

## **Autoethnography: Answerability/Responsibility in Authoring Self and Others in the Social Sciences/Humanities**

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Review Essay:

**Carolyn Ellis (2004). *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. New York, NY: AltaMira Press, 427 pages, ISBN 0-7591-0050-0 (alk. Paper), \$ 27.95**

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**Abstract:** ELLIS' methodological novel about autoethnography is an example of the increasing emergence of alternative forms of writing in the social sciences/humanities that focus on a dialogic notion of self, voice and human consciousness. Autoethnography is a genre of writing in which authors draw on their own lived experiences, connect the personal to the cultural and place the self and others within a social context (REED-DANAHAY, 1997). To understand this commitment to self-reflexive ways of knowing and writing, I draw on BAKHTIN's concept of authoring as creative answerability/responsibility (*otvetsvennost*) that views a self as answerable not only to the social environment, but is also answerable for the authoring of its responses. *The Ethnographic I* serves as a useful text to engage the issues that autoethnography raises both as genre and alternative discourses for authoring self and others.

### **Table of Contents**

- [1. Blurred Genres: Alternative Forms of Writing](#)
- [2. The Act of Authoring: Voice, Consciousness, Creative Answerability](#)
- [3. Autoethnography: Pedagogy or Therapy?](#)
- [4. Re-Authoring the Self and Others: Self-fashioning Fictive Personas](#)
- [5. The Role of the "I" in Ethnography: A Necessary Double-Voicing in Re-authoring the Self and the Social](#)
- [6. Opening Spaces and Possibilities](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

### **1. Blurred Genres: Alternative Forms of Writing**

Postmodern philosophical, political and theoretical debates focus the mission/s of social science/humanities research, the personhood of researchers and the roles of researchers and participants in human inquiry. The introduction of the first person in research texts is a postmodern response to a crisis of representation and current angst about identity—a crisis of representation with roots in epistemology, ethics and ontology (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2001; WATSON, 2005). New interpretive turns in living the life of a social science researcher call for researcher self-reflexivity (BREUER, MRUCK & ROTH, 2002; WATSON, 2005), alternative modes of writing (RICHARDSON, 1994) and integration of scholarly

and personal voices in researchers' textual representations in the social sciences/humanities (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 1996, 2000). This conscious positioning of authors within their texts opens up possibilities for evocative, innovative ways in which researchers may represent realities, themselves and their research participants in their texts. Autoethnography, a genre of writing that involves personalized accounts in which authors draw on their own lived experiences, connects the personal to the culture and places the self and others within a social context (REED-DANAHAY, 1997). This "authoring of self" into a research text blurs the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, takes many forms, serves diverse functions and generates varying or vexing responses to how researchers do and write ethnography (GAITÁN, 2000). [1]

HUFFORD (1995) refers to this appropriation of first person voice as the "egocentric predicament." COFFEY (1999) criticizes autoethnography as self indulgent and views this methodology of first-person narrative scholarship as limiting human inquiry to what "I" can speak about my subject and subjectivity or solipsistic soap operas about "me," "myself" and "I." However, a growing acceptance of autoethnography and concern with the personhood of the researcher among interpretive ethnographers present a new agentive turn to researchers and how they may claim their voices, sign and signature their own acts of authoring self and others (ROTH, 2005). Relevant here is BAKHTIN'S (1990) concept of the act of authoring as a creative answerability/responsibility (*otvetsvennost*) that invokes a much-needed dialogue between self and others in human inquiry. This concept of authoring views a self that is answerable not only *to* the social environment but also a self that is answerable *for* the authoring of its responses. From this perspective, dialogue is a socially embedded meaning-making process, human life and action are synonymous and a self is answerable and responsive to both self and other. BAKHTIN (1984, p.287) explains: "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself to an other, through another, and with the help of another." [2]

