INTRODUCTION

Artists in the academy often face a challenging task when it comes to communicating the personal, creative, embodied, and cultural processes inherent in their artistic research. Over the past two decades, many artists have turned towards the deeply reflexive, creative, and embodied genre of autoethnography to meet such challenges (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). In fields such as visual art, drama, performance studies, music, dance, and film, autoethnography has provided artists with a means to understand, contextualize, and communicate the personal stories behind their artistic experiences. Autoethnography has brought to the arts an embodied mode of inquiry and heightened sense of reflexivity that sheds light on the creative process and performance (Mani, 2017). In this exchange, artists and those engaging in artistic and arts-based research have also brought to autoethnography innovative modes of inquiry and creative forms of expression. As such, autoethnography and artistic research have enjoyed a dynamic relationship—the former enabling the latter, and the latter fuelling the former, and both have found themselves privileging the subjectivity of the artist-researcher, the materiality of the researcher’s body, and the intersubjectivities that emerge through the researcher’s artistic encounters with the world (Östersjö, 2017). These artistic autoethnographies have provided rich models for perception and conceptualization, which not only engage audiences emotionally and sensorily but also cultivate dynamic processes and products of autoethnographic research (Leavy, 2015).

The interface between autoethnography and artistic research has been synergetic with both fields developing within roughly the same time span. Over the past two decades, new and creative approaches have proliferated in both fields, with artistic researchers and autoethnographers establishing critical and creative ways of conducting their research, and championing such approaches within the academy and beyond (see, e.g., Crispin & Gilmore, 2014; Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016). During this development, there has been a significant overlap between these fields in acknowledging the insights that come from researchers’ own subjectivities, voices, and experiences. With their focus on flexible approaches adaptable to context and emergent in nature, both fields have embraced creative processes as key elements in their design (see Tomlinson & Wren, 2017; Coessens, Crispin, & Douglas, 2009; Emmerson, 2017). As Lilja (2015) explains, “In artistic research there are no standard methods. We have a great acceptance for individual or genre specific methods and the evolution of methods over time during the process of work and research” (p. 56). Likewise, in proposing narrative autoethnography as her method for unpacking her piano performance, Do antan-Dack (2012) notes: “the method should allow room for the situatedness and subjectivity of the artistic-researcher’s claim to knowledge, and validate the assertion of his or her artistic value judgement” (pp. 39–40).

As such, both fields have become highly popular with artists and academics searching for ways to make their creative processes and life experiences fit within the confines of the academy (Burke & ONSman, 2018). Unsurprisingly, both fields also have been suffused with many enthusiastic adopters, not always understanding the depth and rigor demanded. That said, a critical mass of outstanding theoretical and applied
work also has helped establish these fields as worthy and legitimate.

However, not all artistic research is autoethnographic and not all autoethnographic research is artistic. Instead, both fields seem to have found a comfortable companionship side by side with an overlapping interface ripe for exploration. When projects sit at the interface between artistic research and autoethnography, artists ask deeply autoethnographic questions through artistic means, and deeply artistic questions through autoethnographic means. At this interface, a dynamic combination of approaches and multi-modes of communication becomes possible. In order to explore this interface further, in the following section I use a range of literature to describe some of the ways artistic autoethnographies are shaped. These examples come from visual art, drama, performance studies, music, dance, and film to illustrate the kinds of contexts in which artistic autoethnography can take place. In particular, I show how autoethnographers are pushing the boundaries of what artistic autoethnography can be, and using this approach to address a range of complex questions concerning their and others creative lives. I hope these descriptions stimulate readers to seek out the creative examples referenced and use them as inspiration for their autoethnographic work in an artistic context.

