How Do We Craft Autoethnography? A Modest Review

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Abstract
I am writing this review as an essential reading for readers and writers of the book—*Crafting Autoethnography: Processes and Practices of Making Self and Culture*, edited by Jackie Goode, Karen Lumsden, and Jan Bradford, which explores the art of crafting autoethnography (Goode et al., 2023). As a novice autoethnographer, I have grappled with challenges and explored borders while shaping my narrative as a self-narrator of autoethnographic writing. So, in this review, I have attempted to engage readers by offering the invitation, encouraging initial reading as entry to the book, subsequent re-entry, and eventual exit as my evaluation of the book. This book resonates with me, emphasizing the significance of writing our lives and stories, developing self-awareness through performative, philosophical, and artistic writing, and shaping our identity—advocacy and transformation. Through diverse perspectives—from sociology to the visual arts—the contributors of the book illuminate their processes, inviting novice and veteran autoethnographers to write to explore the intricate craft of autoethnography.

Keywords
crafting, autoethnography, narrative, self-narrator, lives and stories

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Acknowledgements
I extend this review to readers, both novice and veteran writers and researchers, who appreciate its significance in crafting autoethnographic writing. My gratitude goes to editors Jackie Goode, Karen Lumsden, and Jan Bradford, as well as the contributing authors, for presenting this invaluable book, Crafting Autoethnography: Processes and Practices of Making Self and Culture, in the scholarship.

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I am writing this review as an essential reading for readers and writers of the book—*Crafting Autoethnography: Processes and Practices of Making Self and Culture*, edited by Jackie Goode, Karen Lumsden, and Jan Bradford, which explores the art of crafting autoethnography (Goode et al., 2023). As a novice autoethnographer, I have grappled with challenges and explored borders while shaping my narrative as a self-narrator of autoethnographic writing. So, in this review, I have attempted to engage readers by offering the invitation, encouraging initial reading as entry to the book, subsequent re-entry, and eventual exit as my evaluation of the book. This book resonates with me, emphasizing the significance of writing our lives and stories, developing self-awareness through performative, philosophical, and artistic writing, and shaping our identity—advocacy and transformation. Through diverse perspectives—from sociology to the visual arts—the contributors of the book illuminate their processes, inviting novice and veteran autoethnographers to write to explore the intricate craft of autoethnography.

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**Invitation**

Dear readers, I invite you to read this review and even the book as an essential reading for readers and writers of the work by Jackie Goode, Karen Lumsden, and Jan Bradford. The hallmark of the book is grounded in the crafting of autoethnography. The book's title grasped my attention, so I restlessly penned my thoughts on the book. My experience with autoethnographic writing has been like riding a roller coaster, navigating numerous challenges, and pushing the boundaries to create something meaningful while crafting autoethnography. I subscribed to autoethnography in my master's research in mathematics education (See Dahal, 2013; Dahal et al., 2019) and collaborative autoethnography in my ongoing doctoral research. Different ideas wrestled in my mind as a novice autoethnographer while crafting autoethnographies. These ups and downs always made me ponder a lot of critical questions. So, I consider myself a novice autoethnographer since I am constantly learning and growing in my artistic, philosophical, and performance-based transformations (Dahal, 2024; Denzin & Giardina, 2022). Hence, I am writing this review on *Crafting Autoethnography: Processes and Practices of Making Self and Culture* as a novice (I still call myself) autoethnographer. I believe this book is a must-read for novice researchers because it discusses the importance of writing one's life story, developing one's sense of self through performative writing, and crafting one's identity as an autoethnographer for advocacy and transformation.

Dear readers, *Crafting Autoethnography: Processes and Practices of Making Self and Culture* has inspired me to explore how autoethnography is constructed. I immediately turned my attention to the book's contributors. These contributors, hailing from diverse fields such as sociology, education, counseling, visual arts, textiles, drama, music, and museum curation,
reveal and contemplate the processes and practices they employ while crafting their autoethnographic pieces. As I delved into each chapter, each exploring a unique material or medium, I immersed myself in a rich and stimulating array of demonstrations. The focus was clearly on the practical creation of texts and artifacts.

