"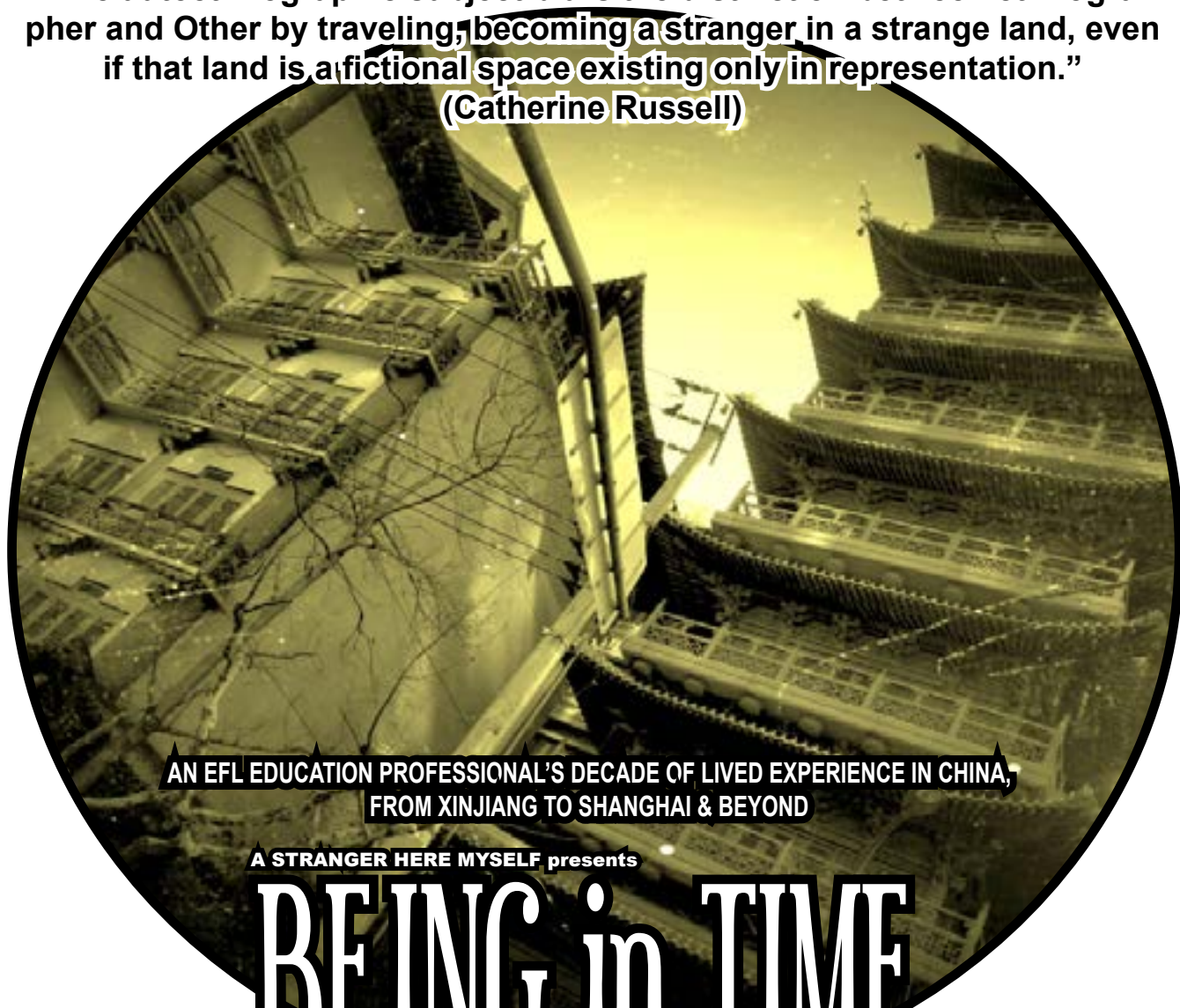The autoethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other by traveling, becoming a stranger in a strange land, even if that land is a fictional space existing only in representation."
(Catherine Russell)

AN EFL EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL'S DECADE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN CHINA, FROM XINJIANG TO SHANGHAI & BEYOND

A STRANGER HERE MYSELF presents

# BEING in TIME
## VOL.1 PT.1

BEING IN TIME [VOL.1 PT.1] | a *420* film | photography, videography, montage/editing, construct design by Robert Cettl | produced by Robert Cettl | filmed in China and Australia from 2009-2023 | music by Aakash Gandhi, Unicorn Heads and others | third party material © fair use (education / critical illustration)

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# BEING in TIME (Vol.1 pt.1)
## "ARTIST'S MEMO"

"Hello. I'm Robert.