EXAMPLES OF ARTISTIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Visual Autoethnography

The visual arts have taken a leading role in bringing together autoethnography and artistic research. For instance, autoethnographers have collaboratively used drawings and words to explore experimental and “troubling” modes of inquiry, which confront issues of the self, art and method (Sava & Nuutinen, 2003). The resulting “texts” are performative in nature, in that they visually communicate a sense of expressive action and encourage an active engagement with audiences. Other researchers have used drawing as a research method to explore the multiplicity and complexity of human experiences (Guillemin & Westall, 2008). In other cases, autoethnographers have drawn on the medium of photography to represent a range of social and cultural interactions between people (Ellis, 2008; Holm, 2014). Both drawing and photography often have provided creative modes of expression for vulnerable and marginalized people who have not customarily been heard through traditional channels of social research (Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008). Other works have focused on how autoethnographic paintings can teach, incite, inspire, or provoke responses in a viewer (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). In these artful explorations, ideas are as important as forms, the viewer’s perceptions as important as the artist’s intention, and the language and emotions of art as important as its aesthetic qualities (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As such, these visual autoethnographies have been designed for use by viewers, rather than for passive reception, and created to provoke conversations and questions, rather than closed-statements and conclusions (Bochner & Ellis, 2003).

Autoethnodrama and Performance Autoethnography

Alongside the visual arts, much autoethnography exists in the areas of drama and performance (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Norris, 2000). Oftentimes referred to as autoethnodrama, this work commonly situates the researcher as playwright/dramatist and uses the conventions of theatre to present auto/ethnographic data through scripted performances (Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Finley & Knowles, 1995; Richardson & Lockridge, 1991; Saldaña, 2011). Scholars reflecting on this work have suggested that a credible, vivid, and persuasive rendering of a researcher and participant’s story as a dramatic performance creates insights for the researcher, participant, and audience not possible through conventional qualitative methods (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010). This is because theatrical performances can communicate autoethnographic research findings “viscerally, beyond or below the usual cognitive filtering mechanisms similar to academic discourse” (Gray, Ivonoffski, & Sinding, 2002, p. 57). This representational power comes from the dramatic enactment of an autoethnographic script or improvisation with actors and scenery, which bring a story to life for audiences in a deeply embodied way (Diamond & Mullen, 2000; Mienczkowski, Smith, & Morgan, 2002; Norris, 2000).

Closely connected to autoethnodrama is the field of performance studies, which contains a rich body of autoethnography. Examples of this can be seen in Pelias (2011), who uses autoethnography, poetic inquiry, performative writing, and narrative to describe how bodies lean together, placing themselves “in relationship to other bodies” (p. 9). Interpreting culture through such self-reflections and cultural refractions of identity is a defining feature of autoethnographic performance (Spry, 2001, p. 706). Recently, Holman Jones (2018) also has linked critical autoethnography and performative writing in the context of
creativity and extrapolated the applications of such a linkage in pedagogy. In these performance texts, voices come together in singular and plural narratives for a personal scrutiny that is both private and public, individual and communal (Alexander, Moreira, & Kumar, 2012).

**Music Autoethnography**

In recent years promising methodological innovations have begun to emerge in the field of music. These innovations look at the expressive qualities of music in particular and how these can be used to present qualitative research in innovative ways—for example, through musical structures, forms, improvisatory processes, and song lyrics (Bresler, 2008, 2009; Lee & Gouzouasis, 2017; Mio, 2005; Williams, 2018). Recently, composers and performers have used autoethnography to uncover how their personal lives and cultural experiences intertwine in the creation and interpretation of musical works (Aszodi, 2018; Bartleet, 2009; Denson, 2014; Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2018; Mani, 2017). For instance, Perks (2019) investigated the potential of the fretless electric guitar by giving an autoethnographic account of his personal performance experience. Another striking example is Hultgren’s musical work, and accompanying exegetical thesis (submitted for his doctorate, 2012) written in response to his sister’s suicide, called *My Sister’s Tears*. This inter-textual twin narrative took the form of words, with characters, scenes, and a plot, as well as sketches from his composition, quotes from the grief literature, and photographs of his sister Heather, all working vividly to recount Ralph’s interpretation of the unfolding events and the meanings he ascribed to them. The composition reached a final resolution of sorts after his sister came to him in a chorale in D (see Figure 9.1).

