

*Reading and writing performance*¹

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ABSTRACT Criteria for evaluating experimental ethnographic texts are reviewed. Subversive, resistance narratives are foregrounded. While the focus is primarily on North American work, scholarship by non-American scholars is reviewed as well, including the arguments by indigenous scholars.

KEYWORDS: *aesthetics, ethics, moral criticism, performative criteria, performance ethnography*

'Rules for "good" experimental ethnographic writing can now be established; at least what should be published as "good" experimental writing can be debated.'
 (Clough, 2000: 278)

'I am concerned with the performance of subversive . . . narratives . . . the performance of possibilities aims to create . . . a . . . space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated.'
 (Madison, 1998: 277, 280)

'We recognize that performative ethnography can mirror and evoke the performative character of everyday life.'
 (Atkinson et al., 2001: 9)

'How can aesthetics move . . . closer to engaged cultural history?'
 (Hartnett, 1998: 288)

For qualitative researchers, the turn to experimental ethnographic texts poses the problem of performative criteria, namely how these texts and their performances are to be critically analyzed in terms of epistemological, aesthetic and political criteria. Building on the discussions of aesthetics and pedagogy in Giroux (2000a, 2000b) and Garoian (1999), this article examines performative criteria in the seventh moment.² I foreground subversive, resistance

narratives, dramatic, epiphanic performances that challenge the status quo.³ My topics are reading, writing and judging performances, and producing performances that move history.

My argument unfolds in four parts. I begin with a discussion of the problem of setting criteria for experimental writing (Bochner, 2000; Clough, 2000). I then turn to feminist and communitarian criteria, as they apply to resistance performance texts. I next discuss alternative modes of assessing narrative and performance texts, building on the recent arguments of Bochner (2000), Bochner and Ellis (2002), Clough (2000), Ellis (2000) and Richardson (2000a, 2000b, 2001). I conclude with commentary on an aesthetic of color, critical race theory and the politics of interpretation in the performance community.

A caveat

In the main I focus on North American discourse in sociology and cultural studies. This has the effect of slighting the highly relevant work of non-American scholars in other disciplines who have taken up the topics I discuss here. Not explicitly examined are related discussions of writing and rhetoric (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; James et al., 1997; Spencer, 2001); the ethnographic self (Coffey, 1999); voice (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 256–7); authenticity and authentic representations of experience (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997); interpretive criteria (Atkinson et al., 1999; Delamont et al., 2000); and indigenous, resistance performance texts (Brayboy, 2000; Grande, 2000; Marcus, 2001; Smith, 1999).

This complex literature is international, interdisciplinary and in flux. North Americans are not the only scholars struggling to create post-colonial, non-essentialist, feminist, dialogic, performance texts; texts informed by the rhetorical, narrative turn in the human disciplines (Delamont et al., 2000). This international work troubles the traditional distinctions between science, the humanities, rhetoric, literature, facts, and fictions. As Atkinson and Hammersley (1994: 255) observe, this discourse recognizes ‘the literary antecedents of the ethnographic text, and affirms the essential dialectic’ underlying these aesthetic and humanistic moves.

Moreover, this literature is reflexively situated in multiple, historical, and national contexts. It is clear that America’s history with qualitative inquiry cannot be generalized to the rest of the world (Atkinson et al., 2001). Nor do all researchers embrace a politicized, cultural studies agenda which demands that interpretive texts advance issues surrounding social justice and racial equality.

Lopez (1998: 226) observes that ‘there is a large-scale social movement of anticolonialist discourse’ and this movement is evident in the emergence of African-American, Chicano, Native American and Maori standpoint theories. These theories question the epistemologies of Western science that are used to

validate knowledge about indigenous peoples. Maori scholar Russell Bishop (1998) presents a participatory and participant perspective (Tillman, 1998: 221) that values an embodied and moral commitment to the research community one is working with. This research is characterized by the absence of a need to be in control (Bishop, 1998: 203; Heshusius, 1994). Such a commitment reflects a desire to be connected to and part of a moral community. The goal is compassionate understanding (Heshusius, 1994).

Researchers are forced to develop new story lines reflecting these understandings. The researcher wants nothing more than to participate in a collaborative, altruistic relationship, where nothing 'is desired for the self' (Bishop, 1998: 207). Such research is evaluated by participant-driven criteria, by the cultural values and practices that circulate in Maori culture, including metaphors stressing self-determination, the sacredness of relationships, embodied understanding, and the priority of community.

These participant-driven criteria function as resources for resisting positivist and neo-conservative desires to 'establish and maintain control of the criteria for evaluating Maori experience' (Bishop, 1998: 212).

Native American indigenous scholars thicken the argument by articulating a spoken, indigenous epistemology 'developed over *thousands* of years of *sustained* living on this Land' (Rains et al., 2000: 337, italics in original). An American Indian Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2000) criticizes simplistic, postmodern, poststructural, critical theory readings of race, ethnicity and identity. Personal identity performance narratives, stories and poetry which emphasize self-determination and indigenous theory are privileged (Brayboy, 2000). For Grande (2000) Red Pedagogy has four characteristics: (1) politically, it maintains 'a quest for sovereignty, and the dismantling of global capitalism'; (2) epistemologically, it privileges indigenous knowledge; (3) the Earth is its 'spiritual center'; (4) socio-culturally, Red Pedagogy is grounded in 'tribal and traditional ways of life' (p. 355).

The performance turn in Anglo-European discourse can surely benefit from the criticisms and tenets offered by Maori scholars, and by a critical Red Pedagogy. There is much to learn from indigenous epistemologies and performance theories.

After Atkinson et al. (2001: 9), we must ask how the forces of history and culture structure those versions of everyday life that are mirrored and evoked in performance ethnography. Of course, the performance turn in Anglo-European theory has not been embraced everywhere, nor is there a massive rush to take up post-interpretive, post-foundational evaluative paradigms. What follows is one interpretation of where this field is currently moving.