*Being in Time* is an auto-ethnographic digital feature film, the pilot in a longitudinal auto-ethnographic transmedia project exploring my lived experience as a foreign EFL education professional living and working in China over a decade since first arriving from Australia in 2011, in Xinjiang (XUAR). This pilot is in two parts: the first part was completed during conditions of zero-Covid in China and the second part (forthcoming at time of writing) is to be completed in the weeks subsequent to the elimination of China's zero-Covid policy (and its re-opening to the world) and concurrent to my teaching of Inter-Cultural Communication (IC) within China's tertiary EFL system. While the first part concentrates on formative processes of trans-cultural meta-cognition, the second is an exploration of the consequences of critical reflection on rendering such foreign teacher identity in China in relation to the development of professional pedagogic practice - i.e. as action research praxis. That is, the content of this film is concurrently utilized in my teaching of IC in China - but only select extracts are used for pedagogic purposes, the full film being a rendering of the genesis in personal narrative of the methodological principles for auto-ethnographic transmedia in Chinese IC National Curricular Reform."

According to Neil (2021) "while digital technologies and social media have become more widely used to document and share visual work, there is limited research examining the potential of these platforms and tools for dialogic and critical reflection that is contextualised for creative arts pedagogy" (p. 1). Consequently, Neil (2021) examined the "phenomenological experiences of using digital auto-ethnography for critical reflective practice in art and design education" (p.1). In my own pedagogic practice - as a university EFL / Inter-Cultural Communication ]IC] teacher in China, throughout the pandemic to date, including China's zero-Covid policy - I applied: experimental montaging of collage based videography; text-based narrativization in visual storytelling; creative montaging of found footage (audio and video encountered / downloaded as digital ethnography - a bibliographic record of concurrent Internet browsing habits) and observational travelogue as methodological tools in an IC centred "design theory" based approach to also address Neil (2021)'s research question of "whether digital auto-ethnography has the potential to empower arts and design practitioners to reflect on their practice dialogically and critically" while also "exploring the reflective spaces that are made possible through digital auto-ethnography" (p.1).

As my professional practice is in the Chinese EFL context, I adapted Neil's concerns to incorporate China's Ministry of Education [MoE] goals regarding the Covid-19 "emergency response" period (Kulich, 2021). This "design theory" modification - beginning with the qualification of "empathy" as a first stage in a potential IC design process that originated in industrial design theory - was determined in frequent consultation with a Chinese peer (with whom I sometimes bilingually co-taught a unit in an MTI course) over how to incorporate this experience into China's evolving National EFL CUrriculum Reform Agenda (Wui, 2021). Such was being spear-headed by Kulich at the Shanghai University of International Studies which, most recently, now intersects auto-ethnographic research methodologies in positioning the use of "cultural stories" as pedagogic tools (Kulich, 2022). Newly commencing teaching an IC course this semester, it is that "cultural story" conceit I intend to begin with. The videographic project **Being in Time** is thus this (my) cultural story: a praxis-based exploration of personal narrative and lived trans-cultural experience in delineating collage-based montagist methodological principles for auto-ethnographic film (as a postmodern genre) as a multimedia IC design tool in post-Covid-19 Chinese tertiary EFL pedagogic practice. To do so, however, the film uses auto-ethnographic inquiry as a montagist design principle - a fusion of collage and montage, rendering participant-observation praxis (direct camera POV) to an evolving, evocative background score and succession of found footage artefacts. -

"Narratively thus, *Being in Time* uses the circumstances of my own lived experience - in China, Australia and (by inference, the USA) - as the personal story underpinning an aestheticized interpretivist phenomenological rendering of concurrent personal and professional identity construction. On the personal level, the key epiphanic reckoning during zero-Covid in China was the death of my father in Australia under circumstances in which I could not be there to take care of him in his final days. A traumatic event, the stress-related illness from which forced my withdrawal from further Academic post-graduate qualification, it is explored in relation to place memory and place memory imprinting, the film shifting in time through the incorporation of authentic video material (subject to relational ethics concerns over its incorporation) in 8 evolving vignettes (in the first part of the 16 part total feature). *Being in Time* thus renders a personal journey to self-awareness as a late-career stage foreign EFL education professional in post-Covid19 China. But it remains the cultural uniqueness of personal narrative that structures the trans-cultural dimensions in the film: considerations over 1)"ethnicity" given my paternal heritage in Slavic lands under Nazi occupation in WW2 as reflected upon during the media blitz surrounding the Russian special military operation in Ukraine (and the rise of neo-Nazi identity politics), and 2) also in relation to a media blitz, the time about China, on Xinjiang, much of which contradicts my own lived experience of residing, traveling and working there as an EFL teacher - the formative place memory of China that the film ultimately hinges on as personal narrative. In attempting *Being in Time*, as an action research project in an ultimately pedagogic context, I thus utilize authentic video I personally shot on location throughout China - including unseen travelogue footage of Xinjiang - and anthologized over a decade. As a final ironic anecdote: the Xinjiang footage used in this film - in its original 8- hr rough cut - was offered to Australia's National Film & Sound Archive (NFSA) (where I had been a SAR Research Fellow before coming to China) but they declined, sight unseen, to add it to their collection as a research film / observational travelogue."

