This is a story about writing autoethnography, about how autoethnographic texts might be constructed. Like any tale, it reflects its teller. I offer a narrative that displays my own sense-making, my own biases and interests, and my own limitations. I move forward by reaching toward a number of qualitative methods (e.g., personal narrative, autobiography, lyric essay, poetic inquiry, ethnodrama, performative writing) that carry their own genre status and nuances, positioned around the headings of the personal, the poetic, and the performative to demonstrate how autoethnography orchestrates the writing strategies of a number of other associated methods to create its texts. My aim in this rendering, then, is to provide some insights into how an autoethnography might find its form, might meet its demands.

Autoethnography, defined as the use of personal experience to explore cultural practices (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Turner, Short, Grant, & Adams, 2018), serves as my organizing term. I could have just as easily in this telling grabbed a label other than autoethnography as the dominant term. I might have argued, for example, that autoethnography can be a productive writing strategy for writing personal narratives or doing poetic inquiry. This seemingly easy exchange gains force for me when I remember the commonalities across the various methods I call forward in this essay. Researchers using these qualitative possibilities are deeply cognizant of the various ways they might position the self. Based in the belief that the knower and known are intricately linked, how the researcher situates the “self” becomes a rhetorical and open question, always demanding reflexivity and always carrying consequences. Researchers working with these methods also believe in the power of the literary rendering. The literary, they trust, has the potential to massage the sensuous out of abstractions, to bring the affective into shared space with the cognitive, to reveal the human heart. Researchers operating with these methods, to list just one more shared belief, understand their efforts to be pedagogical, performative utterances that stand as lessons, available for personal, community, cultural, and scholarly use. Such commonalities make genres blur, suspicious, difficult to nail down. Yet schemes can have their use. I allow autoethnography to serve as my overriding frame, not only because of its current academic prevalence, but also because I want to show how autoethnography might be nudged, in part, by borrowing from associated practices.

As my tale pushes on, my desire is to deploy the strategies I describe. In the first section, “Positioning the Personal,” I share my story of coming to autoethnography, point to a few of the scholars who have influenced my thinking and the professional organizations where autoethnographic work is celebrated, and finish the section by discussing how the personal might figure into writing autoethnographic texts. In the second section, “Positioning the Poetic,” I strive for a poetic voice to demonstrate the power of the lyric utterance for constructing autoethnography. I also include a series of poems based upon newspaper accounts under the title, “Our Children,” to provide a picture of damaged children and their relationship to the adult world within U.S. culture. In the last major section, “Positioning the Performative,” I write performatively, best when read aloud without the citational references, to show how performance practices might be tapped for doing autoethnographic work. The essay completes its argument with a series of
personal claims that point toward good autoethnographic writing.

**POSITIONING THE PERSONAL: PERSONAL NARRATIVE, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, PERSONAL ETHNOGRAPHY, MEMOIR, PERSONAL ESSAY, AUTOPERFORMANCE, MYSTORY, TESTIMONIO**

I found autoethnography as I was searching for a way to write better performance criticism. I was disappointed that the performance criticism I encountered stripped performance of its power, failed to write into its emotional life. It offered thematic insights, historical positioning, and considerations of artistic craft, but it left out what pulled me to performance—its ability to put on display human affect, to allow audience members to enter a given world and to witness how actions carry consequences, to help those who are willing to avoid themselves to the lessons of an empathic encounter to create a better world. I wanted to write criticism that would find its way into the heart of performance. I sought a criticism that would reveal how performance might enter into the emotional lives of audiences.

While I was on this quest, a quest that seemed far from any satisfactory completion, a colleague, Bryan Crow, came into my office with a book in his hand. “Here,” he said, offering me the book. “I know this book isn’t in your area, but I thought you might like it.”


“I think you’ll like how it’s written,” Bryan added. Indeed, Bryan was right.

What I came to see was not only how an organization might be productively viewed as a culture but also how the literary could enrich a scholarly account. Goodall’s detective revealed for me how I might write performance criticism and, more generally, how I might bring affect into scholarly work. As a performance studies scholar, this insight had been right in front of me all along. I had been arguing for years that performance is a method for explicating literary texts and had been involved in the creation of personal narratives for performance. I knew too that performance ethnography was a powerful tool for engaging another culture. But I had not realized that the strategies familiar to me for the stage might translate to the page, might make a scholarly bid in written form. Now, this seems overly obvious, and I report it with some embarrassment. I remain, however, grateful that Goodall’s book was put in my hands. It changed how I did my research, and it led me to others who were doing autoethnographic work.


