

The Graduate School of Education  
at The University of Melbourne present

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography  
and the Literary and  
Performing Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 2013

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Guest Editors *Rita L. Irwin*  
*Anita Sinner*

Editor  
Associate Editor  
Designer

*Lindy Joubert*  
*Naomi Berman*  
*Rosie Ren*

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## EDITORIAL TEAM

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## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

*The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.*

*Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.*

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# Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

## Guest Editors

*Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner*

### THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

# Whose Voice? Whose Silence? A/r/tographic Explorations Through Queer Performative Autoethnography

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## ABSTRACT

This article articulates an a/r/tographic journey over the course of a year exploring aspects of voice and silence within queer, academic, and ecclesial contexts within the author's life. Drawing on autobiographical and socio-cultural events, the article describes the a/r/tographic process of developing the initial performance piece, as well as its accompanying research of poetic, theatrical, dance-based, queer theoretical, theological, and anti-oppressive educational resources. The article then describes the author's movement, academically and artistically, into queer performative autoethnography, and the resulting final performance piece. Specific renderings and ethical challenges inherent to autobiographical research and performance are investigated and demonstrated as a part of the autoethnographic journey. The article and its accompanying creative process culminate in an autoethnographic performance linking the personal/reflexive with the socio-political. (Link to audio performance production included).

## KEYWORDS

*a/r/tography, autoethnography, queer, religion, autobiography, violence*

1  
I recognize that methodological delineations within arts-based research can overlap in complex ways; indeed, autoethnography can be considered as part of the broader framework of research-based theatre. (See, for example, Beck, et al, 2011.) I choose, however, to locate my work within performative autoethnography as understood by Spry, (2011) Adams and Jones (2011). In my own scholarship and praxis, this distinction is an important one in terms of performative autoethnography's particular emphasis on reflexive and sociocultural analysis within autobiographical performance work.

2  
There continues to be broad and constantly evolving debate around the definitional parameters of language surrounding sexuality and gender identity. For the purposes of this article, "queer" will be utilized as a term that traverses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex identities, as well as the many other sexual, gender, and relational configurations that do not conform to traditional heteronormative patterns.

*'What a long time it can take to become the person one has always been!'*  
(Palmer 2000: p. 9).

## I. SETTING THE CONTEXT: MOVING INTO A/R/TOGRAPHY

This article articulates an artistic, educational, and research-based journey that took place over the course of a year, beginning as an initial a/r/tographic exploration, and eventually evolving into a more complex performative autoethnographic journey.<sup>1</sup> I brought an eclectic background to my doctoral studies, including my prior work as a professional musical theatre performer and a community theatre educator, as well as my ongoing work as an ordained minister and Christian theologian; all of these lenses influenced my perspectives as artist, researcher, and teacher. Indeed, while I first engaged in a/r/tographic research in a doctoral course, I soon discovered that much of my prior practice could also fall under the a/r/tographic umbrella, even before I knew to name it as such. In the context of this course, I chose to undertake an a/r/tographic exploration of voice and of silence within various threads of my life: queer <sup>2</sup> voice (as an openly queer scholar and activist), academic voice (as a theologian and an educational scholar), and ecclesial voice (as an ordained minister shifting from pastoral to academic expressions of my ministry). These explorations culminated in a performance piece that combined theatre, liturgy, and audience participation. I coined this combination 'drama/turgy' to reflect the interweaving threads of theatrical inquiry and liturgical expression. The following is an excerpt from the introduction of the winter performance, to give a sense of the drama/turgical approach, (stage directions are in brackets).

