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Rock Star Dreams Co-created (auto)ethnographies*

ABSTRACT

The article is a two-part piece where the first part is a narratively written composition of interview excerpts, and the second part is a theoretical and methodological reflection about this way of writing. The narrative of the first part consists of extracts from in-depth interviews conducted within the framework of an ethnological and autoethnographical research project examining grief, friendship and kinship in the wake of the deaths of two of the authors childhood friends – Marcus and Noel. The potential of the ethnographic material is explored as text by compiling it in an entirely new manner, where multiple voices are condensed into a single narrative. The point of departure is sociologist Carolyn Ellis' ideas on co-constructed narratives and autoethnographic texts as jointly authored. The writing method is also inspired

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by author Svetlana Alexievich and her way of facilitating a focus on specific details of human experience from a larger empirical material.

The intention is that the whole should appear to be greater than the sum of its parts. The common narrative is something new, something singular, something greater than could be conveyed by any one of the interviews, or interviewees, alone. The result is a narrative of death, grief, friendship, parenthood and kinship. About how masculinity can be intersected by the lines of class, place, mental illness and substance abuse. In the text, those who grieve for Marcus and Noel are not alone – in the text they stand together as part of a heterogeneous collective with many voices.

Keywords: Autoethnography, co-constructed narratives, masculinity, grief

MARCUS

We had matching pyjamas. I took care of him; I was always nice to him.

His dad was an alcoholic. So he grew up in an alcoholic home, seeing his dad change from Dr Jekyll to Mr Hyde. His dad was jealous about the amount of time his mum spent on her horse. So, he decided to go and shoot it. I had some distance from that, because I had a different father. Marcus was the one who took it hardest. He cried, of course, and Mum cried too. The pair of them, they cried a lot. I don't feel any sense of security anywhere either. Mum didn't tell anyone anything. She remained pretty much silent all those years.

You don't accept help and you don't talk to anyone and you deal with it yourself.

I can see it know, Marcus always sitting beside Mum.

Marcus never wanted to talk about his dad. It feels like he never wanted to blame his dad for any of it, he never wanted to lay anything on him. He's never shown any desire to talk about it.

His dad threatened to kill himself if Marcus didn't live there. At nine years old, he had that burden. If you don't move here, I'll kill myself, because I'll have nothing to live for.

Marcus was voted the most popular kid in the class. Everyone voted for Marcus and he was always so considerate. Marcus was friends with everyone. He was so bloody kind-hearted was Marcus.

Couldn't say no.

We became friends in secondary school. You were there, of course. I have a photo of us hanging out. All the birds sitting in a line like fucking Barbies. The best looking girls.

Marcus used to throw parties.

He was smart and well-behaved.

He always spoke well of his dad.

We used to nick tampons from his mum.

Marcus was always drumming on something. Non-stop. He played piano at the girls' baptism. He was bursting with ideas. He built a little home recording studio.

Marcus was colour-blind.

We all thought he was gorgeous.

We were together for, what, a week maybe.

We were together for three weeks.

We were together for around 10 days.

He was with Emma as well. My friend Emma.

I suppose he was my first real love. That's how I remember it anyway.

I was always attracted to him.

Marcus moved up to Stockholm as well. He moved around quite a bit. He used to come round my place after work and we would hang out.

I don't really understand what happened to Marcus. He kept everything bottled up. I didn't feel like I knew him anymore, the person I'd known most of my life. It didn't really seem like the same person.

I had been a bit of a stoner. I quit smoking hash before everyone else started.

Marcus didn't do drugs much. He was schizophrenic.

I don't know, maybe he was just really deep.

He began to talk about how love can triumph over everything. I remember him writing a letter to Obama. All of a sudden he was evicted from his flat. And then we lost contact.

