

Disabled Self/Other Performativity in Autoethnographic Film Praxis



A Case Study of Two Films Made During a SAR Research Fellowship at Australia's National Film & Sound Archive [NFSA]

Robert Cettl



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ISBN# N/A

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Disabled Self/Other Performativity in Autoethnographic Film Praxis: an Analytic Reflection and Case Study

ABSTRACT

This paper contextualizes the performativity of self/Other dialectics in autoethnographic film-making praxis by examining two films post-produced on disability and LGBT performance art while the author was in award of a SAR Research Fellowship at Australia's National Film & Sound Archive [NFSA]. Autoethnographic film's self/Other performativity is contextualized with reference to Disability Studies identity theory such as it affects the two films under discussion, specifically to the fusion of autoethnography and Disability Studies in the last decade. Thus framing the Other with reference to Disability Studies considerations of mental health (esp. schizophrenia), the paper examines the effect of auto-ethnographic film praxis on the construction of an autoethnographer-as-filmmaker self-as-Other persona through which to interrogate the social

reality delimiters affecting the construction of a human research subject sexual, LGBT-referential self-identity upon which have been superimposed the constraints of Otherness. It examines specifically the use of autobiographical, biographical and both montagist and dialogic techniques in the representation of the interpretivist phenomenology of self-as-Other identity construction as inherent in autoethnographic film-making praxis. Examples are given from the films under discussion and related to the existing body of work on autoethnography and disability.

KEYWORDS: autoethnographic film, disability, "self-as-Other", interpretivist phenomenology, LGBT, schizophrenia

INTRODUCTION

Spry (2006) noted that the "crisis of representation" which had gripped ethnography - and ethnographic film - for the preceding three decades was rooted in issues of performativity (p. 339). Specifically, that inter-disciplinary feedback had led to an effective paradigm shift "from performance as a distinctive act of culture to performance as an integrated agency of culture" (Strine & Conquergood, as cited by Spry, 2006, p. 339). Agency was performed through the assertion of a "narrative turn", an inclusion of personal narrative which focused on:

the functions of stories and storytelling in creating and managing identity; the expressive forms for making sense of lived experience and communicating it to others; the entanglements that permeate how interpersonal life is lived and how it is told to others; the reflexive dimensions of the re-

lationship between storytellers and story listeners; and the canonical narratives that circulate through society, offering scripted ways of acting. (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 210).

With agency inherently politicizing self-participation, correspondingly, "performance and ethnography continually turn back upon themselves emerging as praxes of participatory civic social action" (Spry, 2006, pp. 339-340). Spry (2006) hence delineated the term *performative-I* as "a researcher positionality that seeks to embody the copresence of performance and ethnography as these practices have informed, reformed, and coperformed one another in the historicity of their disciplinary dialogue" (p.340). In that, this is situated within a methodological emphasis on participant-observation praxis in which the researcher's *performative-I* is meta-textually self-inscribed in relational positionality to human research subjects "psychologically and sociologically... found to be different and excluded from

(the researcher's dominant) hegemony and experience" as a designated Other (Kedar, 2013, p. 1). While for Spry (2006), the *performative-I* was inscribed in relation to non-Western cultures, the consequent interplay of Self/Other dialectics extended from the ethnographic into the autoethnographic wherein this *performative-I* is also a member of the cultural Other being researched (Russell, 1999; Anderson, 2006).

So too, with the recent publication of Hernandez-Saca & Cannon (2019), autoethnography is increasingly prioritized as a means of transcending the self/Other dualism within which personal narratives of people with disabilities have traditionally been situated in Academia. Such positionality of the specifically disabled Other arguably imbues upon the personal narrative a conditionally simultaneous self-inscriptive representation and performativity of a self-as-Other identity construct as an important epistemological issue (Anderson, 2006; Richards, 2008; DeRosa, 2012). While subjectivity epistemics thus dominated subsequent autoethnographic written text-based research into disability and Otherness (Richards, 2008; Schneider, 2010; Krasowska, 2016; Martinez, 2018), in two autoethnographic films on disability self-as-Other identity dialectics - *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010) and *TLK Punk* (2012) - autoethnographer-as-filmmaker self-inscription of this *performative-I* is rendered as the interpretivist phenomenology of a distinctively meta-textual self-as-Other identity construct, the positionality of which vis-a-vis the viewer facilitates an aestheticized discourse through 1) montagist technique variations from traditional mimesis (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012); 2) dialogic interactivity between the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker and the filmed human research subjects (Asche & Connor, 1994).

This paper engages with the place of autoethnographic film in reflective analysis of the afore-mentioned two films specifically within Western disability culture and autoethnographic film-making methodology, informed by a Disability Studies inter-disciplinary model in extrapolation of what is called for by Hernandez-Saca & Cannon (2019): "We call for collective emotional, affective and spiritual autoethnographies for change at the nexus of (disability) labeling and intersectionalities." Specifically, I aim to outline, with case study referentiality, the identity-construct formation and positionality / performativity of the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker in terms of its delineation of a self-as-Other *performative-I* inherent in, and unique to, autoethnographic film praxis. I situate this in relation to disability culture and my positioning within it as the maker of the two aforementioned autoethnographic films (on disabled performance artists) while

myself being "disabled" (as a result of chronic illness). Though this by necessity involves meta-textual self-disclosure (Adams, 2012, p. 182) both in and about the films, to properly contextualize this analytical-reflective study thus, it is necessary to explore the intersection of autoethnography and Disability Studies as it has emerged to increasing prominence with Richards (2008), Schneider (2010), Krasowska (2016) and Martinez (2018).

INTERDISCIPLINARY FUSIONS IN DISABILITY STUDY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Specifically, Richards (2008) highlighted the importance of such qualitative methodology as offered by autoethnography in interrogating self and Otherness, the latter denoting the social status of disabled people. Schneider (2010) correspondingly stressed the importance of identity theory in relation to social normalization and while Martinez (2018) - following Richards (2008) - made herself the subject of inquiry into identity theory in relation to chronic illness, Krasowska (2016) adopted the method in her interrogation with the diaries of a patient with a psychiatric disability (depression); however, in doing so knowingly positioned the personal narrative under inquiry in relation to Academic considerations of a "disabled identity" within a surrounding medical and legal framework: for Krasowska (2016, p. 24) this was an absolute imperative to facilitate best practice physiotherapy. Martinez (2018), by contrast, was avowedly altruistic in framing of her own rationale for autoethnographic inquiry:

Studying a disability can change society's perspective on how invisible disabilities are viewed... Trauma impacts the way one perceives themselves. Chronic illnesses are just the type of trauma that can be a dream assassin or a dream deliver. Writing uncovered a multidimensional intersecting identity. It was not just about the lost identity, it is about changing my fixed mindset and revealing the identity that was thought to be lost. Hopefully someone will find solace in finding their passage to reconstructing their identity. (p.6)

Krasowska (2016) in its intra-institutional aims is problematic when interpreted from a Disability Studies perspective as such positioning of the personal narrative in relation to care and treatment of the disabled person arguably risks deference to the same medical model of disability that Krasowska (2016) interrogates (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 1996; Reeve, 2002). As such, Krasowska (2016, p. 22),

while a participant-observer in rehabilitation and treatment, asserts her reliability as autoethnographer through her own inclusion in the disability collective. Martinez (2018) also lays claim to such identification, but extends this into a struggle for personal and collective empowerment through continuing autoethnographic inquiry: a call which this paper also heeds.

In this, Krasowska (2016) and Martinez (2018) seek to use autoethnography to transcend traditional Academic inquiry into disabled identity construction through personal narrative analysis wherein the disabled person whose identity (as expressed in the writing of a personal narrative) is the object of inquiry and thus not subjectivized (as was the outward intention) but desubjectified and consequently objectified as Other in deference to the third party medical authority of the researcher. Such deference, in traditionally labeling the patient with a medical diagnosis (depression, for instance), delineates the parameters within which the disabled person is allowed to construct an identity in terms of a medicalized taxonomy and related symptomatology (Oliver, 1990: Shakespeare, 1996: Reeve, 2002). Krasowska (2016) self-reflexively thus acknowledges this socially constructed reality informing disabled people's identity construction as what she terms "biopower" (or "biopolitics"):

Biopower (or biopolitics) uses expert specialized language to describe the case. The case of a human being. Arising from state mechanisms, biopower reaches very deeply into our alcove. The objective is that as little as possible escapes its control... The biopolitical approach makes people a mass, a statistic group and simultaneously it desubjectifies them as a human being becomes a disabled individual, a cripple which needs to be treated consequently. And here a normalization discourse appears concerning knowledge (Krasowska, 2016, p. 25)

This paper is also an autoethnographic inquiry into identity construction as "disabled" by a former patient with a psychiatric disability (schizophrenia) and the deferential normalization of self-knowledge / self-identity to medicalized social policy such a diagnostic designation facilitates. Unlike Krasowska (2016), however, it is not an external examination of a research subject's personal narrative by a third party within Academia (or the medical / legal domains), for such makes the autoethnographic component not about the disabled individual but about the third party's relational positioning to a personal narrative as research data (in the form of a primary document). Such a perspective, in elevating the researcher's response, thus risks situating the research subject's identity as inherently

Other (Shakespeare, 1996: Gill, 1997: Reeve 2002). So too, just as Schnieder (2010) first posited that, for "disabled" people, "the process of identity development cannot be adequately encapsulated in a theoretical model" (p.3), I use personal narrative and subjective personal introspection [SPI] to reflexively model the subjectivity of formative identity construction during the making, and reclamation, of personal narrative through critical reflection on two autoethnographic films exploring "disabled" self-identity. In so doing, I problematize my own position as "disabled" autoethnographer chronicling the representation of disabled "Others" (Sheldon, 2017).

Like Schneider (2010) and Martinez (2018), I am a teacher and position this autoethnographic research paper into identity theory / subjectivity dialectics in order to extend Krasowska (2016) and other inquiries into the personal narratives of disabled individuals, with specific context-basis in the psychological disability / mental health arena (Hugo, 2017). So too, there emerges a research question: how is a self-as-Other identity constructed in autoethnographic film in general and can this be delineated through reflective analytical-evocative personal narrative informed by Subjective Personal Introspection [SPI] relationally positioning autoethnographic film-making praxis in context-specificity to disability studies identity theory? This context-specificity is taken as a necessary delineation of existing social reality constructions of Otherness pre-determining the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker's participant-observer status, as Martinez (2018) identified identity theory as the core concept in disability themed autoethnographic inquiry:

Within identity theory, there are four perspectives to view identity. The four perspectives are Nature, Institution, Discourse, and Affinity identities. In order to understand identity, one must understand how identity is formed. Chronic illness identity is a change from all other identities that have been constructed. (Martinez, 2018)

This paper thus seeks to position the chronic illness identity theory perspective underlying the foundation of disability themed autoethnographic inquiry as cemented by Krasowska (2018) and Martinez (2018), with reference to Schneider's (2010) study of social identity construction by diagnosed "schizophrenics" and Erfat's (2003) analysis of performative identity within physical disability, within the greater field of autoethnographic research, specifically the utilization of "creative processes in order to connect personal experiences with those of a larger culture (by) reflect(ing) upon specific personal moments and represent(ing) them using creative tech-

niques... to essentially communicate expressions of self and cultural phenomenon” (Kelly, 2016). That is: to use lived experience of autoethnographic film-making praxis, recounted in the form of a personal narrative, as the basis for autoethnographic inquiry into the identity construction of a ‘self’ onto which have been imposed the parameters of deference to medical taxonomic criteria constituting disability as difference and thus as Otherness - to investigate the meta-cognitive processing of self-as-Other identity construction as rendered in autoethnographic film-making praxis and final film product as self-inscribed representational interpretivist phenomenology.