*(The 'stage' is the front of the classroom. One classroom table is set with several tealight candles and one regular candle in a candleholder and matches. All candles are unlit. To one side is a chair for the various props, relatively out of sight of the audience. To the other side is an empty chair. Author is wearing a clergy shirt without the clerical collar so that it looks like a regular short sleeved shirt).  
(Author takes matches and lights main candle, then puts matches on prop chair).*

*I wondered as I worked on this piece, what voice to bring to it.  
Do I present to you as a queer Christian minister...*

*(puts on the clerical collar)*

*... knowing that as I put on this collar, clergy collar, your view, your ears,  
your reception of what I have to say, may be dramatically altered?*

*Or (pauses, takes off collar and unbutton one button to give more casual air)—*

*Do I present to you simply as an actor, an artist, presenting within an academic  
community... this is a piece of theatre engaging the issues of voice and silence?*

*Is this a lectern? A pulpit? Or simply a stage?*

*Whose voice?  
Whose silence?  
Which voices give life?  
Which voices kill?  
When is silence life giving?  
When does silence equal death?*

*Excerpts from a/r/tographic performance:  
'Whose Voice? Whose Silence?' Dec. 7, 2010*

The piece went on to unpack and explore these six key questions, moving through a series of performative vignettes depicting excerpts from topical media reports, and autobiographical stories. My choice to interrogate queer voice and of silence in this way was deliberately simple and direct. Despite tremendous socio-political progress within queer communities, my research indicated to me that an explicit exploration of queer voices and silencings was still relevant and timely; this explicit approach directly informed both the script and its performance. As I engaged an interdisciplinary range of scholars as a researcher and as an artist, I found myself on a journey towards a stronger sense of voice—and indeed a more vocal claiming of queer space—within the work itself, and this strength was reflected within the performative inquiry. I would begin to discover, in my a/r/tographic and autoethnographic journeying, a new queer, theological, and artistic voice.

For instance, given the artistic and theological contexts of my own work, I turned to poetic sources, like Leggo's (1991) problematization of the very question of what constitutes an 'authentic' voice, and his suggestion that it is difficult, if not impossible, to classify 'voice' within definitional boundaries (p. 143). To support the spiritual contexts of my work, I also looked to theological scholars, drawing, for example, from theologian Dorothee Soelle's (2001) exploration of the qualitative difference between a silence born of poverty and a silence born of abundance. I looked to theatrical researchers like Linds (1999), who investigated the multiple identities that inform his work as a Theatre of the Oppressed facilitator, noting 'multiple and fluid identities in my been-being-becoming-imagining as a facilitator in transformative drama - for example, as researcher, facilitator, participant, observer, audience' (p. 3). Butterwick and Selman's (2003) reflections on the power (both liberatory and oppressive) of silence within popular theatre work also seemed relevant, particularly in their call 'to go deeper into them...[silences in activist work] to create new spaces for speaking and listening, approaches that challenge the dichotomizing of voice and silence, speaking and listening, and actors and audience' (p. 18). Through my engagement with these poets, theologians, and educators, I found multiple pathways into my own autoethnographic exploration.

My own emphasis on queerly embodied research drew me to dance researchers. I was intrigued by Ricketts' (2007) use of dance-based research to give voice to traditionally silenced sociocultural experiences, and the resulting reimagination of her own artistic identity (Ricketts, Irwin, Leggo, Gouzouasis, & Grauer); I wondered how a similar reimagination of my own artistic and ministerial identities might inform my own piece. I resonated with Snowber's (2004) exploration of the inextricably intertwined spiritual and embodied voices in her research, as well as her reflections on the place of detours in shaping her life trajectory, and the need for 'a spirituality of

messiness' in our lives and teaching (p. 134). I concurred with Ricketts' and Snowber's call to integrate embodied, autobiographical processes into the arts-based research process. Certainly, such a call informed my overall topic choice (of voice and silence); it also propelled me towards the integration of autobiographical elements within the finished drama/turgical piece. Informed by the complex interrelationships between personal silence/ings, artistic practice, and autobiography, I decided to explore three rhizomatic threads from my own life: academic, religious, and queer voices, and their respective silences.

