads them to a deepened understanding of their first language, not just grammatically, but as a language that constructs how they view the world.

Writing in traditional ways does not prevent us from writing in other ways for other audiences at other times (Denzin, 1994; Richardson, 1990). There is no single way—much less one "right" way—of staging a text. Like wet clay, the material can be shaped. Learning alternative ways of writing increases our repertoires, increases the numbers and kinds of audiences we might reach.

As I write this chapter, I imagine four friendly audiences: graduate students, curious quantitative researchers, traditionally inclined qualitative researchers, and creative analytic practitioners. I want to clarify and teach—and, yes, proselytize.

Who is your audience? What are your purposes? Understanding how to stage your writing *rhetorically* increases your chances of getting published and reaching your intended audiences. Deconstructing traditional writing practices makes writers more conscious of writing conventions and, therefore, more competently able to make choices.

The new ways of writing do, however, invoke conversation about criteria for judging an ethnographic work—new or traditional. Traditional ethnographers of goodwill have legitimate concerns about how their students' work will be evaluated if they choose to write CAP ethnography. I have no definitive answers to ease their concerns, but I do have some ideas and preferences.

I see the ethnographic project as humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings. Scientific superstructure is always resting on the foundation of human activity, belief, understandings. I emphasize ethnography as constructed through *research practices*. Research practices are concerned with enlarged understanding. Science offers some research practices; literature, creative arts, memory work (Davies, 1994; Davies et al., 1997), and introspection (Ellis, 1991) offer still others. Researchers have many practices from which to choose, and ought not be constrained by habits of other people's minds.

I believe in holding CAP ethnography to high and difficult standards; mere novelty does not suffice. Here are five of the criteria I use when reviewing papers or monographs submitted for social scientific publication.

1. *Substantive contribution*: Does this piece contribute to our *understanding* of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social

scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text? (See "Writing Practices," below, for some suggestions on how to accomplish this.)

2. *Aesthetic merit*: Rather than reducing standards, CAP ethnography adds another standard. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring? (Creative writing is a skill that can be developed through reading, courses, workshops, and practice; see the suggestions listed in the "Writing Practices" section.)
3. *Reflexivity*: Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism? How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold him- or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?
4. *Impact*: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?
5. *Expression of a reality*: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true"—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?

These are five of my criteria. Science is one lens; creative arts another. We see more deeply using two lenses. I want to look through both lenses, to see a "social science art form."

I strongly disagree, then, with those who claim ethnography should be a "science guild," a "craft" with "tacit rules," apprentices, trade "secrets," and "disciplined," "responsible" journey-

men (i.e., professors) who enact rules that check "artistic pretensions and excesses" (see Schwalbe, 1995; see also Richardson, 1996b). This medieval vision limits ethnographic exploration, patrols the boundaries of intellectual thought, and aligns qualitative research ideologically with those who would discipline and punish postmodern ideas within social science. Policing, however, is always about bodies. It is always about real live people. Should the medieval vision triumph, what real live people are likely to be excluded?

What I have learned from my teaching and conversations with colleagues is this: Minorities within academia, including ethnic and racial, postcolonial, gay and lesbian, physically challenged, and returning students, find the turn to creative analytic practices as beckoning. These researchers desire the opportunity to be "responsible" to the "guild" while honoring their responsibilities to their traditions, their cultures, and their sense of the meaningful life.

Welcoming these researchers creates an enriched, diversified, socially engaged, nonhegemonic community of qualitative researchers. Everyone profits—the communities of origin and identification and the qualitative research community. The implications of race and gender would be stressed not because it would be "politically correct," but because race and gender *are axes* through which symbolic and actual worlds have been constructed. Members of nondominant worlds know that, and would insist that this knowledge be honored (see Margolis & Romero, 1998). The blurring of humanities and social sciences would be welcomed not because it is "trendy," but because the blurring coheres more truly with the life senses and learning styles of so many. This new qualitative community could, through its theory, analytic practices, and diverse membership, reach beyond academia, teaching all of us about social injustice and methods for alleviating it. What qualitative researcher interested in social life would not feel enriched by membership in such a culturally diverse and inviting community?