This paper is also, thus, one part of a two part transmedia autoethnography: the written textual component. The second part consists of the aforementioned two autoethnographic films I made a decade earlier and self-reflexively analyze in this paper using Subjective Personal Introspection [SPI]. The two films in question - *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010) and *TLK Punk* (2012) - are in the digital collection of Australia’s National Film & Sound Archive where they have remained, to date, unseen and undistributed, never having been classified for screening (a prerequisite for public dissemination in Australia) for financial and censorial reasons. Indeed, the content of one film (the former) is in arguable violation of then-existing Australian government federal classification laws and thus unreleasable, subject to potential legally mandated prohibition from exhibition, release or private screening. Both films concern disabled LGBT identifying performance artists (one of whom was a disabled prostitute and the other a male-to-female transsexual) awarded South Australian government disability arts grants, and were made by a likewise disabled peer - a heterosexual male autoethnographic filmmaker in simultaneous award of a South Australian government disability arts grant.

This paper situates my simultaneous identity construction as both “disabled” and autoethnographer-as-filmmaker self-as-Other relationally to the human research subjects to effectively destabilize a conventional outsider / objective ethnographic consideration of their Otherness, for I too am subject to the social reality informing that designation (Ellis & Bchner, 2011: Allen-Collinson, 2013). The two films in which this performative self-inscription occurs are procedurally recounted within personal narrative, specific to their finalization during award of an NFSA SAR Research Fellowship for archival research into representations of disability in film. Just as Schneider (2010) asserted the lack of a specific theoretical framework for disabled identity development, I analyze mine specifically in relation to the transformative nature of autoethnographic film’s participant-observation praxis in self-as-

Other positionality and performativity (Russell, 1992: Spry, 2000: Martinez, 2018) wherein “researchers analyze their own subjectivity and life experiences, and treat the self as ‘other’ while calling attention to issues of power, (in the aestheticized (textual) juncture of which) the researcher and the researched, the dominant and the subordinate, individual experience and socio-cultural structures can be (meta-textually) examined” (Cayir, 2017). This autoethnographic film praxis is allied to the methodology argued for by Shakespeare (1996) and Oliver (2002) as an agency for collectivization in the emancipatory research paradigm of Disability Study as a discipline, albeit context-specific in case study to psychological disability / mental health service recipients (Gibbons, 2010: Hugo, 2017).

SELF/OTHER IDENTITY THEORY IN THE EMERGENCE OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC DISABILITY STUDIES

Contemporary Disability Studies began the process of identity theory investigation by prioritizing a form of informed agency as applied theory based on lived experience: “Disability Studies prioritizes faithfulness to lived experience, certainly, but also internal coherence and theoretical adequacy” (Shakespeare, 1996). Disability Studies, in this way, is inseparably intertwined with identity politics (Putnam, 2005), which were ascertained primarily through qualitative sources - the personal narratives of people who identified as disabled and introspectively engaged with in reference to what such entailed in disabled persons’ self-definition and subsequent identity construction (Shakespeare, 1996: Reeve, 2002: Forber-Pratt et al, 2017). The personal narrative intersected ethnography in Gilson, Tussler & Gill’s (1997) study of individual self-identification as “disabled” as signifying collective inclusion in a minority subculture as a means of strengthening subjectivity dialectics surrounding identity construct formation. In this, “identity” is dually constructed in reference to 1) firstly, applying “identifying as an active verb, as much as to say uncovering disabled people or discovering disabled people” and, secondly, using “identity in a reflexive sense, in terms of identifying oneself, which is (sociologically in consequence) about staking a claim to membership of a collective or a wider group” (Shakespeare, 1996).

Mitchell (2007) cites Ristock and Pennell in asserting identity as “the social self that is named and experienced [through which] identity is socially constructed and includes social positions such as gender, race, and sexuality” (p. 115). In contrast to the social construction of identity, Mitchell (2007) proposes reference to Weigert and Gecas’ (2005) indication of the self as “a substantive

social referent for the reflexive process of being self-aware and self-acting” (p. 163): i.e. of the metacognitive processing of, and reflexive interrogation of, the social construction of identity. The metacognitive processing of self is in deference to the socially constructed identity as the praxis of identity construct formation, its epistemic core being self-knowledge as an essential validation of experiential and perceptual criterion-based interpretivist phenomenology informed by the constraining facets of the socially constructed identity. These facets include not just circumstantial, generalizable factors of race, gender and sexuality but the context-specific variables of a complex socialization process rooted in intra-familial experience (MacDonald, 2013; Smith, 2013). The subjective influence of the socialization process on identity construction and resultant self-identity formation (and self-expression thereof) problematizes theoretical modeling of identity development in relation to disability for its additional circumstantial, fixed factors of the biological/physical (the corporeal body) and/or psychological symptomatology, and consequent context-specific biopolitical delimiting constraints on the socially constructed identity (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 1996; Schneider, 2010; Valeras, 2010).

Foundational disability identity theorists Oliver (1990) and Shakespeare (1996) consequently first drew on Foucauldian socio-political theory to contextualize the disabled identity construct as specific to biological/medical and biopolitical delimiters as an imposition of, and by, the political State. Seeking parallel in social activism to expand on the communicative, shared interrogation of true self-knowledge in relation to socially constructed biopolitical identity (inherently delimited), Disability Studies identity theorists beginning with Oliver (1990) and Shakespeare (1996), seeking modeling, turned to the collective empowerment of the LGBT movement, subsequently attesting to “disability” as a collective identity beginning with the qualitative analysis of personal narratives and storytelling as an exploration of the lived experience of, specifically, a marginalized “self”, the delimiting biopolitical constraints upon the socially constructed identity of which predetermine a condition of Otherness:

I suggest that similar processes in self-understanding are going on in the field of disability identity. Previously there was a limited range of narrative devices and themes available to people with impairment: now, new stories are being told, and we are creating ourselves for ourselves, rather than relying on the traditional narratives of biomedical intervention or rehabilitation, of misery, decline and death. Doing it for ourselves, perhaps we can reconcile tensions and produce alternative, happier endings. (Shakespeare, 1996)

Disability activism sought collective identification and the impetus of a movement to parallel and extend the LGBT momentum in communal self-assertion in defiance of mainstream social stigmatization, relegation to minority Otherness and delegation to the medical model of disability rather than a social model, as first delineated by Oliver (1990). Oliver (1995) thus proposed research into disability identity theory be within “an emancipatory research paradigm” wherein:

“The emancipatory research paradigm is about the facilitating of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs. Central to the project is a recognition of and confrontation with power which structures the social relations of research production. The importance of the emancipatory paradigm is not attempts it might make to study the other end of existing power relations but attempts it might make to challenge them. However, the development of an emancipatory paradigm is not simply about confrontation with or accommodation to power structures; it is also about the demystification of the ideological structures within which these power relations are located”. (as cited in Oliver, 1995)

With emancipation borne of collective empowerment the end goal strategy, disability identity politics adopted a liberationist stance (Oliver, 1995). This was progressive, beginning with the institutional delineation and peer-reviewed validation of Disability Studies as a Discipline. Consequent methodological elaboration of the emancipatory research paradigm by Shakespeare (1996) delineated the aforementioned personal narrative investigation strategy, especially the confessional mode as a symbolic “coming out” and both disciplinary and social inclusion signifying rite of passage into the empowerment offered by collective identification - the politicization of the personal experience of “disablement” as consequent to medicalized “impairment” designated social constraints on identity construct formation praxis. In this praxis, the traditional medical model pre-defines this subjective identification as disabled and consequently Other, based on “(disability as) a form of biological determinism, because it focuses on physical difference” wherein the collectivized Other - ‘the disabled’ - are further medically taxonomized by diagnosis but remain a broader “group of people whose bodies do not work; or look different or act differently; or who cannot do productive work” (Shakespeare, 1996). So too for Shakespeare, the “key elements of this analysis are performing and conforming: both raise the question of normality, because this approach assumes a certain standard

from which disabled people deviate” (Shakespeare, 1996). The disabled person’s identity construct thus emerges within an externally imposed centextual set of delimiters which normalize identity construct formation to that of a self-as-Other.

Inspired by Marxism (Reeve, 2002), the social model emerged as a counter to this medical taxonomizing of human beings:

The social model, which focuses on the disability as a relationship between people with impairment and a discriminatory society: disability is defined as the outcome of disabling barriers imposed by environmental or policy interventions. It suggests a strategy of barrier removal, or education to remove prejudice, with the goal of inclusion. Disabled people, in this approach, do not want anything extra, but wish to be treated the same as non-disabled people. In the social model, there is nothing to distinguish people with impairment who are socially disabled, from people with dependent children who are socially disabled. A whole range of people may in fact be disabled by barriers or prejudices. (Shakespeare, 1996)

This view relates directly to a Foucauldian consideration of disability in social policy, which “set up a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor which has influenced social policy up to the present day and led to the identification of the disability category (which) shifts the attention from the person with impairment to the statutory or policy processes which construct him/ her as officially disabled” (Shakespeare, 1996). Shakespeare (1996) corresponding asserts a cultural construction of disability informed by the consequent “processes of denial and projection” (p.2). In summary:

Medical approaches consider negative self identity to be an outcome of physical impairment, and focus on the need for adjustment, mourning, and coming to terms with loss. Social approaches view negative self-identity as a result of the experience of oppressive social relations, and focus attention on the possibilities for changing society, empowering disabled people, and promoting a different self-understanding. (Shakespeare, 1996)

The identity construction of a self-as-Other thus, while consequent to normalizing affects of the medical model of disability, is transformed into an emancipatory action when re-constructed in relation to the social model in autoethnography, for in so doing the self-inscribed personal narrative collectively humanizes the often long-suffering experiential and perceptual reality of the individual self-

as-Other and thus inherently politicizes the personal narrative mode (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 211).

Disability identity politics thus extended into autoethnographic inquiry and the psychological praxis of identity construct formation of the self-as-Other as a criterion qualifiable interpretivist phenomenology of “being” in terms of the self/Other dialectics inherent in autoethnography as qualitative research (Russell 1999: Anderson 2006: Allen-Collinson, 2013: Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Such methodologically entailed engagement with the process of socialization as an Other in relational positioning of the corporeal body as site of a collective identity construct (Spry, 2009). This positioning, in cited reference to the body of work in identity theory behind Disability Studies as a discipline, distinguished a new spate of disability autoethnographic studies (Richards, 2008: Schneider, 2010: Krasowska, 2016: Martinez, 2018: Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2019). These autoethnographic research papers inherently reconfigured the concept of normalization: the disabled identity is normalized into Otherness yet, relational to their subjectivity, their self - as such that those who so designate them as Other effectively impose that condition upon them as a self-identity normalization strictly in relation to the concept of bodily difference - both problematizing and foregrounding Spry’s (2009) locating of the body as site of self-knowledge in ethnographic inquiry. In effect denied “normal” socialization, the self-as-Other identity construct normalized to difference is inherently unstable and subject to trauma and repeat introspective metacognitive interrogation of biopower determiners to maintain a psychological stable identity construct by definition perpetually relational to Self/Other dialectics (Onken & Slaten, 2000: Reeve, 2002).