EATIVE

A stranger here myself.

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75 +5%

A stranger here myself.

## ARTIST'S MEMO | INTRODUCTION

***Being in Time*** utilizes an auto-ethnographic methodological design approach to film / digital video montaging to construct an evocative rendering of the interpretivist phenomenology of epiphanic, meta-cognitive identity construction: as a foreign EFL education professional in China over ten years since first arriving in Xinjiang in 2011.

It is a work-in-progress: an episodic succession of self-contained but sequentially evolving vignettes exploring the relationship between place memory, lived experience and socio-political consciousness raising / knowledge generation and meaning-making in identity construct dialectics. Unified by a non-linear personal narrative transcending time and space, it utilizes exposition, internal dialogue / self-talk and critical reflection to create a simulated, personalized psyche on screen, a direct first-person POV representation of observed sights, sounds and phenomena: even if the filmmaker is rarely seen at first, everything exists as filtered through his meta-cognitive perceptual lens, the processing of same for meaning-making being inherent in the juxtaposition of images and the evolving flow of the audio track - location sounds, music, drop-in voices and songs, found footage artefacts taken from concurrent internet browsing / viewing habits, and interviews - a construct: an AV collage-based Self-simulacrum.

Although a rendering of personally observed and internalized phenomena as they pertain to individual identity construction, it eschews the traditional voice-over narration that has come to characterize auto-ethnographic film since its origins in Trinh T. Minh-Ha's critique of ethnographic objectivity in ***Re-Assemblage*** and the evocative diary / journal mode of Jonas Mekas' ***Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania***. Inspired by Mekas in particular, ***Being in Time*** is a re-conceptualization of Mekas' montagist methodology - contemporizing his design approach to personal "home movie" film-making to incorporate new media sub-genres such as the YouTube "mashup" (and related audio-video collages) wherein found audio-video cultural artefacts (songs, movies, music videos) are incorporated into personal meaning-making through montagist homage. However, where Mekas assembled his footage randomly - in the order he found them - with a unifying reflective voice-over commentary, I assemble "home movie" footage in reconstructed order to evoke their epiphanic role in my personal identity construction, montaging them in incorporation with, and juxtaposition to, the found object "mashup" / collage oeuvre: a psyche informed by lived experience of time and space (place memory) but subject to a cultural socialization to audio-visual content in an ongoing self-actualization process: a Maslowian transcendence.

***Being in Time*** spans two countries - China (where I currently live and work - and have remained throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to date) and Australia (my home country as a passport holder). It intends to render the psychological processing of memories of this trans-cultural experience in relation to a personal habit of constant audio-video cultural artefact viewing on social media. Thus, it fragments time to juxtapose places, events and time zones, evoking an ongoing process of cultural imprinting echoed in found AV footage incorporation, using a montagist discursive continuity based on the progressive association of sound, images and text-based narrative (expository, poetic and self-talk) in strictly timed, rhythmic collage-ist montage to render a representation of the meta-cognitive psychological processing of lived experience in time and space, anchored in place memory.



But: place memory as influenced by the course of time and re-experienced in epiphanic identity construction. In short: as heavily aestheticized and meta-textual rendering, the first part of which (the first 8 - of 16 - vignettes submitted to ***The Autoethnographer***) are informed by a traumatizing event: the death of my father while I was in China and unable - due to Covid-19 travel restrictions and budgetary limitations - to return to Australia to care for him in his final days. With China's "zero-Covid" policy ending at time of this first part's completion - and a setup for the (in progress) second part of an intended auto-ethnographic digital feature length film - the first 8 vignettes cumulatively render the process of personal politicization that accompanied ethnicity-based reflection on his life and death, while in zero-Covid China.

## METHODOLOGY

*Being in Time* was undertaken initially as a research film. As a former SAR Research Fellow at Australia's National Film & Sound Archive [NFSA] - *where my first two experimental auto-ethnographic digital video features on LGBTQ+ / disabled performance art are collected* - I am informed by the Academic debate surrounding auto-ethnography as much as I am by the avant-garde cinema of such as Mekas, Stan Brakhage and even Kenneth Anger. The film was intended to explore that association between theory and auto-ethnographic film-making praxis: to delineate a mode of auto-ethnographic film specifically as a post-modernist genre.