Music teachers have used autoethnography to reflect on the values and relationships they embody in the classroom, and musicians have used autoethnographic methods to reflexively explore how they learn musical skills (Bartleet & Hultgren, 2008; Mackinlay & Bartleet, 2008). Within the field of education, Lee and Gouzouasis’ (2016) autoethnographic duet offers what they call an artful inquiry about the tragedy of a beginning music teacher. Their “inquiry provides complex, multidimensional, artful pathways of understanding the arts-based researcher as artist/researcher/teacher (i.e., a/r/tographer)” (p. 436).

In other examples, music has been analysed autoethnographically as a cultural text, for example, Holman Jones’s (2010) treatment of torch singing as a complex social phenomenon and Spry’s (2010) work on swing as a method to inspire critical processes in qualitative research. In a book I co-edited with Carolyn Ellis, a

![Figure 9.1 Ralph Hultgren—chorale in D from My Sister’s Tears](image-url)
Diverse range of chapters showcase how autoethnography can expand musicians’ awareness of their practice and how musicians can expand the creative possibilities of autoethnography (Bartlett & Ellis, 2009).

**Dance Autoethnography**

While autoethnographic work in the area of dance has been somewhat limited, there are still a number of examples that show how movement can represent and reflect on research in innovative ways (Barbour, 2012; Bowman, Cancienne, & Bagley, 2008; Migdalek, 2012). Dancers in this area call on movement methods to pose critical questions, connect with the emotions of participants, explore theoretical concepts, treat the self as a place of discovery, and represent research through performance for an audience (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002). Other examples show how the performative nature of dance can allow people to address the visceral, emotional, and visual aspects of their research, which are frequently invisible in traditional text-based forms of scholarship (Boydell, 2011).

Work in the area of improvisatory dance also has shown how movement can extend, energize, and bring previously unseen aspects of the research process to light (see Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, 2008). In other examples, choreography has explored dance as a place of inquiry and the body as a site for knowledge (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003). Writers argue that the integration of dance/movement within qualitative research, including autoethnography, provides a place for researchers to teach, perceive, and transform education in new ways that acknowledge bodily-based theoretical frameworks (p. 250). Those working in the fields of autoethnography and arts-based research also have noted how choreographed performances can be multi-vocal and dialogical, cultivating multiple meanings, interpretations, and perspectives for audiences and making the performances evocative rather than literal and explicit (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002; Eisner, 2008). For example, within the context of South Indian dance, Melbourne-based Bharatanatyam dancer Srinivasan (2019) adopts a feminist perspective to unpack reciprocity in artmaking within the migrant diaspora.

**Film and Autoethnographic Documentary**

Autoethnography also has made some inroads in documentary film. Such explorations represent quite a significant shift away from traditional documentaries, where a sense of “objectivity” is strongly upheld (Nichols, 2001). In contrast, autoethnographic documentaries typically reflect the life experiences and ideas of the filmmaker or present a topic through a filmmaker’s subjective point of view. This is because film and video contain dialogue and plot, display images, and can use sound, particularly music, to augment the image and word, giving film and video the ability not only to teach but to actively engage audiences in the communication of an autoethnographic tale (Eisner, 1997). For instance, writers have looked at the ways in which autoethnographic documentaries can allow those who have been traditionally marginalized in films to reclaim their images and rewrite their own stories (Williams, 2011). Those working in this field have suggested that film allows autoethnographers to enhance the “tellability” of their stories and paint vivid pictures in ways that are not possible using traditional research methods (Gertridge, 2008). In particular, given film’s rich allegoric possibilities (Russell, 1999), autoethnographic documentaries can tell several layers of a story simultaneously (Harper, 2005).

