



Ethnography Unbound: From Critical Theory Shock to Critical Praxis. Brown, Stephen Gilbert and Sidney I. Dobrin, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. 326pp.

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Following a long and illustrious tradition of publishing on composition studies, SUNY Press, with the publication of *Ethnography Unbound* has made an equally impressive addition to its collection. Emerging out of the collective work of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), *Ethnography Unbound* seems set on the singular goal of redefining the assumptions, methods, and goals of qualitative and ethnographic research in composition studies. In setting forth this goal, the introduction lists a number of complex questions. Thought provoking with admirable motivations, these questions strike a somewhat canonically strident activist note. However, they help situate the anthology within the long and often difficult relationship that ethnography and composition studies have had with postmodernity.

Critical ethnography, as the editors of *Ethnography Unbound* propose, is the method and vehicle toward their mission. They further assert that critical ethnography constructively challenges the attack that postmodern theory has leveled against traditional ethnography. In the process, the editors of *Ethnography Unbound* contend that critical ethnography offers a model that is in tune with ethical issues of postmodern theory and capable of describing lives of strangers in a more respectful, egalitarian, and empowering manner than what traditional ethnography was capable of. It is able to do this while simultaneously finding a meaningful location and context for the ethnographer's biography. In the editors' words ...

In its emergent, postpositivist incarnation, critical ethnography is personalizing, politicizing, and socializing its praxis: it is politicizing the ends of ethnographic inquiry and socializing the process of ethnographic knowledge-making, while rediscovering its own critical voice with which it with which it is beginning to "talk back" to postmodern theory to answer the: fundamental questions the postmodern assault on traditional ethnographic / practice raised (p.2).

Aside from the introduction to the reader, the rest of the 15 chapters of *Ethnography Unbound* have been organized under five separate sections: 1) Theoretical and Rhetorical Perspectives, 2) Place-Conscious Ethnographies: Situating Praxis in the Field, 3) The Nomadic Self: Reorganizing the Self in the Field, 4) Ethnographies of Cultural Change, and 5) Texts and (Con)texts: Intertextual Voices. Each of the categories contains several individual ethnographies by each of the volume's contributors, except the fifth and final category which contains two essays that function as substantial and expansive theoretical summaries of the rest of the contributors' writing. What follows below is a brief comment on each of the four main sections.



Of the four essays in the first section, Bruce Horner's merits a special mention. Horner reinforces a dialectic between theory and practice, in general, and between cultural materialist perspectives and critical praxis, in particular. His exposé of the limitation of postmodernity in reductively representing the ethnographic self under the rubric of "Lone Ethnographer" is insightful and instructive towards a better understanding of the functional aspects of critical ethnography in composition studies. The fifth essay by Lynée Lewis Gallet discusses the Writing Program Redesign which explores a symbiotic relationship between the ethnographic and the rhetorical. Gallet proposes writing programs grounded in the concept of "civitas," informed by a civic rhetoric and writing inspired by a civic tongue. After the theoretical ruminations in Horner's essay, Gallet's essay serves as a good working example of critical praxis.

In the second section, "Place-Conscious Ethnographies: Situating Praxis in the Field," Brooke and Hogg envision the field site as emerging through the "filter" of doing ethnography where ethnographic knowledge is seen as having a constructed nature. They problematize Ralph Cintron's positioning of Aristotelian ethos with a Burkean perspective. The result of this theoretical stance is the analysis of two site-specific projects that usefully complete the dialectic between theory and praxis and attest to the possibility of community-based project driven ethnographies. Following Brooke and Hogg, Stevens' essay also sees the field site as emerging through the ethnographer's interpretive stance. She draws on Donna Haraway's notion of "diffraction" to establish a relationship between the ethnographer and the field site that resonates with Brooke and Hogg's concept of "filter."

The editor's have generously identified Susan Hanson's essay, "Critical Auto/Ethnography," as creating a whole new genre (p. 8) in the volume's third section entitled "The Nomadic Self: Reorganizing the Self in the Field." Editorial generosity notwithstanding, Hanson's technique of fusing feminist autobiography with postcolonial theory is certainly an original ethnographic treatment of text.

In the fourth section entitled "Ethnographies of Cultural Change," Williams and Brydon-Miller provides yet another example of critical practice in action through ethnography. Influenced by Paolo Freire, they emphasize "social justice" and "social reflexivity" to link ethnographic analysis to cultural action in their essay "Changing Directions: Participatory Action Research."

What is of particular interest to this writer about *Ethnography Unbound* is the methodologically political and deeply personalized relationship with ethnographic acquisition, production and analyses of texts that has systematically, if not organically, been allowed to grow as a collective effort of all of its contributors. For those serious students and teachers of composition studies who are keen on integrating political action and social change in their work using ethnographic research, *Ethnography Unbound* is a welcome development. While it is replete with humanistic jargon, it works hard at demystifying critical ethnography as an answer to postmodern attack on postpositivist ethnography. *Ethnography Unbound*, thus, will provide those in composition studies looking for an expansion of their theory and methodology tool box, plenty of useful choices. This is an important book with quality scholarship.

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