My singular concern was to develop a montagist design approach in construct valid alignment with the foundational principles of auto-ethnography as a research methodology - specifically what Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) had identified as the hybrid fusion of product and practice - praxis:

> "Auto-ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write auto-ethnography. Thus, as a method, auto-ethnography is both process and product." (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011)

Taking myself as subject (auto-) in relation to my personal experience and processing of trans- and inter-cultural China/West (Australia) socio-political dialects (ethno-) and interpretivist montagist rendering (graphy). Place and place memory were thus to be rendered as underlying thick description, juxtaposing an emic perspective (footage I shot during the experience) with etic commentary (in the form of inter-cut, evolving found footage offering greater socio-political and cultural context to the experiential emic view) blended into a rendering of my personal meaning-making through the manipulation of time by both diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Although the personal experience being subjective is not generalizable thus, the montagist methodology is intended as a design template for the aestheticized rendering of that internalized meaning-making and consequent identity construction process. That said, drawing primarily on a personal archive of video shot on location in China and Australia over a decade, I sought not to storyboard a pre-determined narrative but to reconstruct one in media res, beginning with the circumstances surrounding my formative EFL pedagogic practice in China, in Xinjiang.

Montaging work on *__Being in Time__* began surrounding the 2022/02 Beijing Winter Olympics. I had taken a new residence in Shanghai, on Wulumuqi Lu, right opposite a Uygur restaurant. It was a special place for me as I had developed a fondness for Uygur cuisine during my first year in China in Xinjiang (or Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region: XUAR). With editing beginning while I frequented venues and watched the Chinese CCTV Olympics coverage, the process was, however, informed by a Western MSM media propaganda blitz in relation to a "forced labor in Xinjiang" as methodological "genocide" narrative that privileged a separatist, extremist and terrorist influenced Uygur identity construct in denial of the reality I had observed, experienced and documented (on hand-held video) while personally living and working in Xinjiang, teaching Uygur, Kazakh and Han EFL students.



Extrapolating from this beginning, I retrospectively sought to anchor this perspective in relation to lived experience in zero-Covid China as centred on specific venues frequented repeatedly over time and thus of personal significance in formative place-memorization - in both China and Australia, media on China / Australia relations featuring prominently in my AV browsing online, especially following the 2022/02/23 Russian special military operation in Ukraine. With my Slavic father's childhood experience under the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in my mind as I reflected on his then-recent death, a personalized political stance on my identity as a foreigner in China now informed by this patriarchal, Slavic legacy emerged finally in a montagist summation of my personal feelings and actions circa 2023/01/01, to end part one.

# A BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH THE FILM-MAKER

**Q: As an auto-ethnographic digital (feature) film, did you conceptualize and realize the film based on a research question(s)?**

No and yes. Being familiar with auto-ethnographic theory and having applied its research methods tentatively in relation to fieldwork in China, I was mostly concerned with how a principled approach to film montaging could best render its goals in a videotext(e) report / product, especially given auto-ethnography's emphasis on praxis. My research question was thus specifically methodological and the resultant film correspondingly experimental, owing in the end as much to my film-school training as much to established auto-ethnographic theories. It was an exercise in finding a methodological construct validity for auto-ethnographic film as a potential postmodern aesthetically coded genre based on montagist principles. However, in terms of content and subject, how my personal political stances as a foreigner in China were informed by China-Australia trans-cultural experience in relation to the death of my father became a guiding concept during the editing process. Due to Covid-19 and travel restrictions, I was unable to care for him (as I had planned) in his final years and his death had a traumatic effect on my physical and psychological health. The film thus sought to combine the technical exercise with this personal inquiry as a rendering of interpretivist phenomenology. It is in that sense grief and guilt inspired in some of its reflection. Again, my approach was praxis-based: when using montagism as a research methodology in the rendering of epiphanic experience (including trauma), questions that subsequently guided the editing process emerged as a matter of course during the inquiry: i.e. praxis-driven, organic.

**Q: In the 8 vignettes that comprise part 1 of _Being in Time_, 2 are overtly political. Given the surrounding personal narrativization between these vignettes, how did contemporary global politics influence the film's conception and construction of the vignette sequencing in part 1?**

Part 1 is partly anchored around particular locations in Shanghai's Jing An district, close to where I had an apartment on Wulumuqi Lu. Venues around the apartment building location evoked for me memories of my experience living and working for a year in Xinjiang. As I commenced work on the montaging during the 2022/02 Beijing Winter Olympics and the subsequent Russian special military operation in Ukraine, I constantly followed evolving Western media discourse on China (re: Xinjiang and Taiwan) and Ukraine. Having been in Xinjiang I regarded the Western narrative with due scepticism and, being Slavic, was perhaps affected by the neo-Nazi origins of the Ukraine dilemma on a more profoundly existential level than others - maybe. I sought thus to render how these two socio-political contexts affected my own identity construction as a foreigner in China in reflective subversion of the established Western narratives.

