Personal Effects

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The figure of the solitary thinker comprises a most powerful and enduring representation of scholarly life. This is the figure of the autonomous scholar-teacher, whose intellectual sovereignty and productivity, both in and out of the classroom, seemingly rests as much if not more upon untold hours of secluded reading and writing as it does upon building relationships with others—even those others who eventually may comprise important audiences for the scholar’s writing and teaching.

Those of us whose experiences inside the institution readily challenge the usefulness of unqualified autonomy as an ideal, simultaneously recognize its appeal. Despite (or, ironically, perhaps sometimes because of) influences such as the political and bureaucratic constraints on scholarship and teaching that scholars like Michael Bérubé, Cary Nelson, and Richard E. Miller have explored; feminist theories and practices examining the role of the ‘personal’ in professional work; widely accepted educational approaches stressing collaboration and dialogue in learning and teaching; and seemingly daily calls in the media for scholar-teachers to communicate rationales for their work with the public more often and in ways deemed more “accountable,” the ideal of the autonomous scholar-teacher, much of whose most important labor occurs outside of collaborative (or competitive) relationships, continues to circulate as a symbol of professional success.

This ideal of autonomy endures perhaps because the vision of relative (if not absolute) autonomy provides academics with what Richard E. Miller would call a “felt sense of distinction” (26); perhaps it endures as well because it comprises, at least for some, part of a legacy and a link to a common, professional past. In any case, at the very least such an ideal operates within the institution like other “subterranean text(s)” (e.g., the text which Linda Brodkey argues leads composition to “abet middle-class illusions of meritocracy” [234]) that “insinuate rather than argue (their) claims” (215). That such an ideal figures strongly in others’ and our own perceptions of the profession is evidenced, for example, by the frequency with which “autonomy” is cited by tenured faculty members as one reason for high satisfaction in their jobs (Schneider par. 8).
This text of scholarly autonomy also is powerfully sustained by traditional forms of academic writing that privilege a stance of ‘objectivity,’ and the development of argument that ostensibly stands outside the shaping influences of social or rhetorical conditions (Gee 63). Such writing follows what both David Olson and James Gee have called an “autonomous model of literacy”—a set of conventions traditionally privileging a writer’s explication of logical connections between ideas, while neglecting (or at least de-emphasizing) an examination of the relationship between a writer’s subject position and those ideas, or his or her relationships to various audiences.

In recent years, however, a proliferation of scholarly memoirs and other examples of autobiographically inflected scholarship across diverse disciplines in the humanities and social sciences suggests a shifting away in the U.S. academy from scholars’ privileging exclusively, in their practices and assessments of writing, this “autonomous” model. Such a trend perhaps also suggests a shifting away from the view that scholars are of necessity professional ‘loners,’ engaged in work that is optimally solitary. In contrast to traditional forms of academic writing, examples of what I will call more “reflective,” academic practice like scholarly memoirs, ethnographies that are ‘situated’ with regard to the subject position of the writer/researcher, and teaching portfolios, at least in part define themselves against traditional expectations for ‘objectivity’ that require, for instance, a scholar to adopt a personal detachment from his or her object of study or to maintain a certain distance from potential audiences.

Specifically, I would suggest that such reflective, academic texts emphasize the ways in which relationships between writers and their diverse audiences (both those who are scholars and those who are not) are established. Not surprisingly, these texts align themselves with postmodern epistemologies that affirm the multiplicity and contingency of the writing ‘self’—acknowledging the ‘everydayness’ of people’s lives (as that is defined by realities of emotion and psychology as well as by material exigencies), and the personal realities of writers and readers in relationship. In this essay I would suggest not that the practice of writing “reflectively” threatens to supplant (or should supplant) more traditional approaches to scholarly writing, however. Rather, I would offer that its most thoughtful examples illustrate how such practice is situated more broadly within an array of causes and effects involved in the current “crisis of representation” endemic to the academy and western culture; and that such practice has the potential for being responsive to history and to the diversity of experience within the current moment in ways more difficult for traditional forms. (George Marcus and Michael Fisher, focusing on the origins and implications of cultural “transition(s),” also argue that broad, historical forces have helped to contribute to a shift in the purposes of academic writing in
anthropology specifically, prompting this writing to move away from “explaining changes within broad encompassing frameworks of theory,” and toward “exploring innovative ways of describing at a microscopic level the process of change itself” (Marcus 15). As in the case of many of the scholarly memoirs I examine in this essay, this “microscopic” level is often at the level of individual lives and the specific communities and contexts which shape and are shaped by those lives.