Like many scholars from different disciplines who are drawn to BAKHTIN's dialogic theory of human consciousness, I am intrigued by his emphasis on creative answerability and agency to understand the nexus between the larger domains of social activity and individuals' ways of authoring subjectivities in the social sciences/humanities. BAKHTIN's understanding of subjects as authors of their discursive existence resonates with the epistemological assumptions and methodological aspirations of postmodernist, interpretive scholars pushing the boundaries of social science/humanities research (CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986; GEERTZ, 1988; ROTH, 2005) and blending genres by exploring alternative forms of qualitative writing (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 1996; PHELPS, 1990; RICHARDSON, 1994). This use of first person voice that is intently subjective connects to evaluating the role of reflexivity in understanding the self and personhood of the researcher. Researcher is both a social being and actor learning to read the word and world with a more critical perceptive eye and heightened human consciousness (FRIERE & MACEDO, 1987). [3]

Autobiography and autoethnography genres that include intimate reflections, personal narratives about the relationship of self, others and cultures intentionally blur the traditional lines between social science and literature, subject and object, and subjectivities and cultures. Autoethnography, a form of discourse and genre, offers much dialogic and expressive potential to qualitative and ethnographic researchers dealing with the complexities of selves and others who cross cultural borders. Indeed, it challenges traditional epistemologies about whose knowledge is privileged and whose voices are expressed, recognized and heard. It boldly calls for alternative, more expansive ways, creative forms and textual spaces in which researchers construct research texts, position themselves and others. However, understood as a genre within the context of "the crises of representation" (CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986) and "politics of recognition" within the academy (TAYLOR, 1994), autoethnography is not unproblematic (SPARKES, 2000). Especially niggling is what criteria are appropriate to evaluate reflexive projects of selfhood (IVANIC, 1998). Indeed, this postmodern sensibility to self fashioning confronts dominant forms of representation and power (TIERNEY, 1998) and offers new ways of writing ethnographies (GOODALL, 2000). However, autoethnography is still quite vulnerable to the hegemonic pressures of more canonical, powerful discourses within mainstream methodologies and traditional epistemologies (HOLT, 2003). So what does this mean for the act of authoring for researchers in the social sciences/humanities and their representational practices and who gets to speak and be recognized after all? Whose stories are deemed plausible? [4]

## **2. The Act of Authoring: Voice, Consciousness, Creative Answerability**

I welcome the opportunity to review Carolyn ELLIS' book *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*. I was attracted to its title which explicitly signals this push for alternative forms of writing in the social sciences/humanities, re-authoring of lived (RICHARDSON, 1994) and figured worlds (HOLLAND, LACHICOTTE, SKILLNER & CAIN, 1998), and development of a reflexive anthropology and sociology of subjectivity. ELLIS' book is a timely text to consider the act of authoring and blurring of fact and fiction in human inquiry. It promises to stimulate continued debate and dialogue about the role and personhood of the researchers in qualitative and ethnographic research with their myriad forms and traditions (DENZIN, 2003). It is an especially important book for researchers in general and autoethnographers in particular to reflect on thorny issues of voice, consciousness and creative answerability/responsibility (BAKHTIN, 1990). Using figurative tropes, dialogue, fictional techniques such as character, plot development, scene setting and other rhetorical conventions which I associate with my background in literature, ELLIS (p.11) admits that she "has intentionally merged ethnography and fiction" to engage readers in the methodology of doing ethnography just as fiction engages readers in constructing a narrative plot. In the Preface, she poses an interesting question for all scholars concerned about the "authorial presence," the ethical consequences of self disclosure in their inquiries and whether they are speaking for, to or with their 'subjects': What can be gained by making the 'I' a part of, even a focus of,

ethnographic research?" (ELLIS, p.xix) This question should provoke readers to reflect not only about ELLIS' intentions as an author, her textual representation/s of self and others and what BAKHTIN (1984, p.287) calls an author's/speaker's emotional-volitional tone. It should also provoke researchers to think about their own authorial intentions, reflexive projects of selfhood and the emotional salience and valence of their stories (IVANIC, 1998). [5]