SETTING CRITERIA FOR PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY

In the social sciences today there is no longer a God's eye view which guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory- or

value-free knowledge. The days of naive realism and naive positivism are over. In their place stand critical and historical realism, and various versions of relativism. The criteria for evaluating research are now relative.⁴

Clough (2000) rightly warns that setting criteria for judging what is good and what is bad experimental writing, or performance ethnography, may only conventionalize the new writing 'and make more apparent the ways in which experimental writing has already become conventional' (p. 278). More deeply, in normalizing this writing, and the performances connected to it, we may forget that this kind of writing was once 'thought to be 'bad' writing, improper sociology. . . . It might be forgotten that experimental writing was strongly linked to political contentions over questions of knowledge' (p. 278). And, the new writing, in one moment, was taken to be a form of cultural criticism, a way of also criticizing traditional ethnography.

Bochner (2000) elaborates, observing that today 'no single, unchallenged paradigm has been established for deciding what does and what does not comprise valid, useful, and significant knowledge' (p. 268). Furthermore, it is impossible to fix a single standard for deciding what is good or bad, or right; there are only multiple standards, temporary criteria, momentary resting places (p. 269). Too often criteria function as policing devices. The desire to authorize one set of standards can take our attention away from 'the ethical issues at the heart of our work' (p. 269).

On this point Clough and Christians (2000) agree with Bochner – all inquiry involves moral, political and ethical matters. Clough goes one level deeper. With Atkinson et al. (2001: 3) she reminds us that from the beginning the criticisms of standard ethnographic writing in sociology were linked to identity politics and feminist theory, and in anthropology to postcolonial criticisms. These criticisms involved a complex set of questions, namely who had the right to speak for whom, and how? (Clough, 2000: 283).

The need to represent postcolonial hybrid identities became the focus of experimental writing in ethnography, just as there has been 'an effort to elaborate race, classed, sexed, and national identities in the autoethnographic writings of postcolonial theorists' (Clough, 2000: 285). These debates about writing, agency, self, subjectivity, nation, culture, race and gender unfolded on a global landscape, involving the transnationalization of capital and the globalization of technology (p. 279). Thus, from the beginning, experimental writing has been closely connected to gender, race, family, nation, politics, capital, technology, critical social theory and cultural criticism – that is, to debates over questions of knowledge, and its representation and presentation.

The drive to performance ethnography within Western ethnography, the drive to the personal, and the autobiographical, Clough suggests, reflects a growing sensitivity to issues surrounding agency and the new media technologies. But, the subjectivity and forms of selfhood performed and examined in the new autoethnography are linked to 'the trauma culture of the teletechnological' (Clough, 2000: 287). Clough observes that much of the

new autoethnography involves persons writing about the 'experiences of drug abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, rape, incest, anorexia, chronic illness, and death.' She goes on, 'autoethnography is symptomatic of the trauma culture that has been most outrageously presented in television talk shows' (Clough, 2000: 287).

This trauma culture exposes and celebrates the erasure of traditional barriers separating the public and the private in American life. In a pornography of the visible, the violent side of intimate family life is exposed, and the contradictions in capitalism as a way of life are revealed. Much of the new autoethnography focuses on trauma, on injuries, on troubled, repressed memories, inability to speak the past, the search for a new voice, shattered, damaged egos seeking new histories, new forms of agency. But in speaking from the spaces of trauma, autoethnographers do not 'critically or self-consciously engage enough the technical substrata of their own writing form' (Clough, 2000: 287).

Clough does not mean to trivialize the trauma written about. Rather, she wants to read it as symptomatic of something else that requires attention, namely how the new television, computer and media technologies, in conjunction with global capital on a transnational scale are creating new forms of subjectivity. 'I think it is these figures of subjectivity appearing in autoethnography which cultural criticism must now attend' (p. 287).

Thus Clough comes back to a single criterion for evaluating experimental writing, namely cultural criticism and theoretical reflection. Staying close to these two terms allows 'experimental writing to be a vehicle for thinking new sociological subjects, new parameters of the social' (p. 290). She is fearful that the search for new criteria will silence cultural criticism (p. 290). I agree.

In seeking to conventionalize performative criteria, Clough's and Bochner's warnings must not be forgotten. 'Orthodoxy . . . is not a stable category' (Atkinson et al., 2001: 11). Mindful of the above distinctions, discussions of criteria move in three directions at the same time: the moral, political and the ethical; the literary and the aesthetic; trauma and the politics of experience.

FEMINIST, COMMUNITARIAN CRITERIA

Building on Clough, in the seventh moment the understandings and criteria for evaluating critical performance events combine aesthetics, ethics and epistemologies.⁵ Several criteria can be outlined. Like hooks's black aesthetic (1990: 111), and Giroux's public pedagogy (2000b: 25), these performance criteria erase the usual differences between ethics, politics and power. This erasure creates the possibilities for a practical, performative pedagogy, a call for performances which intervene and interrupt public life. Such interruptions are meant to unsettle and challenge taken for granted assumptions concerning problematic issues in public life. They create a space for dialogue and questions, giving a voice to positions previously silenced, or ignored (but see Bishop, 1998: 209; also Smith, 1999).

Ideologically, this performance aesthetic refuses assimilation to white middle class norms and the traumas of that culture. It resists those understandings that valorize performances and narratives centered on the life crises of the humanistic subject (see Comolli and Narboni, 1971). In contrast, this aesthetic values performance narratives that reflexively recognize, go against the grain, and attack the dominant cultural ideologies connected to race, class, family and gender. These performances expose cracks in the ideological seams in these dominant cultural mythologies, both through political action and by their subject matter.

Richard Posner's public art functions this way (Pitzl-Waters and Enstrom-Waters, 2002: 6). For example his Berlin installation, 'Der Wider-Haken-Kraiter-Garten' ('The Live not an Evil Garden'), manipulates two swastikas made of broken glass. The first swastika, with its arms spinning clockwise, is a symbol from ancient temples representing the sun, and its ability to sustain life. The second swastika, its arms spinning counter-clockwise is the Nazi Hakenkreuz, a symbol of prejudice. Posner located this installation on the site where a synagogue had previously stood. Destroyed by Allied bombers, the site had been turned into a toxic place, a public dump. Posner's art transforms this toxic place into a site which honors the victims of the holocaust, including members of Posner's family.