**Artistic Autoethnography in Other Fields**

Such artistic explorations have not been limited to those who would call themselves “artists” or “artistic researchers.” Increasingly, qualitative researchers from a range of fields, including anthropology, the social sciences, education, and health, have turned towards artistic modes of inquiry and expression. Brady (1991) uses the term “artful scientists” to represent anthropologists who use poetic and literary modes of expression for their research. Likewise, a number of scholars in critical arts-based education have explored the aesthetics and politics of educational inquiry through literary forms of non-fiction writing, screenplay, and painting (Barone, 2003; Finley, 2011). In particular, they have examined the ways in which artistic modes of inquiry, such as observing, interacting, and performing, can be used to effect change in teaching, learning, and the overall school environment (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Leavy, 2009). In other examples, those working in the health sciences have explored the ways in which qualitative research findings relating to health issues, such as HIV, can be translated into scripts and videos for use in clinical practice (Sandelowski, Trimble, Woodard, & Barroso, 2006). For example, since 2010, visual art has found a home in the halls of Canadian medical institutions. Each year, health science students, residents, and faculty from across Canada submit art to a juried show held in conjunction with the Canadian Conference of Medical Education, which publicly celebrates the
integration of science, arts and humanities and engages audiences to reflect on what it’s like to be in the medical profession. The example shown in Figure 9.2 is a self-reflection piece that experiments with different media and dimensions to portray dimensions of time and space.

A young medical student looks towards the future with nervous anticipation. Twenty years pass. She’s become an experienced physician; her slight smile says “if only she knew it would all be ok. Time inescapably rolls forward. Now a patient, she grips her memories in her wrinkled hands” (Egri, 2015).

The wide range of contexts and approaches I have described illustrate how artistic autoethnographies can be representational and also evocative, embodied, sensual, and emotional. Artistic autoethnographers can provide audiences with access to multiple strata of meanings, interpretations, and voices associated with lived experience (Bagley, 2008; Denzin, 2003). They also challenge audiences to not only engage with the artist’s perceptions and feelings but also recognize their own in the artistic work. As such, these artistic autoethnographies have the potential to speak and engender understanding amongst a wide and diversified audience beyond the confines of the academy.

Building on these examples, in the following section, I focus on three key traits of artistic autoethnographies and explore how non-linearity, improvisation, and embodiment often characterize these types of creative autoethnographic explorations.

**TRAITS OF ARTISTIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES**

**Embracing Non-linearity**

When the arts are used as a mode of inquiry in autoethnography, the research does not always follow a linear sequence or prescribed method as much social-scientific
research does but rather an ongoing inquiry committed to continuously asking questions (also see Harris & Holman Jones, 2019b). Indeed, Crispin (2014) mentions the words “jaggedness,” “messiness,” and “bricolage” in defining non-linearity as one of the prime characteristics of artistic research in music. This involves a quest for understanding that is emergent, generative, and responsive, thus resulting in a re-ordering of the conventional research sequence. Questions often emerge towards the end of the study rather than at the beginning; the literature (in the broadest sense of the word—e.g. it may include sound recordings) often used to contextualize an artistic autoethnography accompanies the creative activity rather than preceding it (Ritterman, 2004). At the heart of this process is the desire to interrupt taken-for-granted ways of knowing. The resulting story—whether presented in words, musical notes, movement, brush strokes, or filmic images—itself creates a new kind of reality, a revealing and dismantling of one’s creative practice so that the new knowledge comes to the fore (Ylönen, 2003). These processes can be somewhat “unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative” and are certainly not under the sole control of reason or instrumental logic (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 431). However, the unpredictable nature of this non-linear approach is what often gives the resulting autoethnographies the “unique ability to convey complexity” in the creative process (Bresler, 2008, p. 229).