## A. ACADEMIC VOICE AND SILENCE

The struggles inherent in integrating queer, theological, and educational strands of graduate studies were a recurring theme in my a/r/tographic research and its accompanying drama/turgical piece. I researched and performed about the paradoxical journeys of coming out as queer within mainstream seminary settings, and, conversely, coming out as Christian within secular university settings. In the former, the challenge lay in integrating my out queer identity with various institutions' understandings of Christian ministry—demonstrating on a daily basis that, in fact, radically queer Christian ministers *do* exist. I understood a part of my arts-based research in seminary as an opportunity to bring embodied artistic (theatrical) praxis into my research through explicitly queer lenses. In the latter, the challenge - and the 'coming out' process - both emerged around the integration of theological and spiritual themes within my doctoral studies. Here, I was called to come out repeatedly as a 'Christian with a brain' - my tongue-in-cheek attempt to play with the subtle (and sometimes more overt) resistance to Christianity, religion, and theological discourse, that I encountered within a secular university setting.

I was reminded of the resistance Gosse (2008) encountered, in his attempts to incorporate arts-based inquiry as a legitimate form of doctoral research. Revealingly, he stated that 'I hadn't fully realized that by breaking silences, I also had to break with academic traditions, which can be rigid and, in my view, contrary to true academic curiosity and inquiry'(p. 67). In encountering similar resistances in my theological and secular scholarship, I found myself struggling to find—and indeed use—my academic voice. Encouragingly, I unearthed a variety of voices that push towards these educational borderlands. I noted intriguing contiguities between theatre scholar Lind's (2008) challenge to create space for 'discomfort, ambiguity, and uncertainty about what we will discover about ourselves through the story that is being explored' (p. 172), antioppressive educator Kumashiro's (2002) challenge to investigate beyond heteronormative binaries (p. 170), and a/r/tographer Irwin's (2004) belief that 'those who live in the borderlands are re-thinking, re-living, and re-making the terms of their identities... living a thirdness, a new third world in which tradition no longer constitutes true identity: instead, there are multiple identities' (p. 29). At heart, I wondered if what I was wrestling with here was yet another form of resistance to the queering of boundaries—to those places where my educational trajectory did not fit neatly into one category, be it religious/secular, artistic/theoretical, or queer/Christian. To my own surprise, I found the a/r/tographic process immensely helpful in articulating this struggle, as well as (beginning at least) to bring my own academic voice to bear on this resistance. Intriguingly, it was—and continues to be—within a/r/tographic frameworks and communities that I have found a rich space for exploring,

articulating, and confronting these third spaces. My growing intuition was that a/r/tography's explicit embrace of liminalities and ruptures in turn created an opening for the kind of queer spirituality that was so integral to my own work.

## B. RELIGIOUS VOICE AND SILENCE

In this second rhizomatic thread, I focused in on dynamics of voice and silence that were specific to my experiences working as an ordained minister, and more particularly, in my prior work as a congregational pastor. I drew from Creed's (2003) writing on religious tempered radicals: that is, religious leaders challenging traditional beliefs within their communities of professional practice. I was also drawn to Addison's (2008) exploration of authenticity and emotional labor in religious occupations; despite the contextual and theological distance between Addison's context (the highly regimented and conservative Campus Crusade for Christ movement,) and my own ministerial framework, I nonetheless found significant points of connection in the article. I particularly resonated with Addison's discussion of the explored the emotional labor inherent in religious occupations, particularly in terms of the dissonance between an employee's felt experience and the emotional life displayed in that person's relationship with self, organization, and God (p. 2). Certainly, this echoed my own experience of the complex tension between a clergyperson's inner life and the demands of their call to congregational ministry. I also noted problematic ethical tensions between autobiographical accuracy in the dramatic work, and the unique issues inherent to pastoral confidentiality. While my initial piece did not cross ethical boundaries by identifying specific church-related people or situations, I nonetheless wrestled with how much of my personal pastoral story was, indeed, mine to tell.