In a feminist, communitarian sense, this aesthetic contends that ways of knowing (epistemology) are moral and ethical (Christians, 2000). These ways of knowing involve conceptions of who the human being is (ontology), including how matters of difference are socially organized. The ways in which these relationships of difference are textually represented answer to a political and epistemological aesthetic which defines what is good, true, and beautiful.

Three interconnected criteria shape these representations of the world. *Interpretive sufficiency* is the watchword (Christians, 2000: 145).⁶ Accounts should possess that amount of depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence that will permit a critical consciousness, or what Paulo Freire (2000) terms conscientization to be formed. Through conscientization the oppressed gain their own voice, and collaborate in transforming their culture (Christians, 2000: 148).

Second, these accounts should exhibit a *representational adequacy* and be free of racial, class or gender stereotyping (Christians, 2000: 145). Finally texts are *authentically adequate* when three conditions are met: (1) they represent multiple voices; (2) they enhance moral discernment; and (3) they promote social transformation (Christians, 2000: 145). Multi-voiced ethnographic texts should empower persons, leading them to discover moral truths about themselves, while generating social criticism. These criticisms in turn should lead to efforts at social transformation (p. 147).

All aesthetics and standards of judgment are based on particular moral standpoints. Hence, for example, an Afrocentric feminist aesthetic (and epistemology), stresses the importance of truth, knowledge and beauty ('Black is

Beautiful'). Such claims are based on a concept of storytelling, and a notion of wisdom that is experiential and shared. Wisdom so conceived is derived from local, lived experience, and expresses lore, folktale and myth (Collins, 1991).

This is a dialogical epistemology and aesthetic. It involves a give and take, an on-going moral dialogue between persons. It enacts an ethic of care, and an ethic of personal and communal responsibility (Collins, 1991: 214; Giroux, 2000a: 130). Politically, this aesthetic imagines how a truly democratic society might look, including one free of race prejudice and oppression. This aesthetic values beauty and artistry, movement, rhythm, color and texture in everyday life. It celebrates difference and the sounds of many different voices. It expresses an ethic of empowerment.

This ethic presumes a moral community that is ontologically prior to the person. This community has shared moral values, including the concepts of shared governance, neighborliness, love, kindness and the moral good (Christians, 2000: 144–9). This ethic embodies a sacred, existential epistemology that locates persons in a noncompetitive, nonhierarchical relationship to the larger moral universe. This ethic declares that all persons deserve dignity and a sacred status in the world. It stresses the value of human life, truth telling and nonviolence (Christians, 2000: 147).

Under the principle of authentic adequacy, this aesthetic enables social criticism, and engenders resistance. It helps persons imagine how things could be different. It imagines new forms of human transformation and emancipation. It enacts these transformations through dialogue. If necessary, it sanctions nonviolent forms of civil disobedience (Christians, 2000: 148). In asking that interpretive work provide the foundations for social criticism and social action, this ethic represents a call to action.

This aesthetic understands that moral criteria are always fitted to the contingencies of concrete circumstances, assessed in terms of those local understandings that flow from feminist, communitarian understandings. This ethic calls for dialogical research rooted in the concepts of care, and shared governance. How this ethic works in any specific situation cannot be given in advance.

Properly conceptualized, performance autoethnography becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project. It turns researchers and subjects into co-participants in a common moral project. This is a form of participatory action research. It has roots in liberation theology, neo-Marxist approaches to community development, and human rights activism in Asia and elsewhere (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 568). Such work is characterized by shared ownership of the research project, community-based analyses, an emancipatory, dialectical, and transformative commitment to community action (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 568, 598). This form of inquiry 'aims to help people recover, and release themselves, from the constraints embedded in the social media' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 598).

As a cultural critic, the researcher speaks from an informed moral and ethical position. He or she is anchored in a specific community of progressive moral discourse. The moral ethnographer-as-performer takes sides, working always on the side of those who seek a genuine grassroots democracy (Hartnett, 1998: 288).

Moral criticism and taking sides

The ethnographer-as-performer, as cultural critic, takes sides. This is proper because this is what politically engaged theatre does. This is a complex process (Becker, 1967; Hammersley, 2001). Performers-as-critics must make their own moral and political values clear, including the social constructions, values, and so-called objective facts and ideological assumptions that are attached to these positions. Alternative standpoints and claims to truth must be represented with minimal distortion. The performer-as-critic assesses this standpoint, revealing how it disadvantages and disempowers members of a specific group (Ryan et al., 1998).

Performers then show how a participatory, feminist, communitarian ethic addresses the situation through actions which empower and enable social justice. Advocates of the Black Arts Movement in the 1970s, for example, insisted that art function politically. They asked how much more beautiful a poem, melody, play, novel or film made the life of a single black person (Gayle, 1997: 1876).

In a call to action, researchers-as-performers engage in concrete steps which will change situations. They may show citizens, like Richard Posner did, how to bring new and sacred meanings to a previously marginalized and stigmatized public site. Through performances they will demonstrate how particular texts, directly and indirectly misrepresent persons and reproduce prejudice and stereotypes.