I did see him on one occasion. In town. He didn't recognise me. I could see in his eyes that he didn't know who I was. I felt a bit weird to meet him, knowing that something had happened to him. It's difficult, difficult to try and remember. It feels like that's kind of my final memory. Marcus was gone for many years of course. I find it fucking difficult, this whole thing with time.

I've never met anyone with a psychosis before. Voices in their head and all that.

I said: *I want to help you; you can't go on feeling like this.* He never got to a place where he was willing to accept help.

Glimpses of how happy he is with the girls, messing

around with them.

I tried for a long time. Many times when Mum couldn't get through to him, I could talk to him. I just hope that the medication helps now, I said, so everything will be OK.

You think it will pass. For him, at least. But, of course, you'd say the same thing about anyone you knew.

He died in the mental hospital. It just shouldn't bloody happen, you know?

So, he pukes. Lying on his back. Pukes. Inhales the vomit. Can't breathe. And then he collapses. And dies. Suffocates. He was gone. He suffocated. On Monday morning he's dead.

But whose responsibility is it?

He died in November. I was lying in bed asleep. And Mum had sent a text message. I don't know if that's what woke me or If I just woke up of my own accord. And there it was: *something terrible has happened, I'll be there soon.*

We didn't know anything then. Just that he had died. No idea of what had happened. I didn't know what he had died of. We didn't get any information for almost six months.

Still, there have always been people who have lost their children, I know that, so I'm sure I'll survive it as well.

I never saw Marcus as someone who wouldn't make it in life. But, of course, you never know. For some, things work out just great. Maybe he was a lost cause. I should have understood what was going on much sooner. But, you know, it can be quite cruel to judge oneself through older, more experienced eyes.

And Noel didn't come to the funeral. He called me when Marcus died. He was beside himself. Noel was so fucking wretched, thinking it was his fault. He should have helped him.

He said he would come, but he didn't come. And then, a year later he died.

NOEL

He really wanted to get help. He really wanted to be a good person. He didn't want to be that piece of shit. He was proud. He had one hell of an inferiority complex as well. He had so many demons. We met often, sat and talked about everything under the sun and about life and all its problems. He was like a little boy. He wanted you to talk to him so he felt support. And he loved music.

Dreamed of being a rock star.

Actually, I often think about Noel. He would have made a good rock star. He played the guitar. Noel got his first electric guitar when he was five years old. Just like that, the kid could play. And I thought to myself: *how the hell did he learn that?*

It was his dream, to go into the studio. His dream was to have a family and drive the latest Mustang.

Noel thought he was immortal. At the same time, he said: *I'm going to die young and leave a beautiful corpse.* He was diagnosed with ADHD. He messed about at school and was called in to see the headteacher and his class teacher many times.

He was out and got in a fight, broke some bone or other. And then he did it again.

I never smelt alcohol or anything on him.

Here's Noel. He was not a high jumper. He started off playing ice hockey.

He was one of those lads who were always being told what a pain in the arse they were, that they were troublemakers, useless.

Then he was in and out of jail for a while. He was in prison on several fucking occasions. To me, it still never seemed real. Because he never showed that side to me.

It was just the fucking drink.

He enjoyed fighting. He was calm and happy when he drank.

Noel had other, good sides as well.

He'd get into trouble but still do the same thing the next day.

Like he just couldn't control himself. He had a lot of anger inside him. It's this world that's crazy, why be positive? Why should you be happy?

He got a job with a subsidised wage. Became part of the organisation and contact person for other kids. That gave him some really good years. He lectured on drugs in schools. And he supported others. He coached other lads. But still.

A few weeks before he died he turned up on the doorstep, completely broken. I'd never seen him in such a state. I've seen him under the influence before. Now, he had blood around his mouth and he'd been mugged.

Noel carried some kind of sadness, like life had robbed him of something. He was broken, scarred.

I don't like the word 'broken'. Maybe it's better to describe people as wounded rather than broken?

Noel had a burnt heart. That's a translation of a Farsi expression. Something from the past that stings all the time.