This non-linear approach characteristically involves cycles of creation, reflection, refinement, and, ultimately, performance for an audience. Artists sort, sift, edit, form, make, and remake in a process of reflection and discovery (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003; Crispin, 2014). These cycles often occur in communion with a wide range of sources, such as recordings, paintings, scores, and so on, that inspire, inform, and contextualize the creation of the work. This inherently non-linear process allows the artists to draw on a range of creative experiences and reference points, so that distinctions between the personal, artistic, and social become entangled (for a visual autoethnographic depiction, see Sava & Nuutinen, 2003, p. 530; see also Mittner & Bergli, 2018). Work in this area has involved the presentation of new understandings (rather than findings), which help to conceptualize the processes and products within the artful inquiry.

Exploring Through Improvisation

When the focus is no longer on predictability, artistic modes of autoethnographic inquiry, such as improvisation, can emerge. Improvisatory modes of inquiry allow autoethnographers to explore open spaces where the unplanned and unexpected are central to the research process. Such an approach requires skills and knowledge of the basic structures of the process, imagination, a connection among those involved in the exploration, and a shift away from “automatic pilot” mode (Bresler, 2009). This does not mean a free-for-all approach. While many would suggest that improvisation is the embodiment of artistic freedom, Bendrups and Burns (2011) remind that it needs to be grounded in a kind of “common practice” for both artistic coherence and effective communication with audiences (p. 69). As Becker (2000) has argued, improvisation is not about complete freedom but is based on pre-existing structures that guide an improvisational moment (Becker, 2000; Nettl, 1974). As Knight (2011) argues in his artistic autoethnography, improvisation would not exist without preconceived frameworks and equally would not exist without the spontaneous gesture within those frameworks. Similarly, Bresler (2009) notes that improvisation involves moving back and forth between script and exploration, tradition and innovation, working with existing materials, such as texts, scores, images, instruments, as well as creating new ones.

This improvisatory mode of inquiry also entails interplay between a self and others. This is both intuitive and based on shared understandings of artistic language, contexts, and relationships. As Bendrups and Burn (2011) suggest, balancing individual spontaneity with group cohesion and various distinct performance practices and creative ideas is necessary in improvisation. As they describe, their jazz-fusion ensemble is “analogous to a group of seven poets, each with different language (musical) backgrounds, all trying to simultaneously collaborate on a poem, which is recited in real time, with no opportunity for editing or revision” (pp. 76–77). As they discovered, this interplay between artists allowed the ensemble to maintain a musical conversation not only with each other but also with broader musical influences and cultural contexts.

Such an interplay between people, musical ideas, and cultural contexts resonates with autoethnography, which also involves a shifting of perspectives between the personal and contextual, the intuitive and structured, the evocative and analytical, and the descriptive and theoretical (Burnier, 2006). As Picart and Gergen (2004) explain from a dance perspective, “like jazz improvisation, which has some ‘logic’ to it, we have used a ‘blurred genre’ that aims to be conceptual but aesthetic, explicative but evocative, clear but porous” (p. 837). By embracing this blurriness and fluidity in our autoethnographic work, we can also make our audience sensitive to the fluidity of the personal and cultural experiences explored (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). Such improvisatory processes thus move us away from a world of order and clearly defined things whose individual permanence is taken for granted to
a world where our certainty breaks down and new insights can emerge (Saarnivaara, 2003). In improvisation, creativity unfolds in real time; in autoethnography, insights unravel unplanned in real time. This area is still ripe for exploration, as artistic autoethnographers further consider how autoethnography through the lens of improvisation might work. For instance, improvisatory explorations could examine the intersections between creativity and identity politics, community engagement, cultural democracy, and broader issues of social and environmental justice.