Whose interests are being served in the authorial act and appropriation of this self reflexive way of knowing? Is this blurring of fact and fiction a creative solution to postmodern representational dilemmas or a fibbing of results in the "doing" and "writing" of ethnography? (ROTH, 2005). How might readers view ELLIS as the obviously self-inscribed figure in this novel? For example, is she adopting the role of the seer, scholarly priestess helping readers connect vicariously to the complexities of "a dense academic plot" on the human condition that focuses on lived experiences that are too problematic to engage with directly? Or is she taking readers on a solipsistic, therapeutic journey about unresolved vexing issues in her own lived experiences? ELLIS claims, "the plot she constructed had to fit what plausibly might happen in a classroom and convey academic and practical information about doing autoethnography" (p.335). From the very first page, she pulls readers into her fictional graduate classroom of diverse students who are mostly composite characters with attributes similar to students she has taught. She sets the scene, tone and herself as the "speaking subject" of the novel in the first paragraph of her Preface (p.xv):

"A woman in her mid-forties opens the door to my office and hesitates in the entryway. (1) A large-brimmed, floppy straw hat covered with purple bangles hides her face. A matching scarf hangs loosely around her neck. 'Professor Ellis?' 'Yes, that's me,' I respond." [6]

Through this interesting self-reference note here that directs readers to page 371 (ELLIS, 1999; BOCHNER & ELLIS, 2000), she alludes to another key character in her novel—enter Art, her other I, who emerges first in this reference note and then in a descriptive co-authored scene in chapter 2 that ELLIS titles "How We Met." This methodological novel like ELLIS' previous work is "a continuation of what [she has spent] the last 15 years doing, which is using autoethnographic stories—stories written in an autobiographical genre about the relationship of self, other, and culture—in social science research" (ELLIS & BERGER, 2003 p.157). [7]

### **3. Autoethnography: Pedagogy or Therapy?**

In autoethnography, "the researcher self is not separate from the lived self" (RICHARDSON, 2003, p.197). GAITÁN (2000, para. 6) views autoethnographies as "a means of understanding (and healing) ourselves." Thus, autoethnography can serve as a creative, pedagogical and therapeutic resource, a textual site for re-authoring the self and dealing with the ethical consequences of self-disclosure and emotionality. In articulating her preference for autoethnographic-authoring personal stories, ELLIS (p.xix) makes statements about *The Ethnographic I* that

later connect to who she is in relation to her teaching, her home life, and her scholarly and personal voice. Her pedagogical intent is obvious in the content of each seminar class such as the early chapters that focus on the history of ethnography, various approaches to and publishing of autoethnographies. She structures this fictional account of a semester seminar into ten classes, four interludes she titles as friendship, community, participant and author interludes. She also includes four appendices with suggested readings and assignments for an autoethnography class, a chart of impressionistic and realist ethnography, guidelines for personal writing papers and editing personal narratives. While very useful and also an insightful reflexive synopsis of her teaching, they are not normally the "narrative" matters included in novels! [8]

As a professor who teaches Qualitative and Ethnographic research methods to international students from diverse language, cultures and positionings, I appreciated ELLIS' attempt to advocate and present new methodological approaches and issues and link them to her students' fictional projects. Noteworthy as well is her aim to create more textual spaces for their emotionally evocative work and "speaking personalities" (BAKHTIN, 1981) to be expressed and recognized. She connects, sometimes successfully and, at other times, unsuccessfully, the subplots in her methodological novel to the issues raised in her fictional class to "her students' personal lives" and to her "personal and relational life and to community and social action" (p.335). What emotional valence might these stories have for other readers in the "real" world? For example, in constructing these tales, I wondered to what extent she really advances and enhances our sociological and human sensibilities—what EISNER (1997) calls more "empathetic forms of understanding" and BAKHTIN refers to as "active understanding." Since she is a sociologist by training, I was looking for an exemplified, responsive understanding of the larger social-cultural, historical and political surroundings and positionings of herself and her students? ELLIS (p.333) claims: "they represent real people in my novel." Many subplots are local stories about the personal crises of the students that are interwoven into the students' equally localized projects that ultimately seem very contrived and manipulated. ELLIS admits: "I had to select the characters and projects carefully to carry my story" (p.328). However, the subplots take on the form of painful "confessional moments" in the students' lived experiences that range from awareness of bicultural/biracial identity, domestic violence, breast cancer, sexual relationships and intimacy. They may leave some readers wondering about the relationships between intentions and emotions in acts of authoring—an issue that warrants further exploration in using alternative forms of writing ethnography and autoethnography. [9]