I've thought a great deal about Noel.

If life has been good to you for a while and you blow it,

there's a tendency to be that much more destructive. You understand what you've lost. That was certainly true of Noel. It was heroin, other drugs. It happened really quickly. There was nothing there, no hope, nothing. When you're an addict, it's difficult to bring out the good things. The drugs take over. Heroin closes you down completely. It kills everything. You're like a dead person, yet still living.

Many people pay with their lives. It costs too much.

You know, people die, so sometimes you forget people. But I can still hear his voice in my head.

Yeah, I was at the funeral. I met his mother there as well.

You always think this kind of thing won't happen to me, or won't happen to us. Not one of my friends. We should be having class reunions, not hanging out at funerals. He had a tough time, and he had us. That's the sad thing.

It's much, much more difficult when it's kids, like Noel, who pass away. I find that much more difficult.

What did the autopsy say, was it heroin?

A lot of people say he took an overdose of heroin.

For some reason, his heart stopped.

It's so strange that he died of a heroin overdose. It was always alcohol with him.

Alcohol was always his thing.

A lot of hash, a lot of weed.

He took shit loads of pills, sedatives and shit. But I thought he was clean. He told everyone he was clean.

He was clean. He was. That's why it killed him.

The last I heard was that he'd bought new clothes, a new jacket, one of those expensive ones.

Someone said he was beginning to get his act together again.

Scriptum 2/22

I thought he was probably smoking dope and drinking. I had no bloody idea that he was on such heavy drugs. You think that if you start on heroin then you're screwed. I really didn't think that it would go that far. By the time he died, I still didn't understand that he had taken so many drugs. And he was on heroin.

He was rescued once. He took an overdose before he died.

And then, on 29 January, his little brother called. Burst into tears. *Noel's gone.*

I think he just took far too much and his heart stopped.

The friend he lived with punched him in the face to try and wake him up. But he realised it was too late and called the police.

I would have liked to have seen him once but they wouldn't let me.

It was heroin, a lethal dose. But he also had loads of other medication in his body.

It was really distressing to have to tell you that.

It was almost a relief when he died.

Rest in peace.

We'll never know if he did it on purpose or if it was an accident. Addicts rarely kill themselves, we shoot up until we die.

I guess there were a few too many setbacks. Things fell apart. After all, he was only human. It's not easy being human.

He chose a less demanding path, as we say in the 12-step programme. That path cost him his life.

He was so bloody sensitive.

He had all these feelings that he just couldn't manage.

Noel was so scared: fear controlled him.

He had far too big an ego, did Noel. Everything had to be on his terms.

All those years that I hated myself. And Noel did too. He hated himself.

I was never afraid of him. He was never mean to me. He has never screamed obscenities at me, or hurt me, or anything like that. He just kind of disappeared.

He had so much in him, I'm sure of it.

He didn't expect much out of life.

Of course, I was in a relationship with an addiction.

I found him very charming.

Noel was the sweetest and cutest baby when he was born, no trouble at all. Everyone loved him. I didn't want a daughter, I wanted a son. Because I thought: *it would be no good if she turns out like me.*

And then it ended up like this.

It's not as if I say no to a drink myself.

I was the one who had to bake an enormous cake every birthday.

I was often really angry with Noel. You shouldn't hit children, but I did.

It was a good time as well. Everything has different sides, of course.

I was always at home. That's why I was so tired. What would have happened if I hadn't been that person, if I'd been someone else? When I think about it, it doesn't matter. It doesn't help.

Fathers who are unattainable to kids, because they're the ones who disappear. Mum, who is always there for them. She's taken for granted. They don't come to Mum to talk. As a mother, you understand nothing. You don't understand.

Scriptum 2/22

Even when your child passes away. I don't think you ever get over it.

Isn't it strange, all the things that have happened?

I don't believe one should blame oneself; I try to think that I've done everything as best I could. We're only human and we've done our best.