Working From Embodied Knowledge and Understanding

When non-linear and improvisatory modes of inquiry are employed, the body is often the epistemological and ontological locus from which these new insights emerge (Spry, 2006). In this vein, Snowber (2012) reminds us that “we do not have bodies, we are bodies.” Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s (1994) concept of “body-minded brain” laid the foundation for embodiment discourses, and more recently embodied cognition establishes that a pre-reflective understanding of phenomena occurs first in the body (Godøy, 2011). Just as the work of a dancer and musician is corporeal, an autoethnographer also works from embodied knowledge and experiences (Järviö, 2006; Mani, 2017). This focus frees the voice and body from the conventional and restrictive Cartesian mind–body split that continues to pervade traditional academic research and, indeed, writing. Spry (2001) concurs, suggesting that in the autoethnographic process, “text and body are redefined, their boundaries blurring dialectically” (p. 711).

This centrality of the body in artistic autoethnography is even more pronounced in the area of dance, where the body is the instrument for communication. Fundamental to integrating dance as part of the autoethnographic research process is the premise that the body is a site of knowledge. This interplay of art forms brings to mind Picart & Gergen’s (2004) article that uses multiple media (photography and videography) and modes of human communication (poetry, prose, dance, visual art) to explore the conjunction of ballroom dancing and relational theory. Their work highlights the relational nature of autoethnography. As Cancienne and Snowber (2003) explain, the combination of dance, a kinaesthetic form, and writing, a cognitive form, can forge relationships between body and mind, cognitive and affective knowing, and the intellect with physical vigour, allowing new autoethnographic perspectives to emerge. Artistic researcher Crispin (2015) also establishes a similar interplay in the anthology Artistic Experimentation in Music (p. 67).

As this review of artistic autoethnographies implies, these non-linear, improvisatory, and embodied approaches to both autoethnography and artistic research can offer artistic modes of inquiry and creative forms of expression that move beyond the literal and explicit. Such approaches allow us to work within research paradigms that respond to the dynamics of the artistic process and the ebb and flow of creative life, rather than pre-ordained, linear prescriptions modelled on social-scientific research approaches. As I describe in the following section, the challenge then becomes how to best (re)present and communicate the insights and understandings that emerge from such creative modes of inquiry.

(RE)PRESENTING ARTISTIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES

Artistic autoethnographies can appeal directly to the senses and emotions of the author/composer/performer and audience (Barone & Eisner, 2006). As Ellis (2004) explains, you “want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of.” You want to “evoke readers to feel and think about your life and theirs in relation to yours . . . to experience your experience as if it were happening to them” (p. 116). Holman Jones (2002a, p. 51) concurs, suggesting that through performance, the meanings and stories behind the autoethnography gain further significance, as the audience is challenged to actively engage with them on different levels, from the intellectual to the embodied to the emotional. In the following section, I focus on the temporal nature of performing autoethnographies, the construction of accompanying twin narratives, the vulnerability of subjecting one’s creative practice to scrutiny, and balancing artistic and aesthetic concerns with the rigors of research processes.

Performing Artistic Autoethnographies and Writing Accompanying Narratives

When the form of representation is a performance, unlike a published research paper, the moment is temporal and ephemeral. As Saldaña (2011) reminds us, what remains after a performance might be a recording, slides, photographs, or written artifacts such as a musical score or theatrical script, but these do not constitute the event itself. To use an example from his work, one can read the script for his autoethnodramatic one-man play, Second Chair, which explores the feelings of a marginalized individual in a competitive mainstream society.
However, this does not capture the evocative experience of seeing it performed (Saldaña, 2008). As Bowman (2008) concurs, there is a big “difference between reading a dramatic script (devoid of dramatic nuance, except for what my non-dramatist’s imagination succeeded in creating) and seeing it performed” (p. 192). This is not to say that artistic autoethnographies are in opposition to scores, scripts, and text-based forms of representation; instead, the twin narrative to these works (often written in words) can allow the reader to glimpse new insights and contextual understandings they might not have had by listening to a composition on its own. The challenge is to make sure these twin narratives speak to the creative work, rather than for it or about it.