In advancing this utopian project, the performer seeks new standards and new tools of evaluation. For example, Karenga (1997), a theorist of the Black Arts Movement in the 1970s, argued that black art should be political, functional, collective and committed. Politically, and functionally, this art would, as it was for Du Bois' (1926: 134) black theatre, be about blacks, made by blacks, for blacks, and located in local black communities. This community art would support and 'respond positively to the reality of a revolution' (Karenga, 1997: 1973). It would not be art for art's sake, rather it would be art for persons in the black community, art for 'Sammy the shoeshine boy, T.C. the truck driver and K.P. the unwilling soldier' (Karenga, 1997: 1974). Karenga told blacks that 'we do not need pictures of oranges in a bowl, or trees standing innocently in the midst of a wasteland . . . or fat white women smiling lewdly. . . . If we must paint oranges or trees, let our guerrillas be eating those oranges for strength and using those trees for cover' (1997: 1974; see also Gayle, 1971: xxiii). Collectively, black art comes from the people, and

must be returned to the people 'in a form more beautiful and colorful than it was in real life . . . art is everyday life given more form and color' (Karenga, 1997: 1974). Such art is committed to political goals. It is democratic. It celebrates diversity, personal and collective freedom.⁷ It is not elitist.

In asking if a work is political, functional, collective and committed Karenga's black aesthetic compliments the feminist communitarian ethic and its concepts of interpretive sufficiency, representational and authentic adequacy. Multiple criteria can now be brought to a work. Is it political, functional, committed, and free of stereotype? Does it exhibit depth, nuance, detail, coherence and emotion? Are multiple voices and ethical positions present? Does the work create the conditions for critical consciousness?

Committed scholars implement these understandings in their performances. They show persons how to fashion their own *grounded aesthetics* within the spaces of the everyday world (Laermans, 1993: 156; Willis, 1990). This grounded aesthetic is at once political and personal. In the area of commodity consumption, this aesthetic deconstructs the images, appearances, and promises of happiness that are used to make objects attractive to consumers (Harms and Kellner, 1991: 49). These aesthetic practices speak to the complex interplay between resistance and consumption, between desire and pleasure. They articulate the many different ways in which consumers creatively use the resources of popular culture for personal and group empowerment (Laermans, 1993: 154–5).

This grounded aesthetic functions both as a vehicle and as a site of resistance. In the arena of consumption and race, for example, race scholars deconstruct negative racial representations. They turn these negative images into positive representations. They invent new cultural images and slogans. In these moves a racially grounded practical aesthetic is formulated. In the sensuous enactment of this aesthetic, the consumer becomes an active player in the construction of new racial identities.

Critical scholars will, of course, make their own values clear. At the same time they will listen to the perspectives and voices of many different stakeholders. In any given situation, they will advocate for the side of the underdog (Ryan et al., 1998). In so doing they will attempt to create a critical, reflexive moral consciousness on the part of the citizen-consumer. They will argue that happiness is not necessarily connected to the possession of particular material objects, that in fact the desire to possess is a desire created by the manufacturer of the object in question (Harms and Kellner, 1991: 65).

Critical researchers will demonstrate how particular consumption patterns and choices reproduce, for particular oppressed consumer groups (poor, women, youth, queer, racial), the normative ideologies of possessive materialism, designer capitalism, and current fashion. They will show how the emphasis on the possession of material goods becomes an end in itself, not a means to attain specific nonmaterial ethical and moral goals. Moreover, scholars will indicate how advertising reproduces gender, racial, sexual

orientation, and social class stereotypes, and even contributes to consumer practices that are harmful to personal health and the environment. In so doing, interpretive researchers engage in social critique and moral dialogue, identifying the different gendered relations of cultural capital that operate in specific consumption contexts.

But more is involved. The researcher-as-performer will evaluate specific programs, making recommendations concerning programs and practices, advocating lines of action that maximize participatory democracy, citizen health and autonomy. Such a commitment makes the researcher accountable for the moral and personal consequences of any particular line of action that is recommended.

*Performative norms and criteria*⁸

As argued elsewhere (Denzin, 1997: 282–3), the feminist, ethical model produces a series of norms for this writing and performing project. These norms elaborate four nonnegotiable journalistic norms: accuracy, nonmaleficence, the right to know, and making one's moral position known. The ethnographer-performer's moral tales are not written to produce harm for the innocent (Christians, 1986: 124), or those who have been oppressed by the culture's systems of domination and repression (the principle of nonmaleficence). The identity of those written about, when harm would be produced, should always be protected. These tales are factually and fictionally correct, organized under the rule that if something did not happen, it could have happened. When fiction, or creative non-fiction is written, or when composite cases are moulded into a single story, the writer-performer is under an obligation to report this to the reader (see Christians et al., 1993: 55; Eason, 1984, 1986). The reader has the right to read what the ethnographer has learned, but this right to know should be balanced against the principle of nonmaleficence.

The writer must be honest with the reader.⁹ The text must be realistic, concrete as to character, setting, atmosphere, and dialogue. The performance event, as in good ethno-drama, provides a forum for the search for moral truths about the self and the other. This forum explores the unrepresentable in the culture, the discontents of daily life. The performer stirs up the world, objectivity is a fiction, and the writer-performer's story (mystery) is part of the tale that is told. The writer has a theory about how the world works, and this theory is never far from the surface of the text. Self-reflexive readers-viewers are presumed, citizens who seek honest but reflexive works that draw them into the many structures of verisimilitude that shape the story in question.

There remains the struggle to find a narrative and performative voice that writes against a long tradition that favors autobiography and lived experience as the sites for reflexivity and self-hood (Clough, 1994: 157). This form of subjective reflexivity is a trap which too easily reproduces normative conceptions of self, agency, gender, desire and sexuality. And there is, to repeat, a pressing need to invent a reflexive form of writing and performing that turns

autoethnography and experimental literary texts back 'onto each other' (Clough, 1994: 162).

Always a sceptic, this performer-writer is suspicious of conspiracies, alignments of power and desire that turn segments of the public into victims. So these performance works trouble traditional, realist notions of truth and verification, asking always who stands to benefit by a particular version of the truth. The public ethnographer-as-performer enacts an ethics of practice that privileges the client-public relationship. The ethnographer is a moral advocate for the public, although a personal moral code may lead individual researchers to work against the so-called best interests of a client, or a particular segment of the public.