## C. QUEER VOICE AND SILENCE

A third thread that emerged in my a/r/tographic research was the voice of queer bodies—my own, and those of my queer communities. As I was developing this piece in the fall of 2010, my a/r/tographic focus underwent a radical shift as a result of a relentless wave of media reports of suicides by lesbian/ gay/ bisexual/ transgender or perceived-to-be queer youth. As an a/r/tographer and as a queer minister, I found myself profoundly impacted by these deaths. Further, I sensed that the widespread media responses had unearthed and made public a collective grief within queer communities. Impelled by these teens' stories, my work took on a much more deliberate and confrontative approach. I worked performatively with an excerpt of the soon-to-become-viral YouTube 'It Gets Better' campaign, started by gay columnist Dan Savage (2010), as well as with the debates within the queer community's responses to it. I noted, for example challenges to the campaign like that of lesbian editor Diana Cage (2010) who pointed out that, 'seriously, we all know it gets better a lot sooner if you are white, cisgendered <sup>3</sup>, and middle class. And for a lot of us it stays pretty hard' (website).

On personal levels, these events also tapped into my own lived experiences of homophobia and heterosexism, experiences that directly informed the a/r/tographic process. Several autobiographical vignettes of homophobia emerged in my initial performance. Additionally, on a professional level, these teen suicides reinforced

3  
*'Cisgender' is employed here as a term used by many transgender and queer communities to refer to those who identify within traditional binary gender norms, and to challenge the unexamined privilege that accompanies traditional binary gender norms.*

my long held belief in the critical importance of a fully integrated sexuality and spirituality, as well as a growing sense of urgency to find ways to translate that integration more explicitly into my educational praxes. I noted that in much the same way that my denomination has spent four decades calling for a return of the sexual body into the church, (Perry 2004) antioppressive educators were calling for an illumination of the sexual body within education (Kumashiro 2002). Like Warren and Fassett (2004), however, I noted the integration of the spiritual and the sexual as a dangerously volatile arena for educators, whether or not they self-identify as queer; as the authors put it, 'both sexuality and spirituality are controlled, circumscribed, and legislated. To engage sexuality in the classroom, to highlight and explore, is to invoke religious fervor. To engage spirituality, or, perhaps more properly, spiritualities, in the classroom is to invoke secular fervor' (p. 22).

In researching this strand, as well as in creating its accompanying drama/turgical threads in my piece, I noted what Kumashiro (2002) referred to as citational violence: the repetition of verbally violent discourse that calls up the history of a particular epithet or stereotype, creating a citational production of oppression. (p. 50-53). I deliberately chose to place two religiously homophobic voices in a pulpit within the piece, not simply because it reflected their sources, but also to dramatically illustrate the power of such citational violence when it is issued from voices of religious authority. Unexpectedly, I experienced citational violence myself through the theatrical rehearsal process. I was surprised by the depth of emotional impact that memorizing and enacting such violently homophobic speeches had on my body and spirit. In engaging rehearsal processes I'd learned as a professional actor, I memorized the monologue through a variety of oral, aural, and physical techniques until I had the piece integrated into my actor's 'muscle memory'. This meant, however, that I was also incorporating the text's violent discourse *into my body*; I realized, as I did so, that this took an emotional and spiritual toll. I found that incorporating an element of ritual into the performance (the lighting of candles,) also afforded me a moment of pause to release each character's voice (and this violent discourse) before moving on.

Finally, compelled by my preacher's instinct to link the personal, the political, the spiritual, and the communal, at the end of the performance piece itself, I asked the audience to engage the questions of voice and of silence within their own lived experiences. I found myself deeply moved by my classmates' willingness to fully engage with the piece, and with their bravery in engaging with their own moments of voice and silence during this final participatory segment.

## II. A/R/TOGRAPHY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: INTEGRATION AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Rather unexpectedly, this a/r/tographic exploration of voice and silence was profoundly integrative for me—on both academic and personal levels. And yet, as I continued through the academic year, I was aware that the piece, and indeed the a/r/tographic process, felt unfinished. While I didn't want to simply relegate this work to a dusty file box on my bookshelves, I also knew that it wasn't yet time to share this work more publicly beyond the university classroom. I let the work lie fallow for several months, knowing that I would return to it organically when the creative process called me to do so.