But, of course, he's always with us – he will always be with us.

I believe that people will live again, that it is like sleeping, that the dead are sleeping. So, that is my hope and my consolation.

To this day, I still don't know what happened exactly.

I know that Noel was an alcoholic and drug addict, he had a disease. And it's worse than cancer. It's worse than anything. You buy your own lies. That's what he did, he bought his own lies.

God has the answer.

Not many of us have made it, most ended up like Noel. Without a miracle, you can never escape.

You can be anything. If you believe in it.

Everyone has their path to walk.

Could I have done anything differently? It's easy to be wise after the event.

It's also important to look at the chances he actually had.

His jacket is still here. That's all I have left of him.

MARCUS AND NOEL

They were very different. Noel was a fuck-up, Marcus was respectable.

How could they be such close friends?

Of course, they belong together: Marcus and Noel.

Noel was always the black sheep.

Marcus did well in school and was well-behaved. It's not like Noel was so calm in school. I remember that Noel was home alone a great deal. Marcus would also spend a lot of time by himself.

Both were drinking at a very young age. But they had music. They played together as well. They were really good.

What happened to make them choose a completely different path? Why did it all end so tragically for them and not for others?

We were always joking about it, that they wanted to live the rock-star lifestyle before they were rock stars.

For their mothers, it is both a great relief and a great sorrow that they didn't have children.

For my part, there was very little contact during those final years. It seems that they both led separate lives that they didn't share.

They were kids.

What if.

It could have ended well.

They are playing together somewhere else right now.

It's so beautiful that they are lying beside each other.

It's so hard to grasp that they are no longer alive.

It's difficult to think about the fact that they will never come home. Never again will they come home for Christmas.

EPILOGUE

Co-created (auto)ethnographies – the text in context

This narrative consists of extracts from in-depth interviews conducted within the framework of an ethnological research project examining grief, friendship and kinship in the wake of the deaths of two of my childhood friends. Also central to the study is an analysis of how addiction, mental illness and masculinity intersect in the lives and deaths of my two friends, Marcus and Noel. All of these elements are actualised in the interviews, as the interviewees attempt to understand and explain why Marcus and Noel are no longer alive. I write about two deceased individuals with the intention of making their lives and deaths comprehensible. I write about Marcus and Noel because I knew them when they were alive.

My personal grief, my personal pain, has been the point of departure for the study. As author Susanna Alakoski so aptly wrote: “We need words to overcome the pain. Otherwise, it would be unbearable” (Alakoski 2015, 157). As Alakoski puts it, I write so that I can bear the grief and pain, but I also write to help others with similar experiences to bear their grief and pain (cf. Adams et al. 2015, 39). The knowledge I seek to create and convey cannot be comprehended without the subjective dimension – on the contrary, the research process has been contingent on this dimension – and this has led me to apply an autoethnographic approach.

As a methodological approach, autoethnography differs from – but is related to – the self-reflexivity that has been an established part of ethnographic research practice for decades in disciplinary domains such as ethnology and anthropo-

logy (cf. Custer 2014, 11; Reed-Danahay 1997, 1). The application of autoethnography swings the pendulum in just the way I seek: between the *internal* – identity, experience and emotion – and the *external* – relationships, context and culture (Adams et al. 2015, 46). Geographer Valerie De Craene has described the autoethnographic approach as a conscious erasure of the boundaries between the researcher as human being and the researcher as academic (De Craene 2017, 453). In creating the empirical data and analysis, I am both friend and researcher. The roles of researcher and friend are interwoven to mutually deepen one another (cf. Ellis 2007, 13; Tillmann-Healy 2003). My position allows me to see both more than I would have solely as a friend and more than I would have solely as a researcher, providing knowledge that would have been inaccessible, or at least less accessible, in any other way (cf. Lapadat 2017, 593). That I am both researcher and friend allows me to place Marcus's and Noel's life and my own experiences in a broader context and connect them to history, society, politics and earlier research (cf. Lapadat 2017, 589ff; Ellis et al. 2011; Khosravi 2010, 5).