Influenced by those early years of introduction, I began to see the work of my performance studies colleagues who were theorizing and staging personal narratives (e.g., Corey, 1993; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998; Langellier, 1989, 1998, 1999; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Lockford, 2004; Park-Fuller, 1995; Miller, Taylor, & Carver, 2003; Pineau, 2000; Spry, 2001a, 2001b) as carrying an autoethnographic impulse. The echoes between autoethnography and personal narrative are, at times, so loud that differences are drowned out. The same can be said of all the labels identified in this section’s heading. What consistently comes forward with these forms is the evocative and productive appeal of calling upon the personal. Even after encountering that early work, I see those who turn to the personal in their work as my writing guides. They create space for how I wish to stage personal experience and to render myself on the page in my performance criticism and in my autoethnographic accounts.

Writing the personal, I want to offer a detailed account of my human experience, stripped of pretense and equivocation. I strive for an open and raw
presentation as I turn remembered fragments into narratives. I struggle, wrestling with memories, images, and glimpses of the past, hoping that they may come together, become momentarily set for my own and others’ consideration. I seek to uncover the human in humanity, to show how one human life might or might not find resonance with others. As I proceed, Lockford’s (2001) words stay with me:

> It is often dirty work, this digging into the rich soil of humanity. Digging into our humanity, we cannot keep the soil out from under our nails, the clay off our faces, and the sand away from the folds of our skin. We write with humility about that which makes us remember our humanity, that which makes us human. (p. 118)

This digging into the personal is what lets the self unfold, discover itself again and again in its multiplicity of forms, and put itself on display. With luck and labor, the archeological effort exposes what was previously hidden and elusive and makes public the unspoken and forbidden. In such excavations, I begin to see myself as named, ready for inspection, as a case study calling for further inquiry. I come to understand myself in my human condition, humble, hurrying to make sense of it all and then ready to begin again.

Writing the personal demands a self available for a reflexive turn. I write examining myself in the desire to lay bare the intricacies of my experience. I endeavor to show one individual’s cognitive and affective stance, to demonstrate how one individual, culturally situated, comes to some understanding. In my sense-making search, I acknowledge how I might be complicit in whatever I critique, always wanting to accept responsibility for my problematic actions and always hoping to construct alternative possibilities. This is not an act of self-indulgence, narcissism, or navel-gazing, as some (e.g., Atkinson, 2017; Buzard, 2003; Hammersley, 2008; Hantzis, 1998; Parks, 1998; Shields, 2000; Terry, 2006) would suggest. Instead, it is, as Goodall (2000) claims, “the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experience in ways that reveal the deep connection between the writer and her or his subject” (p. 137). Unlike personal absorption, the reflexive gains its power by reaching for the cultural. It requires careful and rigorous thought, culturally located, as it presents a personal narrative in all its emotional and intellectual capacities. Such introspection offers an intimate knowledge based upon lived experience with others.

Writing the personal, I work for an honest account, recognizing that all narratives are “partial and partisan” (Goodall, 2000; also see Bochner, 2014; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Language and experience share a slippery relationship, and no account of any experience is innocent. Even so, my task requires a personal truth; it demands that whatever I say is true to my experience. I may have a different story from others. I may lack information. I may be blind to any number of things, but I always know if I am presenting claims that I know to be deceptive, corrupt, or fabricated. I know when I am lying. I must, if I want my personal narrative to participate in the scholarly conversation, have confidence that I am telling the truth as I understand it. Failing to do so, I become the researcher who is fudging data. I am also aware that my truth implicates others. Some tales I elect not to tell. With others, I might take into account others’ perspectives. I might need to protect their identity in cases where participants rather not be specified for personal, political, or legal reasons. I might license others to revise or veto what I’ve written. In short, whenever I share a story, I must be accountable to its inhabitants through a careful consideration of how my tale might do harm. Often this requires consultation with those I elect to place in my stories. Honesty and ethics are intertwined, knotted together, an imbroglio of obligations.