The ethnographer's performance tale is always allegorical, a symbolic tale, a parable which is not just a record of human experience. This tale is a means of experience, a method of empowerment. It is a vehicle for readers to discover moral truths about themselves. More deeply, the performance tale is a utopian tale of self and social redemption, a tale which brings a moral compass back into the reader's (and the writer's) life. The ethnographer discovers the multiple 'truths' that operate in the social world, the stories people tell one another about the things that matter to them. Like the public journalist, the ethnographer writes stories that create 'pockets of critical consciousness . . . discourse[s] of cultural diversity' (Christians, 1996: 11). These performance stories move oppressed people to action, enabling transformations in the public spheres of everyday life.

Literary and aesthetic criteria

I turn now to the work of Ellis, Bochner and Richardson. Collectively these scholars offer a subtly nuanced set of criteria that emphasize the literary, substantive and aesthetic dimensions of the new writing. (These criteria are consistent with the four nonnegotiable journalistic norms discussed above.) In the main, these scholars and their students have focused on what Clough calls the experiences embedded in the culture of trauma. Their works (especially Ellis and Bochner) destigmatize the experiences of damaged egos.

ELLIS'S LITERARY REALISM

Ellis (2000: 273) offers a fully developed literary aesthetic. She wants writing that conforms to the criteria of interpretive sufficiency and authentic adequacy. She wants works that are engaging, and nuanced, texts that allow her to feel and think with them. She wants a story that immerses her in another world, a story that stays with her after she has read it. She privileges evocation over cognitive contemplation. If a writer cannot write evocatively, she recommends they write in another genre. She asks that a story tell her something new: 'About social life, social process, the experience of others, the author's experience, my own life. Is there anything "new" here?' (p. 275).

To the criteria of interpretive sufficiency and authentic adequacy, Ellis adds a third, what might be called literary value, or what Richardson (2000a: 937; 2000b: 254) calls aesthetic merit. Ellis wants stories to have a good plot, to have dramatic tension, to be coherent, logically consistent, to exhibit balance, flow, and an authenticity of experience, to be lifelike. She asks that authors show and not tell, that they develop characters and scenes fully, but that there not be too many characters or scenes.

She wants careful editing, an economy of words, but vivid pictures, sounds, smells, feelings, conversations that feel like real life, surprise endings that challenge her to see things in a new way. She asks if analysis has been connected closely to the story, and to the relevant literature. She asks if the story is worth fighting for, even if it is unconventional (p. 276).

She wants to know what the author's goals are, what they are trying to achieve, and asks if the goals are achievable, and if they are worthwhile. She asks if another writing form would better serve the author's purposes. She wonders if the writer learned anything new about him or herself, about other characters in the story, about social processes and relationships (p. 275).

Ethical questions are also raised, but in a less detailed manner than required by the criteria of authentic adequacy. She does not explicitly ask for multiple voices, moral discernment, or social transformation. She asks if the author received permission to portray others, if others had a chance to contribute to their perspective in the story. If this did not happen, she wants to know why. She asks if the story causes pain for characters and readers.

She asks if the story will help others 'cope with or better understand their worlds? Is it useful and, if so, for whom? Does it encourage compassion for the characters? Does it promote dialogue? Does it have the potential to stimulate social action?' (p. 275). She does not specify the form or direction of social action.

BOCHNER'S NARRATIVES OF SELF

Ellis's literary realism complements Bochner's vision of poetic social science and alternative ethnography. Bochner also emphasizes issues surrounding interpretive sufficiency. He asks if these new narratives of self use language in a way that allows the reader (and writer) to extract meaning from experience, 'rather than depict experience exactly as it was lived' (p. 270). Bochner isolates seven criteria.

First, he looks for abundant, concrete detail, for the 'flesh and blood emotions of people coping with life's contingencies; not only facts but also feelings' (p. 270). Second, he likes structurally complex narratives, stories told in the curve of time, weaving past and present together in the nonlinear spaces of memory work. Third, he judges authors in terms of their emotional credibility, vulnerability and honesty. He wants texts that comment on those 'cultural scripts that resist transformation . . . squeezing comedy out of life's tragedies' (p. 270), texts that take a 'measure of life's limitations' (p. 270).

Fourth, he wants stories of two selves, stories of who I was to who I am, lives transformed by crisis.

Fifth, he holds the writer to 'a demanding standard of ethical self-consciousness' (p. 271). Like Ellis, he wants the writer to show concern for those who are written about, concern for their place in the story, and concern for how telling the story changes the writer's (and reader's) self, concern for the 'moral commitments and convictions that underlie the story' (p. 271). Sixth, also like Ellis, he wants a story that 'moves me, my heart and belly as well as my head' (p. 271). He does not demean a story if it is confessional or erotic, or pornographic, because every story is a dare, a risk.

Seventh, consistent with the criteria of authentic adequacy, Bochner wants narratives of the self that can be used as 'a source of empowerment and a form of resistance to counter the domination of canonical discourses' (p. 271). He values those works that devictimize stigmatized identities, works that 'confirm and humanize tragic experience by bearing witness to what it means to live with shame, abuse, addiction, or bodily dysfunction and to gain agency through testimony' (p. 271).

These criteria do not actively engage the issues surrounding authentic adequacy, including ethical discernment and social transformation. It is perhaps not enough, Clough would argue, to just bear witness to tragic experience, to just make public the traumas of the trauma culture.

RICHARDSON'S FIVE CRITERIA

Laurel Richardson asks for more, offering five criteria that move back and forth across the dimensions of interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy. Her first criterion is *substantive contribution*: does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Is the work grounded in a social scientific perspective? Second, she asks if the work has *aesthetic merit*, does it succeed aesthetically, is it artistically shaped, is it satisfying, complex, not boring? (2000b: 254). Her third criterion is *reflexivity*, which involves several separate issues. She asks if the author is familiar with the epistemology of postmodernism. She wants to know how the information in the text was gathered, were ethical issues involved in this process? She asks if the author's subjectivity is in the text, is their point of view clear, is there adequate self-awareness, and self-exposure? Is the author held accountable to standards of knowing and telling (2000b: 254)?