The remainder of this paper is an analytic-evocative autoethnographic personal narrative interrogation of the psycho-social and psycho-sexual interpretivist phenomenology of self-identity construction as “disabled” self-as-Other pursuant to participant-observer praxis of meta-cognitive internalization of medical and social model dualism as personally experienced surrounding award of a SAR Research Fellowship at Australia’s National Film & Sound Archive [NFSA]. Methodologically, this paper henceforth adapts Subjective Personal Introspection [SPI] to a critical reflection on the psycho-social and psycho-sexual interpretivist phenomenology of identity construction as “disabled” occasioned during this period in 2009-2010, founded on Giddens (1991) assertion that “(s)elf-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual (and thus) is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his (auto)biography’ (as cited by Shakespeare, 1996). In this autoethno-



ABOVE: IMAGE 2.1 Observational rendering of the disabled “Other” - fetish escort as performance artist - Mel Kelly in self-expression following government arts grant in *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010: d. Robert Cettl). LEFT: IMAGE 2.2 Observational rendering of the disabled “Other” - transgender punk performance artist - Teri Louise Kelly in self-expression following government arts grant in *TLK Punk* (2012: d. Robert Cettl).

graphic research design thus, “(a) person’s identity is not to be found in behavior nor - important though this is - in the reaction of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (Giddens as cited by Shakespeare, 1996): i.e. through self-inscription anchored in authentic autobiographical personal narrative.

In revisiting - and reflexively reconstructing - events from a decade ago, I relocate my past personal narrative in reference to my current situation in an effort to identify subsequent direction (Martinez, 2018). It is in keeping a personal narrative “going” that I aspire for higher-level psychological fulfillment of what Maslow (1954)

identified as a “hierarchy of needs”: i.e. for self-actualization in higher conscious awareness of one’s being in the human condition. My dilemma is that of potentially defining my self as being in the human condition as “disabled” and therefore, by existing social definition, of being impaired and therefore lesser than pinnacle state of the human condition in relation to biopower delimiters, of essentially being Other and by definition unable to achieve holistic integrity (Mellucci, 1989; Weeks, 1990; Shakespeare, 1996). Is therefore the only self-identity construct offered me as disabled that of a deferential self-as-Other? Or is my assignation of such indicative of a personal “weakness” inherent in my disability and consequent to the social reality delimiters informing my Australian social services designation as practically and literally worthless based on my limited working-hour utility? The interplay of personal-psychological factors and socially imposed conditionals I adopt for the remainder of this paper in reflexive metatextual self-inscription as a transformative autoeth-

nographic methodological tenet to extend sociological understanding (Wall, 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Custer, 2014).

In this consideration, the personalized narrative in this paper draws upon Reeve's (2002) conception of the psycho-emotional dimensions of "disabled" identity-construction: "Foucauldian themes of power, knowledge and subjectivity to explore the ways in which the psycho-emotional dimensions of disability are created and maintained within society and how in turn these are challenged by disabled people" (p. 494). So too on Polkinghorne (1991) who asserts "narrative is appropriate for understanding identity, since the very act of creating, telling, revising, and retelling our story enables us to discover, know and reveal ourselves..(o)ur narratives are our identities" (as cited by Valeras, 2010). Such psycho-emotionality involves in participant-observation praxis. meta-cognition of psycho-social and psycho-sexual social conditioning "which affect what disabled people can (construct as a self-identity), rather than what they can do, include being hurt by the reactions of other people, being made to feel worthless and unattractive and have their roots in the negative attitudes and prejudices about disabled people within society" (Reeve, 2002, p. 495). As a tool of self-inscription, "I" am framed by external social reality pre-determination of the conditions in which my personal narrative must be framed for any sense of self-identity and related personal and professional integrity to be formulated, if not wholly thus validated / invalidated. This *performative-I* I experientially internalize reflexively in media res as incipient Existential Crisis (Martz, 2004), anchoring the personal narrative in the autobiographical for situational authenticity in the positioning of same *performative-I* and meta-textually psycho-dramatic performativity wherein "the combination of the existence of a physical or mental disability with an implied moral causation of the disability... contribute(s) to a devaluating, stigmatizing perspective on disability and a decreased adaptation to disability" (p. 139). This incipient Existential crisis arises when confronting both remembered and current lived experience of stigmatization, criticism and judgment by parental, pedagogic and governmental authorities, with resulting attribution of characterological flaws as causal factors in deference to religious and socio-political-medical authorities (Shakespeare 1996; Martz, 2004, pp. 139-140).

THE OPERATIONAL FRAMING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

In the remainder of this paper I self-conscious-

ly acknowledge my experience of disability, specifically schizophrenia, as defined for initiating purposes in referential terms of an "I am" illness in its component personal identification, "a fusion of self with sickness, of diagnosis with identity" and resultant chronicity (Estrof, 1993). Taking note of identity politics and subsequent theories of psycho-social development, I do so in methodological engagement with the subjectivity dialectics of analytic autoethnographic inquiry as praxis-based and transformative (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2009; Custer, 2014), specifically through the mode of Subjective Personal Introspection [SPI], commencing with autobiography. Such autobiography is context specific to a nine month period spanning 2009-2010, approximately a decade ago, shortly after being released from a six week-long period of hospitalization for acute schizophrenic symptomatology. During this time, through to the present day, I thought of myself purely through "a spread of evaluation from characteristics actually affected by the (symptomatology) to other characteristics not necessarily so affected" (Martz, 2004, p. 141) which resulted in self-demeaning tendencies to the point of self-disgust and near complete social withdrawal under the belief that I was of deserved lower social status and indeed unworthy of acceptance by a wider body politic (Ladieu-Leviton et al., 1977 as cited in Martz, 2004, p. 141). Also not working, I had no self-worth and was engulfed by "an awareness of isolation, groundlessness, meaninglessness, and the inevitability of death" (Yalom, 1980 as cited by Martz, 2004, p. 142).

Following my hospital discharge, and feeling an increasing cognitive dissonance about my ongoing deference in self-identification to stigmatized "disability" (Martz, 2004, p. 142), in 2009-2010 I received a South Australian Arts Grant through the Richard Llewellyn Arts & Disability Trust to write a monograph on representations of disability in Australian film - the first book on the subject - to culminate in a Scholars and Artists in Residence [SAR] Research Fellowship at Australia's National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra, ACT - the nation's capital. During the research process I post-produced two autoethnographic films concerning the underground disability / LGBT spoken word performance art subculture in Adelaide, South Australia, the two primary artists within which - then separated LGBT couple Mel Kelly (aka Recyclopath) and her transsexual partner Teri-Louise Kelly - had also received Richard Llewellyn Arts & Disability Trust grants. The two autoethnographic films in question - *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010) and *TLK Punk* (2012) - each profiled one of these artists, Mel Kelly in the former and Teri-Louise Kelly in the latter. Both films were screened for the artists and their immediate peer group but, for budgetary limitations and

legal restrictions, never publicly exhibited or distributed in Australia though there is no relational ethics issue in referencing them of their participants. During my in-residence time at the NFSA as a Research Fellow, however, the first film was added to the NFSA collection - on restricted access - while the second was added sometime later, following a protracted post-production montaging of footage shot concurrent to the first film.

The two films embodied my own struggles with identity construct formation in relation to disability labeling and my own meta-cognitive existential introspections (Martz, 2004) wherein a “core issue was naming phenomena and experiences and giving meanings to them (wherein) diagnoses and naming things in a professional way meant inclusion to services but at the same time they could mean exclusion from former roles and participation in one’s community” (Romakkaniemi & Kilpeläinen, 2015, p. 446). I had no such community and was left seeking inclusion anew in deference to medicalized social reality delimiters offered me by “disability” diagnostic labeling and yet concurrently expanded greatly by my status as SAR Research Fellow and thus within institutional Academia. It was in the attempt to reconcile this that my SAR research focused on representations of disability within Australian film: for such is what I was doing in autoethnographic film praxis and I sought to know - for both theoretical and grounded self-knowledge - what representational history was afforded me now as referential qualifying factor in my own identity construct formation, if such was to be within strict social reality delimiters designated by medical taxonomizing of my psychological disability / mental illness with respect to gender, social class (a child of immigrant “New Australians” subject to discrimination by Australians on grounds of non-Anglo-Saxon socio-cultural, nationality and linguistic heritages) and, now, biopower. As delineated in the remainder of this paper, these issues were self-inscribed in a meta-textual examination of self-as-Other identity construct formation as inherent in autoethnographic film praxis.

At that time, myself, Mel Kelly and Teri-Louise Kelly were all on Australia’s Disability Support Pension [DSP] and our individual creative output subject to severe financial restriction. Both Mel and Teri were spoken word artists / performance poets, Teri being also a twice published author through Adelaide’s premier print publisher Wakefield Press. Mel was a former fetish escort who wrote and performed literary pieces based on her experiences as a disabled sex worker, while Teri was a male-to-female transsexual who moved from autobiographical writing of his punk youth to her new interest in creative short fiction and poetry. I was a published author of film non-fiction who had recently completed a Graduate Diploma in Information Studies [GDIS]

in preparation for my SAR Research Fellowship. With no additional funding available to produce a documentary film utilizing the three of us, I opted to make an experimental digital video autoethnographic feature - my first (and later second) - utilizing only available resources: my camera, actual locations, found artifacts (and footage), authentic lighting and sound recording. As this was exactly the economic circumstance in which Mel and Teri developed and performed their art, I deemed this to be a much more authentic methodology than a conventional, professionally budgeted documentary production. Indeed, pursuant to McKee’s (2011) evaluation of YouTube as a potentially more efficient archival resource than the NFSA, the conventional arts grant criterion stipulation of “quality media outcomes” being production of conventional “well-made film” professionalism suitable for NFSA archiving I rejected as elitist authoritarian aesthetic impositions pre-determining discursive suitability for public dissemination via access-restricted, industry regulated media channels. YouTube aesthetic tropes thus offered me a personally revolutionary counter-aesthetic to the dominance of well-made film professionalism. At the very least, any resultant film I made within these restrictions, inherently true to the social reality framing the filmed subjects and rejecting the industry-imposed conditions upon their “acceptable” media representation, would be correspondingly true to the social reality and sub-culture to which Mel and Teri - as human research subjects - were included and which framed their own self-identities, and thus constitute authentically autoethnographic films favoring praxis over product.

My consequent approach to my own project research, and to the filming process, was thus grounded in Disability Studies theories of the “social model” of disability (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 1996). Thus, while both Mel and Teri identified as “disabled” I sought to portray them in relation to their artistic goals as circumstantially delineated by their socio-economic and cultural status as both “disabled” and LGBT identifying. Although identity politics in the form of personal narratives were of paramount importance within the broader Disability Movement, I sought to frame their personal “stories” (obtained during filmed interview data collection) within a broader social context: firstly, that of their immediate sub-culture and that of the broader Australian censorial social reality as it impacted their self-expression through their chosen artistic means, both literary and performance art / spoken word based. I did not overtly interrogate them as to their self-identity as “disabled” or LGBT-identifying but instead used the film-making process as a participant-observation praxis within which to meta-cognitively engage with my own incipient identity-construction based on problema-

tized positionality in relation to collective identification, which I inherently resisted and internalized as meta-cognitive trauma (Onken & Slaten, 2000; Martz, 2004).