Entry

Based on the sections of the book (1) this writing life, (2) making a drama out of it, (3) crafting selves, (4) creating class, and (5) space and belonging, I attempted to enter in each of the chapters of the book. So, in this review, I have summarized my reflections on chapters of the book based on the sections of the book. This Writing Life covered two chapters, Shoring up the Fragments and When the Slave Ships Came. As I read the chapter—Shoring up the Fragments by Jackie Goode, I immersed myself in her unique approach to autoethnographic writing. She links her practice to a form of collecting, gathering fragments of experiences that have scattered along the journey of life. These fragments are then reassembled, creating a vessel that keeps our evolving selves intact while allowing us to reinvent ourselves continually. Goode's process of creating an autoethnographic text is both restless and purposeful. She walks in step with theorists, novelists, and poets, taking improvisatory strides. She chases the elusive White Rabbit, finds herself stuck in a hole, and engages in the labor of memory work. She traces the absences, examines the notions of nostalgia and its meanings, and ultimately invites the reader to embark on their journey of autoethnographic discovery. This chapter serves as a description and an example of crafting a written autoethnographic text. Next, I read the chapter—When the Slave Ships Came, in which Panya Banjoko explores the simultaneous creation of self and poetry as she navigates her past. She contemplates the potential impact of racial discrimination on her creative, personal, and professional life. She considers how voices, once lost, can be reimagined and given a place in history. A significant challenge for her is finding ways to bear witness to history retrospectively, redescribe, and intervene creatively. She seeks to express the ignored and submerged voices while highlighting the chain of historical events that perpetuate racial inequalities. This contemplation sparks her desire to reclaim hidden narratives through poetry. For me, each poem she crafts marks a significant moment in her journey as a writer and heritage professional in Nottingham. Her creative process involves studying the atrocities of slavery, distilling the brutalities into free writes, sculpting, and then building words into poems. As she works her way through historical accounts of the Transatlantic Slave Trade's horrors, she also explores how present-day issues around race and representation in museums influence and sometimes impede her creative decisions.

The Making a Drama Out of It section covered two chapters, Reflections and Confessions on the Making of a Performative Autoethnography: University Performance Development Reviews and the Academic Self and Mi Amigo Giovanni: A Digital Engagement of Friendship, Community and Queer Love Through a Zoom Performance. The chapter—Reflections and Confessions on the Making of a Performative Autoethnography: University Performance Development Reviews by Karen Lumsden explores her autoethnographic journey. Karen delves into the intricate world of the performance development review—a managerial tool wielded within UK universities. This strategic activity scrutinizes, evaluates, and quantifies staff performance against predefined criteria. These criteria typically encompass teaching, research, and impact for scholars like me. As she embarked on this autoethnographic exploration, she found herself swaying like a pendulum. On one side swung the performing-public-academic self, dutifully conforming to organizational expectations. On the other side lurked the hidden private self, critical and resistant to these expectations. The pendulum became her compass—a tool for self-reflection and critical inquiry. It allowed her to
deconstruct, process, and make sense of her experiences. So, crafting autoethnography served as more than mere documentation. It became a form of catharsis, a means of self-care, and a quiet act of resistance. She reconciled her public and private selves through its pages, navigating the labyrinthine corridors of academic life.

In the second chapter, *Mi Amigo Giovanni: A Digital Engagement of Friendship, Community and Queer Love Through a Zoom Performance* by Rodríguez-Dorans and Méndez Díaz delve into a duoethnography that explores their experience of creating and performing the online piece titled "Mi amigo Giovanni". For them, digital autoethnography emerged as a response to the profound grief they felt after losing a dear friend. "Mi amigo Giovanni" weaves together various threads: personal reflections, conversations with friends, family, and even strangers, and the raw emotions associated with loss. The heart of their narrative lies in the friendship between two individuals—Elliot and Giovanni—who first crossed paths as teenagers. From those early encounters, they trace their journey through university, professional beginnings, love relationships, and the intricate web of connections within their chosen family. Spanning a three-year period from 2019 to 2022, their performance piece grapples with themes at the intersection of death, community, and gay identity. Through this creative process, all participants—themselves included—underwent a kind of transformation, as if being "re-made" by the act of storytelling. Hence, "Mi amigo Giovanni" demonstrates the power of digital performance to reshape my understanding of community, friendship, and the process of mourning while crafting autoethnography.

