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Creative writing and ethnography: Four explorations

Ethnographies are more than texts, but ethnography and writing have a special relationship. Jotted down observations, field notes, diaries, and interview transcripts all contribute to the making of ethnographic knowledge (see eg. Schindler and Schäfer 2021). As ethnography also has a rich history of experimenting with different genres when presenting research results (see eg. Clifford & Marcus 1986; Visweswaran 1994; Behar & Gordon 1995; Geertz 1998; Zenker & Kumoll 2010), the point of this thematic issue of *Scriptum* was to explore connections between creative writing and ethnography. As guest editor, and a creative writing researcher trained as an ethnographically oriented folklorist, I was expecting the call for papers to lure in texts on field notes or fieldwork diaries, autoethnographical studies of writing processes, a lot of reflexivity, and some experiments into the deep end (or, hopefully even something baroque, see Marcus 2007).

My expectations proved to be both justified and overly simplistic. The following four articles reflect on bodies and texts, voice, materiality and politics, stories and truth claims. They demonstrate the personal becoming theoretical, present ethical considerations that start from, but reach beyond,

the individual researcher, and emphasize embodied ways of knowing. The texts also explore modes of knowledge production and presentation that go beyond the conventions of academic prose. All of these can also be ethnographic pursuits. However, ethnography in these pages is interpreted widely, as a stance or a collaborator rather than a specific method originating in anthropology (cf. Howell 2017).

The issue opens with writing teacher and researcher Johanna Pentikäinen's article. Complimenting or reorienting socio-cognitive writing research with a somatic approach, Pentikäinen explores the connections between creative writing and the practice of Feldenkreis Awareness Through Movement. The Feldenkreis method pays special attention to bodily sensations, movement patterns and ways of observing, verbalizing and rejuvenating them. Heightened awareness of the body's ways can also benefit the writer engaged in creative work. Working with the body can help the writer to cultivate their practice, guide towards more detailed, finely tuned ways of expression, and also train our attention in the complex process of writing.

Pentikäinen analyses how the concept and metaphor of voice can be understood in creative and somatic writing. Voice can refer to a speaking consciousness in the Bakhtinian sense; it can evoke the notion of a true, authentic self behind the text, or an image of the writer that the reader creates, or an identity to be expressed and affirmed through writing. Voice can also refer to the writer's skillful use of language. In the context of somatic writing, voice is communication within and from the body. A somatic approach to writing can enrich our understanding of embodied existence, taking us beyond limited perceptions of voice or body as the

property of a disembodied, ghost-like subject.

Although not ethnographic as such, the article has connections to sensory ethnography (see eg. Pink 2009), and the framework Pentikäinen presents could be useful to ethnographers preparing for, or doing fieldwork. As Pentikäinen (in this issue) asks:

> Could writing partly happen as an ethnography of that soma, as self, connecting the areas of attention, resonation, and voice? What if those approaches we often direct towards making observations and remarks of others, could actually be fruitful in learning how to observe ourselves, and through this activity, develop heightened sensitivity towards the observation that can be done in connection to the other parts of the world?

The following article continues the inquiry into voice and bodily ways of knowing. Soprano, voice teacher and music scholar Runa Hestad Jenssen explores voice as a material, vibrating force, a singer-academic's embodied experience, a metaphor for subjectivity and a powerful tool for change. Characterized as performative autoethnography, the text takes up the challenge of presenting research with creative academic writing. Hestad Jenssen analyses voice with a series of stories, or voice lessons. The lessons take us to sing along with Madonna, and to experience the affective tensions and jubilations, the hierarchies and the stuffy gender politics of the classical music scene. We rejoice in academic crushes and struggle with academic jargon.

As well as autoethnography, Jenssen's text could perhaps be located in autotheory, which, according to Lauren Four-

nier, "points to modes of working that integrate the personal and the conceptual, the theoretical and the autobiographical, the creative and the critical, in ways attuned to interdisciplinary, feminist histories" (Fournier 2021, 7). The nomadic feminism of Rosi Braidotti and other scholars of new materialist feminism permeate Hestad Jenssen's text, though not always in an obvious way. The full-body mirror she has in her studio becomes a central image. The mirror can be an instrument of control, guiding the singing body towards a normative understanding of itself – or it can be a symbol for the voices and stories yet to come. Voice comes across as an embodied, ever changing expression of material, porous, but still socially located and specific bodies. Voice has power: it voices stories. Stories have power, and stories can change.