My reticence at self-identifying as “disabled” was a matter of some complexity but finally lent an autoethnographic quality of self-inscription to the films in succession, more so than straight documentary. Though I did not overtly make myself the primary subject at first, I deliberately and cumulatively included unrelated or incidental footage I found personally meaningful (or aesthetically engaging and occasioned both in external human subject interview and random fieldwork roaming) to represent the social reality around me and influencing my own self-inscription in the autoethnographic film-making practice (Russell, 1999; Suhr & Willerslev, 2012). So too, I inserted asides or sudden images in order to destabilize and dislocate the spectator from the objective distance of commercial documentary and augment the mimetic inquiry with a meta-textual engagement with my own transformational subjectivity as participant-observer in making the film, expressed firstly through montagist techniques (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012) and cumulatively through dialogic interaction (Asche & Connor, 1994). Both films thus document the lived experience of featured disabled artists in the social reality in which they lived, worked and defined themselves, their framing by society at large as interpreted by one of their direct peers, and equally experienced in imposed self-identification as Other to a dominant social norm. In rendering as interpretivist phenomenology my own self-as-Other identity construct formation, I sought to dissolve the traditional self/Other dualism inherently informing likely spectator bias in engagement with the film’s ethnographic and autoethnographic human subjects (Russell, 1999; McDougall as cited by Stern, 2011).

As mentioned, I believed in making the films that it was important to do so using only the available resources allowed the human research subjects (and myself) by their own poverty-level existence: to qualify their social and psychological state of being “disabled” in constant interaction with mine, in socio-economically authentic, perceptually and experientially valid representational interpretivist phenomenology (Russell, 1992). My *performative-I* was thus positioned in relation to the identity politics of the disability movement in its social model based interrogation of a sociological disablement process as situated in my relation to the visual body of the human research subject on film (Spry, 2006, p. 583). This was in extrapolation of my concurrent NFSA research into representative disability on film had identified as a uniquely Australian qualification of such representations: a crisis of disablement in which disability was increasingly essayed

as a socio-cultural condition of the Australian identity, specifically as it intersected sexuality, as both Mel and Teri also identified as LGBT and made their sexuality a central piece of their art, especially Mel, who based her performance poetry on experiences gained working as a fetish escort. So too, Mel had had exhibitions of her art censored and access restricted due to their sexually explicit content: thus, her Arts Grant was for material literally on the cutting edge of Australian censorship law. This hybrid nexus of disability arts, censorship and pornography positioned the films’ human subjects’ constitution of a disabled sexual self-identity within federal government mandated social / legal / aesthetic limits on its allowable self-expression, both behaviorally and artistically.

POSITIONING SELF-AS-OTHER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN RELATION TO DISABILITY (AND CHRONIC ILLNESS)

“Muñoz (1999) maintained, “[d]isidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology” (Munoz, 1999, p. 97 as cited by Eguchi, 2014).

I do not usually self-identify as “disabled”.

Though I have, and do, on strategically selected occasions, and where legally required to do so. Not for any lack of a medical impairment, but for weariness of stigma, fear of judgment, condemnation and rejection: much of which I have experienced during my adulthood - a “hurt” identity (Krasowska, 2016) - consequent to having to subsequently define my self-identity in deference to my invisible, psychological difference and thus rendered in identity construct formation in obliged deference to relationally imposed Otherness (Eguchi, 2014). This is experienced as fluidity, perpetually malleable and reactively transformational, stemming from the consequential personal insecurity over rights to social inclusion and/or exclusion as I have no self-evident physical impairment: of my disability being “invisible” and psychological (Valeras, 2010). In that,

While persons with hidden disabilities are afforded a sense of anonymity, they must contend with different challenges, including learning strategic self-disclosure and impression management; when to disclose and make disability visible and when to “pass” and give society the impression of “able-bodiedness.” The choice, to be or not to be disabled, has important implications for the way we conceptualize disability, and the concept of identity as a whole.



ABOVE: IMAGE 2.3 Observational rendering of the social milieu and actual venue for disability performance art in *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010: d. Robert Cettl).

(Valeras, 2010)

I thus vacillate, my self-identity fragile and insecure, in a reactive flux influenced by circumstantial social reality (Shakespeare, 1996; Reeve, 2002; Valeras, 2010). As indicated above, this is experientially internalized - and introspectively meta-cognitively processed - as akin to an incipient Existential Crisis (Martz, 2004): “I am” is in perpetual alteration with “I am not”, a precarious self-as-Other identity construct necessitated in the wake of such self-destablization and desubjectification (to the extent of introspectively confronting self-obliteration: in experiential reckoning with self-annihilation in the form of recurring suicidal thoughts).

Some 28 years ago I was first diagnosed with, not exactly schizophrenia, but with a schizophreniform condition. After medical verification of my condition - my medical impairment (although psychological not physical or intellectual) - I was defined as “disabled” in relation to existing Australian social policy stipulated medical taxonomic terminology and awarded Australia’s then existing Disability Support Pension [DSP], which I remained on for

over twenty years before a change in Australian social policy with the election of Australia’s Liberal Party - as Shakespeare (1996) indicated inherent in social policy governmental qualifications of “disability” and the Foucauldian exercise of power - targeted the social reality in which I now had to define myself; strictly in relation to my ability to work a designated quota of weekly hours: i.e. to workplace employment utility (Valeras, 2010; Martinez, 2018). Decreed again, under such social policy upheavals, as unfit to work, temporarily, I was awarded a payment (substantially less than when I had previously been in the same circumstance several years prior) and politely told that I was required to check-in with the appropriate government department every three months or my payment would be suspended / canceled: such a cancellation would effectively leave me homeless and filled me with perpetual fear and consequent social instability.

I was socially, politically and culturally re-defined according to my social usability / utility within the workforce, as limited by an impairment, which correspondingly needed re-assessment not on medical terms - as such was now a mere taxonomic reference to a medical condition

without consideration of the nature of that condition - but merely my workplace utility measured in work hour contribution (Martinez, 2018). My human worth to Australian society - and the amount of money granted me to live below the official poverty line - was simply economically commensurate to my “ability” to work: Neo-Liberal utilitarianism. If the new Liberal Australian government inaugurating this workplace utility model - instituted by then Treasurer Joe Hockey under the auspices of then Prime Minister Tony Abbott and enacted with compounding restriction by current Prime Minister Scott Morrison - could rescind my stipulated living allowance, they would for, being unable to work, I was no longer “entitled” to a living allowance in the form of the DSP. Even today, I live in perpetual fear of my meager financial award being rescinded and thus of being forced into homelessness (again).

From that perspective, as “disabled” and thus limited in my work capacity, and thus of no dollar value or net worth, I am a worthless human being. It is from that inherently self-defeating perspective that I negatively define my self identity construct in deference to conceptions of failure and lack of worth due to limited utility (Shakespeare, 1996: Reeve, 2002: Gibbons, 2010: Martinez, 2018). And it is from that perspective that I am compelled to re-investigate my past personal narrative, my social status as disabled Other pre-determining the methodological strategies in my autoethnographic inquiry (Martinez, 2018). I must rediscover my personal narrative from a sense of wretchedness, socialized into utility by relational analysis of my impairment (Shakespeare, 1993: Gibbons, 2010: Martinez, 2018). Like my disability, I am hidden away from larger social participation within the greater body politic by socioeconomic circumstance as dictated by the biopower-driven social policy determining my social reality (Valeras, 2010). My “difference” having been previously fetishized as medical tragedy, is ignored in this biopower social policy assimilation in deference to workplace utility views of non-disabled or non-impaired governmental ministers and policy makers (Morris, 1991: Shakespeare, 1993). It is in deference to the view of those who relegate my self to that of an aberrant, castigated and despised Other to the dominant social, political and cultural national identity construct that I must now redefine and reconstruct my self-identity.

My self identity construction (in retrospect and also in media res through spontaneous generation of personal narrative as self-inscribed autoethnographic text) is solely now in terms of a self-as-Other (Eguchi, 2014). I am Other. Alone on a ship of fools as my collective membership were historically denoted mad and removed from the wider body politic (Johnstone, 2004). My starting point: I

am virtually useless to society and therefore I am worthless as a human being, and as an Australian am unwanted and barely deserving of poverty-level existence: I am in effect also denied an opportunity for any nationalistic or patriotic self-identification within a greater socio-cultural collective citizenship. I am a social burden, better off dead lest I become a “useless eater”¹ So too, the films I made remain unseen: are they also indicative of my worthlessness? Do I thus internalize my own oppression in deference who those who define me as Other to the body politic (Freire, 1972 as cited by Shakespeare, 1996)?

Perhaps I can rely on my heterosexual white masculinity and inherent privilege?

I am a man and will find a way to succeed in society and prove my “worth” (Shakespeare, 1996).

My poverty is my fault as I am a lazy “dole bludger” (Martinez, 2018).

I shall overcome (Shakespeare, 1996):...

... but in sentiment, is this but my continued internalization of the socio-economic dimension of oppression (Freire, 1972 as cited by Shakespeare, 1996) in which failure to so overcome is indicative not of any impairment or disability but only of my own worthlessness as a human being, the repetitive assertion of which is now compulsive to me and self-reinforcing: “being disabled is a stigmatized identity which must prove that the life of the disabled has a value... (i)t means to constantly prove that it needs means to live in a situation when it is not able to undertake work” (Krasowska, 2016, p. 25). Weary of descending merely into therapeutic writing. I mention this also primarily as contextual in media res autoethnographic methodology: I have only ever known a life in, or near, poverty and have been systematically normalized into believing this is my fault, by characterological causality: and perhaps it is - I am again in flux over my own social situation and personal responsibility for it, which fills me with guilt and further reinforces a profound self-loathing (Martz, 2014).

On my award of in-house residence at the NFSA, I could not afford to pay the rent for my public housing assigned 2 bedroom unit during what would be a three month absence from my home city while resident in Canberra. But I would not forego this opportunity. I disposed of most of my belongings, sold what furniture I could, and - keeping the remainder of my personal possessions in storage - drove the thousand miles from my home town of Adelaide to Canberra to take up the residence, essentially as a homeless person of no fixed address, in the NFSA

1 A term used by Liberal Party politicians and which I discovered in political correspondence occasioned during my SAR Research and incorporated into the manuscript that emerged (and remains officially unpublished though is in the NFSA collection for access.

designated residence assigned me as part of the Research Fellowship, which at that time, ironically enough, had no wheelchair access. In that I was researching representations of disability in Australian film for a proposed monograph on the topic - which eventually emerged as an unpublished manuscript - I was amused by the irony of being myself “disabled” - though my impairment had not impeded award of my Research Fellowship as I had parlayed it following award of a Richard Llewellyn Arts and Disability Trust Grant from the South Australian government - of specifically being a homeless “schizophrenic”. The irony subsided with the feeling that I was there to fulfill a political obligation to include a disabled person in the research process, and thus a manifestation of tokenism (Oliver, 2002, p. 5). That underlay a now deeper level of shame at being somehow fraudulent within institutional Academia and thus as still inherently worthless, anything I may add discursively thus being consequently invalid.