Crafting Selves section presents five chapters—*Thinking with our Hands While Becoming Autoethnographers, Putting Ourselves in the Picture, Digital Autoethnography: An Approach to Facilitate Reflective Practice in the Making and Performing of Visual Art, Stitching as Reflection and Resistance: The Use of a Stitch Journal During Doctoral Study,* and *Making the Dreamer: Cut-ups, Découpage and Narrative Assemblages of Interbeing and Becoming.* In the chapter, *Thinking with our Hands While Becoming Autoethnographers,* the authors—Rommy Anabalón Schaaf and Javiera Sandoval Limarí explore their autoethnographic practices. They create a unique audio-visual piece as a platform for reflection and discovery. The piece comprises a video clip and three artifacts: The Blanket, The Portrait, and Trees, each contributing to the narrative in their own way. Rommy Anabalón Schaaf and Javiera Sandoval Limarí delve into their relationships with their mothers, providing a detailed, personal, and insightful analysis. They skillfully intertwine their autoethnographic work with a feminist decolonial lens, offering a fresh perspective on their identities as Latinx artists and researchers. This work is a compelling blend of personal narrative and academic inquiry. Their innovative approach to autoethnography, combined with their thoughtful exploration of identity, results in a piece that is as thought-provoking as it is moving. Hence, their work serves as a testament to the power of creative expression in unlocking new ways of thinking and understanding.

In the chapter, *Putting Ourselves in the Picture,* Simon Denison explores self-reflexivity in visual culture, writing about a concept often overlooked in the field. Denison provides a practical guide for adopting a self-reflexive critical method, encouraging writers and researchers to delve deeper into their emotional responses, memories, personal narratives, and values. This process is shown to unlock tacit knowledge, fostering new insights and enriching interpretations of visual culture. Denison advocates for transparency in interpretation, promoting a more authentic form of critical writing that resonates with the writer's unique life experiences. The chapter emphasizes the importance of reflecting on one's thoughts and feelings about photographs, thereby crafting a self-aware understanding of visual culture. I found this approach transformative. It enriches my knowledge of visual culture and challenges me to introspect and connect my personal experiences with critical analyses.
Likewise, I find digital society's omnipresence fascinating in the chapter, Digital Autoethnography: An Approach to Facilitate Reflective Practice in the Making and Performing of Visual Art by Joanna Neil. It paints a picture of narcissism, indulgence, and self-assuredness. The 'selfie' is often seen as a symbol of self-absorption rather than self-reflection, projecting a manufactured image of oneself to the world. Autoethnography has faced similar criticisms back and forth. Yet, when approached with genuine curiosity, it can reveal a challenging and enlightening self. So, Neil revisits his previous autoethnographic work, showcasing how digital tools can be used to introspect, disrupt routine practices, and carve out new spaces for close observation, documentation, and reflection on the ongoing journey of shaping one's artistic and pedagogical identity. Through the lens of digital technology, this exploration of the self offers a fresh perspective on my understanding of identity in the digital age.

In the chapter, Stitching as Reflection and Resistance: The Use of a Stitch Journal During Doctoral Study by Clare Daněk, I find Daněk's exploration of the PhD journey through an embroidered "stitch journal" intriguing. For me, this unique medium serves as both a record and a reflective tool in her autoethnographic study of amateur craft learning. Her entries pose academic questions about the traditional research process and offer insights into her life beyond academia – family, local surroundings, and hobbies. Contrary to the image of a solitary artist or researcher, the creation of an autoethnographic artifact, and by extension, the self, is portrayed as a more social and collaborative endeavor. Thus, this innovative approach provides a fresh perspective on the journey(s) and the broader context of life for novice and veteran autoethnographers.