Furthermore, CAP ethnography is now firmly established within the social sciences. There are prestigious places for students and

others to publish. *Sociological Quarterly*, *Symbolic Interaction*, *American Anthropologist*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Journal of Aging Studies*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *International Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, *Qualitative Studies in Psychology*, *Qualitative Sociology*, *Waikato Journal of Education*, and *Text and Performance Quarterly* routinely publish CAP ethnography. The annuals *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* and *Cultural Studies* showcase evocative writing. Publishers such as Routledge, University of Chicago Press, University of Michigan Press, Indiana University Press, University of Pennsylvania Press, Rutgers University Press, Temple University Press, and Sage Publications regularly publish new ethnography by both well-known and lesser-known authors. AltaMira Press (formerly a division of Sage) boasts the excellent *Ethnographic Alternatives* book series, which is dedicated to qualitative research that blurs the boundaries between the social sciences and humanities. New York University Press has launched the *Qualitative Studies in Psychology* series, which is receptive to creative-analytic texts. Trade and university presses are increasingly resistant to publishing old-style monographs, and traditional ethnographers are writing more reflexively and self-consciously (see Thorne, 1993). Even those opposed to postmodernism legitimate it through dialogue (Whyte, 1992). Throughout the social sciences, convention papers include transgressive presentations. Entire conferences are devoted to experimentation, such as the "Redesigning Ethnography" conference at the University of Colorado and the Year 2000 Couch-Stone Symbolic Interaction Symposium.

At least three well-respected interpretive programs—at the University of Illinois (under Norman Denzin), the University of South Florida (under Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis), and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas (with Andrea Fontana and Kate Hausbreck)—teach creative analytic practices. The Ohio State University's Folklore Studies (under Amy Shuman) and its Cultural Studies in Education Ph.D. program (under Patti Lather) privilege postpositivism. Dissertations violating the traditional five-chapter, social science writing style

format are accepted in the United States, Canada, England, New Zealand, and Australia. Elliot Eisner (1996), art educator and past president of the American Educational Research Association, has gone further. He proposes that novels should be accepted as Ph.D. dissertations in education. All of these changes in academic practices are signs of *paradigm changes*.

In the 1950s, the sociology of science was a new, reflexively critical area. Today, the sociology of science undergirds theory, methods, and interdisciplinary science studies. In the 1960s, "gender" emerged as a theoretical perspective. Today, gender studies is one of the largest (if not the largest) subfield in the social sciences. In part, science studies and gender studies thrived because they identified normative assumptions of social science that falsely limited knowledge. They spoke "truly" to the everyday experiences of social scientists. The new areas hit us where we lived—in our work and in our bodies. They offered alternative perspectives for understanding the experienced world.

Today, the postmodernist critique is having the same impact on the social sciences that science studies and gender have had, and for similar reasons. Postmodernism identifies unspecified assumptions that hinder us in our search for understanding "truly," and it offers different practices that work. We feel its "truth"—its moral, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, intuitive, embodied pull. Each researcher is likely to respond to that pull differently, which should lead to writing that is more diverse, more author centered, less boring, and humbler. These are propitious times. Some even speak of their work as spiritual.

And Thence

The ethnographic life is not separable from the Self. Who we are and what we can be—what we can study, how we can write about that which we study—is tied to how a knowledge system disciplines itself and its members, its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members.

We have inherited some ethnographic rules that are arbitrary, narrow, exclusionary, dis-

torting, and alienating. Our task is to find concrete practices through which we can construct ourselves as ethical subjects engaged in ethical ethnography—inspiring to read and to write. Some of these practices involve working within theoretical schemata (sociology of knowledge, feminism, critical race theory, constructionism, poststructuralism) that challenge grounds of authority; writing on topics that matter, personally and collectively; *jouissance*; experimenting with different writing formats and audiences simultaneously; locating ourselves in multiple discourses and communities; developing critical literacy; finding ways to write/present/teach that are less hierarchal and univocal; revealing institutional secrets; using positions of authority to increase diversity, both in academic appointments and in journal publications; self-reflexivity; giving in to synchronicity; asking for what we want, like cats; not flinching from where the writing takes us, emotionally or spiritually; and honoring the embodiedness and spatiality of our labors.

What creative analytic practices in ethnography will eventually produce, I do not know. But I do know that the ground has been staked, the foundation laid, the scaffolding erected, and diverse and adventurous settlers have moved on in.