I accepted an identity-construct rooted in the medical taxonomy of my impairment assigned me by disabledist social policy (Oliver, 2002; Reeve, 2002) as a prelude to workplace utility-based assessment of my worth to Australian society. In that, I made sense of myself by referring back to “various bodies of knowledge” which allowed me a subjectivity only in deference to their absolutist authoritative power to command the knowledge-base offered me to inform my allowable self-identity construction and thus informing my allowable self-knowledge (Danaher, et al. 2000: 50). The NFSA Fellowship afforded me a new factor for social identity construction - my position in relation to Academia; the Other in one of very institutions of power through which the biopower discourse that consigned me to Otherness was validated and disseminated. Since then becoming a university teacher, my self-identity transformed in research praxis, from desubjectification to resubjectification in a collective identification with the disabled Other.

I am not Other, I am self-as-Other, knowingly deconstructing the social forces which delineate my Otherness and “owning” them through transformational autoethnographic praxis. In terms of subjectivity dialectics:

As the construction of subjectivity is through power/knowledge, people are formed as subjects from above by technologies of power, but this is modified by the ways in which individuals oppose these relations of power (resist) or transform themselves (technologies of the self)... Subjectivity is also dependent on the context - people constitute themselves as different subjects depending on whether they are going to vote or are seeking a sexual relationship with a partner... Therefore subjectivity is a fluid

identity, affected by time and place, culture and society (Foucault as cited by Reeve, 2006).

But what was this knowledge-base to which I was deferring my own identity-construction? Who was responsible for the qualification of “disability” and the medically taxonomic criterion of “schizophrenic” which delimited my self-identity to that of a specific subset of diagnostic criteria? How had the representation of “disability” in society been socially constructed? For me, it was, of course, the broader field of psychiatry as first identified by Foucault (1971). Normalized into it against my will, such being beyond my ability to wholly resist, my interest in film and media led me to begin a search for identification in screen representations of, specifically “schizophrenics” in relational positioning to disabled people as the collective identity-construct in which Australian social policy now designated me as allocated for permitted self-knowledge and thus for deferred referential self-identity construction. How was my condition represented in Australian film and what would viewing these films afford me in my search for a self-identity beyond that of self-as-Other?

Could I myself make a film that explored this identity? Collectively, individually and (inter-)personally?

To qualify for a Richard Llewellyn Arts & Disability Trust grant and investigate this in terms of the representation of disabled people in Australian film, I had to self-identify as “disabled” and thus assign my own deferral to its mantle of collective inclusion. But in my proposal was the objectivity of a participant-observer, of doing so at Australia’s National Film & Sound Archive as a Scholar-and-Artist-in-Residence [SAR] Research Fellow. Yet that afforded me only a tentative socially constructed identity to a self prone to worthiness only permitted me by acquiescence to normalized inclusion alongside those who define themselves also in difference and utility. As an Other. Thus it was that, in the NFSA, having ironically self-identified as a “homeless schizophrenic”, I sought a collective identification within the incipient Disability Movement, feeling initially empowered by a sense of “belonging” to a collective Other as an anchor for future identity construction (Mellucci, 1989 and Weeks, 1990 as cited by Shakespeare, 1996: Gill, 1997), concurring with Morris (1991) in recognition of a centralizing conceit that “ideas about disability and about ourselves are generally formed by those who are not disabled” (Morris, 1991 as cited by Shakespeare, 1996). Yet resenting that same Other for my consignment to it and still partially resisting communal identification accordingly.

As: I am not Other except in others’ consideration of me as such. But in asserting such, do I deny myself collective identification with “the disabled” to which I



ABOVE: IMAGE 2.4 Contrasting an openly sexualized culture to the hidden, taboo sexuality of the disabled sex worker as “Other” in *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010: d. Robert Cettl).

had previously admitted self-identification with to secure grant funding as a recipient of the DSP? Knowingly, therefore, I reject the socially constructed utilitarian condition of imposed Otherness imposed on my self by the State but in so doing remain irresolute, fragile and vulnerable, traumatized in awareness of one certainty: my discourse is now wholly socially constructed in referential deference to a framing sociological discourse informed by those very terms of utilitarian invalidity and corresponding worthlessness (Calhoun, 1990 as cited by Shakespeare, 1996) and which I analyze autoethnographically in relation to existing theory. So too, such is the pre-conceived bias that many viewers may bring to viewing any films I make or to reading the meta-textual creative methods in this paper: I, as a disabled Other, filming other disabled Others and rendering as representational interpretivist phenomenology their experience of self-identity as seen through my own as metatextual framing device.

I have my past narrative to define myself. But I am no longer what I was.

Furthermore: my award of a Richard Llewellyn Arts & Disability Trust Grant occurred shortly following the

publication of two of my poems in the Adelaide, South Australian Arts periodical - *The Adelaide Review*: the state’s premier arts, literature and high culture monthly publication. The poems created something of a scandal, being sexually explicit and deliberately transgressive and I was publicly decried and dismissed as a virtual “pornographer” even though the poems were autoethnographic explorations into my sexual identity as socialized in relational positioning to the dominant pornographic discourses then widespread - though subject to access restriction - in Australian society and media. It was primarily because of this reputation, though I was in fact a newly qualified librarian soon to be a SAR Research Fellow, that Mel Kelly initiated contact with me ostensibly to potentially collaborate on a spoken word piece. It was on that basis that I commenced filming her, and her wider social scene and arts peer group, as an exploration into what both she and I had been accused of - literary transgression - and how this informed her self-identity as a disabled LGBT-identifying woman.

To me, the film was a rare opportunity, on many levels.

In first talking with Mel, I was struck by an irony: she disclosed in a filmed interview - which I judiciously extracted for integration into *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* - that she worked as a fetish escort - not to supplement her DSP but by her admission because she enjoyed it - and that one of her former clients worked for the very same publication in the letters pages of which I was accused of literary obscenity (and even, strangely enough, witchcraft): the self-same *Adelaide Review*. To me, that was delicious.

I had to make a film, my first, on my digital video camera.

Why not? Just do it!

Indeed, I was filled with something approaching sheer joy at the giddy mix of communication, ethnography and autobiography from which to create a meaningful discourse through “aesthetic devices to investigate cultural texts, assumptions about relationships, and premises of human interaction (and to use) personal experience to illustrate, interrogate, and disrupt lived instances of hegemony, oppression, cultural inadequacy, and other kinds of harm” (Adams, 2012, pp. 182-183). The transgressive challenge of performativity was therefore appealing (Spry, 2006). It was in such a film that I could engage “in a discursive and representational space for voices hitherto unheard or actively silenced, thereby posing a direct challenge to hegemonic discourses” which designate the disabled human research subjects (and myself as filmmaker) as Other (Allen-Collinson, 2013). Specifically, how am I situated as an autoethnographer within participant-observation praxis in regard to the proposition “that ethnography necessarily relies on dichotomies and the construction of a separate Self and Other, but within that, the ethnographer can (and should) still trouble those dichotomies and constructions” (Pensoneau-Conway & Toyosaki, p. 382)? The question before me in this endeavor was thus: how do I position and perform myself as autoethnographer-as-filmmaker? How do I performatively situate self-as-Otherness? Rather than script or storyboard, as is the conventional approach to “professional” filmmaking, I conceived a methodological template which emphasized praxis over product: to bring my camera with me wherever I went and film the naturally occurring events as and when they occurred, returning for interviews or contextual background to fill in the surrounding social reality.

INTERROGATING REPRESENTATIONAL INTERPRETIVIST PHENOMENOLOGY IN PERFORMATIVE SEXUAL SELF-IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Mel worked on Christmas Day 2009, in a North Adelaide brothel and invited me into the deluxe room to film her do a poetry reading. It was the most natural I’d ever seen/heard her read, far less aggressive and proto-punk in your face shock-rhyme than were her usual performance pieces, which I had also previously filmed (and which included her performance of a strip-show as a prelude to spoken word performance). She felt empowered in this location to perform at her most natural - as a sexual being in the human female condition (freed from the imposed constraints of disability and difference: free from imposed Otherness) seeking sexual agency in pursuit of pleasure as emancipation (Sloane, 2014, p. 454). Australian film had tackled disability and such emancipatory sexual agency in *Dance Me to My Song* (1999) but where that was fictionalized, I was here by invitation to film autobiographical personal narrative as performance art: she trusted me to film her in this location, in her work dress, and render the essential nature of the experience she sought in so inviting me to film there aesthetically in the final film form.

She asserted - in her art - an identity for herself as a sexual performer, a fetish escort. To her, emancipatory pleasure was inherent in what she considered her act of transgression wherein self-knowledge was sexual knowledge, carnal knowledge: “(o)pening up sexual options and knowing about pleasure alternatives, can be helpful tools in the fight for the right to sexual pleasure” (Sloane, 2014, p. 464). As hers was a profession still greeted with social disapproval, I sought to utilize my minimalist budgetary restrictions as a strength, a complete disavowal of product-oriented film “professionalism” and introduce to the film an autoethnographic destabilization of viewer positioning in relation to Mel’s sexuality as a disabled sex worker to experimentally render self-as-Other identity construct formation in media res (Ghosh, 2006).

Mel wanted to appear on film in explicit scenes of sexual performance, which to me was still equated with “pornography” and which are not only surrounded with legal restriction on their filming but the interpretive social bias of Radical anti-feminism from Dworkin (1989) to Dines (2011), which held pornography as the discourse of female oppression and would consider Mel a victim of patriarchal socialization, mistaken in her belief that prostitution was a form of self-empowerment, even though Mel had clearly internalized a belief in such self-empowerment through sex work, which she allied to a concept of transgression. Her social reality, from the viewpoint of Dworkin (1989) and Dines (2011) was such that constituted her identity solely in deference to victimology, which Mel clearly rejected even though according to Jeffries (2008) as a disabled woman she was at increasing risk for sexual



ABOVE: IMAGE 2.5 Observational meta-textual rendering of the process of making a film: the film-within-a-film in *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010: d. Robert Cettl). RIGHT: IMAGE 2.5 Participatory film-within-a-film rendering of collaborative praxis teaming “Self” and “Other” in creative process of making trash film in *TLK Punk* (2012: d. Robert Cettl).

abuse and exploitation. The dilemma in representation was hers, as she was determined to sexualize her representation in relation to her work as a fetish escort rather than to accepted cultural media scripts of spontaneous intimacy (Sloane, 2014, p. 462), but also mine: I was not a pornographer filming a sexual act for the titillation of viewers, but if I filmed a sexual act would I inherently impose upon her the weight of patriarchal sexual oppression argued as the inherent discourse in the representation of such acts (Dworkin, 1989; Elman, 1997; Dines, 2011)?