In the final chapter, Making the Dreamer: Cut-ups, Découpage and Narrative Assemblages of Interbeing and Becoming by Mark Price, Price uses the Möbius strip as a metaphor for his life's journey, a continuous loop of self-reflection and transformation. After leaving academia, he turns to a student-gifted statuette of Rodin's The Thinker. Through découpage, he reimagines The Thinker into The Dreamer, a symbol of his own evolving narrative. This chapter invites me and others on a journey of self-discovery and transformation, a process he describes as "rhizomatic." Rather than theorizing, Price shares the hallmarks that guided him, shaping his narrative. As a reader and reviewer, I empathized with his sense of disorientation as he navigates the fluid boundaries between teacher and student, researcher and writer, thinker, and dreamer. His story is a testament to the transformative power of self-reflection and the courage to embrace change.

Creating the class section in the book presents two chapters—Hidden Time and Coming Back to Class. In Hidden Time: An Autoethnographic Narrative on the Creation of Seven Working-Class Time Pieces, Teplitzky explores the embodiment of "working classness" through music. Composed during lockdown, the pieces reflect his own experiences and those of his family. He delves into the concept of time, examining how it is experienced both positively, as a "gift of attention over time," and negatively, due to the insecurity associated with low wages and part-time work. Each piece provides a personal insight into how being working-class alters one's perception of time. The chapter includes a link to a performance of the compositions and an autoethnographic narrative creation. It provides context for creation, describes the process of translating lived experiences into individual compositions, and reflects on the finished pieces. Teplitzky acknowledges how his working-class identity is reflected in his work. He also recognizes that his creative practice involves managing the tension of creating discrete "objects" to represent a culture that resists simplification. His compositions profoundly explored class identity for me by offering a unique perspective on the working-class experience.

In the chapter Coming Back to Class: The Remaking of an Academic Self, Tiller explores the enduring impact of class and gender, even after achieving success in education
and the arts. She takes me on a journey from her humble beginnings as a bright working-class girl from Leeds, through her various roles in education and the arts, to her return to academia as a mature doctoral student. She shares her process of self-reinvention, revisiting past experiences, and reconnecting with allies in her struggle, including students, colleagues, and writers on class and gender. This journey of "Starts, False Starts, and Re-Starts" is a testament to her resilience and determination. I found her realization that "coming back to class" is a more affirming and supportive experience this time, both literally and metaphorically, particularly poignant.

The final section of the book Space and Belonging presents three chapters—Walking as Knowing, Healing, and the (Re)making of Self, Where the River Flows out to the Sea and Making Mistakes: Learning through Embarrassment when Curating Indigenous Collections in UK Museums. The chapter Walking as Knowing, Healing, and the (Re)making of Self Amoroso by Lauriel-Arwen Amoroso explores walking as a transformative practice. Her walks, spanning from the USA to the Caribbean and Spain, serve as the foundation for her doctoral dissertation. She documents her journeys through a blend of prose, poetry, and photography, creating a dialogue with the landscapes she traverses and her own body. Her walking practice becomes a vehicle for self-discovery and creating a new self, shedding the burdens of colonialism and epistemic hegemony. Her journal entries expose the limitations of Western knowledge structures that prioritize objectivity over holistic human development. Her reflections on the issues her walks unearthed are deeply insightful. I found walking becomes a healing process for her, fostering a deep connection with her own ways of knowing. This results in the (re)formation of an identity more attuned to the land and a heightened sense of aliveness.