The last two articles engage with interview material by creative writing and performance. Ethnologist Kim Silow Kallenberg's text Rock Star Dreams combines narrative and analytical perspectives. The article is part of a research project on grief, friendship and kinship after the deaths of Marcus and Noel, two of the authors childhood friends. First, we encounter Marcus and Noel in evocative stories composed from interview excerpts. The second part of the article provides theoretical and methodological reflection about the way the stories are written.

A personal experience of grief is the starting point for Silow Kallenberg's text. She positions herself as a friend/scholar, which gives her a unique perspective into her research and writing. As a reader, I feel that the vulnerability she shares creates a point of contact: the text expresses and analyses grief in a way that makes room for me to honour and process my own. The text challenges dichotomies of ana-

lytical and personal, theoretical and emotional, academic and artistic.

The stories about Marcus and Noel are based on fifteen interviews, during which the author also shared her own memories of her friends. Thus interviewing is not about "gathering data", but an occasion for shared storytelling and meaning-making. Silow Kalleberg presents the voices from the interviews as a single story. The shifts in perspective are subtle, but still audible: we hear Marcus and Noel's family members, their friends and lovers. The narrator is split, but speaks as one. As a result, Marcus and Noel become all the more vividly portrayed. As Silow Kallenberg notes, authorship of an autoethnographic text does not belong to a single person but is co-constructed. The narrative becomes more than the sum of its parts, conveying emotions as well as insights into grief and mourning, masculinity, addiction, mental illness and class.

In the latter part of her article, Silow Kallenberg provides an account of her writing process and the theoretical frameworks of her research. Reminiscent of "writing stories" proposed by Laurel Richardson (2011), Silow Kallenberg writes about how the stories of Marcus and Noel were given this particular form. I see this as an ethical move that highlights authorial responsibility. She also touches on the emancipatory potential of finding and sharing the stories that may otherwise be silenced.

Finally, artistic researcher, performance artist and actor Nora Rinne explores the connections between ethnography and composing a verbatim, word for word, performance text. Similar to Silow Kallenberg, Rinne deals with questions of knowledge-production, truthfulness, ethics, and art. Loca-

ting her work between artistic research and new materialist childhood studies, she argues that creative skills are needed to "lie less", to present research in a way that is reciprocal and alive. The text is centered on *Child Service* (2011), a bilingual verbatim performance that was part of her doctoral study. The performance script created by Rinne was based on children's recorded words. The entire research was made in close collaboration with the children involved, and thus questions of power and ethics are highlighted.

The methods of an ethnographer doing fieldwork with children, and an artistic researcher creating a script for a verbatim performance, are similar in many ways. In manner of participant observation, Rinne recorded situations with the children that she often did not initiate: listening and observing formed a major part of her practice. She also asked questions and started discussions, but her method didn't involve predetermined themes or planned interviews. Also comparing her approach to journalism, Rinne concludes that her methods are closer to post-qualitative, new materialist ethnography. Nuances of live speaking situations, how things were said, are important in her analysis, as well as an interest in seemingly meaningless or easily overlooked details. However, the relationships between artistic practice and ethnography are not necessarily unproblematic. As an artistic researcher, Rinne takes a critical stance towards simply "using" artistic mediums for presenting knowledge produced elsewhere, eg. in ethnographic fieldwork. For her, artistic practice is way of knowing in itself. Creative writing in her case is not about crafting stories based on dramatic conflict, tension and conflict-resolution. Rather, creating a verbatim performance text is a matter of selecting and arranging the textual

and non-textual elements that make up a performance. The writing process is also a process of listening, as Rinne works simultaneously with the audio file of the recorded material and the written transcript. Again, embodied ways of knowing are prominent.

As ethnographers who verify their research by quoting their research material, verbatim performance makers deal with questions of originality and the real. In her article, Rinne delves into the complexities and ambivalences in these notions. In *Child Service*, the children participated in the performance, but they did not perform the verbatim content made up of their own words. Instead, Rinne performed this content, imitating the children speaking. Thus the performativity of the performance was highlighted instead of played down. For Rinne, this is an important ethical and analytical gesture to question the idea of children as natural and unspoiled, as well as to draw attention to "the gap between the artwork and the so-called reality to which it relates" (Rinne, in this issue). This gap presents a possibility of a reflective distance, which allows us to see the world in a new way.

To conclude: The articles published in this issue demonstrate how placing ethnographic methods and ways of knowing in the context of creative writing can lead us to important questions about ethics, agency, knowledge and authorship. They help us ask whose stories we are telling and how, where our voices as researchers and writers are coming from, and what voices we are not yet hearing. They invite us to observe, ever more carefully, how our bodies are writing and coming to know.

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