In her collection of autobiographical essays entitled *Crossing Ocean Parkway: Readings by an Italian American Daughter*, Duke scholar Marianna De Marco Torgovnick, for example, theorizes the ‘everyday’ sources for her authority and knowledge as a scholar, examining what her family history and her childhood growing up in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn has meant for her intellectual work. For Torgovnick, Bensonhurst is not only the home of her childhood. It is a place she recognizes as both “choking and nutritive” (11), a place that is also the New York of newspaper headlines, where in the summer of 1989 Yusuf Hawkins is set upon and killed by a group of angry whites. Like Howard Beach before it and Crown Heights after it, this public Bensonhurst will come to signify for much of the rest of the country the intersection of urban violence and racial hatred—a place with a distinct yet terrible ‘voice,’ othered by its own ability to other a young African American man and the two friends walking with him through the neighborhood that night. Torgovnick herself describes the ways in which her own gender is the basis of an othering within Bensonhurst’s Italian American community, and how her hometown becomes for her an object of scholarly—as well as personal—inquiry:

What has Bensonhurst to do with what I teach today and write? Why did I need to write about this killing in Bensonhurst, but not in the manner of a news account or a statistical sociological analysis? Within days of hearing the news, I began to plan this essay, to tell the world what I knew, though I stopped midway, worried that my parents or their neighbors would hear about it. . . . Now, much to my surprise, Bensonhurst—the antipodes of the intellectual life I sought, the least interesting of places—had become a respectable intellectual topic. People would be willing to hear about Bensonhurst—and all by the dubious virtue of a racial killing in the streets. (9-10)

Even though Torgovnick’s Bensonhurst presents itself as a “respectable intellectual topic” because of Hawkins’s killing, she resists writing about it as such—at least not in the manner in which she has been trained professionally. Instead, she gives us a hybrid text: she briefly provides us with, in the words of my colleague Anne Reeves, a “phantom” treatment of the event as she might have written it, and then goes on to give her audience what she apparently thinks they...
need to hear, or perhaps at least what she feels she needs to say: “Now, as I write about ‘the neighborhood,’ I recognize that although I’ve come far in physical and material distance, the emotional distance is harder to gauge. Bensonhurst has everything to do with who I am and even with what I write” (11).

In this way, Torgovnick’s text accomplishes some of what Michael Bérubé identifies as cultural studies’ work of “talking back”—talking back to dominant paradigms, “raid(ing) and unsettl(ing) the compartmentalized disciplines of traditional academic study” (138), by replacing a more traditionally framed academic treatment of the events in Bensonhurst with an explanation of the “emotional distance” she has traveled, and the connections between that distance and her intellectual work. This hybrid text not only talks back to assumptions about what constitutes appropriate academic writing, however; it also talks back to assumptions about who constitutes an appropriate—or perhaps inevitable—audience for that writing. For while Torgovnick expresses the fear that her parents and neighbors will react badly to her essay, her anxiety suggests she is inscribing in that essay multiple audiences—composed not only of her academic peers, but of her family and community, as well.

Torgovnick’s text, as one example of what I would identify as the most engaging and productive autobiographical writing being produced by scholars today, is also characterized by an inscription and explicit analysis of multiple ‘voices’ within the text. Such a multiply-voiced text often comprises what Torgovnick herself has called “crossover writing” (PMLA, 282), for its ability to establish relationships with diverse, disciplinary audiences within the institution. “Crossover writing” may be a useful term, as well, for thinking through the ability of reflective texts like memoirs also to reach extra-academic audiences. Providing scholars with a means for communicating with audiences beyond the academy’s walls, as well as with a means for communicating with audiences inhabiting other academic disciplines and various positions of power within the institution, makes it possible for them to enact an ethics of accountability, for example, to diverse individuals and constituencies both within and outside institutions of higher education.

In the case of scholarly memoir and other ‘reflective’ academic texts—that is, texts which explicitly examine the subject position of the writer and implications of that writerly position—such communication is achieved through the kind of “heteroglossia” (324) that M.M. Bakhtin describes. Scholarly memoirs thus might be said to comprise an alternative intellectual practice, while also varying (as does all discourse) in the ways in which and degree to which they nurture the “roiling mass of languages” (Holquist 69) and voices of which they are comprised. As a group, these memoirs might be said to privilege the establishing of relationships not only between different voices within the text,
but also between the text and diverse audiences without, a practice that enacts both an accountability to and a “responsive understanding” (Bakhtin 280) of the social world.

SITUATING ‘PERSONAL’ VOICES WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

Such an intellectual practice is embodied in much of the work of feminist scholars across the disciplines. Gesa Kirsch introduces her study of the writing experiences of women scholars in *Women Writing the Academy: Audience, Authority and Transformation* in part by exploring the relation between gender and speaking with an “academic” voice:

Women who write academic discourse have a different point of departure than men: they first have to establish a place of authority before they can begin to speak and write with confidence. In establishing such a place, women have to challenge old norms and establish new ones; they have to create a space for themselves in an institution that has not always provided space for them. . . . Furthermore, feminist scholars have pointed out that women’s authority is easily undermined because they have to speak—and write—the “language of patriarchy,” a language that places men in superior and women in subordinate positions in its vocabularies and representations of everyday phenomena and social relationships. (20–21)

Scholars such as bell hooks, Patricia Williams, Marianna De Marco Torgovnick, Nancy K. Miller and Ruth Behar, among others, also have demonstrated in their scholarly work, much of which draws on examples from personal experience, how academic and professional languages function to place women, people of color, and the poor in subordinate positions both outside and within the academy, albeit in different ways and with different consequences.