### A. REFLEXIVITY AND SCHOLARLY IDENTITY

Around this same time, I also found myself grappling with questions of scholarly identity, torn between my lifelong commitment to activist, anti-oppressive education as a core of my doctoral work, and a growing, undeniable pull towards a more contemplative, reflexive approach to my studies. I also grew increasingly curious about the place of researcher reflexivity and discomfort within anti-oppressive education. I resonated with Kumashiro's (2002) belief that 'the desire to learn only what is comforting goes hand in hand with a resistance to learning what is discomfiting, and this resistance often proves to be a formidable barrier to movements toward social justice' (p. 4). Autoethnographers Ellis and Bochner's (2003) call for a more explicitly reflexive integration of first-person narrative into academic research helped me to contextualize what I experienced as a profound resistance to researcher reflexivity in some of my university classrooms (pp. 201, 216). In articulating an approach to anti-oppressive research, Potts and Brown (2005) highlighted the importance of reflexivity as a critical aspect of the researcher's own role in such knowledge creation and its resultant power relations. However, they also reminded new (and seasoned) researchers that the discomfort that arises from reflexive research praxes is both necessary and unavoidable (pp. 260, 283). I was also struck by Regan's (2010) groundbreaking challenge to take a decolonizing approach to the researcher's own inner work, and to their own complicity in oppressive structures (pp. 12, 26). For Regan, this 'empathic unsettlement' was essential not only to develop a more ethically reflexive research approach, but moreover, to shift the responsibility for anti-oppressive learning from the oppressed to the oppressor (pp. 31, 51). These scholars supported my instinctive push towards more reflexive research processes, and challenged me to explore how I might incorporate a more rigorously reflexive approach in my own work.

Both inside and outside the academy, I also wrestled with my own understandings of self-care as an artist/researcher/teacher committed to social change. I became aware of a growing internal struggle between my sense of vocational calling to social justice work and an emerging sense of deep soul-tiredness in the face of years of this work. Something new seemed to be pushing its way forth in my academic and spiritual learnings, but as yet it was nebulous, unclear. I wondered... if I were to let go of my current understanding of activism, what new identity, work, capacity, might emerge in this liminal space? I was drawn to Ellis' (2004) notion, that indeed, a 'move inward' could perhaps offer the most effective route towards social change (p. 254). Indeed, in

the two years since the creation of the original piece, I have noticed a significant shift in my own a/r/tographic work towards a more contemplative activism, accompanied by a more complex analysis of the ethics of queer autoethnographic research.

## B. ARTS-BASED AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS POSSIBILITY

These queries led me towards performative autoethnography, which I now understand as one 'branch' of the a/r/tographic 'tree'. Within the academic autoethnographic community, I found a language, an approach, and indeed a methodology, that spoke directly to my desire for a more reflexive, embodied approach to educational and theological research. Ellis' (1999, 2004) groundbreaking work articulating autoethnographic as method contextualized this approach for me; I was further intrigued by Ellis' (2009) later addition of 'meta-autoethnography', wherein she 'meta-reflected' on earlier autoethnographic research. I was encouraged by Ellis' (2002) analysis of autoethnography's potential for creating community through the connective power of narrative storytelling, as well as by her articulating powerful links between personal narratives and social change movements.

Bickel's (2005) arts-based autoethnographic work, exemplifying the deliberate exposition of researcher vulnerability and highlighting arational knowing, Ricketts' (2007) a/r/tographic use of dance to explore issues of displacement, cultural silencing, identity, and voice, supported my intuition that I might find a theoretical and artistic home within this area of the academy. Pelias' (2004) and Carver's (2007) calls for more heartfelt approaches to scholarship echoed my own deep unease—my sense of a *lack* of heart within the academy—with which I'd been wrestling since beginning my doctoral studies. I was intrigued by Poulos' (2010) explorations of accidental ethnography - what he understood as an ability to be receptive to moments of significance, breakthrough, or inspiration that can inform his ethnographic and narrative crafts. Adams and Jones' (2011) explorations of the intersections of reflexivity, queer theory, and autoethnography provided me with a theoretically and poetically resonant framework. Indeed, in the years that have followed, their approach, as well as that of Spry's (2011) book on performative autoethnography, have significantly shaped the development of my own queer performative autoethnographic methodology. I was beginning to locate my own queer thread within this web of interdisciplinary approaches.