Mel had positioned her identity as “disabled” in relation to a concept of sexual transgression in which agency of her sexuality as an escort empowered and emboldened her, in contrast to Dworkin (1989). Determined not to judge it, or frame it in judgmental deference to the feminism into which I had been tertiary-trained to deconstruct pornography, but aware of that being a likely spectator bias through which she (and any final film) would be viewed, I sought, in representing Mel’s phenomenological experience of sexual identity in the aesthetics she wished



and staged for me to film, to reposition myself from low-budget documentarian (in which spirit I had began the film with objective long take interviews) to self-conscious autoethnographer wherein “the role of the ethnographic film-maker is to produce programs subversive to their audiences’ view of the world and the media” (Ruby, 2000, p. 197 as cited in Falzone, 2004, p.328). Nevertheless, I was aware of the framing argument that “through pornography, sexual abuse is decontextualized as assaultive and reconstituted as ‘art’” (Elman, RA, 1997, p. 257). My endeavor was not art, however, it was discursive - an ethnography of the disabled artist, whose performances



ABOVE: IMAGE 2.6 Film and film-within-a-film merge as an aesthetically unacceptable (to Australian censors) balance of violence and sexual content manifest as an ethnographic interpretivist rendering of the artistic expression of the “Other” in *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* (2010: d. Robert Cettl).

constituted adult film acting to be of emancipatory agency (Olsen, 2017). Nevertheless, the operating theoretical frame in which Mel wanted to stage sexual performance, as subversive performativity, was in Australian social-political discourse determined by Jeffries (2008):

Organisations supporting men with disabilities campaign for their sexual rights which may mean using pornography and prostituting women. These forms of sexual exploitation teach and represent an objectifying sexuality. It is precisely this form of sexuality that disabled women suffer from, in the form of unwanted sexual contact and the fetishising of disability. (p.327)

However, in regards to available “pornographic” performativity of the disabled Other:

It blows the lid off one of the last taboos, sex with a cripple, which in both a moral and public policy sense, is analogous to pedophilia and incest. This is because disabled women have the social status of a dependent child, and because they are considered to commit a crime against society when

they reproduce... The people who enter into relationships with sexual minority members, carry their own stigma due to their association with the sexual other. They become sexual suspects, and are devalued by their association with the sexual other. Their sexuality is also pathologized and criminalized like the pedophile and the incestor. Their sexual orientation too is driven underground... Starting with Stoll, moving through the underground, and ending with the New Mobility imagery, we see the unveiling of the physically disabled woman, with kinks, bends, and all. This may be the result of a generational change in the sexual empowerment of disabled women (Faye and Fiduccia, 1999, p. 280-281)

If, as Elman (1997) argued, pornography was an “embodiment of sexualized vulnerability”, that Mel had performed such as an important part of her representation on film was such that Faye and Fiduccia (1999) counter-argued as empowering: my role was to somehow convey both Mel’s perspective that such provided her with emancipatory agency (Olsen, 2017) and the social theorizing which framed her as a stigmatizing delimiter in her stage and film work. By filming Mel in the process of sexual performance,

I took on, as a self-reflexive interrogation of disability and sexual identity in performativity, a literal rendering within autoethnographic film of critiques of ethnographic inquiry which held it as discursively mirroring pornography (Hanson, Needham & Nichols, 1989; Russell, 1999). Filming Mel's story, chronicling how she asserted her identity through sexualized performance art, I sought to destabilize (and subvert) the viewer's relationship to Mel (and the film, and to myself) by transgressing both the radical feminist and evangelical Christian morality informing pre-held conceptions, and placing ideological and moral biases in an experiential social context: ideally to deconstruct the social mechanisms which denote Mel - as disabled subject - a deferential Other and invalidate her sexual identity in terms of victimology: to thus represent her social reality and her self-assertive defiance of its delimiters. Autoethnography in this situation "democratize(d) the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power" (Neumann, 1996 as cited by Denzin in Holman-Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 189).

I deliberately stepped out of the documentary mode and sought also now to address my own position in relation to Mel and thus my potential relational-ethical responsibilities using evocative autoethnography (Denzin, 1997). The intent was to produce as Spry (2001) anticipated: "Autoethnographic performance can provide a space for the emancipation of the voice and body from homogenizing knowledge production and academic discourse structures, thereby articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity" (p. 727). My sense of self, my presence as autoethnographer-as-filmmaker and the sense of migratory self that was affected in me through participant-observation was now of equal importance in the film-making process (and final rendering as representative interpretivist phenomenology). As Research Fellow now, what was my responsibility in post-producing the film and rendering subjective experience of disabled subjectivity in identity construct praxis? It is therein that theories of a praxis-oriented self come to prominence as "axiologically conceptualized with its ethico-moral responsibility bestowed upon its own constructs of temporality, multiplexity, and embodiment" (Pensoneau-Conway & Toyosaki, 2011, p. 385).

Who therefore was I, and how should I represent myself?

Such consideration necessitated to complement positionality with performativity to break down traditional film text spectatorship through self-inscription (Russell, 1999; DeRosa, 2000), historically located in the evolution

of autoethnographic film since the indigenous films of Jean Rouch wherein "self-interrogation and the awareness of the relativity of one's own point of view drove the ethnographic filmmaker to integrate his self-doubt into his representation of the other by means of cinematic devices" (DeGroof, 2014, p. 111). Positionally reflexive self-doubt, of my identity-construction as autoethnographer-as-filmmaker being also constructed in social reality as a disabled Other, led to the formation, during film-making praxis, of a self-as-Other identity construct, a participant-observer both included member within the Other culture depicted - disabled artisanship - and as Other to the sexual subjectivity of the central performer Mel. Otherness was thus construed as influenced by a two-fold social condition (disability and gender) while self was informed by the positional and performative rendering of the essence of operational psychological medical impairment. In so acting as a *performative-I*, filming "the everyday practice of doing allowed me the 'doing' of meaning about that liminal, manifold, and incoherent space" (Spry, 2006, p. 341). This incoherent space manifested itself in film-making practice in a restless, hand-held camera gaze and rapid, dislocational zoom-based montaging of dialogic interactivity.

THE PERFORMATIVE DELINEATION OF THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKER AS SELF-AS-OTHER

I am not an invalid in the medical usage of the word but am yet invalidated and denied of healing integration into a collective identity for its centralizing of difference and disability on the physical body as my relation to disability identity politics is physically invisible and unable to be so rendered as physically representational difference (Gill, 1997). What I defer to also, in common with Mel, however, is my sexuality, operationally denied me in social reality as Other in the enforced asexuality imposed upon the "disabled" (Shakespeare, 1996; Reeve, 2002). The autoethnographic facet of the depiction of Mel's sexuality was thus both the destabilization of the spectator's position (and subversion of their moral and ethical biases towards "pornographic" iconography) and the positioning of myself as agent of such destabilization in relation to the subversive process: by way of presence/absence signification, acknowledging my interaction with Mel (and juxtaposed with my interaction with another disabled woman encountered homeless on the street) by "double-voiced" Bahktinian open-ended interactive dialogism (Gardner as cited by Asche & Connor, 1994, p. 14): i.e. through "conversation that involved negotiation

of meaning as dialogic” so that “once this speech is incorporated into a text, it raises questions about the connection between the ideas being represented – those of the speaker and of the (autoethnographer-as-filmmaker)” (Asche & Connor, 1994, p. 14).

I thus positioned myself in the film as directly present (visually implied - through mobile hand-held camerawork, shadows and fragments of my body - handshake) in relation to Mel primarily during the scene in which I interview her in a brothel room: the only other heterosexual males to interact with her or see inside that room did so under the terms of sex-for-money transactions, as “johns” (Dines, 2011). How was she sexualized in such an environment: what was the male gaze to be during a non-sexual exchange with the male now in the room a sexually powerless spectator viewing her recite poetry in which she was the sexual subject: how does the male gaze interact with her, the details of her revealing work dress, and sexualize or objectify her? Or does it? How was I, as heterosexual male, sexualizing and objectifying her in recording the event? The editing of this was the opportunity to render the interpretivist phenomenology of sex worker performance art spectatorship, in an authentic location in which paid sexual performance - and related gender power-play - was enacted in her daily life as a means of self-empowerment and sexual self-identity construction. The only other film to so have examined disabled female sexuality with such explicitness was *Dance Me to My Song* (1996), a fictionalized biopic of cerebral palsy impaired Heather Rose, made by established filmmakers within industry-standard aesthetic signification of quality.

I discovered during the filming of this, that I was not making a documentary film. The film was thus in film-making praxis purely reconceived in terms of subjectivity/objectivity and self/Other dialectics in relation to the representation of a sexual identity in general but context-specific to the sexual performance art of a fetish escort who self-identified as “disabled”. In such, I was adopting an action research methodological paradigm which “fundamentally differs from similar methodological paradigms including qualitative, naturalistic, constructivist, and interpretivist, in that action research focuses on the breakdown between observer and observed, bringing the subject in as a full participant in the process of research and forming collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relationships between researcher and subject” (Falzone, 2004, p. 328). I was the male heterosexual complement - her Other yet an equivalent social Other in both being designated (but myself not so readily self-identifying) as “disabled” - simultaneously recording her performance as sexual subject and representing my

sexualization (and arguable objectification) of her (as her Other and symbolic “john”) as interpretivist phenomenology: could such render the dialectical destabilization of gender power she felt was the transgressive art so empowering to her? The operating mode to examine this was thus “automethodology” as a qualitative method wherein:

- (1) The ethnographer can no longer claim ethnographic authority over and ownership of knowledge about the ‘other,’ as the self becomes the other.
 - (2) The line between the ethnographic self and the ethnographic other becomes blurred, as the seemingly distant two are merged into (an albeit slippery) one.
 - (3) The self is fragmented, as the ethnographic process and product highlight the contingencies associated with working to understand and articulate a singular, solid sense of self.
 - (4) The situated self moves to the forefront, illuminating the ways that the individual is never merely an individual, but an individual situated in a myriad of contexts, such as cultural, geographical, historical, political, and social. It is the interaction of the self and the self’s situations that serves as the ethnographic data.
- (Pensoneau-Conway & Toyosaki, 2011, p. 385).

The question was how to position myself in relation to her act of transgression: how did I interpret it, representing my generation of meaning in the aestheticization of the events represented on film - as an interpretivist phenomenology, a rendering of the essential interplay of self/Other dialectics in identity construction as participant-observer, as autoethnographer-as-filmmaker? How did I construct my sexual identity in relation to her sexual subjectivity and its “objective” photo-realist recording as data collection? Was this perceptually and experientially generalizable? Adopting a *performative-I* to answer these questions necessitated adoption - in the rendering of the interpretivist phenomenology of identity construction - in automethodology of a progressive montaging style to represent my experience as both self and Other, as self-as-Other, in the form of what Allen-Collinson (2016) postulated as “extending the ‘auto’ focus further inward to the phenomenal layers of the researcher’s lived experience” (p.17). So too, an autoethnographic aestheticization of such, to retain conceptual unity and construct validity, was in terms of montage (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012) and dialogic interactivity (Asche and Connor, 1994).

In film-making process capturing my own perceptual instability and disorienting “strangeness” in so positioning myself relationally to Mel, I confronted my own sense of shame in an inability to form meaningful adult relationships, borne of once again identifying as “different”, and, out of consequent inter-personal relational dys-

functionality with women since adolescence, now in being inclined myself to become the “john” whose symbolic position I embodied situationally while filming Mel in a brothel room. My own consideration and practice of rendering self-inscription was thus in terms of fracture, expressed in film diegesis first by inserting asides into documentary interview content and then as direct frisson in the initiating presence/absence of self-signification (Martin, 1994):

While the emphasis is on the individual's unique construction of self, Erikson described identity achievement as a prerequisite to the formation of genuinely intimate relationships in adulthood. Again, the task of defining a distinct or separate identity results in both greater inner wholeness and in an enhanced ability to unite with others in relationships. (Gill, 1997)

In this, “*performative-I*” positionality is concerned less about identity construction and more about constructing a representation of the ‘incoherent,’ fragmented, conflictual effects of the copformance, of the copresence between selves and others in contexts” (Spry, 2006, p. 344). Nevertheless, this was for me an act of self-as-Other identity construction conditional to my participant-observer role as autoethnographer-as-filmmaker, and thus an organic part of autoethnographic film praxis: it was transformative, self-actualizing (Maslow, 1954) - an attempt to stabilize the inherent instability I innately experienced as Existential crisis (Martz, 2004).