. . . and Forever After

The *Handbook* editors really do want all the contributors to predict the future of qualitative research. I thought I had. Oh, how I resist! But here goes.

Forty years ago, I was an undergraduate who detested the yearlong course "History of Western Civilization"—2,500 years, five continents, 700 countries, six trillion names, dates, wars, and places. I thought the final would decimate me. But fortune smiled. In addition to the zillions of "objective" questions, we were given a take-home essay: "What is the future of history?" I said—in 10 pages or less—that the future of history was *both* toward unity *and* toward diversity. I got an A+ on that essay. I think I'll stick with it. That's the way I see the future of qualitative research, too. We will be clearer about its domain and more welcoming of diverse representations.

The domain's metaphor will be the "text"—or some other equally outrageously encompassing image—but the meaning and construction of text will far exceed the written page, the computer screen, and even the hypertext: two-dimensional, three-dimensional, refractive, layered texts. Discussions of the boundaries between literature and science will seem quaint, as "writing"—in the future understood as any textual construction—will be routinely understood as a "method of inquiry." And, therefore, it will have to be challenged!

Oh, dear!

♣

♣

◆ Writing Practices

Writing, the creative effort, should come first—at least for some part of every day of your life. It is a wonderful blessing if you will use it. You will become happier, more enlightened, alive, impassioned, light hearted and generous to everybody else. Even your health will improve. Colds will disappear and all the other ailments of discouragement and boredom.

Brenda Ueland, *If You Want to Write*, 1938/1987

In what follows, I suggest some ways of using writing as a method of knowing. I have chosen exercises that have been productive for students because they demystify writing, nurture the researcher's voice, and serve the process of discovery. I wish I could guarantee them to bring good health as well. The practices are organized around topics discussed in the text.

Metaphor

Using old, worn-out metaphors, although easy and comfortable, after a while invites stodginess and stiffness. The stiffer you get, the less flexible you are. Your ideas get ignored. If your writing is clichéd, you'll not "stretch your own imagination" (Ouch! Hear the cliché of pointing out the cliché!) and you'll bore people.

1. In traditional social scientific writing, the metaphor for theory is that it is a "building" (structure, foundation, construction, deconstruction, framework, grand, and so on). Consider a different metaphor, such as "theory as a tapestry" or "theory as an illness." Write a paragraph about "theory" using your metaphor. Do you "see" differently and "feel" differently about theorizing using an unusual metaphor?

2. Consider alternative sensory metaphors for "knowledge" other than the heliocentric one mentioned in the text. What happens when you rethink/resense "knowledge" as situated in voice? In touch?

3. Look at one of your papers and highlight your metaphors and images. What are you saying through metaphors that you did not realize you were saying? What are you reinscribing? Do you want to? Can you find different metaphors that change how you "see" ("feel") the material? your relationship to it? Are your mixed metaphors pointing to confusion in yourself or to social science's glossing over of ideas?

4. Take a look at George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). It is a wonderful book, a compendium of examples of metaphors in everyday life and how they affect our ways of perceiving, thinking, and acting. What everyday metaphors are shaping your knowing/writing?

Writing Formats

1. Choose a journal article that exemplifies the mainstream writing conventions of your discipline. How is the argument staged? Who is the presumed audience? How does the paper inscribe ideology? How does the author claim authority over the material? Where is the author? Where are you in this paper? Who are the subjects and who are the objects of research?

2. Choose a journal article that exemplifies excellence in qualitative research. How has the article built upon normative social science writing? How is authority claimed? Where is the author? Where are you in the article? Who are the subjects and who are the objects of research?

3. Choose a paper you have written for a class or that you have published that you think is

pretty good. How did you follow the norms of your discipline? Were you conscious of doing so? How did you stage your paper? What parts did the professor/reviewer laud? How did you depend upon those norms to carry your argument? Did you elide some difficult areas through vagueness, jargon, calls to authorities, or other rhetorical devices? What voices did you exclude in your writing? Who is the audience? Where are the subjects in the paper? Where are you? How do you feel about the paper now? About your process of constructing it?