The subplots and interactions between ELLIS and her characters also raise a host of ethical issues about honesty, integrity, identification and transference in the research process and researchers' and participants' lived inter relationships that could have been teased out more clearly. It is ironic that the "I" of the fictional students' personal stories and projects frequently disrupt the narrative flow of the "fairly dense (methodological) academic plot" (p.335) she claims she is trying to evoke, tell or show. Evocative expression of personal experiences and emotions

is the essence of autoethnography, Indeed, autoethnography can represent events in diverse powerful ways and generate understandings that traditional research texts cannot. Yet, in ELLIS' methodological novel the balance between teaching and healing in the re-authoring of self and others is often tenuous and may also leave readers pondering about the benefits and risks of autoethnography as self study or self indulgence, as a pedagogy or therapy. It may cause some readers to question what kind of inferences can be made about who these characters are at any one moment in the novel. [10]

#### **4. Re-Authoring the Self and Others: Self-fashioning Fictive Personas**

One of ELLIS' guest lecturers in the novel and friend in real life Laurel RICHARDSON argues, narratives of self can evoke very personalized and revealing texts in which authors tell intimate stories about their own lived experiences and those of others (RICHARDSON, 1994). Many of the students' autoethnographies emerge as "confessional tales" (VAN MAANEN, 1988), evocative, self-absorbed accounts of pain and trauma that are at times tedious to read. There is no doubt that ELLIS invites and intends readers to make emotional connections with her and her students. In doing so a number of questions emerge similar to earlier ones posed in this review. Is she engaging in a solipsistic exercise in "selfing" in which, through the imagination, readers might learn how to enter subjunctive worlds and connect their scholarly and personal voices? (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 1996). Or are some subjunctive worlds really more privileged than others? Reframed as self-representation and re-authoring of self and others, in autoethnography theoretically speaking, all subjects can enter the discourse or dialogue in some particular textual form, place, time and space. In the actual act of self-fashioning fictive personas, the author has the authorial power to also write characters out of the narrative. For example, one of her characters, Ken, a sociology student who discloses his interest in gay parenting, wrestles early on in the narrative with revealing his most intimate feelings, drops the course (much to the author's relief), and is conveniently written out of the narrative (ELLIS, p.121). Jack, a composite character, serves two oddly dual functions. He appears as an obvious foil character representing those who resist or dismiss qualitative research and narrative in particular as unscientific, lacking in rigor or who are uncertain about its merits. He also takes on a rather stereotypical persona representing those who are interested in interracial relationships. [11]

ELLIS' entire cast of characters includes composite fictional students, faculty, colleagues, guest speakers and her soul mate Art and their pets. Readers discover in the last chapters that some are actual students whom she interviewed about their experiences as characters in her novel. They appear to have given their consent for and approved their stories as constructed in the novel, although how authority, power and transference issues between instructor and students are dealt with is rather opaque. Through these conversational interviews about autoethnography and their lived experiences, she attempts to tease out diverse issues such as doing autoethnographic research on family members, mentor-mentee relationships, confidentiality, embodied writing, authenticity, faith and context—all important in the doing and act of writing autoethnography, re-