**Q: You mentioned the death of your father (in Australia) as a key traumatic event during your zero-Covid years in China. How did you seek to address this in the film?**

Through the evocation of place memory. I had filmed a location in Australia of personal significance and had even coordinated an impromptu performance piece there with some friends (and their family). So too I had taken my father to see the location and he was delighted by it. I combined film of my father in the venue with previous recordings as a comment on the socio-political conditions in Australia affecting aged care; as a counter-point to my experience alone in China. It is that transition, between countries, cultures, times and spaces that I hope qualifies the internalized psycho-drama of the personal narrativization as a rendering of the processing that ultimately led to my epiphanic coming of political consciousness on reflection on my father's death and legacy.

**Q: If the Shanghai locations are one part of the geographic anchor in China, where is the**

**second part located, especially the vibrant location beginning the film in the first vignette?**

Jinan, Shandong.   It's where I lived and worked while maintaining the apartment in Shanghai for when I could travel there, schedule permitting.  The alternation between Jinan and Shanghai comprises the China-based sections in the vignettes, with Australian locations in and around Adelaide (South Australia's capital city) comprising the Australia-based content and sections.  The venue in the first vignette is a personal favourite "hangout" and provided exactly the trans- and inter-cultural environment I thought perfect to introduce the film: hence, the montagism of the project is cemented in that first vignette, especially through the use of music including samples and extracts from popular songs, anchored in the actual location as a vinyl record, music and foreign culture venue in China.

**Q: The use of cultural artefacts - samples from popular songs especially but also news video and archival footage (even movie allusions) - also characterizes the film, especially its flowing audio-scape in the first 4 vignettes: what did you intend by this technique?**

The 1st part of the film (first 8 vignettes) is an evocative rather than analytical auto-ethnography.  Personally, having an HBA in film (psycho-analytic semiotics) and heavily influenced even now by pop culture reference points in music and movies, I sought to integrate reference to these culturally significant artefacts as the film proceeds, to render their contribution to my meta-cognition as an evocative layer, qualifying the often oblique text-based narration.  Without voice-over, I used the music - and the emotional affect of it - over the visualizing of intersecting and overlapping timelines as a means of establishing a personalized discursive continuity.   Rather than me describe in voice over how an epiphany was experienced and processed, I sought to evoke it purely in audio-visual terms, with an added text-based narrative reflection, modelled on self-talk as well as expository story-telling.

**Q: The text-based narration, or self-talk, you mention seems to include poetry, confessional and autobiographic exposition, alternating between three subtitled languages - English, Mandarin Chinese and Russian.  What was the intention behind this technique?  Why this way?**

The ongoing text-based narrative in the multiple languages is timed: it establishes a reflective authorial presence in the absence of either voice-over or much iconographic direct representation of me personally in the film.  Dramatized to include poetry and even an interior dialogic quality (hence I refer to it as "self-talk"), it's also an evocative form of positionality.  The choice of languages, and the timing of their subtitled inclusion, reflects the increasing political consciousness that develops by the 8th vignette which closes out the film's first part.

**Q: How do you intend to develop the film in part 2?**

The 1st part was shot entirely prior to China's termination of its zero-Covid policies.  Now that China has "opened up" again, the 2nd part of the film will examine how I newly construct my identity as a foreign education professional in the changing socio-cultural circumstances that are rapidly evolving at present in China.  So too, montaging timelines to segue between zero-Covid and post zero-Covid experience, especially in relation to how this informs my pedagogic professionalism.  Although I am an EFL teacher, the first part does not address pedagogic professionalism, instead setting up a context in which to examine it.  Thus, the 2nd part (another 8 vignettes) will look in much more detail at how pedagogic professionalism qualifies the political consciousness rendered by the end of part one.  Also, to extend this into fictionalized auto-ethnography by the film's conclusion.  I have the final vignette almost completely done, and it is a radical departure from everything that has preceded it.  As planned, it will conceptually and constructionally complete the film.