The fourth criterion assesses *impact*. Richardson asks how the work effects her, emotionally, intellectually, and as a scholar. She asks, does it generate new questions? Does it move her to try new research practices? Does it move her to action? Fifth, she wants to know how the work *expresses a reality*: 'Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience? Does it seem "true" – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?' (2000a: 937).

Together, Ellis, Bochner and Richardson offer a set of interpretive criteria that

emphasize the literary and aesthetic qualities of a work, as well as its substantive contributions to an area of knowledge. Ethically, they focus on the dialogical relationship between the writer and the subject, asking that this be an honest and open relationship. Each of these scholars wants to be moved emotionally and intellectually by a work. Each values reflexivity, and texts that empower.

A new aesthetic criterion emerges in this reading of Ellis, Bochner and Richardson. It might be termed the dialogical requirement. In asking that they be moved by a text, these writers want works that invite them into another person's world of experience. In privileging the reading experience, they bring new meaning to the writerly text. If writing is a form of inquiry, then they want works that provoke self-reflection. And they do not want to be bored! (Richardson, 2000a: 923–4).

Clough privileges cultural criticism and theoretical reflection. These impulses are present in Ellis, Bochner and Richardson, but not privileged. Nor do they interrogate, as Clough asks, the technical substrate of their writing. But they offer guidelines for aesthetically pleasing, elegant and moving autoethnographies. We are privileged to be able to stand on their shoulders.

I turn now to another list. Building on Christians, Ellis, Bochner, and Richardson, risking Clough and Bochner's ire, I offer a set of performative understandings and criteria for performance texts in the seventh moment.

*Performative understandings in the seventh moment*¹⁰

These tales and performances are organized by a counter-hegemonic, or subversive, utopian anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983). This aesthetic enacts the feminist communitarian ethic. It embodies the spirit of Clough's call for cultural criticism, for critical readings of the trauma culture. It works outward from critical race theory. Drawing on the aesthetic and literary guidelines of Ellis, Bochner and Richardson, it is shaped by the following understandings:

- No topic is taboo, including sexuality, sexual abuse, death and violence
- The search for texts that speak to women and children of color; to persons who suffer from violence, rape, racial and sexist injustice
- Ethics, aesthetics, political praxis and epistemology are joined; every act of representation, artistic or research, is a political and ethical statement. An ethics of care is paramount
- Claims to truth and knowledge are assessed in terms of multiple criteria, including asking if a text:
 - (a) interrogates existing cultural, sexist and racial stereotypes, especially those connected to family, femininity, masculinity, marriage and intimacy;
 - (b) gives primacy to memory and its connections to concrete lived experience;
 - (c) uses dialogue and an ethics of personal responsibility; values beauty, spirituality and a love of others;

- (d) implements an emancipatory agenda committed to equality, freedom and social justice and participatory democratic practices;
- (e) emphasizes community, collective action, solidarity and group empowerment.
- Presumes an ethnographer, performer and social researcher who is part of, and a spokesperson for, a local moral community, a community with its own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions
- Asks that the writer-artist draw upon vernacular, folk and popular culture forms of representation, including proverbs, work songs, spirituals, sermons, prayers, poems, choreopoems, folktales, blues, jazz, rap, film, paintings, theatre, movies, photographs, performance art, murals, and corridos (Denzin, 2002: 182)
- Seeks artists-researchers-writers who produce works that speak to and represent the needs of the community (drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, murder, gang warfare, AIDS, dropping out of school)
- Understands that no single representation or work can speak to the collective needs of the community, rather local communities are often divided along racial, ethnic, gender, residential, age and class lines.

Thus are sought emancipatory, utopian performances, texts grounded in the distinctive styles, rhythms, idioms and personal identities of local folk and vernacular culture. These performances record the history of injustices experienced by the members of an oppressed group. They show how members of a local group have struggled to find places of dignity and respect in a violent, racist and sexist civil society.

These performances are sites of resistance. They are places where meanings, politics and identities are negotiated. They transform and challenge stereotypical forms of cultural representation, white, black, Chicano, Asian, Native American, gay, or straight.

Performative criteria

Building on these normative understandings, I value those autoethnographic texts that:

1. Unsettle, criticize and challenge taken for granted, repressed meanings;
2. Invite moral and ethical dialogue, while reflexively clarifying their own moral position;
3. Engender resistance, and offer utopian thoughts about how things can be made different;
4. Demonstrate that they care, that they are kind;
5. Show, instead of tell, while using the rule that less is more;
6. Exhibit interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy;
7. Are political, functional, collective and committed.

In asking if a performance event does these things, I understand that every performance is different. Further, audiences may or may not agree on what is caring, or kind, or reflexive, and some persons may not want their taken for granted understandings challenged. I turn now to a brief discussion of the politics of interpretation in the performance community. I want to connect this discussion to critical race theory.

Trauma, race and the politics of interpretation

Writing, Richardson (2001: 879) reminds us, is not an innocent practice, although in the social sciences and the humanities there is only interpretation. Nonetheless Marx (1888/1983: 158) continues to remind us that we are in the business of not just interpreting but of changing the world. Clough asks that writers transcend the traumas celebrated in a mass-mediated trauma culture. She asks for works that go more deeply into cultural criticism, into the politics of interpretation.

This requires a return to race, and critical race theory, an aesthetic of color. In this section I want to work back and forth between variations on a Chicana/o (Gonzalez, 1998; Pizarro, 1998) black and African-American aesthetic (Davis, 1998; hooks, 1990, 1996), and the relationship between these practices and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Parker, 1998). I want to connect to the radical performance texts stemming from the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Baker, 1997; Baraka, 1997; Harris, 1998).