## C. AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ETHICS

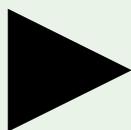
Another area that remained unresolved for me was around the ethics of autobiographical storytelling. I was aware of a complex mix of feelings around some of the autobiographical stories I'd incorporated into the original performative piece. While I had certainly stayed within the official ethical research guidelines, and while I'd not identified any of the specific people or situations from which these stories had been drawn, I nonetheless felt conflicted about sharing stories that might be recognizable to specific original 'players.' I resonated with Poulos' exploration of the dilemma of relational research ethics within his autoethnographic explorations of autobiographical secrets. Like Poulos (2008), I wrestled with the balance between telling these stories in ways that 'do no harm' to specific people in his own life, and his sense that 'to tell the story may well be the only ethical thing to do' (p. 65).

In response to my ethical struggles, eventually, I reworked certain sections of the original piece to eliminate any such autobiographic identifiers. This was perhaps the most difficult artistic choice for me—between dramatic specificity and a desire not to identify particular people or situations. In the end, I chose to portray characters and situations that were composites or compilations, trusting that they would still portray the autoethnographic truth of what had happened over time. The complex issue of queer autoethnographic ethics is one that I continue to explore in my research, my pedagogy, my art, and my ministry.

### III. PERFORMATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS INTEGRATION

Finally, several months after the first a/r/tographic performance, I returned to the piece with the actively questioning lenses of autoethnography and artist/researcher/teacher identity. In response to a professorial challenge, I also looked at how to incorporate dual artistic methodologies: a familiar one (theatre), and an unfamiliar one (djembe drumming.) To my surprise, a new performance piece organically (and rapidly) emerged—one that incorporated the heart of the original a/r/tographic piece, whilst simultaneously interweaving an autoethnographic framework. I also felt compelled to incorporate a significant autobiographical experience of anti-queer violence that had happened in recent months. Even more surprising, however, was the strength of voice—artistic voice, academic voice, and educational voice—that erupted in this new piece of work. I was pleased to find my feelings of strength reflected in audience comments after the performance. Somehow, over the months, I had moved into a stronger sense of voice—and indeed a more vocal claiming of queer space—within within the work itself, and this strength was reflected within the performative inquiry. I had discovered, in my a/r/tographic and autoethnographic journeying, a new queer, theological, and artistic voice.

As I look back on both this journey and the performance piece that grew out of it, I am struck by its nascent quality—here, I was able create an artistic marker for an early moment in my autoethnographic journey. As my methodologies and my sociocultural analyses have developed in the ensuing years, I continue to be fascinated by the complexity of these interweaving threads—theoretically, artistically, and theologically. I close this article, then, by sharing that voice through an audio recording and script of this final piece. It offers a condensation of a yearlong journey, and, congruent with that journey, ends with additional questions and liminalities yet to be explored. I invite the reader/listener to reflexively consider their own questions of voice and of silence as they engage with the recording of the performance that follows.



Whose Voice Whose Silence

Notes:

1. References at the end of this script indicate characters that were drawn from specific situations and sources. (These have been cited in italics within the script.) All other characters are composite characters, and, while they reflect the lived experience of the author, are not intended to depict specific individuals. This audio recording, while not of the in-classroom performance, is meant to offer a resonant audio depiction of that performative inquiry as work-in-process.
2. As a complete novice to audio production techniques, I was intrigued to discover that the audio production of this recording was, in and of itself, an additional a/r/tographic process. Working with professional musician and fellow a/r/tographer Danny Bakan, we strove to create an audio archive that was both true to the final performance and also open to new renderings that emerged through the production process. I am deeply grateful to Danny, (who, indeed, was also present for the initial a/r/tographic piece last winter), for his generous artistic, technical, and a/r/tographic insight reflected in this recording.