## RENDERING THE EPIPHANIC SELF

**_Being in Time_ is influenced by Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, specifically that of "self-actualization" as epiphanic experience. Rendering this in montage, however, required autoethnographer-as-filmmaker positionality: of my own psychological processing as subjective point-of-view determining the movie's montagist AV rhythms - the dilemma of self-representation.**

This process of self-actualization is aestheticized in the auto-ethnographic montage as "self-fashioning" (Clifford, as cited by Russell, 1999) in which the auto-ethnographer represents him/herself in the dialectics of present or absent signification, thus "inscribing a doubleness within the auto-ethnographic text" (Russell, 1999). Auto-ethnographic films and videotexts - for instance - hence portray "other selves as culturally constituted, (and) also fashion an identity authorized to represent, to interpret, even to believe – but always with some irony – the truths of discrepant worlds" (Russell, 1999). The auto-ethnographer exists in his/her own text as a meta-textual identity construct - "I am other" - systematically destabilized, subverted, reconstituted and self-actualized in the accompanying narrativization. The auto-ethnographer's individual identity is thus meta-textually signified as a construct: a "self-as-other" persona existing solely within montagist praxis as a rendering of the epiphanic self.

This, of course, relates to what Nichols asserted: "that what films have to say about the reducing human condition or about the pressing issues of the day can never be separated from how they say it and how this saying moves and affects us... (thus) (w)hen an audience views a documentary, (ethnographic film or auto-ethnographic film) they are engaging with an interpretation of the world that is mediated by the filmmakers own ideologies and motivations". The dominant motif in the auto-ethnographic text therefore is thus the aestheticized media-based representation of the interpretivist phenomenology of meta-cognitive "self-representation wherein any and all subjects are able to enter discourse in textual form,(whereupon) the distinctions between textual authority and (psychological) reality begin to break down" (Russell,1999). For McDougall thus, "film-as text notes an import ant departure from the strictly observational cinema theories and recognizes the interplay of primary elements involved in film (such that discourse construction occurs in conceptual space somewhere within a triangle formed by the subject, filmmaker, and audience and represents an encounter of all three'" (McDougall as cited by Stern, 2011). In this way, subjective epiphany can be rendered in audio-visual montage: traveling in time and space.

According to Russell (1999), "the auto-ethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other by traveling, becoming a stranger in a strange land, even if that land is a fictional space existing only in representation." That "fictional space" no matter how authentic is the rendered process of Self-as-Other epiphany. That is: "strangeness" as diegetic effect, a joussance-like experiential involvement of the viewer, through montagist manipulation, in the rendering of autoethnographer-as-filmmaker "Self-as-Other" identity, but in which viewer meaning-making occurs in relation to their personal positionality vis-a-vis the discursive construction / narrativization. Subjectivity / objectivity destabilization thus facilitates positionality shifts in relation to the centralizing narrativization (linear or non-linear) of ongoing identity construct dialectics.



Consequently, in **_Being in Time_**, the filmic space is a rendered reconstruction of personal, psychological space anchored in thick description evolving over time, as depicted in split-screen montaging which progresses the viewer through different times in my life ,and audio stylization (music, voices, found objects) intended to evocatively personalize their affect. Traveling through different times and the places associated with them to an accompanying audio track which features diegetic alongside non-diegetic sound - musical selections chosen for their personal relevance and discursive continuity (also methodologically representative of my online browsing habits concurrent to the making of the film: a digital ethnography). This travel, the "strangeness" in **_Being in Time_**, however, inherently politicizes personal positionality.

## RENDERING THE EPIPHANIC SELF (cont/.)

***Being in Time*** fuses various techniques that have been independently used in artistic, evocative auto-ethnographic works - photography, scrap-booking, montage, bilingualism, dance, performativity, found footage juxtaposition - but eliminates (for part 1) any reflective voiceover.  In doing away with this convention, narrative and reflection are conveyed in a poetic text-based form of dialogic "self-talk".  Eliminating the voiceover in this way, destabilizes the viewer, forcing them to engage solely with the cumulative diegesis in order to ascertain meaning and situate themselves in relation to the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker.

An on-screen, unfolding text-based narration, evocative and expository, evolves as a form of internalized self-talk, a reflexive, rhetorical monologue in which I narrativize my unfolding meta-cognitive processing of the images and sounds depicted on-screen.  This text alternates three languages - English, Mandarin and Russian - often (but not always) in direct translation, unfolding in rhythm to the AV content.  As I sparsely represent my own image iconically on screen, this ongoing narration evokes the increasingly politicized consciousness of the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker in praxis: as process and product.  Borne of inter-cultural lived experience in facing personal trauma during Covid-19 (the death of my father in circumstances beyond my ability to intercede), the textual commentary, rather than explanatory voiceover, complements and augments rather than analyzes the AV rendering.