In her book *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), anthropologist Ruth Behar states that only the anthropology that breaks one's heart is worth doing. In reference to Behar's argument, sociologist Carolyn Ellis writes that the strength of autoethnography lies in precisely this dimension of vulnerability. Ellis contends that if, as a researcher, one allows oneself to be vulnerable, it is more likely that you will also evoke a sense of identification in your readers, quite simply making them more receptive to your message, which in turn may effect societal change (Ellis 1999, 675; cf. Silow Kallenberg 2019, 63). The political – socially transformative – am-

bition of my study is multifaceted but, among other things, it is intended to problematise which lives are *grievable* (cf. Butler 2009) and thus to alter the circumstances of people living with addiction and mental illness and of their friends and families. Ellis sees no contradiction between research that is rigorous, theoretical and analytical and research that is emotional, therapeutic and emphasises the personal: autoethnographic research has the potential to be everything at once (Ellis et al. 2011, 283).

The empirical material consists of my own memories of Marcus and Noel and interviews with those who knew them in various ways. I have spoken with family members, friends, former lovers and others who encountered them in specific contexts such as, in Noel's case, crime prevention and rehabilitation organisations. Some of those I have spoken to knew Marcus, some Noel, while others knew both of them. In total, I conducted formal interviews with fifteen individuals, which were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Some were interviewed once and others on several occasions. My most intensive contacts have been with the mothers of Marcus and Noel and I therefore consider them to be my primary empirical sources. The work of interviewing those who knew Marcus and Noel was ongoing from 2016 until 2020, varying in intensity over different periods. The interviews vary in length from approximately one to four hours.

During the interviews, I also shared my own memories of Marcus and Noel, thereby occasionally adding layers to the interviewee's story. The interview form is similar to what Ellis and others have described as interactive interviews, a method that reinforces the dialogical aspects and brings the interview closer to a normal conversation in which all parties

give and take (Ellis et al. 2011, 279; Ellis et al. 1997).

Narrative research has demonstrated that narratives are shaped by the interplay between the narrator and the context within which the story is being told (cf. e.g. Fröhlig 2013, 20). There may be a special need to speak about difficult and perhaps even traumatic events, as the telling contributes to creating order from chaos and reshaping ourselves and what we have been through into a more comprehensible form (cf. Fröhlig 2013, 20; Custer 2014, 3; Mattingly 1998, 1; Broyard 1992, 19). This may go some way to explaining why those I have interviewed about their difficult experiences have chosen to speak to me. It is certainly one of the reasons why I was keen to speak to them. They have accepted my memories, in the form of stories, and together we have created a narrative and thereby an understanding of who Marcus and Noel were and what befell them (cf. Ellis et al. 2011, 279).

In a previous paper, I studied the importance of understanding masculinity to these co-created narratives (Silow Kallenberg 2020). The two people I write about – Marcus and Noel – are made comprehensible as men by a number of culturally available narratives. Contained in the material are narratives of absent fathers, problems in school, drug use and violence. In order to understand these narratives, and to explicate how what happened to Marcus and Noel could occur, I have drawn inspiration from Raewyn Connell's discussions of the concept *protest masculinity*. In discussing various forms of masculinity, Connell uses the term *protest masculinity* to understand constructs of masculinity among men who are far removed from the labour market, all of whom have a low level of education and come from working-class backgrounds, criteria that also apply to my dead friends. Connell

connects the concept of protest masculinity to resistance to authority, criminality, alcohol and drug abuse, job insecurity and short-term heterosexual relationships (Connell 1996, 137). So, although the expression of protest masculinity can also be interpreted as, and in some sense is, an expression of power, it comes from a position of (perceived and/or real) deprivation.