Creative Analytic Writing Practices

1. Join or start a writing group. This could be a writing support group, a creative writing group, a poetry group, a dissertation group, or another kind of group. (On dissertation and article writing, see Becker, 1986; Fox, 1985; Richardson, 1990; Wolcott, 1990.)

2. Work through a creative writing guidebook. Natalie Goldberg (1986, 1990), Rust Hills (1987), Brenda Ueland (1938/1987), and Deena Weinstein (1993) all provide excellent guides.

3. Enroll in a creative writing workshop or class. These experiences are valuable for both beginning and experienced researchers.

4. Use "writing up" your field notes as an opportunity to expand your writing vocabulary, habits of thought, and attentiveness to your senses, and as a bulwark against the censorious voice of science. Where better to develop your sense of self, your voice, than in the process of doing your research? Apply creative writing skills to your field notes. You may need to rethink what you've have been taught about objectivity, science, and the ethnographic project. What works for me is to give different labels to different content. Building on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), I use four categories, which you may find of value:

- *Observation notes* (ON): These are as concrete and detailed as I am able to make

them. I want to think of them as fairly accurate renditions of what I see, hear, feel, taste, and so on. I stay close to the scene as I experience it through my senses.

- *Methodological notes* (MN): These are messages to myself regarding how to collect "data"—who to talk to, what to wear, when to phone, and so on. I write a lot of these because I like methods, and I like to keep a process diary of my work.
- *Theoretical notes* (TN): These are hunches, hypotheses, poststructuralist connections, critiques of what I am doing/thinking/seeing. I like writing these because they open my field note texts to alternative interpretations and a critical epistemological stance. They provide a way of keeping me from being hooked on one view of reality.
- *Personal notes* (PN): These are uncensored feeling statements about the research, the people I am talking to, my doubts, my anxieties, my pleasures. I want all my feelings out on paper because I know they are affecting what/how I lay claim to know. I also know they are a great source for hypotheses; if I am feeling a certain way in a setting, it is likely that others might feel that way too. Finally, writing personal notes is a way for me to know myself better, a way of using writing as method of inquiry into the self.

5. Keep a journal. In it, write about your feelings about your work. This not only frees up your writing, it becomes the "historical record" for the writing of a narrative of the Self or a writing-story about the writing process.

6. Write a writing autobiography. This would be the story of how you learned to write: the dicta of English classes (topic sentences? outlines? the five-paragraph essay?), the dicta of social science professors, your experiences with teachers' comments on your papers, how and where you write now, your idiosyncratic "writing needs," your feelings about writing and about the writing process. (This is an exercise that Arthur Bochner uses.)

7. If you wish to experiment with evocative writing, a good place to begin is by transforming

your field notes into drama. See what ethnographic rules you are using (such as fidelity to the speech of the participants, fidelity in the order of the speakers and events) and what literary ones you are invoking (such as limits on how long a speaker speaks, keeping the "plot" moving along, developing character through actions). Writing dramatic presentations accentuates ethical considerations. If you doubt that, contrast writing up an ethnographic event as a "typical" event with writing it as a play, with you and your hosts cast in roles that will be performed before others. Who has ownership of spoken words? How is authorship attributed? What if people do not like how they are characterized? Are courtesy norms being violated? Experiment here with both oral and written versions of your drama.

8. Experiment with transforming an in-depth interview into a poetic representation. Try using only the words, rhythms, figures of speech, breath points, pauses, syntax, and diction of the speaker. Where are you in the poem? What do you know about the interviewee and about yourself that you did not know before you wrote the poem? What poetic devices have you sacrificed in the name of science?

9. Experiment with writing narratives of the self. Keep in mind Barbara Tuchman's warning: "The writer's object is—or should be—to hold the reader's attention. . . . I want the reader to turn the page and keep on turning to the end. This is accomplished only when the narrative moves steadily ahead, not when it comes to a weary standstill, overlaced with every item uncovered in the research" (in *New York Times*, February 2, 1989).

10. Try writing a text using different typefaces, font sizes, and textual placement. How have the traditional ways of using print affected what you know and how you know it?

11. Write a "layered text" (see Lather & Smithies, 1997; Ronai, 1992). The layered text is a strategy for putting yourself into your text and putting your text into the literatures and traditions of social science. Here is one possibility. First, write a short narrative of the Self about some event that is especially meaningful to you.