As our experiences are always dynamic, relational, embodied, and highly subjective, they are difficult to express, particularly from an artistic perspective where text-based and language-driven forms are not the primary vehicles of communication (Cobussen, 2007). However, as Ellis and I have argued, autoethnographic approaches offer a way of working through this complex situation (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). Autoethnography frees artists from writing dry accompanying narratives; rather, it encourages them to convey the meanings of their vibrant musical experiences in an evocative (Pelias, 2004) and embodied way. Hence, our goal is to write so that our creative identity can be fulfilled through the autoethnographic writing process rather than be restrained by it (Harris & Holman Jones, 2019b; Leavy, 2015). The resulting artistic autoethnographies—in the form of creative outputs and accompanying narratives—can embody the artist’s unique voice, colloquialisms, and emotional responses, and provide “a means of inviting others to consider what I (or they) could become” (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507).

Leah Cotterell’s The Pleasure of Sad Songs (2015) provides a powerful example. Through the development of a show (and accompanying narrative submitted as a master’s exegesis), she shared a moving artistic autoethnography about a family living with agoraphobia, schizophrenia, and dementia. In her show, she skilfully wove together songs, images and stories, of her experiences as a singer, carer, advocate, and witness to the journeys of her mother and brother. She reflected on both the painful stigma of mental illness and the joys of recovery as she struggled to manage their final transition into full time care.

When these forms of representation become public, autoethnographers oftentimes experience vulnerability. As Ritterman (2004) explains from a musical perspective, for many musicians, the thought of subjecting one’s own musical practice to deep critical reflection and then writing and speaking about it publicly is disconcerting. Similarly, Mienczakowski et al. (2002) note that the “reality-based” mounting of human life on the dramatic stage is a risky enterprise. Unlike the distancing one may experience when reading a journal article in private, the live performance with

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**Figure 9.3** Excerpt from Saldaña’s Second Chair playscript (2008, pp. 185–186)

(Johnny squirms uncomfortably in first chair, as if fighting with unseen forces, then slides to second chair; pause) I’m always looking sideways to see who’s sitting next to me, ahead of me, better than me, more privileged than me. It’s true what they say, very true: when you’re not of the mainstream, you have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good. Competition is deeply embedded in American culture. And in Texas culture. And in male culture. And in academic culture, and in Hispanic culture, and in gay culture, and in high school culture, and in band culture. It’s been taught, reinforced, and socially hard-wired into me. (Rises, lightening the mood) Oh, I’ve had my moments of triumph now and then: a book publishing deal here, a research award there. In all honesty, those things are very important to me. First chair doesn’t give me “meaning.” First chair gives me value. (Walks to first chair) First chair lets me know—that I’m not stupid. Though, admittedly, I still say and do some very stupid things now and then. Who doesn’t? (paces, as if trying to figure it out) First chair lets me know . . . not that I’m the “best” but that, quite simply . . . (Pause) that I’m OK—that those things are all right. Do you know what I mean?
live actors before a live audience intensifies the representation. Like autoethnographers, artists grapple with exposing their secrets to the world, knowing that once they are out there, these secrets cannot be taken back. Moreover, as Cobussen (2007) suggests, many artists fear that consciously monitoring what they are doing can lead to a loss of inspiration and freedom. However, as Ellis and I have argued (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009), although revealing the personal and vulnerable parts of their creative lives may feel risky to artists, it also can be highly inspiring, rewarding, and even liberating, especially when the autoethnography is itself lyrical and artistic.

**Presenting Multimodal Artistic Autoethnographies**

As the previous sections have suggested, temporal and aesthetic considerations need to be considered alongside the complicated interplay that can arise between the creative work and words. My sense is that multi-modal presentation formats might extend the future possibilities of artistic autoethnographies. They could unlock some of the broader social and artistic agendas future work in this field might address. One such example is the autoethnographic website Webber (2011) created to explore the experience of living with Asperger’s syndrome (see Figure 9.4).