Writing the personal places me at risk. To share personal aspects of my life leaves me open to the evaluations of others. I am available to whatever constructions others may make of my disclosures. I remind myself, however, that I wish to be accepted or rejected on the basis of who I understand myself to be. I do not want to live a hidden life. I also tell myself that sharing intimate details of my life offers the possibility that others might find themselves in my public confessions or might discover alternative scripts, perhaps in sympathy or perhaps in opposition, for their own behavior. I recognize too that social and cultural rules regulating disclosive acts often serve unproductive ends. Such licensing of what can and cannot be told may keep normative practices in place, practices that may limit or harm individual agency. So, I try to write without fear. In doing so, I may in my reporting invite traumatic experiences to return, as Zingaro (2009) suggests, but I push on, believing in the power of an emergent vulnerable self. Such telling is always a personal choice, one demanding considerable reflection. Once told, it cannot be retracted.

Writing the personal, I speak from the body. I seek a “sensuous scholarship” (Stoller, 1997), a scholarship attuned to the visceral and somatic. I want affect to mark any account I might offer because the personal finds itself most fully in what it does and does not feel.
My body and mind work in concert, sensing the wisdom of Gingrich-Philbrook’s (2001) poetic insight: “My body makes language. It makes language like hair” (p. 3). As Spry (2011) suggests, my body functions “as a site from which the story is generated by turning the internally somatic into the externally semantic” (p. 63, italics in the original). I am my body speaking. I am a mind/body fully engaged. I am a thinking and feeling agent trying to assemble some sense of experience, trying to let the cognitive and affective guide my way.

Writing the personal carries material consequences. I recognize that words matter. They matter to me as I construct my sense of self, and they matter as potential utterances in the world. I seek words that function productively, that build better human relationships, and that work in behalf of social justice. I write wanting to lean in (Pelias, 2011), wanting the labor of obligation, of compassion. This positioning of the personal creates dialogic space, opens possibilities, and offers to others occasions for consideration. When successful, sharing the personal stands as an instructive and ethical utterance, a performative act, an accomplishment that makes a positive difference in the world.

I end this section in the belief not only that I have put forward my own desires when I write the personal in my autoethnographic endeavors, but that I have also articulated familiar expectations for a community of autoethnographic writers who recognize the power of the personal. Write from the heart of your humanity, be honest and self-reflexive, recognize the risks for yourself and others in your constructions, allow your body to have a speaking presence, and create a better, more ethical world. Personal narrative, autobiography, personal ethnography, memoir, personal essay, and testimonio are resonant possibilities in constructing autoethnographic accounts. The self, always situated culturally, becomes an exploratory tool, an affective and cognitive opening for cultural and critical inquiry. I stand as a member of a community of autoethnographic scholars to offer an autoperformance, a “mystery” (Ulmer, 1989, 1994), a testimony on behalf of the personal, on behalf of what marks our humanity.

POETIC INQUIRY

I begin this section with a warning: The poems that follow are hard, not in the sense of difficult to comprehend what the poems are describing, but difficult to take in, to understand how such things could occur. As noted earlier, I base the poems on newspaper accounts of children and, disturbingly, many of them chronicle a horrific act done by an adult to a child. Taken together, they offer a sociological account, rendered poetically, into the world of damaged children. They unfold from multiple perspectives, including at times from the points of view of individuals who inflicted considerable harm.

My intent is not to exploit or sensationalize these children’s experiences. Instead, I seek a poetic inquiry that reveals the emotional cost of such events, that presents an ethnographic feel, that pushes forward the ethical responsibility that adults must carry. I write calling upon my empathic capacities in the belief that leaning into the experiences of others enlarges my understanding of what it means to be human.

Prior to each poem is a poetic fragment that can stand as an entry into the following poem and as a comment on how the poetic might work in an autoethnographic essay. This section, then, argues that the poetic and the autoethnographic can come together to speak from the heart, from the body’s joys and sorrows, from the most exalted to the most tragic. They can join together to name, to write into the commonality of the human condition, to note the differences that matter.

***

The poetic gives to the autoethnographic:

A way in, an entry into a lush labyrinth, turning and twisting on a line, curving into the center, into the heart, beating, beating its way, in anticipation, into its seductive surprises, into its delightful and disturbing displays, insisting that more be carried on the way out.

OUR CHILDREN

1. Front Page Children

***

Caught in the midweek heat of August 15th, seven-year-old Robby, smiling, soaks his feet in a creek that runs through Giant City Park. Tennis shoes and socks wait by his side as the sun pours color into the cool stream. He sits in the shade on a smooth rock.