authoring selves and others. While the students and their stories appear plausible to some degree, they lack depth, focus and imaginative appeal and did not have emotional valence and intellectual impact on this reviewer. Her interludes of reflective conversations with her partner and mentor Art about ethnography, their after class dinners, wine and food preferences include superfluous minutia of detail about their home and private life and "dog children." In these interludes, she becomes vulnerable to COFFEY's critique of autoethnographies as rather self-indulgent. Especially gratuitous are her personal stories about her abortion and her mother's illness and death that read like memoirs of guilt and regret. These personal stories seem most oddly placed here in this methodological text as these acts of investigating subjectivity first appeared over a decade ago (ELLIS, 1995, ELLIS & BOCHNER, 1992). These stories also appear in other contributions in FQS; for example, her article on self reflexivity (ELLIS, 2003) or Stacy HOLLMAN JONES' (2004) conversation with ELLIS and BOCHNER. [12]

ELLIS claims that the primary audience for the book is "graduate students and professors in numerous disciplines interested in investigating and learning to write and teach autoethnography" (p.335). In addition to the useful introductory chapter mentioned earlier, in which she very clearly compares various methodological approaches and traditions, she also introduces readers and students in her fictional seminar to interview research techniques such as dyadic interviews, interactive interviews and co-constructed narratives. These are the obvious strengths of the book, especially to students and readers new to qualitative and ethnographic research in general and autoethnography in particular. Despite the frequent, tiresome referencing of self and colleagues in the "inner circle" of autoethnography after each chapter, the book is timely and useful in provoking readers to think more deeply about many issues that remain unresolved in the art and ethics of doing and evaluating autoethnography. The early chapters are stronger than the latter ones that mostly focus on the subplots. As these confessional subplots unfold through the students' deliberately contrived projects, personalities and personal crises take over. I frequently sensed the latter chapters losing their coherence, clarity and focus. It is perhaps these chapters that especially reveal weaknesses in ELLIS' skills as a fiction writer. [13]

The action of her novel, she explains, take "place primarily in a classroom in the form of conversation buttressed by mini lectures" (p.342). It occasionally shifts to her imageless office and stilted conversations with students, to her car on the way home as she attempts to engage in introspection "about her own life and display interior dialogue," to a community organization's domestic abuse shelter as one of her students negotiates her presentation of her workshop on abuse. She includes a restaurant scene as she engages in conversations with the guest lecturer from the fictional seminar, Laurel RICHARDSON, and episodic interludes at her home as she self reports fictive conversations with her partner and mentor Art as they sip *Veuve Clicquot* champagne or eat pasta or take out Thai food. Despite making use of a repertory of embodied actions such as crying, laughing and even trivial details about sitting in her ergonomic chair in her home office, the dialogue in many of these locations, ultimately self refer back to ELLIS' either performing or contesting self that tend to dominate the "novel." The result is that

the social relational quality of narrating and collective value of reading/writing narratives as conversations is, at times, compromised if not, sometimes, lost. From an ethnographic perspective, she does not evoke for this reader a strong cultural sense of place, scene, setting or community—some of the defining characteristics of ethnographic writing. [14]

### **5. The Role of the "I" in Ethnography: A Necessary Double-Voicing in Re-authoring the Self and the Social**

Autoethnography encourages multiple layers of consciousness in different places, times and ideological spaces. Human consciousness comes into existence through the medium of the surrounding ideological world and finds itself "inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.295). For BAKHTIN, language is inherently dialogical: language for the individual consciousness lies on the borderline between oneself and another. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention (BAKHTIN, 1981, pp.293-294). A dialogic view of authoring entails being responsive to the voices of others and a necessary double-voicing in re-authoring the self and others. Double-voicing refers to utterances that may be attributable to two speakers at once. The *Ethnographic I* raises important issues about the "speaking subject" or "subjects" in writing ethnography and autoethnography. [15]

ELLIS provokes interesting questions for researchers who use the first person and want to genuinely engage in self-reflexivity:

"What is the role of the 'I' in ethnography, you might ask?