As Webber (2011) argues in his digital doctoral submission (https://colinwebber.com), in artistic autoethnographies, “it is entirely relevant to use a format that directly reflects these research and creative processes” (n.p.) As he explains, the hypertext format, the inclusion of images, sound, and video, and the multiple links between pages create a more “writerly text, allowing for the reader to define significant aspects of their own experience. The writer and the reader can make meaning together through these pathways” (Webber, 2011, n.p.). This example has many resonances with Kathryn Coleman’s (2017) digital PhD thesis and a/r/tographic study (www.artographicexplorations.com). Coleman presents a multi-modal living inquiry, curated as a digital collection of images, essays, and ethnographic video, and situated within embodied praxis. Likewise, various fora have been created to explore this interface. For instance, the University of Surrey hosted a conference, “Beyond ‘mesearch’: Autoethnography, self-reflexivity, and personal experience as academic research in music

![Figure 9.4 Colin Webber’s “Creating a Virtual Heart” website](image-url)
studies” in association with the Institute of Music Research (IMR) in June 2018. The conference sought to “cultivate modes of engagement in music research that enable scholar-practitioners at all levels to locate their experiences within a robust intellectual framework as well as to articulate their relationship to wider sociocultural contexts.” The emergence of online journals also might make increasingly possible a cross-fertilization of representational forms that encompass these sorts of combinations of text as print, image, voice, music, film, and movement. For instance, Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies, Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, Journal of Autoethnography, Journal of Artistic Research, Journal of Embodied Research, and the Swedish peer-reviewed artistic research and theory journal Music & Practice, all have the capacity for such multi-modal autoethnographies. However, the future availability of alternative forms of publication will nevertheless need to be matched by changes in the culture of the academy in the ways in which unbounded forms of inter-textual representation are perceived and judged.

CONCLUSIONS

As the examples in this chapter illustrate, the dynamic interface between autoethnography and artistic research is continuing to deepen and develop. Projects sitting at this interface embrace and embody deeply creative and personal forms of communication that engage audiences to critically reflect on their own lives in new ways. Emerging approaches in both fields are also looking at ways in which autoethnography and artistic research can become vehicles for taking ambitious creative and social agendas. As both fields have matured, they have increasingly engaged with questions about justice, activism, and power-imbalance (Östersjö & Nguyênn, 2013; Crispin, 2018). Here scholars and artists enhance access to and engagement with research, promote and evoke the voices and experiential worlds of the marginalized and dispossessed, and facilitate broader social change (Harris & Holman Jones, 2019a; Mackinlay, 2019). As artistic autoethnography becomes more commonplace, I believe we will see the inclusion of many voices that customarily have not been heard. In parallel, in artistic research, a diversity of cultures, genders, and musical forms are better represented today (Nguyênn, 2018; Östersjö & Nguyênn, 2013). This is because the critically reflective, empathetic, and evocative capacity of the arts allows us to transpose autoethnographers, artists, and audiences “into new, critical political spaces” (Denzin, 2003, p. 19) of cultural awareness and resistance through the performance, representation, and embodiment of ideas, relationships, and issues. As Cobussen (2007) concurs, “Art not only lets us experience beings differently; in or through art (an other) reality is created” (p. 26). He further suggests that “Whenever art happens, it presents the instigation of the strife between the unfamiliar and the familiar, between the extraordinary and the ordinary” (p. 26). Through its different forms of representation, which often go beyond realist realms into the abstract and highly symbolic, art challenges us to engage critically with the subject matter. Add to this autoethnography’s ability to inspire audiences to reflect critically upon their own life experience, constructions of self, and interactions with others within socio-historical contexts (Spry, 2006). Herein lies the future potential of artistic autoethnography, not only as a creative mode of inquiry and multi-modal and inter-subjective form of representation, but also as an instigator of personal, disciplinary, and broader social change.

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NOTE

1. Artistic research can be conceptualized as “research done by artists in, through, or by means of their artistic practice” (Kirkkopolto, 2017, p. 134).

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