These interconnections are now being established in the various Black Cultural Studies projects of the new Black Public Intellectuals and cultural critics (Hall, Gilroy, hooks, Gates, West, Reed, Morrison, Wallace, Steele). A current generation of blues, rap, hip hop, and popular singers, jazz performers, poets (Angelou, Dove, Jordan, Knight, Cortez), novelists (Walker, Morrison, Bambara), playwrights (Wilson, Shange, Smith) and filmmakers (Lee, Singleton, Burnett, Dash) are also making these links (see Christian, 1997: 2019–20; Harris, 1998: 1871–2).¹¹

A FEMINIST AESTHETIC OF COLOR

A feminist, Chicana/o and black performance-based aesthetic uses art, photography, music, dance, poetry, painting, theatre, cinema, performance texts, autobiography, narrative, storytelling and poetic, dramatic language to create a critical race consciousness, thereby extending the post-civil rights Chicana/o and Black Arts Cultural movements into the current century (see Harrington, 1999: 208). These practices serve to implement critical race theory which 'seeks to decloak the seemingly race-neutral, and color-blind ways . . . of constructing and administering race-based appraisals . . . of the law, administrative policy, electoral politics . . . political discourse [and education] in the USA' (Parker et al., 1998: 5; also Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Thus is Collins' (1991, 1998) Afrocentric feminist agenda for the 1990s moved into this new century – that is, theorists and practitioners enact a standpoint epistemology that sees the world from the point of view of oppressed persons of color. This aesthetic is also informed by successive waves of the Asian and Native American, women, gay, lesbian and bisexual movements, who 'use their art as a weapon for political activism' (Harris, 1998: 1384; also Nero, 1998: 1973).

Theorists critically engage and interrogate the anti-civil rights agendas of the New Right (see Jordan, 1998). But this is not a protest or integrationist initiative aimed solely at informing a white audience of racial injustice. It dismisses these narrow agendas. In so doing it rejects classical Eurocentric and postpositivist standards for evaluating literary, artistic and research work.

AESTHETICS AND CINEMATIC PRACTICES

Within the contemporary black and Chicana/o aesthetic communities, there are a specific set of film, narrative and visual cultural practices associated with this aesthetic project (see Denzin 2002: 183–6 for a review). These practices inform and shape the narrative and visual content of these experimental texts. They include:

- Experiments with narrative forms, folk ballads, and corridos that honor long-standing Chicano discourse traditions (Fregoso, 1993: 70–6; Noriega, 1992: 152–3);
- The use of improvisation, mise-en-scene, and montage to fill the screen with multi-racial images, and to manipulate bicultural visual and linguistic codes;
- The use of personal testimonials, life stories, voice-overs and off-screen narration to provide overall narrative unity to a text (Noriega, 1992: 156–9).
- A celebration of key elements in Chicano culture, especially the themes of resistance, maintenance, affirmation, and neoindigenism, or *mestizaje* (Noriega, 1992: 150), thereby challenging assimilation and melting pot narratives;
- Production of texts which deconstruct machismo, the masculine identity, and the celebration of works which give the Chicana subject an active part in the text, while criticizing such timeworn stereotypes as the virgin, whore, supportive wife, or home-girl (Fregoso, 1993: 29, 93–4);
- A rejection of essentializing approaches to identity; an emphasis on a processual, gendered, performance view of self, and the location of identity within, not outside, systems of cultural and media representation;
- A refusal to accept the official race-relations narrative of the culture which privileges the ideology of assimilation, while contending that black and Hispanic youth pose grave threats for white society (Fregoso, 1993: 29).

These artistic representations are based on the notion of a radical and constantly changing set of aesthetic practices. As hooks (1990) observes, 'There can never be one critical paradigm for the evaluation of artistic work . . . a radical aesthetic acknowledges that we are constantly changing positions, locations, that our needs and concerns vary, that these diverse directions must correspond with shifts in critical thinking' (p. 111).

At this level, there is no preferred aesthetic. For example, realistic art is not necessarily better than abstract, expressionist, or impressionist art. In the worlds of jazz, ragtime, New Orleans, classic or swing are not necessarily more or less politically correct, or aesthetically better than bebop, cool, hard bop, Latin, avant-garde, or fusion. Nor is Charlie Parker less politically correct than Lester Young, or Ben Webster, Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, Nancy Wilson, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, John Coltrane, or Miles Davis.

But then June Jordan (1998: 199–200) might put it differently. In her Jazz Prose Poem, 'A Good News' Blues' she pays homage to Billie and Louis, Nina, and Bessie, to anyone who sang the blues. In the following lines she praises Billie Holiday:

Since the blues left my sky
I'm runnin out on Monday
To chase down all my Sundays . . .
I'm liftin' weights and wearin sweats . . .
And thrillin through the night . . .
And if I want to rewrite
all the sorry-ass/
victim/passive/feminine/
traditional
propaganda
spinin out here

Each text, each performance should be valued for the collective and individual reflection and critical action it produces, including conversations that cross the boundaries of race, class, gender and nation. We ask how each performance text promotes the development of human agency, 'resistance . . . and critical consciousness' (hooks, 1990: 111).

This aesthetic also seeks and values beauty, and looks to find beauty in the everyday, especially in 'the lives of poor people' (hooks, 1990: 111). Here is an illustration from bell hooks, who recalls the houses of her childhood, especially the house of Baba, her grandmother. Looking back into her childhood, hooks observes that she now sees how this black woman was struggling to create, in spite of poverty and hardship, an oppositional world of beauty. Baba had a clean house crowded with many precious objects. Baba was also a quiltmaker. She turned everyday, worn out clothing into beautiful works of art, and her quilts were present in every room of her small house.

Late at night hooks would sit alone in an upstairs room. In the stillness of the night, in the reflections from the moon's light, hooks came to see darkness and beauty in different ways. Now, in a different time, late at night, she and

her sisters 'think about our skin as a dark room, a place of shadows. We talk often about color politics, and the ways racism has created an aesthetic that wounds us, we talk about the need to see darkness differently . . . in that space of shadows we long for an aesthetic of blackness – strange and oppositional' (1990: 113).