The title *Rock Star Dreams* captures a duality in the discourse on protest masculinity in general and my friends specifically. It can be read as both a masculine-coded aspiration for success and freedom and a narrative containing the seeds of destruction – that too masculine coded. Indeed, one of Connell’s articles developing her argument for protest masculinity is titled “Live Fast and Die Young” (Connell 1991). As my empirical material makes clear, the rock star dream contains such a seed of destruction. Several interviewees recall that alcohol, drugs and talk of dying young and leaving a beautiful corpse were elements of Marcus and Noel’s self-staging as rock stars (Silow Kallenberg 2020:499), elements that were almost as important as their music itself. I interpret this as an expression of their own form of protest masculinity.

In the project, I utilise various types of writing practice as tools to make the deaths of my two friends comprehensible. I interweave more traditional academic texts with essays, fiction and poetry. Gender studies researcher Nina Lykke has emphasised that writing is indivisible from the research process and that writing should be considered part of the analytical process (Lykke 2014). We do not simply think first and then write down our thoughts, our scientific ideas are stimulated by the act of writing in different styles (Lyk-

ke 2014, 2; cf. Richardson 2000a). Exploring new ways of writing ethnographic prose may be viewed as a contribution to a scientific collegial discourse concerning the framework for academic writing (cf. Ingridsdotter & Silow Kallenberg 2017, 6).

Creative academic writing need not necessarily culminate in published texts, instead it can be used as a method for processing and exploring one's material (cf. e.g. Petö 2014, 89). Sociologist Laurel Richardson has defined writing as just such a "method of inquiry" (Richardson 2000b); to her, writing is as much a matter of knowing as it is of telling (Richardson 2000b; cf. Koobak 2014, 96; cf. Rosaldo 2014). I believe that, as researchers, our choices in terms of exposition should be made clear and discussed in the papers we publish. In the same way as we explain our methods and theories in relation to our empirical data, we should explain and justify our choices regarding the form of our texts to a greater extent than is usually the case, not least if we consider writing to be a central part of our method, in which case we should put down in black and white how our writing practice has contributed to the production of knowledge.

In this paper, I have explored the potential of the ethnographic material as text by compiling it in a manner entirely new to me. My point of departure was Carolyn Ellis' ideas on co-constructed narratives and autoethnographic texts as jointly authored. Ellis asserts that co-constructed narratives illustrate the importance of relational experience – that experiences of, for example, family and friendship are not mine or yours but ours, together (Ellis et al. 2011, 279).

That said, it is important to point out that those of us represented in the summary of my ethnographic material

are not authors on equal terms. It is my name that appears on this paper and it is I who have chosen what to include from the interview material. Richardson (1990) is one of the researchers who has discussed the ethical problems of authorship and authority. She states that researchers can never entirely avoid speaking for others but that we should reflect on the manner in and purposes for which we do so (Richardson 1990, 27). Richardson asks herself what the alternative is to speaking for others and concludes that "the stilling of the sociologist-writer's voice not only rejects the value of sociological insight but implies that somehow facts exist without interpretation" (Richardson 1990, 27). As researchers, the exercise of ethical authorship may mean using our knowledge to call attention to the voices of others alongside our own, and to tell stories that are otherwise largely silenced (cf. Richardson 1990, 25). Raising awareness in this way may be the starting point for social change (cf. Richardson 1990, 26).

In working with this text, I have also found inspiration in the methods of author Svetlana Alexievich. In many ways, Alexievich works like an ethnographer, conducting many interviews before beginning each new book. Her methodology is inspired by author Ales Adamovich; the narratives of interviewees are rewritten in the text in the form of dialogue (Ingridsdotter 2017, 30). Alexievich has described how a long interview may sometimes result in a single meaningful sentence in the final book. The writing I engage in here has been inspired by Alexievich's methodology and facilitates a focus on specific details of human experience – the writing of "a condensed form of experience" (Ingridsdotter 2017, 30f).