Is the 'I' only about the eye of the researcher standing apart and looking? What about the 'I' of the researcher, the part that not only looks but is looked at, that only acts but is acted back upon by those in her focus. Is ethnography only about the other? Isn't ethnography also relational, about the other and the 'I' of the interaction? Might the researcher also be a subject?" (p.xix) [16]

This last question signals her intentions as an author. ELLIS is indeed the inscribed subject of this novel. Parsing the title, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* the "novel" is more about ELLIS' self storytelling about "living the autoethnographic life" or what she thinks it to be or might be and less about ethnographic cultural descriptions that highlight the individual and collective worlds studied and her relationships to them. This seems ironic for a researcher like ELLIS with a background as a sociologist! If autoethnography has the potential for socio-cultural criticism, it is surprising that ELLIS does not locate her narratives of individual experiences within larger more macro level socio-cultural political spaces, especially in contexts of asymmetrical power relationships. [17]



That this book both evokes and provokes may have either positive or negative emotional valence for readers. In many ways, the book falls short of the expectations Ellis sets out to achieve which she clearly explains in her Preface: "I showcase the process of doing and writing autoethnography as I teach students about it, thus making pedagogy a part of this book" (p.xix) and re-explains in concluding chapters:

"I think and gather information like an ethnographer, but I try to write like a novelist or storyteller. Autoethnographic writing goes hand in hand with fictional techniques such as dialogue, scene setting, and plot development. These strategies allow me to show rather than tell, present a feeling for how life flows, and display the autoethnographic process as I teach it" (p.335). [18]

I agree that, in the blurring of fact and fiction, autoethnography can liberate researchers as ethnographers and writers to tell their personal stories and "present a feeling for how life flows" (ELLIS, p.335). However, when all is said, expressed, voiced and written, ELLIS' writing skills as a fiction writer are clearly not as strong as her abilities as an ethnographer and begs the question: What kind of text is this blurred genre? [19]

The *Ethnographic I* is a pastiche of complex embedded narrative turns, twists and timelines that intersect with ELLIS' "living in the moment" as she interacts with a fictional group of students' lived experiences and struggles. Noteworthy, given her pedagogical intent, is that ELLIS sets her "methodological novel" about autoethnography and doing autoethnography in a fictional graduate classroom with a deliberately created group of fictional and composite students to showcase different aspects and issues in engaging in autoethnography that she wants to highlight. Ultimately, it is ELLIS' voice and consciousness that dominates the discursive activity and existence of her fictional class and construction of her fictional students' stories. She confesses that she set out "to create what I needed to make the plot work" (p.335). This begs the question as to whose authorial intentions are being served here. [20]

If this methodological novel were made into a movie what might readers/viewers envision? A movie trailer might well convey a portrait of this empathetic teacher as a superwoman who lives a chaotic life until she meets Art, the love of her life, conversational partner, editor, mentor and calming influence. As omniscient narrator, ELLIS assumes the persona of "heroine," a caring nurturing professor engaging students in the "process of doing and writing autoethnography," teaching them about it and empathizing with their struggles as she helps them locate their own ethnographic projects within her own narrative. These final projects presented in chapter nine range from psychodrama about abuse and cross racial relationships to cancer experiences and crises of self representation that all aim to display multiple layers of consciousness. While not the only social, cultural and interpretive turn in social science/humanities research, feminism has played a role in the narrative autoethnographic movement and push for alternative forms of writing and representing and it does so in this methodological

novel. For example, it is interesting to note that it is the women in the novel who embrace and find it easier to take on autoethnography, its issues/their issues. [21]