## **SCRIPT: 'WHOSE VOICE? WHOSE SILENCE? AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION'**

(Stage directions are indicated in brackets.)

(Author stands centre stage with drum on stand right of centre.)

I'm thinking about autoethnography, the notion that our lives, our bodies, are sources of research data... of knowledge... of wisdom. And that through the lens of culture, the data our bodied lives give us can offer challenge, critique, inspiration, or simply more questions...

I'm thinking about the place of art in my life... reclaiming the name of artist... and then realizing that actually, it is a claiming. Because while I've named myself as an actor, a singer, a teacher, minister, I've never named myself as an artist. And now that I claim artist, my work, my studies, my knowing- change.

I'm thinking about rhythm and movement... drumming more than 20 hours last week and loving it... discovering that I love to drum... and discovering that drumming allows me to access a different part of my brain... to meditate in a way that drops down deeper than my intellect and my dis-ease...

(Author moves to drum and demonstrates simple drumming, moving to a faster and more complex rhythm, then stops and moves back to centre stage.)

I'm thinking about art and autoethnography and rhythm as I reflect on a moment a few weeks ago...

(Author physically enacts her own and the stranger's characters and voices in the exchange that follows.)

A moment when I'm on my way home from this class actually, waiting for the bus at Howe and Robson. I lean out to look for my bus and as I step back, a woman says

'Get your queer ass out of my face.'

I think I've misheard but when I look at her she is staring at me with open hostility.

'Excuse me?'

'Get your queer ass out of my face.'

This exchange continues... and moves into an odd and disturbing direction—where, among other things, she informs me that the army is coming to kill all of us—by whom I assume she means all queer people...

When she finally leaves on her bus, I close my eyes and say 'bless you'...

(Author enacts this moment)

knowing even as I do that it is more a statement of defiance than of benediction.

As I get onto my own bus soon after, I don't feel at risk, but all the same, I sit near the front... just in case.

In remembering her words, there is a part of me that knows this voice well... the part of me that sat near the front of the bus that day, just in case, is the same part of me that scopes out a public bathroom for personal safety... is the same part of me that checks a church's theology before I set foot in the door... is the same part of me that assesses, in a moment or a day or a semester, how safe a space is... how much space I can actually take... is the same part of me that continues to come out on a daily basis even though I officially 'came out' 17 years ago. It's very close to the part of me that knows that queer autoethnography is no simple method... that, like Poulos, each story I tell holds the potential to out me or someone else... to break a silence, to tell a story... and, like Poulos, I wonder which stories are mine to tell... which stories have no choice but to be told. (*Poulos 2008*)

This part of me... the continually coming out, ethically cautious, personally vigilant part of me, almost wants to thank the woman on Howe and Robson... on some level I can appreciate her directness. There's no subtlety whatsoever. 'Get your queer ass out of my face' is pretty unambiguous. And this part of me, the continually coming out part of me, hears in her statement an echo... of many other voices, explicit and implicit, that I hear, sense, intuit, every day. Her statement echoes a recurring rhythm.

I remember her words... and wonder what they might sound like as rhythm...

'Get your queer ass out of my face...'

'Get your queer ass out of my face...'  
(Author begins to explore the rhythmic qualities of this phrase on the drum. Slowly, the statement becomes a rhythm, and the drum's rhythm takes over. Author plays this rhythm for a significant chunk of time to allow the audience to hear and feel it.)

I play with the rhythm... enjoying my facility with the drum, despite the disturbing

source of the rhythm's original inspiration...

(Author pauses from drumming during this last statement. During the next passage, the recorded version of the drumbeat from the chapel is played underneath the spoken words).