But in that my specific praxis of self-identity construction is borne of “difference”, and imposed delimiting in normalizing socialization into the body politic that constitutes me as Other, so too am I denied a sexuality: I do not have the right to be a sexual being and must be either asexual (Morris as cited by Reeve, 2002) or, in being not socially worthy of entering a relationship, seek congress with sex workers. In representing Mel's transgression, I entered into a sexual psychodrama of self-representation, looking to anchor my own disorientation in iconographic details of the immediate social reality, deferring to a sexually objectifying gaze, to details of place, people in authentic environs and the religious symbols of my received socialization towards prostitution (having been to an Anglican private school which had reinforced a personal sense of shame at my own sexual desires) for a sense of the fixative. Mel's transgression was thus framed in reference to context-specific conditional social theories (explained in interview footage with Australian adult industry lobbyist Robbie Swan) that underlay the Christian basis to Australian censorship practice as “religious individuals tend to disapprove of pornography use and support por-

nography censorship” (Grubbs, et.al, 2015, p. 126). In the physical position of a “john” in a brothel room with her, but removed from that role as a mechanism of her empowerment as sexual performer / filmic subject, subordinating the sexual authority of the “john” in that situation, I was dislocated by the Otherness I embodied in relation to her sexual self: the filmmaker as symbolic “john” - an ironic inversion of the autoethnographer-as-pornographer (Hanson, Needham & Nichols, 1989; Russell, 1999).

My gaze thus, my camerawork, manifested this sexual psychodrama of self/Other dialectics through autoethnographic “participant audition” audio recording of my own interactive social positionality to the research subject (Meyer & Schareika, 2009, p. 1). My vocal presence was augmented by inserted fragments of my corporeal “self” as (mostly offscreen) physical body and participant-observation witness to a disabled sex worker's performativity of her “self” in artistic sexual self-expression: such witnessing having been identified as a key component in the empowerment and involvement of the human research subjects in autoethnographic transmedia (Walley, 2015, p.4). Inherent in presence/absence dynamics, this necessitated editing for final representation of the positioning of her autobiographic situation and the performativity of her sexual self-identity - in relation to my presence/absence - to represent the interpretivist phenomenology of “transgressive” participant-observation in deference to her theorizing of the concept: rendering the essence of her act of transgression wherein she was empowered performer and sexual agent and I was destabilized, subverted Other, dislocated in my relation to her and seeking an anchor in a sexualizing gaze, but perpetually unable to settle on a fixed image of her as sexual object and thus incapable of enacting a male gender-power socialized rendering of her as fully subordinated Other: my perceptual bias was dislocated spatially and temporally and I sought to re-anchor it the physical details of social reality and the theoretical basis for such as the exercise of socio-political power over the delineation of acceptable social reality and “disability” biopower.

In film-making praxis I became a protagonist in the film itself, and shifted again, from documentarian to ethnographer to autoethnographer specifically. The autoethnographic component here foregrounding the concept of disability performance art spectatorship - for myself as disabled peer and for non-disabled Others to myself and Mel, for the broader biopolitical social reality that defined us lingered for the duration of the performative event, informed by sexual subjectivity/objectivity dialectics in the witness by a white male of a white female, augmented later in the film by situating Mel in relation to her own bisexual-



ABOVE: IMAGE 2.6 Aestheticized rendering of the disabled “Other” as performance artist to conjure a perceptual validity beyond the everyday photo-realist in *TLK Punk* (2012; d. Robert Cettl).

ity as opposed to the heterosexual gender power dynamics inherent in a brothel room location. Thus, when it came to filming Mel during the making of a short rape-revenge film for the underground Australian film collective Trasharama, I downplayed my direct presence (having been now established as primarily an offscreen subjectivity through which to view the social reality being documented) to meta-textually merge the underground film’s making with my own simultaneous representative interpretivist rendering of the film being made, as disability arts text on sexual identity construction. The resultant meta-textual context was intended as simultaneous deconstruction of the sexual identity being constructed by the filmmakers, by framing it in relation to the authentic dialogic interchange naturally occurring within the social reality of the film-making process on actual locations. But my positionality was situational, determined by my subjective placement as participant-observer based intuitively on the “event” being filmed: I was progressively dislocating myself and therefore arguably the viewer, viewing the event through my subjectively reconstructed rendering of interpretivist phenomenology.

Following the filming of these scenes, some of which were sexually explicit, I entered into a re-interroga-

tion with my own sexual identity, especially now in relation to being arguably an autoethnographer-as-pornographer, though none of the sexual scenes depicted were ostensibly directed by me or involved payment to the participants. I became introspective: was my consideration of personal integrity as both an autoethnographic filmmaker and human male, also informed by the medical nature of my impairment? I felt wretched and disowned myself (Gill, 1997) in a wish to be Other than myself, but in so doing constituting as Other the majority body politic which simultaneously (and paradoxically) consigned me to problematized Other in deference to the mainstream non-disabled collective. Meta-cognitive processing that informed the diagnostic criteria offered me for self-identity construct formation were operational as a vicious circle.

I am not your Other: you are Other to me.

But though I am no-one’s Other, I by deference still referentially construct my identity in terms of self-as-Other dialectics, I am...

... a stranger here myself. As autoethnographer, transforming in praxis, self-actualizing as so being in the human condition in reference to Eastern, not Western, philosophical tradition: of the Confucian Doctrine of the

Mean - as participant-observer between worlds, perpetually both inside and outside, and neither; aloof, detached in adjudication, a stranger here myself. Such is my technology of the self (Foucault, 1971; McNay, 1992 as cited by Reeve, 2002), initially rooted within the restrictions of cultural representation (Foucault, 2000 as cited by Reeve, 2002) but progressively seeking self-actualization outside it (Maslow, 1954; Reeve, 2002). What remains though, is an overwhelming sense of shame at my mental state (Onken & Slaten, 2000). As expressed by a severe sufferer of mental illness:

I have been ashamed ever since I've been diagnosed. I just don't tell people. I don't know how they're going to treat me or if they're going to look at me strangely or something like that, so I don't tell people. Right away I think they stereotype you and assume you're crazy and you're not stable and that you're going to be acting weird or something like that. They just don't know how to deal with that. They figure you're not like them, you're not normal. (Onken & Slaten, 2000)

I am abnormal.

I do not deserve inclusion in society.

I am a worthless human being.

To spare my culture the burden of my Otherness, I will withdraw from all contact and social interaction with those who - if they knew my shame - would denigrate me, judge me, dismiss me as different, disabled, lesser than "normal" or, like my father would repeatedly say of me, lazy. I am normalized to my difference to normality. I am, after all, self-as-Other. And that is to my eternal shame:

When persons with mental illness are aware of being seen as different, it can trigger judgments that are expressions of shame. To be seen as sick, to be viewed as defective, to be judged as helpless - these are experienced as shameful. What evolves is a self-perpetuating cycle in which being a person with a disability equates to being shameful and targets one for further shaming (by others and by one's self). (Onken & Slaten, 2000)

Resolution of this destabilization of my self identity-construct was through the return to documentary style objectivity, to depict the social forces within which I now had to reconstruct myself and which were now variables in identity construct formation: but not exclusively disability politics related, for I had tentatively resolved that in adopting as autoethnographer-as-filmmaker an unstable but validated self-as-Other identity construct. I instead sought to anchor it in the umbrella interview discussion in-

terspersed through the film: the nature of a bill of rights in Australia specifically as it applies to sexual self-expression including that through multimedia representation - the exact issue which framed Mel's expression of her sexual identity, and mine as documented in the film as identity construction in film-making praxis, representational interpretivist phenomenology of self-as-Other formation in the final film as product.

I subsequently wanted to explore - again in relation to disability identity theory and sexual identity-construction - the performativity of the disabled person's personal narrative: of the autobiographical relationship to the *performative-I* in artistic self-expression and even collaboration. My subsequent film - *TLK Punk* - thus explored autoethnographic film's relationship to the more conventional biopic genre, though made with the same methodological rejection of "well-made" film professionalism, for such was - to me - a disabling biopolitical delimiter to the acceptability of my self-expression, and those in a similar socio-political and cultural situation to myself in relation to disability identification, both individual and collective. In so doing, I had to re-position my performative-I in sexual agency relational ethics to a transgender spoken word performance artist, Mel's former spouse.

DEFINING SELF-AS-OTHER IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSONAL NARRATIVE AS REPRESENTATION OF INTERPRETIVIST PHENOMENOLOGY

Mel's transgender partner Teri I met towards the end of the production process of *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* though had filmed her perform and once introduce Mel and included part of the filmed footage in *Confidential Report*. Unlike Mel, Teri was a published author - of autobiographical works - and did not centralize her sexuality though did not hide from visibility her gender in-between-ness ((Nordmarken, 2014). Thus, I approached the film about her with a similar methodology to that on Mel but context-specific to the autobiographical nature informing Teri's work (and her recent radio profiling by national broadcaster ABC Radio National) - linear, chronological biography combining interview, filmed performance and found footage of same to chart several months in her semi-professional career: the time during which she was awarded a Richard Llewellyn Arts & Disability Trust Grant and with my own in process of ending. As oriented more towards the biopic, I titled the final film in relation to Teri's name (as authorial branding) and her sub-cultural identification with, and longstanding inclusion within, the underground "punk" movement, calling it sim-

ply *TLK Punk*. Heavy in found footage biopic assembly of autobiographical performance, the film was about the nature of reflexive autobiography, where I positioned myself as firstly biographer and then autoethnographer staging autobiographic performance art in collaboration with the performer / film subject and LGBT-delineated non-binary, disabled Other: to affect a twofold, meta-textually deconstructive analysis of privileging of the self-revelatory subject / object in personal narrative performativity (Coffey, as cited by O'Shea, 2018, p. 5)

What I became aware of during the production of *TLK Punk*, more so than *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression* was the home-life aspect of Teri's existence, the social reality of low rent housing while on a disability pension. So too, as Teri split from Mel - in performed poetry referring to her former lover becoming a heroin addict - I was reminded of the Warhol/Morrissey Factory "superstars" and appropriated into my filming style the deadpan realism of Morrissey in filming the lives and performances of drug users, hustlers, transsexuals and punks: though Teri was British by birth, I sought to locate her autobiographical content in a hybrid style of brash British punk and heroin-trash Morrissey Factory cinema, anchored in the same social milieu of performance poets that I had depicted in report format in *Confidential Report*. Thus, *TLK Punk* featured much more interactivity of Teri in the social milieu, anchoring her personal narrative in place and peer group, as opposed to my screen treatment of Mel, who wanted to be framed in terms of an independent, transgressively sexual self-expression. The performativity of disability in Teri's work was thus biographic chorological-sequential rendering of her autobiographical performances and increasing interactivity with her peer group: how she established safety, belonging and esteem. Subsequent ethnographic films on disability identity theory - *Read Me Differently* and *Original Minds* - assessed similar conditions and also utilized this autobiographical performativity and dialogic interactivity as a methodological trope: "(t)hese films provide alternative research approaches of studying disability, that is, from their own perspectives through video ethnography as a research tool that reveals their previously suppressed voices" (Horejes, 2013). So too, the Australian film *On the Waves of the Adriatic* (1991) first assessed ethnographic means as a way of accessing disabled people's lived experience.