I applaud ELLIS for trying "something" outside the accepted orthodoxies and forms of "academe" and authoritative canonical, mainstream research and powerful political discourses. However, the end result is a "something"—a blurred genre text that blends fact and fiction, but at times distracts readers in its minutia of detail, excessive self-referencing and disruptive interludes. So what is ELLIS really doing in this act of authoring self and others? In "her" methodological novel, she really offers three interwoven narratives: her own narrative exercise in "selfing" controls and dominates the text; another sub narrative of her relationship with her mentor and partner Art, their lived experiences including their dog children that are presented in interludes after each seminar; lastly, narratives of her interactions with her students and their narratives of their struggles, which, ironically, like the author's self story, take over the plot. This may explain why, as a novel, the plot and subplots seem too contrived and calculated, the character composites flat and stereotypic, and the setting mundane in its minutia of local details that do not enrich a cultural sense of place, setting, context or community. Readers might ask the following questions when reading this book. Is it really a novel? Or is it a therapeutic solipsistic, self-indulgent journey for the author herself? Is it useful? Or is it an exercise of selfing by a class of "white women who want to write victim narratives" (p.121)? I wrestled with these questions as I read this book during the fall semester when I was teaching a course in Qualitative and Ethnographic research methods in a multilingual urban city within a unilingual French province. I was constantly aware of the author's privileged location as a white woman in a North American, English pristine academic locale. [22]

## 6. Opening Spaces and Possibilities

In writing this review, I am convinced that autoethnography as a "blurred genre" has much to offer researchers and graduate students who are also researchers being socialized into different communities of practice. It offers much potential for opening real or imagined spaces and textual possibilities for ethnographers and writers to tell their stories. Yes, the *Ethnographic I* evokes and provokes discussion about BAKHTIN'S concept of authorship as it simultaneously disturbs, disrupts and distracts readers. This is both a positive and negative feature of the text. As an ethnographer working on identity and agency in multilingual contexts, I must admit that I was looking for a rich setting for ELLIS' reflexive project/s of selfhood and the location of selves in social-cultural contexts that link to the larger domains of social activity and historical, political forces. [23]

In the Province of Quebec, the French reflexive verb appears on the license plates of motor vehicles: *je me souviens* which loosely translates to "I remember myself," or poetically/politically, "I remember who I am." We define ourselves by what we remember of our "selves." Subject and object are the same! REED-DANAHAY (1997, p.9) defines autoethnography as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text. RUSSELL (2001, p.1) sees autoethnography in cinema "as a form of space where auto-

biography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film or video makes the viewer understand his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes." It is these larger social formations and historical processes that are blatantly absent from ELLIS' methodological novel as she becomes the dominant inscribed figure in the book. That being said, ELLIS' work invites readers to reflect on the place of narrative in ethnography and the continued pressures from accepted orthodoxies in mainstream social science research to conduct more than mere anecdotal inquiries to scientifically rigorous, generalizable studies. The debate is obviously personified in some of her fictional characters like Jack who resists the kind of narrative writing she is advocating and Ken who ultimately drops the fictional seminar. As Ethnography enters the spaces of literature and cultural studies and becomes more intimate and self-reflexive, the political and ethical challenges abound about who has the authority to write about others and represent complicated issues of emotionality, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and with what kind of emotional-volitional tones and valence. While she draws on RICHARDSON's work on writing as inquiry—a method of knowing—scholars in writing, composition and contrastive rhetoric have been writing for decades about the responsibilities of writers have to those whom they write about and whose interests are really being served in the authorial act of writing (PHELPS, 1990). [24]

I return to BAKHTIN's concept of the act of authoring as a creative answerability/responsibility that views a self as answerable not only to the social environment but also for the authoring of its responses. This dialogic view of authoring points to the need for researchers to confront issues of voice, consciousness, emotionality and answerability/responsibility in authoring self and others. Engaging these issues may prevent autoethnography from becoming sociology's narcissistic or solipsistic turn or anthropology's egocentric predicament. Indeed *The Ethnographic I* is an evocative book that signals the need for more inspirational and alternative genres for writing and representing and ways of knowing about self and others and, as such, serves as a useful text to engage the issues that autoethnography raises—as both a genre and discourse for authoring self and others. [25]

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