On the autobiographical travelogue, Russell (1999) thus quotes Sitney: "it is the autobiographical cinema per se that confronts fully the rupture between the time of cinema and the time of experience and invents forms to contain what it finds there".  At issue is once again is montagist subjectivity: "Subjectivity cannot be denoted as simply in film as with the written 'I' but finds itself split in time (such that) the image of the filmmaker, when it appears in a diary film, refers to another camera-person,or to a tripod that denotes an empty, technologized gaze"contained yet again within the dialectics of the present/absent signifier (Russell, 1999). The dilemma here is the representation of the self as embodiment of an absently signified subjectivity: to render self-consciousness itself in formative relation to observed social reality through interpretivist montage: the travelogue as representative intersection of the self with the wider social reality of an external objectivity, inherent in it the theme of social confrontation by the self-identity in process of formation: i.e. of "being" in participant-observation praxis within the field.

The auto-ethnographic film text is thus both analytical and evocative - through its relational nature and positing of subjectivity dialectics, such that, correspondingly, auto-ethnographic films in particular "can thus be seen as (both) illustrative (and) revelatory in approach, the first form obviously bearing the closer resemblance to written anthropology" (MacDougall, 1978, p. 413).  The auto-ethnographic film requires "the viewer to make a continuous interpretation of both the visual and textual material articulated by the film-maker (wherein) (text-based) narration need not make images wholly illustrative in character provided the (textual) voice is an integral part of the subject matter" (MacDougall, 1978, p. 413): i.e. of authorial revelation in relation to the construction of the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker as self-conscious participant-observer in a socio-cultural milieu.



This self-conscious subjectivity - and interrogative onset of subjectivity / objectivity dualism - is hence inherent in self-conscious meta-textual reference to authorial subjectivity through meta-textual acknowledgment of autoethnographer-as-filmmaker camera point of view in relation to an external, objective reality in which the participant-observer is simultaneously observed or overheard during the research and data collection process.  Such is to situate, in relation to autoethnographer-as-filmmaker self-as-Other identity construct formation, the satisfaction of Maslowian (1954) needs: how participant-observation praxis situates the self within the Other culture under examination, allowing for the meta-cognitive processing of self-actualization through epiphanic experience, aestheticized in film rendering.

## POLITICIZING PERSONAL POSITIONALITY

_**Being in Time**_ **chronicles the formation of a personalized socio-political consciousness in oppositional distinction from those views and political narratives which saturated Western MSM during the last stages of China's zero-Covid policy: in short, positioning the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker (EFL education professional living and working in China) as newly self-actualized global citizen.**

In this way, the postmodern radicalism of auto-ethnographic texts situates subjectivity is, furthermore, as inherently transformative if not outright traumatic for the autoethnographer in praxis: "(i)t is not an easy task to relate to who we were in the past and understand how that translates into our identity today" (Custer, 2014, p.1). Meta-textual deconstruction of such a self-actualized "identity-construct" as a structural methodological tool of discourse construction is in conceptual unity with its "subjectivity" epistemic integrity. Auto-ethnographic films' distinguishing characteristic is thus their systematic invalidation of objectivity except as the conditional factors of social reality influencing identity construct formation, in simultaneously superimposed validation of subjectivity through aestheticized (increasingly montage-driven) rendering of meta-cognitive interpretivist phenomenology, of the progressive psychological needs-based mechanisms of the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker in transformative self-as-Other praxis.

Self, in terms of being, is thus inscribed in the auto-ethnographic film evocatively and analytically as discourse construct, aestheticized as simulacrum to provoke an emotional/intellectual response in spectator consciousness,which in turn generates meaning for the spectator:

> Our consciousness of our own being is not primarily an image, it is a feeling. But our consciousness of the being,the autonomous existence, of nearly everything else in the world involves vision. We assume that the things we see have the properties of being, but our grasp of this depends upon extending our own feeling of being into our seeing. In the process, something quintessential of what we are becomes generalized in the world. Seeing not only makes us alive to the appearance of things but to being itself. (McDougall, 2006, p.1)