My performativity of the self-as-Other identity-construct essayed in my first film was more traditionally anchored in its positionality in my second film, which progressively foregrounded interactionality as a transcendent process: of engaging through autobiography into interactive understanding of the disabled Other. Far less inher-

ently politically problematic than *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression*, my second film thus investigated the role of personal narrative (in relation to performance art) in identity-construct formation, participating with the subject - Teri - in the means of her own self-representation: as progressively collaborative (auto-)ethnographic film (Stern, 2011). My own self was thus rendered as collaborating witness and participant in the creation of disability-art. Here, my concern was augmented by the dialectics surrounding disabled person's narrative studies:

In narrative studies, narratives are often treated as data for a researcher. They do not, however, come into existence as data, but instead as a process of identity formation that has profound significance for the narrator. They are formed as individual stories that are only generalizable to an extent. If they are generalized too far, they can dehumanize their subjects and turn them from people into cases. (Richards, 2008, p. 1720).

It was again, to me, an issue of humanization. How was I to humanize the personal narrative of a human research subject - again like myself designated as Other - whose identity as transgender reinforced her ostracism from the dominant social group and body politic likely to be potentially viewing the film? At core was again thus, positional spectatorship within both ethnography and autoethnography, of *performative-I* relational ethics: "One way of resisting objectification by others is by writing about oneself... sometimes known as autoethnography, but has also been known by other names, such as personal narrative, reflexive ethnography, complete-member research, experiential text, indigenous ethnography, and heuristic inquiry (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Wall, 2006 as cited by Richards, 2008, p. 1720). I was here to position myself directly as peer-to-peer participant-observer, again subject in the financial restriction of the film-making process to the aesthetics of product-oriented "professionalism" and "quality outcomes" that delimited the self-expression of disabled artists to pre-existing, arbitrary, aesthetic industry-derived (and self-serving) standards determining suitability for dissemination into the public, able-bodied (and disabled) public sphere.

I sought thus a filmic equivalent of autoethnographic writing's provision of "a thick and textured description of a state of being and also to interrogate assumptions about that state of being" (Richards, 2008) anchored etic in social-relaistic mimesis such that conditionally framed the fusion of autobiography and performance art that characterized Teri's artwork. Teri self-consciously referred to her transgender experience in her performance

pieces, which I assembled into chronological sequence from YouTube found footage and interviews and impromptu performances filmed by myself. Rather than stage a “coming out” directly, I sought to represent in the chronological sequence the strategic deployment of stealth, passing and outing common to transgender experience and what is known as being “in-between” as it surfaces in her performative autobiography (Nordmarken, 2014, p. 38). Indeed I found in Teri something later acknowledged in Nordmarken (2014):

As a trans person, I occupy a particularly between kind of betweenness. Among my other legible positionalities, I am read as sexually deviant because I appear gender-deviant. In this historical movement, I enjoy pushing people to think about gender in a non-binary way. (p.40)

Not to put words in Teri’s mouth, for throughout the film I let her speak for herself, but there was an agent provocateur in her which made her non-binary work more slyly subversive than the in-your-face sexual performativity of Mel. More self-assured, she didn’t need overt stylization to render her “art”: it spoke for itself, so chronological autobiography was the narrative tactic I went for, inscribing myself as interpretivist collaborator, and surrendering control of the camera for a moment to Teri’s partner Jenny, for a brief experimental allusion to collaborative ethnography - thus appearing in film as my full corporeal self for the first time, objectified from another participant’s point of view (Russell, 1992; Shuman, 2011).

Following the autobiographic content, I inscribed my emic self in the narrative autoethnographically as a filmmaker and collaborator, with whom Teri interacts by direct address in the filmed scenes of dialogic exchange surrounding the filming of further autobiographical performance pieces. In this way, I sought to place the biographical use of autobiographic found footage within a participant-observer praxis that documented the process of making the performance videos and chronicling Teri’s interaction with her peers: her social reality, exploring the socio-economic delimiter which affected her self-expression. I deliberately downplayed any direct engagement with the label of “disabled” which also affected Teri, leaving that as an off-screen, unspoken condition dialectically engaged with in the film when referenced by Teri during performance but never directly interrogated. Again, the references to disability and the Richard Llewellyn Arts and Disability Trust Grant were left to Teri to breach at her behest during her impromptu performances, interspersed throughout the final film. I was wary here of associating disability with transgender identity in a causal manner,

thus again deferring to my restless camerawork and editing to represent my identity-construction in relational ethical positioning to her performance as both subject and object. Where such self-as-Other subjectivity dialectics had informed the filming with Mel, so too it informed the group participation and impromptu performance scenes in *TLK Punk*.

The issue to me again was my sexual identity-construction as a heterosexual white male destabilized in relation to the transgender Teri: how do I perceive her, subjectify and objectify, for by now to me there was a continuum between them. How did I react to Teri’s in-between-ness? I was endeavoring to use autoethnography and autobiography to comprehend how I was situated in regard to the human research subject, to “understand the innovative embodiment of the ethnographer self—his or her discourse, action, and the sense of being together with others (communal participation) in research processes” (Pensoneau-Conway & Toyosaki, 2011, p. 379). The details of this investigation into reflexivity were in our dialogic interchange during the production of her performance pieces, a meta-textual staging of a film within a film that mirrored the same situational positioning I explored in *Confidential Report: an Australian Transgression*: another instance of deliberate double-voicing to facilitate spectator deconstruction of subject/object and self-as-Other positionality and performativity within the autoethnographic film (Asche & Connor, 1994). In the staging of Teri improvising while playing a bass guitar I let my camera follow my gaze from objective distanced shots fluidly zooming in to closeups of her face and female body parts seeking to anchor my perspective in relation to her bodily difference. I was again destabilized in my relational positioning to her status as both disabled and transgender, my restlessness reflecting their seeming irreconcilability.

While her in-betweenness was visible, her “disability” was invisible and unaddressed, untaxonomized unless it was medical authority that linked them for organization clarity, as had been past medical establishment practice (O’Shea, 2018, p. 8). My irresolution ended in a coda after end-credits scene: a short movie that I, Teri, her partner Jenny and another participant, Nicki, made as an entry in the Trasharama film festival, the same festival for which I had filmed Mel in the process of making an entry. My self-as-Other identity moved from autoethnographer to creative collaborator and peer, though offscreen. In creative collaboration on a zero-budget trash film short, we cooperated to express ourselves collaboratively within the social reality delimiters that affected us as individual selves within the greater disability collective. It was an empowering experience to end the two film inquiry into

disability identity theory, sexual performativity and autoethnography, but marked what I became aware of as a potential move from autoethnographic filmmaker to trash film auteur (Russell, 1999). In deference to my self-as-Other embodiment of the *performative-I*, the dialogic nature of the film's final stages positioned me as "a coperformative participant felt-sensing a hermeneutics of humility for listening to and assisting in the subversion of... (bio) power" (Spry, 2006, p. 343).

CONCLUSION

The two films I made that were added to Australia's National Film and Sound Archive remain unseen for a decade now. Their inclusion was, for that decade, interpreted by me the institutionalization of my shame, my difference, my Otherness, my dollar-value equivalent worthlessness as a human being. I felt that, as an Other working in a deliberately non-professional methodology of praxis rather than product orientation, my films - though absolutely authentic documents of Otherness seen from the perspective(s) of those so designated Other - were cheap, raw, unpolished and seemingly unfinished in relation to traditional documentary. For a decade, until restoring my ongoing personal narrative by writing this paper, I felt that they were worthless films: unseen, undistributed, unprofessional, unprofitable, unscientific, unlikeable, unapproachable, unsettling. Just as I was a worthless Other - consigned by workplace utility limitations to poverty - so too the films meta-textually representing the interpretivist phenomenology of formative self identity-construction within condition of such Otherness were by association worthless: bad films in their complete disavowal and rejection of conventional "well-made film" professionalism of the film-making establishment.

But they are genuine autoethnographic films, positional in relation to subjectivity epistemics in relation to autoethnographer-as-filmmaker "disabled" identity construction as a perpetual self-as-Other and thus of the pursuit of self-knowledge in deference to such:

The first important conclusion concerns the fact that mentally ill people frequently do not see themselves as disabled, but rather as desubjectified by their illness which does not allow them to be reliable for other people and causes imposed loneliness. Thus, disability is constructed in various ways and it is not necessarily called disability. Disability is a process of labeling which penetrates biographies of people as a trajectory for many years or even their entire life. It is also a process of becoming conscious of one's identity, as

symptoms of disability impact how we construct knowledge about ourselves... sexuality of the disabled constitutes an area which "provides proofs to underestimate problems of «sexuality, human relationships and patients' own identity»". Therefore, disability is a desubjectifying factor, i.e. depriving the right to be a person. On the other hand, there is a question what being a healthy person means. Because sometimes even people suffering from schizophrenia, but remaining in remission, are considered to be healthy. Therefore, a theoretical as well as a practical challenge is that the scientific, common and media discourse about disability does not stigmatize and commemorate inequality as each of us has physical and mental barriers in a way. A huge value of features related to some types of disability is in the fact that they constitute positive points of reference and areas of similarities of experienced ability. (Krasowska, 2016).

To both Mel and Teri, and to myself, though in vastly different ways, performativity was transgression, "a force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back in the vortices of political struggle" (Conquergood as cited by Spry, 2006, p. 344). So too, in my constant destabilization of positionality and rendering of self-as-Other interpretivist phenomenology, I found then, and find now also on reflection, that:

The reconstruction of self regarding the experience of severe mental illness differs, however, in the sense that there are less clearly defined parameters of the experience and disorder with which one can come to terms. Such parameters shift in part due to the cyclic nature of the psychiatric impairment itself. Consequently, the individual must redefine the self over and over in light of the ongoing and ever changing nature of the mental illness condition itself and society's response to it. (Onken & Slaten, 2000)

While I would like to claim the films limitations and flaws as virtues - especially the socio-economic mode of their production and rejection of well-made film professionalism - I make no assertions as to their "merit" as art or discourse, but only for their authenticity as autoethnographic films. The methodological import of participant-observer praxis inherent specifically in autoethnographic film self-inscription is manifest in rendering as interpretivist phenomenology a self-as-Other identity construct in formation as a transformational consequence of participant-observation. While the autoethnographic films analyzed reflexively in this paper designate such Otherness primarily in relation to disability and LGBT identity theory, this is merely the operational context-specificity in which the autoethno-

graphic film-making praxis was applied: just how discursive construction of autoethnographer-as-filmmaker self-as-Other identity construct functions in relation to alternative operational contextual delimiters of Otherness is the dominant conceit of autoethnographic film praxis. So too, while disability and minority arts funding favors “quality outcomes”, so too the transformative, healing power of praxis in the creation of autoethnographic personal narratives as a necessary stage in the empowerment of disabled people is being oppressed in favor of tokenistic adherence to disablist, industry standard professional aesthetic regulations on the acceptable discourse of the Other.

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Disabled Self/Other Performativity in Autoethnographic Film Praxis



A Case Study of Two Films Made During a SAR Research Fellowship at Australia's National Film & Sound Archive [NFSA]

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