In working on the paper I have titled *Rock Star Dreams*, I have read the transcribed interviews in search of articulations

that I find especially beautiful and meaningful, by which I mean they have struck a chord in me that I feel is important to the story of my two dead friends. That I have been able to make such judgements and juxtapositions has been made possible by the considerable length of time I have spent with the material processing it in various ways. A number of researchers emphasise the creative potential and practices of autoethnography (cf. e.g. Ellis 1999; Custer 2014). Dwayne Custer, for example, writes that this “is the true beauty of autoethnography as a research method – art serves as a means to convey life.” (Custer 2014, 7). The manner in which I relate to text here is in line with the autoethnographic approach that, among other things, aims to break down the binary division between science and art (Ellis et al. 2011, 283; Ellis 1993, 724).

The words and sentences I have chosen from the interviews have been cut and pasted from the transcripts into another document, meaning that scraps of text from individual interviews were initially in consecutive order. I have also included my own contributions to the interviews, thus taking my place in the collective of narrators grieving Marcus and Noel and trying to understand what happened to them. I have done so without allowing my narrative to stand in the way of the other narratives included in my material (cf. Ellis 1999, 680).

In the next stage, I broke down this structure and pieced together the sentences dealing with Marcus and Noel respectively under separate headings. The material dealing with both of them was also collected under its own heading. In the final stage, I have processed the material to produce a readable, even aesthetically pleasing text from the material.

That said, any editing that has been done has been highly scrupulous. I have omitted a number of conventions such as “like”, “well” and “you know” from the quotes used. I have sometimes changed the order of words for the sake of readability. Generally speaking, however, the text is a summary of my ethnographic interview material. I have tried to tell the story of my friends in a way that makes it clear but at the same time emotionally affecting, among other things by interweaving the material to instil a sense of rising drama. At times, I have retained repetition to illustrate the fact that several individuals have said roughly the same thing, thus demonstrating a shared interpretation.

Dwayne Custer describes autoethnography as an embodied narrative that fosters empathy (Custer 2014, 4). This is the kind of narrative I am engaged in here; by sharing embodied experiences – my own and others’ – my hope is to evoke sympathetic resonance in the reader (cf. Custer 2014, 5; Silow Kallenberg 2017). In a defence of thick description against the critique that it was impossible to prove its truthfulness, anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote that the important thing when determining the accuracy of an interpretation is not its truthfulness but whether it is apt (Geertz 1973). Carolyn Ellis follows a similar line of reasoning when she writes of autoethnographic writing that, “rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better” (Ellis et al. 2011, 284).

Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo also thinks in similar terms when he reflects on his own method for using ethnographic poetry to achieve insight into a subject (Rosaldo 2014, 106). Rosaldo argues that his mission as a poet “is to

render intelligible what is complex and to bring home to the reader the uneven and contradictory shape of that moment” (Rosaldo 2014, 107).

After the final processing, the many voices in the material have been transformed into a single narrator, making it plain that the story of Marcus and Noel and the grief left in their wake is our common narrative, even if it encompasses many individual experiences and memories (cf. Ellis et al. 2011, 279). After this process, it is no longer clear who has said what, even if some of the formulations still bear witness to a specific relationship and position relative to the deceased. The intention is that the whole should appear to be greater than the sum of its parts. The common narrative is something new, something singular, something greater than could be conveyed by any one of the interviews alone. The result is a narrative of death and grief. Of friendship, parenthood and kinship. About how masculinity can be intersected by the lines of class, place, mental illness and substance abuse. It is in the words of the research subjects that these themes reside. Rather than I as a researcher interpreting the meaning of their words, I invite the reader to study their – our – words and to interpret and feel for themselves as they do so. In the text, those of us who grieve for Marcus and Noel are not alone – in the text we stand together as part of a heterogeneous collective with many voices.