This emotional response is inherently cognitive, meta-textuality in relation to the diegetically represented person (or persona) of the autoethnographer-as-filmmaker, forcing spectator meta-cognition of the film's rendering of identity construction. In so doing, through constant diegetic engagement and destabilizing disengagement, the spectator is vicariously situated as themselves a participant-observer: a fellow traveller as it were.
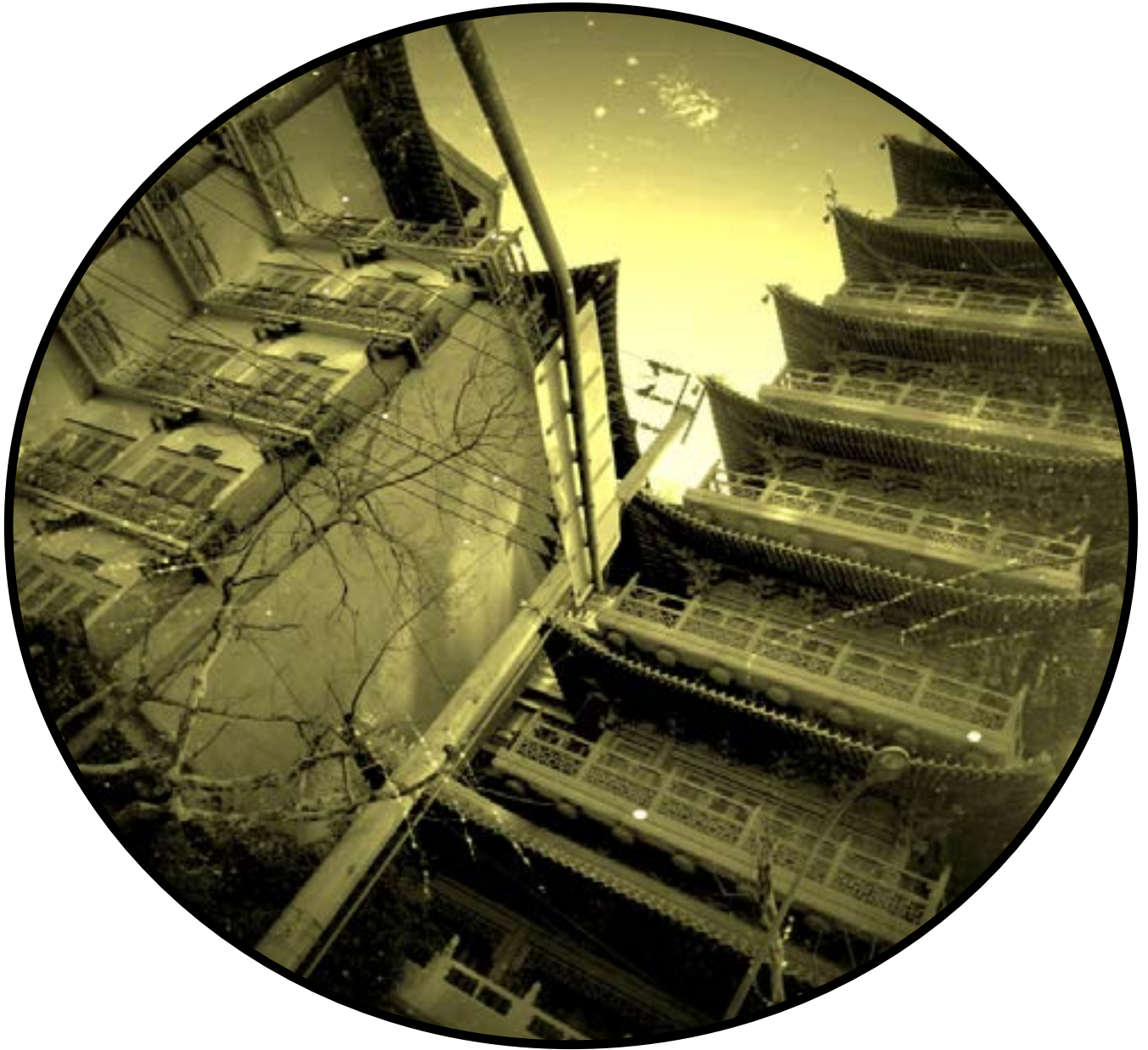
In this, culturally specific AV filmic iconography is thus deployed not for diegetic effect or verisimilitude alone but as representational subjectivity epistemics:

> "By treating images-in paintings, photographs, and films--as a product of language, or even a language in themselves,we ally them to a concept of thought that neglects many of the ways in which they create our knowledge. It is important to recognize this, not in order to restrict images to non-linguistic purposes-this merely subordinates them further to words-but in order to re-examine the relation between seeing, thinking, and knowing, and the complex nature of thought itself. (McDougall, 2006, p. 2.)

The product is the simulacrum of participant-observation praxis, the discourse construction (through deliberate montage-based aestheticization) of which positions the spectator in direct meta-textual relation to the self-as-Other identity being constructed (and simultaneously deconstructed).



Representation of autoethnographer-as-filmmaker as simultaneously subject and object - of self-as-Other- is essentially a Brechtian alienation trope which breaks the conventional diegesis of conventional cinema, and of anthropological data recording, to facilitate its in-media-res deconstruction and cumulative reconstruction in relation to a praxis-inspired transformative reconstruction of autoethnographer-as-filmmaker identity construct formation. This culminates in autoethnographer-as-filmmaker self-actualization rendered as aestheticized interpretivist phenomenology borne of participant-observation. Consequently, personal politicization positions authorial subjectivity/objectivity as a representative consciousness of being in the human condition: I am.

# BEING in TIME

## VOL.1 PT.1