Aesthetics, art, performance, history, culture and politics are thus intertwined, for in the artful, interpretive production, cultural heroes, heroines, mythic pasts, and senses of moral community are created. It remains to chart the future, to return to the beginning, to re-imagine the ways in which performance ethnography can advance the agendas of radical democratic practice, to ask where these practices will take us next.

Into the future

A new post-interpretive, post-foundational paradigm is emerging. This framework is attaching itself to new and less certain interpretive criteria. A more expansive framework shaped by an aesthetics of color and critical race theory principles informs these criteria.

Epistemologies and aesthetics of color will proliferate, building on Afrocentric, Chicana/o, Native American, Asian, and Third World (perspectives). More elaborated epistemologies of gender (and class) will appear, including queer theory, and feminisms of color. These interpretive communities and their scholars will draw on their group experiences as the basis of the texts that are written, and they will seek texts that speak to the logic and cultures of these communities. In so doing they will challenge those representations that have come before (see Cook-Lynn, 1996: 37–8, 71). They will be committed to advancing the political, economic, cultural and educational practices of critical race theory. These practices will be embedded in the everyday world, in the worlds of oppression. New forms of critical pedagogy will not be reduced to arguments or explanations 'bounded by the Western tradition' (Bishop, 1998: 209).

This new generation of scholars will be committed to not just describing the world, but also to changing it. Their texts will be performance-based. They will be committed to creating civic transformations, and to using minimalist social theory. They will inscribe and perform utopian dreams, dreams shaped by critical race theory, dreams of a world where all are free to be who they choose to be, free of gender, class, race, religious, or ethnic prejudice or discrimination. The next moment in qualitative inquiry will be one where the practices of performance ethnography finally move, without hesitation or encumbrance, from the personal to the political.

In the end, then, to summarize, I seek an existential, interpretive social science that offers a blueprint for cultural criticism. This criticism is grounded in the specific worlds made visible in the writing process. It understands that all ethnography is theory and value-laden. There can be no objective account

of a culture and its ways. Taking a lead from mid-century African American cultural critics (Du Bois, Hurston, Ellison, Wright, Baldwin, Hines), we now know that the ethnographic, the aesthetic and the political can never be neatly separated. Ethnography like art is always political.

Accordingly, after Ford (1998/1950), a critical, civic, literary ethnography is one which must evidence a mastery of literary craftsmanship, the art of good writing. It should present a well-plotted, compelling but minimalist narrative. This narrative will be based on realistic, natural conversation, with a focus on memorable, recognizable characters. These characters will be located in well-described 'unforgettable scenes' (Ford, 1998: 1112). Such work should present clearly identifiable cultural and political issues, including injustices based on the structures and meanings of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The work should articulate a politics of hope. It should criticize how things are and imagine how they could be different. It should locate and represent the gendered, sacred self in its ethical relationships to nature. Finally, it will do these things through direct and indirect symbolic and rhetorical means. Writers who do these things are fully immersed in the oppressions and injustices of their time. They direct their ethnographic energies to higher, utopian, morally sacred goals.

The truth of these new texts is determined pragmatically, by their truth effects, by the critical, moral discourse they produce, by the 'empathy they generate, the exchange of experience they enable, and the social bonds they mediate' (Jackson, 1998: 180). The power of these texts is not a question of whether 'they mirror the world as it "really" is' (Jackson, 1998: 180). The world is always already constructed through our performances. Rorty (1980) is firm on this point. There is no mirror to nature.

And so we must learn how to enact an enabling, performative ethnography; an ethnography which aspires to higher goals. We can scarcely afford to do otherwise. We are at a critical crossroad in the histories of our disciplines, and our nation. Cornel West reminds us that, 'We simply cannot enter the twenty-first century at each other's throats' (1994: 159). But with West we must ask, 'Do we have the intelligence, humor, imagination, courage, tolerance, love, respect, and will to meet the challenge?' (1994: 159).

NOTES

1. I thank the editors for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this essay which draws from Chapter Five in Denzin (2003).
2. Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 2) define the seven moments of inquiry, all of which operate in the present, as: the traditional (1900–1950), the modernist (1950–1970), blurred genres (1970–1986), the crisis of representation (1986–1990) postmodern, or experimental (1990–1995), post-experimental (1995–2000), and the future (2000–). For criticisms of this model see Atkinson et al. (2001), and Delamont et al. (2000).
3. These narratives enact Turner's (1986) four-fold processual model of breach, crisis, redress, reintegration or schism.

4. There are three basic positions on the issue of evaluative criteria: foundational, quasi-foundational, and nonfoundational. Foundationalists apply the same positivistic criteria to qualitative research as are employed in quantitative inquiry, contending that there is nothing special about qualitative research that demands a special set of evaluative criteria. Quasi-foundationalists contend that a set of criteria unique to qualitative research must be developed (see Smith and Deemer, 2000). Non-foundationalists reject in advance all epistemological criteria.
5. Definitions: Aesthetics: Theories of beauty; Ethics: Theories of ought, of right; Epistemology: Theories of knowing. Anti-Aesthetic: denies a privileged aesthetic realm, is political. This section draws from Denzin (2000: 326–7). I seek a radical anti-aesthetic that operates as political critique, challenging at every turn the aestheticization of everyday life, and modernist ethical models (Eagleton, 1990: 119; Featherstone, 1991: 67; Jameson, 1981: 299).
6. I thank Clifford Christians for clarifying these principles.
7. These parallel Du Bois' four criteria for real black theatre; such theatre, he said, should be about us, by us, for us, near us (1926: 134).
8. The following section draws from Denzin (1997: 282–3).
9. The rules in this paragraph plagiarize Raymond Chandler's '12 Notes on the Mystery Story' (Chandler, 1972).
10. This section draws from Denzin (2002: 182–13; also Denzin, 2000)
11. A parallel movement (see below) is occurring in the worlds of cinema, where Chicana/o and black filmmakers are using voice-overs, first person and off-screen narration, mise en scene, and montage as ways of disturbing traditional gendered images of the racial subject (see Denzin, 2002: 183–4 for a review).

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