Then step back and look at the narrative from your disciplinary perspective and insert into the narrative—beginning, midsections, end, wherever—relevant analytic statements or references, using a different typescript, alternative page placement, split pages, or other ways to mark the text. The layering can be multiple, with different ways of marking different theoretical levels, theories, speakers, and so on. (This is an exercise that Carolyn Ellis uses.)

12. Try some other strategy for writing new ethnography for social scientific publications. Try the "seamless" text, in which previous literature, theory, and methods are placed in textually meaningful ways, rather than in disjunctive sections (for an excellent example, see Bochner, 1997); try the "sandwich" text, in which traditional social science themes are the "white bread" around the "filling" (C. Ellis, personal communication, April 27, 1998); or try an "epilogue" explicating the theoretical analytic work of the creative text (see Eisner, 1996).

13. Consider a fieldwork setting. Consider the various subject positions you have or have had within it. For example, in a store you might be a salesclerk, customer, manager, feminist, capitalist, parent, child, and so on. Write about the setting (or an event in the setting) from several different subject positions. What do you "know" from the different positions? Next, let the different points of view dialogue with each other. What do you discover through these dialogues?

14. Consider a paper you have written (or your field notes). What have you left out? Who is not present in this text? Who has been repressed or marginalized? Rewrite the text from that point of view.

15. Write your "data" in three different ways—for example, as a narrative account, as a poetic representation, and as readers' theater. What do you know in each rendition that you did not know in the other renditions? How do the different renditions enrich each other?

16. Write a narrative of the Self from your point of view (such as something that happened in your family or in a seminar). Then interview another participant (such as family or seminar

member) and have that person tell you his or her story of the event. See yourself as part of the other person's story in the same way he or she is part of your story. How do you rewrite your story from the other person's point of view? (This is an exercise Carolyn Ellis uses.)

17. Collaborative writing is a way to see beyond one's own naturalisms of style and attitude. This is an exercise that I have used in my teaching, but it would be appropriate for a writing group as well. Each member writes a story of his or her life. It could be a feminist story, a success story, quest story, cultural story, professional socialization story, realist tale, confessional tale, or another kind of story. All persons' stories are photocopied for the group. The group is then broken into subgroups (I prefer groups of three), and each subgroup collaborates on writing a new story, the collective story of its members. The collaboration can take any form; drama, poetry, fiction, narrative of the selves, realism, whatever the subgroup chooses. The collaboration is shared with the entire group. All members then write about their feelings about the collaboration and what happened to their stories, their lives, in the process.

18. Memory work (see Davies, 1994; Davies et al., 1997) is another collaborative research and writing strategy. Stories shared in the group are discussed and then rewritten, with attention paid to the discourses that are shaping the stories in each of their tellings. As more people tell their stories, individuals remember more details of their own stories, or develop new stories. Participants discover what their stories have in common, perhaps even writing what Bronwyn Davies (1994) calls a "collective biography."

19. Consider a part of your life outside of or before academia with which you have deeply resonated. Use that resonance as a "working metaphor" for understanding and reporting your research. Students have created excellent reports by using unexpected lenses, such as choreography, principles of flower arrangement, art composition, and sportscasting, to view their lives and the lives of others. Writing

from that which resonates with your life nurtures a more integrated life.

20. Different forms of writing are appropriate for different audiences and different occasions. Try writing the same piece of research for an academic audience, a trade audience, the popular press, policy makers, research hosts, and so on (see Richardson, 1990). This is an especially powerful exercise for dissertation students who may want to share their results in a "user-friendly" way with those they studied.

21. Write writing-stories (see Richardson, 1997), or reflexive accounts of how you happened to write pieces you have written. Your writing-stories can be about disciplinary politics, departmental events, friendship networks, collegial ties, family, and personal biographical experiences. Writing-stories situate your work in contexts, tying what can be a lonely and seemingly separative task to the ebbs and flows of your life, your self. Writing these stories reminds us of the continual cocreation of the self and social science.

Willing is doing something you know already—there is no new imaginative understanding in it. And presently your soul gets frightfully sterile and dry because you are so quick, snappy, and efficient about doing one thing after another that you have no time for your own ideas to come in and develop and gently shine.

Brenda Ueland, *If You Want to Write*, 1938/1987

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