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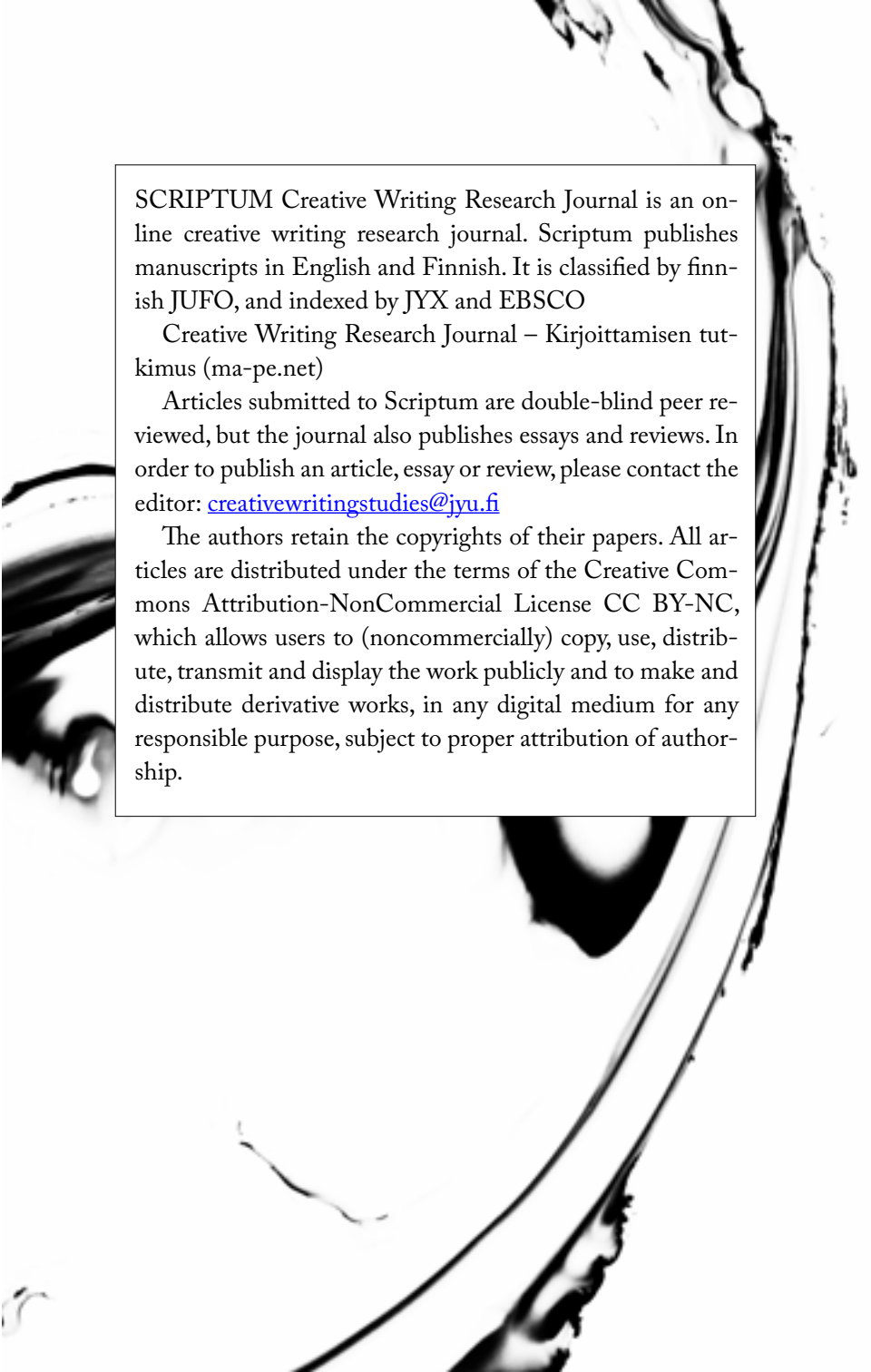
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