In the chapter, Where the River Flows out to the Sea, Limb poignant exploration of walking to generate a sense of place. It begins with a touching account of walks in Edinburgh with his mother, who was recently diagnosed with cancer. The narrative is followed by an exposition detailing its creation, revealing how writing and compiling an annotated photo album unearthed the intricacies of human relationships—with time, place, nature, and each other. The chapter, rich with childhood memories and references to classical literature and poetry, explores the symbiotic relationship between people and places. What stood out to me as a reviewer was how interactions with strangers shaped Limb's experience of the river's fresh waters before they merged into the salty Firth. These interactions brought a semblance of order to an otherwise wild place and an uncertain time in his life. I found this chapter to be a profound exploration of human experience, beautifully encapsulating the transformative power of place-making.

In the final chapter, Making Mistakes: Learning through Embarrassment when Curating Indigenous Collections in UK Museums, Davy provides a candid account of his journey as a White English curator of Indigenous American artifacts. He recounts his early missteps, the learning curve in understanding the field's complexities, and the uncomfortable power dynamics he encountered. His narrative culminates in a public call-out by a renowned playwright at the Globe, an event he describes as the pinnacle of embarrassment. Davy's self-reflective process is laid bare as he delves into the role of embarrassment in his professional evolution. This introspection leads him to reshape his curatorial approach, striving to be more responsive and collaborative. I found his professional transformation significant, not just for his personal growth but also for its implications for reshaping cultural approaches.

Re-Entry and Exit

Dear readers, being a reviewer is not about being critical for the sake of writing a book review. It is about taking an unbiased, open-minded look at the text (Chenail, 2010; Dahal,
So, I believe the goal is to offer feedback that benefits both the editors and authors. On the other hand, I appreciated the contributors for their scholarly work. So, when I reviewed this book, I considered a range of factors—pace, genre, targeted audience, key essence, and writing styles (to name but a few). I also looked at the backgrounds of the folks who contributed to it, their previous work, and any relevant historical or cultural context. This allowed me to assess the book's structure, writing style, pace, strengths, and weaknesses. As a reviewer, I saw this work as a solid basis for anyone wanting to write their lives and stories, develop their self-understanding through performative writing, and shape their identity as autoethnographers.

Dear readers, finally, in my view, the book aims to bridge the hierarchical divide between art and craft and intellectual and practical cultural production in writing as a process of inquiry. It does this by blurring the lines between knowledge and creation. I am especially interested in connecting my personal experiences to social and cultural phenomena. The contributors tackle a wide range of topics, including social class, familial relationships and intergenerational transmission, loss, longing, and grief, the neoliberal university, gender, sexuality, colonialism, race, and racism, national identity, digital identities, indigenous ways of knowing and creating, and how these are narrated, curated, and presented to the public, as well as our relationship with the natural world (Goode at al., 2023). I wholeheartedly embrace the contributors' insights into how the "crafting space" is a place of intellectual inquiry, debate, and reflection. I would recommend this book as a foundational text for readers from both traditional and practice-based disciplines who are undertaking qualitative research methods subscribing to autoethnographic inquiry, as well as for community-based practitioners and students passionate about creative practice, practitioner research, and arts-based research in the social sciences and humanities. Overall, I also find this book beneficial for crafting my autoethnographic writing in the scholarship.

References


Author Note

Niroj Dahal (https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7646-1186), works at Kathmandu University School of Education under the Department of STEAM Education. He also serves as an editorial board member of TQR. His research interests include ICT in education, artificial intelligence (AI), generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), qualitative research—action research, participatory action research, appreciative inquiry, arts-based inquiry, autoethnography, narrative inquiry, case study, content analysis, critical ethnography, critical social theories inquiry, decolonizing methodologies, decolonizing autoethnography, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and collaborative inquiry (among others), mathematics education, open, distance & e-learning, STEAM education, research and development, and ICT & e-Research. Mr. Dahal has been teaching graduate and undergraduate students for over the past two decades. He has also been continuously taking part and presenting his research and practices in more than four dozen national and international conferences, workshops, and seminars. He has published articles, research notes, commentary, editorials, book reviews, books, and book chapters in various national and international journals and publication presses in ICT, qualitative research, education in general and mathematics education, and STEAM education. He may be contacted by e-mail at niroj@kusoed.edu.np.

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