Posed to announce her music scholarship to Julliard,
sixteen-year-old Michelle, master flutist, blond hair pulled back into a no-nonsense bun, tailored blue shirt buttoned to the top, holds her instrument to her lips and plays. Her hands delicate as a winter whisper.
dark and beautiful,
moving its little hands
into little fists.
I was glad I had
shot that girl twice
in the head,
glad she couldn’t see
her with all that talk
about how she was only
seventeen and woman enough
and how I was twice
her age and didn’t have none.
I took that baby,
cut it loose,
cleaned it up,
made that baby mine.
I’m a good mother,
much better than her
sassy dead self.

Pictured too, in black and white, is eleven year old
Ryan, ribbon falling from her hair, hands
on her hips as if ready to begin a cheer,
looking forward, looking straight ahead,
victim of first-degree murder by two boys,
ages 7 and 8, unnamed, who wanted her bike.

The boys, who hit her on the head with a rock,
who molested her with a stick, who suffocated her
by shoving her panties in her mouth, by
stuffing leaves and grass up her small nose,
who, some say, should be tried as adults, sat
in juvenile court drawing pictures and eating
Skittles.

Section C, Page 9

***

It seems
it wasn’t them.
It seems
the boys were
forced
to confess.
It seems
it was police
work
that made
those two Black boys
front page
news.

A sensuousness, through the image into the imagi-
nation, through the heard into the felt, through the
touched into the known. Through and through, the
body is called, caressed, claimed—body by body, body
to body, a lean in, a taking on.

2. Her Baby

When I put the knife
to her belly,
I almost started to cry,
knowing the baby
was so close and all.
I was wanting to hold it
so bad. So
I pulled that knife
across her,
just like I saw
on that television show,
and there it was,
8C’s baby went flying through it,
I couldn’t fix it. Oh, I know how
but I couldn’t make myself move.
I just stared at those broken edges
not wanting to see what that child saw
when she came through.
I don’t know who is going
to make that pane right.

A piece of evidence, visceral data supporting a case,
growing in the gut, weighted, knotted, burning, insisting the rose is both its bloom and its decay.

4. Lt. Ashley’s Report

I’ve been on the force for twenty-three years,
worked the toughest neighborhoods,
seen things I’d rather not talk about,
seen fourteen-fifteen-year-olds
inflict unimaginable harm on each other,
but six and seven-year-olds, girls. Seems they were just playing with their Barbie dolls
and got into a name-calling, hair-pulling fight
over a missing Barbie shoe. I’m not sure who was supposed to be looking after the kids—
we’re looking into that—but it seems the six-year-old told her friend she was going to kill her, went home, returned
to her friend’s apartment with a knife, stabbed her in the back. The victim, hospitalized with a three-inch wound,
is in serious condition. We questioned the six-year-old but because of her age,
there is little that can be done.
We released her to her parents.
At the crime scene, we found the missing shoe.
We do not know who was responsible for the loss.

A realizing, a coming together, a fighting against confusion, found by what language figures, forged with fading ink. A moment’s truth, a moment’s prayer, made as a present answer.

5. Ice Breaks

It could have been Robbie
trapped under
with the other four
who didn’t make it out.
It could just as easily have been him
frantic, under ice,
searching for the light.
He said they were taking

a short cut.
I’ve told him what could happen.
I watched them coming
under that winter’s sun
from my kitchen window.
I was making cookies,
covering them with icing,
I saw them laughing
before they fell from sight.
By the time I got there,
Robbie was out, screaming
for the others.
We did what we could.
When help came,
it was too late.
You could feel the current
under the shining, thin ice.
It took them,
turned them greenish, gray,
too cold to call back.
I took Robbie home,
wrapped him in blankets,
threw the cookies out.
We rocked,
waiting for the ice
to break.

A perspective, an owl, head cocked, listening; the moment before a gazelle’s frightened run; an alligator’s pretend sleep. An ethical investigation, a questioning, a balancing of one hand against another, and in that search for right and wrong, perhaps marching orders, an action that must be taken, that places one body next to another.