And I wonder, as a queerly bodied person, a queerly spiritual person, how often these rhythms are playing around me, in the world around me, in the people I encounter. How do these rhythms impact my living, my working, my art? I wonder whose voices we hear in those rhythms... I wonder whose voices – and whose silences—we hear in resistance to those rhythms...

Whose voice? Whose silence? (Author adds live percussive emphasis each time this phrase is repeated).

Which voices give life? Which voices kill? When is silence lifegiving? When does silence equal death?

Whose voice? Whose silence?

(For each of the statements that follow, excerpted from the original a/r/tographic characterizations, Author steps to left of centre, and enacts the specific character with embodiment and voice.)

I hear the voice of turning a blind eye... (enacting Dan Savage's telling of the story) Billy Lucas, 15, reportedly endured intense bullying at the hands of his classmates—classmates who called him a fag and told him to kill himself. His mother found his body... (*Savage, 2010*)

Whose voice? Whose silence?

I hear the voice of religious bigotry... (enacting the homophobic minister) Some suppose that they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn tendencies toward the impure and unnatural. Not so! Why would our heavenly father do that to anybody? (*Robinson, 2010*)

Whose voice? Whose silence?

I hear the voice of academia... (enacting a composite of various voices of academic authority ) You are welcome here... just a thought... you might want to think about how to frame your queer studies... your theological studies... so that your classmates and some of the faculty can understand it, and so that your work will be heard, and well received.

Whose voice? Whose silence?

I hear the voice of unexamined privilege... (enacting a composite of those close to Author who have echoed similar words) So I have to admit, I don't completely get all the gay political talk. It's all pretty mainstream, isn't it? I mean, why are you so angry? Isn't it kind of up to you? I mean what do you expect if you look like that? How do you expect people to react?

Whose voice? Whose silence?

I hear the voice of denial... (enacting a composite of voices who have echoed similar words) the best way to resolve this – and what’s best for the community- is not to respond to what they’re saying about you... to rise above it. If you don’t respond, eventually they will stop.”

Whose voice? Whose silence?

I hear the voice of accusation... (enacting homophobic Christian author) Matthew Shepard wasn’t killed because he was a homosexual; it was a matter of robbery. And the robbers obviously weren’t Christians. However, the timing was right for the ‘gay’ scheme, and so Matthew Shepard became the new martyr of the homosexual movement: a symbol of ‘gay’ victim- hood at the hands of the evil Christians. (*Liveley, 2009*)

Whose voice? Whose silence?

I hear the voice of silence by omission... (enacting autobiographic statement from Author’s past) I don’t talk with them about her death. It’s too complicated trying to explain who she was to me, what our relationship was, and how deep this loss runs.

Whose voice? Whose silence?

And I hear the voice of resistance... (enacting performance poet/activist) I am not here to queer it down a little for anybody. I’m here to queer it up for the dykes the sissies the faggots the tomboys the trannies. ... this is it. This is your chance to be a badass. When someone else calls you a name you’re going to say hell yeah and reclaim it. (*Shaughnessy, 2010*)

Whose voice? Whose silence?

Which voices give life? Which voices kill? When is silence lifegiving? When does silence equal death? Whose voice? Whose silence?

(Author begins playing with the recording now)

And I listen for the voice within the rhythm, inside the rhythm, playing it for long stretches of time...

(Recording changes to that of the drumming group collectively playing the same rhythm; Author continues to play live with them.)

I even play it with my community of drummers...

I play... knowing that eventually I will find a new way of being in this rhythm, of claiming something stronger and deeper than the violence that created it... of transmuting it into something else. Not yet perhaps, but it is coming... Whose voice? Whose silence?

Thank-you.

## AUDIO RECORDING/ SCRIPT REFERENCES

*References are in order of appearance within the script; all other vignettes in script are autobiographical composites.*

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Drumming: 1) Author in Naramata Centre Chapel: July 22, 2011 and 2) Drumming Class with *Name of Instructor* at Naramata Centre: July 22, 2011.

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