6. Child Molester Beaten

When they put him in the same cell with me
I just snapped, remembering how
he made me bend over, his strong hands
holding my hips, pulling me to him, hard,
and me in tears, pleading for him to stop,
but he wouldn’t, until he was done. Then,
he took Sal, made me watch as he greased himself and did to Sal what he did to me.
We’d be dead if he hadn’t been scared off
by a noise coming from next door. He left
us naked, two ten-year-old boys, afraid
to look anywhere but down. We wiped
ourselves on the dirty sheet and used it
to cover what young boys should not know.
So, when he came in and smiled at me
like I was some friend he hadn’t seen for years,
my fists tightened and I was on him, pounding
him, my flesh against his, until the bones
of his body turned soft, and blood ran. They say it will cost me some serious time but the way I see it, I got time back.

A tear, a joy, feelings that matter, taken in, held, guiding our lives, like a closed mouth, like a fist made, like a hand resting on another’s heart, vulnerable as flesh.

7. Gwen

***

Shit, man, I didn’t know. Said he was Gwen, wearing that dress and make-up and all. So yeah, I was coming on to him when I thought he was a she. Then, I saw these guys laughing and they told me, started saying I was gay, a faggot. So me and my buddies took him, pulled that dress off his skinny ass, showed him we’re not perverts. I got the longest time. They say it was my kick that cracked his naked back. Been in this hole too long—done four of fourteen. Too bad he isn’t in here—we’d use him like those other fags.

***

I still can’t believe what they did to my Eddie, my sweet Eddie trapped in that chair, unable to move, unable to feed himself. It always frightened me, him dressing like that, going out, his father yelling as the door would close behind his back. Now, he just sits, waiting, hardly ever smiling, except when his father is out. I know what he wants:

I put him in his red silk dress, leading one dead limb through at a time, placing his shoulder-length blond wig, then, roll him to the mirror. “Look how beautiful,” I say, rubbing rouge on his cheeks, coloring his lips with gloss. “Look, Gwen. Look at you.”
Ethnodrama and performance ethnography—this orchestrated move from field notes to theatrical presentation (Denzin, 2018; Madison, 2018), this “act of activism” (Denzin, 2010b), this “radical act of translation” (Madison, 2006, p. 397), this “strategic method of inciting culture” (Alexander, 2005, p. 411)—insists that the aesthetic staging of ethnographic findings is a mode of scholarly representation, designed to dialogically engage audiences, or as Saldaña (2005) puts it, “to entertain—to entertain ideas as it entertains its spectators” (p. 14); assumes that “If people are genuinely interested in understanding culture, they must put aspects of that culture on and into their bodies” (Jones, 2002, p. 7), must “put experimental flesh on . . . cognitive bones” (Turner, 1986, p. 146); recognizes that social life, “even its apparently quietest moments, is characteristically ‘pregnant’ with social dramas” (Turner, 1982, p. 11); establishing this “body, paper, stage” (Spry, 2011) process laden with demands: it requires the research expertise of the ethnographer as well as the artistic skills of the playwright, director, and actor; a sensitivity to the conflictual and dramatic nature of everyday experiences or, as Denzin (2003) notes, a consciousness that “We inhabit a performance-based, dramaturgical culture” (p. x); an ethical awareness and care, a moral map (Conquergood, 1985), for the representation of one’s own and others’ lives; a reach beyond one’s own cultural positioning to the worlds of others, a “vehicle by which we travel to the worlds of Subjects and enter domains of intersubjectivity that problematize how we categorize who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them,’ and how we see ourselves with ‘other’ and different eyes” (Madison, 1998, p. 282), “to find new ways of being on this violent world, new ways of performing pedagogies of hope” (Denzin, 2018), to name just a few requirements; which reminds autoethnographic writers of the care that must be taken as they move from the field experiences of their own lives with others to representations on the page; that writing others is always a cultural act and a cultural reach; that the aesthetic staging of their discoveries might find their fullest form in their theatrical articulation; that writing an autoethnographic account might best be conceived, not simply as act of accurate reporting, but as a task of creating an aesthetic script, of locating the drama in everyday experience, of turning autoethnographic accounts into tales that carry theatrical power:

Performative pedagogy, in the classroom and on the stage, is an interventionist lesson designed to critically scrutinize ongoing cultural practices, to interrupt structures of power, and to offer alternative visions for being (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2005; Denzin, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2018; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Freire, 1992; Giroux & Shannon, 1997; McAree, 2015; McAree & Huber, 2017; Pineau, 2002; Stucky & Wimmer, 2002), is “an active intervention to break through unfair closures, remake the possibility for new openings, and bring the margins to a shared center” (Madison, 2005, p. 178), where the performing body serves “as raw data of a critical cultural story” that “reveals the understory of hegemonic systems” (Spry, 2011, pp. 19–20, italics in the original) to create a “politics of possibilities, a politics that mobilizes people’s memories, fantasies, and desires” (Madison, 1998, p. 277) and to offer “performances of resistance” that “claim a positive utopian space where a politics of hope is imagined” (Denzin, 2003, p. 17); where performance functions “simultaneously as a form of inquiry and as a form of activism, as critique, as critical citizenship” (Denzin, 2010, p. 18); where “Pedagogical practices are always moral and political. The political is always performative. The performative is always pedagogical” (Denzin, 2006, p. 326); where “the use of emotion and the personal strives to illuminate the roots of how activism comes to life in the context of a pedagogy, my pedagogy, of love and hope” (Warren, 2011, p. 22); where students will be enabled “to construct meanings that are lived in the body, felt in the bones, and situated within the larger body politics” (Pineau, 2002, p. 53); which reminds autoethnographic writers that their accounts presented on the page or on the stage are a doing, a doing with consequences, that requires a vigilant attentiveness to the work they accomplish; that autoethnographic writing always carries pedagogical instruction, sometimes creating possibilities for social justice and sometimes not; that communicative acts, for better or worse, are constitutive of cultural logics; that autoethnographic writing guided by an ethic of care and hope moves the world, inch by inch, toward new possibilities, new visions, new structures of justice:
Language is a summons. An incantation. A performative *nommo* or magical naming that call-into-being each living sensibility according to its nature.

(Pineau)

performative writing dances into new territory.

(Carver)

Like Pinocchio, this language refuses to be what it is, refuses to accept itself as mere wood, mere substance. It leaps forth, moves its limbs, opens its eyes, claims to live.

(Stucky)

This reminds autoethnographic writers that language is nothing more than water leaking through the fingers of our cupped hands and nothing less than the best way to hold what we value; that the page is a performance, positioning its readers to decide if they are pleased with how they spent their time; that language carefully and aesthetically articulated is evocative as a literary construction and as a tactic for material change in ongoing social practices; and that to make words perform is an invitational call inviting other performative acts:

or so it appears: a determined doing, done and undone, daring, defying what language holds steady, a construction deconstructed, poetically rendered.

A FINAL PERSONAL COMMENT

I have listened as students and colleagues use many of the labels identified in this essay interchangeably, wondering if the clear genre expectancies I held for each were stable, commonly shared. I have called upon these various forms in my own work, sometimes beginning to write one thing, only to believe at the end that I had written something else. I have written pieces that I wasn’t sure how best to classify. Despite this slipperiness, I remain convinced that autoethnography benefits from its acquaintance with the personal, poetic, and performative as it goes about the business of creating its accounts. Each form stands as a reminder to the others of what might be done, what slant or tactics might serve to most fully enter a subject. In short, familiarity with such practices makes available to autoethnographic writers a repertoire of writing strategies. In the end, though, the question of
how a particular essay might be defined is significantly less important than what work it accomplishes. As a writer, I am most satisfied when I know what work each word, each sentence, each paragraph, each section, and each essay does.

I am most satisfied when my autoethnographic accounts are personal, exposed as a jellyfish on the hot sand, become a microscopic and telescopic pause, telling all that it can see. I’m most satisfied when I can trust what I have written, can feel its truth deep in my gut, in my heart. I’m most satisfied when I recognize the times my body deserves blame, when it needs to shake its finger at itself. I’m most satisfied when my personal life is deployed, like a thrown egg, on behalf of others.

I am most satisfied when my autoethnographic accounts are touched by the poetic, language their way, sentence by sentence, line by line, to the image that summons like a black hole. I’m most satisfied when I work with the rhythm of the steady traveler, always moving forward, always knowing my destination. I’m most satisfied when my lines know when to turn, when to repeat themselves, when to stand alone. I’m most satisfied when I have a firm hand on the literary as I go, as I move through logical arguments, as I make summary claims and theoretical speculations.

I am most satisfied when my autoethnographic accounts are performative, a performance on the page that plots the drama of living. I’m most satisfied when my personal experiences, my notes from the field, become poetic scripts, ready for the page or the stage, when they write others with the care I would hope they might write me. I am most satisfied when my performative acts turn my learning into instruction, clear paths of bramble that snag personal freedom and slow social justice. I am most satisfied when my words work, personally, poetically, politically.

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