Though still too frequently excluded, the voices of these ‘others’ represented in such scholarly work nevertheless have contributed significantly to a “heightening of debates and stakes involved in writing that is perceived as theoretical” (Lutz 261)—that is, the very writing that is given the highest currency in the institution. At the same time, Catherine Lutz writes that “one effect of the struggle (of women, and men and women of color in the academy) for institutional space and respect may have been an inflation of theory’s value even as questions are raised about the dualisms and individualism on which its existence is based” (261). Such an inflation suggests that the heteroglossia of voices emanating from those whose discourses are different from the traditional, “masculinized” (Lutz 249), theoretical discourse of the academy may be as hard as ever for us as scholars to hear.

The kind of “responsive understanding” of the social world which such hearing encourages, however—an understanding that acknowledges the legitimacy
and 'logic' of multiple voices striving for equity and defining excellence in multiple ways—is what drives much research in both feminist composition and feminist literary studies. Both fields take as one of their points of departure the (im)possibility of a mix of voices—especially the voices of women, people of color, and working-class people—being both heard and valued within the institution. In her essay “Me and My Shadow,” Jane Tompkins articulates this (im)possibility as she identifies herself as, in fact, double-voiced. Tompkins suggests that, by possessing (at least) two ‘voices,’ the voice of a “critic”-self, and that of a “person who wants to write about her feelings,” women academics have a more difficult time achieving speech at all, at least within a professional context.

While Tompkins argues that such diverse voices sound within contexts which are necessarily exclusive of each other because of the hierarchies which inhere in academic discourse and theory, Nancy K. Miller challenges Tompkins’s dichotomy by responding, “Do you have to turn your back on theory in order to speak with a non-academic voice?” (5) The very language of even Miller’s question, however, suggests the power of dichotomies as she posits two voices, one which is academic and “theoretical,” and the other which is not.

Feminist scholars in composition, like Terry Myers Zawacki and Elizabeth Flynn, take yet a different tack on the question of what ‘voice’ is appropriate to academic writing, as they struggle to find ways to present to students “alternatives to traditional academic discourse,” and to help students write “personal-academic” (Zawacki 33) essays—essays that might feature “authentic” voices able to integrate “intuition with authoritative knowledge” (Flynn 429). Lynn Z. Bloom, like Zawacki and Flynn, suggests that finding one authentic, personal voice (845) is crucial if a writer is to accomplish academic work (that is, work involving much debate and innovation) while at the same time claiming political power. Bloom, Zawacki and Flynn echo the notion that there exists an authentic voice which a writer might discover, a notion that Lester Faigley argues commonly operates in scholarly debates within composition vis à vis the view of the individual as “the subject of high modernism: a coherent consciousness capable of knowing oneself and the world” (16). In such a view, a writer’s one “authentic” voice might be said to function as a “window” on the self and the world, at the same time it serves as a necessary condition for individual agency.

In any case, this attention paid to the issue of ‘voice’ in feminist scholarship may be said to represent an anxiety about the (im)possibility of inscribing the personal—which is linked closely to political agency in feminist circles outside the academy—as also part of the intellectual work of scholars and students. Negatively, this anxiety perhaps at times manifests itself in an unreasonable
quest for a writer’s one, “authentic” voice—that voice which will serve her in accomplishing both the scholarly work of the academy and the political work she might be called on to do outside the academy. Positively, this anxiety has helped drive the proliferation of new forms of academic writing, including that of scholarly memoir.

It is not that the academic trend toward valuing reflective writing offers hope of achieving an ‘all-purpose’ discourse, fit for purposes both academic and extra-academic; rather, it will be my contention in the rest of this essay that such reflexivity is not beside the point of good academic work, but instead is central to rigorous scholarly practice.

Such a reflexive turn is also part of a wider valuing by society of personal stories, as well as part of a complex dialogue among the voices and life stories which surround us every day. From the floors of national political conventions, to the sets of popular T.V. talk shows, to the halls of the academy, publicly delivered and published reflections about personal lives—some examples of cultural analysis, lavishly textured and insightful; others arguably instances of a more prosaic or self-serving rhetoric—function to persuade, cajole, give testimony to, instruct and entertain a complex array of audiences. Moving along on the social currents created by these stories are voices, highly variegated and kinetic, simultaneously responding to and reshaping each other. And these voices increasingly have made their way into the academy, mixing with traditional voices of disciplinary authority as the canons of many fields have been challenged and disrupted, for example, by the growth of cultural studies, feminist studies and postmodern epistemologies that insist that the ‘everyday’ and the local are not only valid objects of inquiry, but also valid sources for authority and knowledge.

AN ALTERNATIVE INTELLECTUAL PRACTICE: WRITING TO INTIMATE AUDIENCES

Like Torgovnick, anthropologist Ruth Behar draws on the local and the ‘everyday’ in order to address multiple audiences. Like much feminist writing, Behar’s essay “Writing in My Father’s Name” purposely draws attention to its form. Appearing as a series of diary entries, the essay in part chronicles the reaction of a nonacademic audience—her family—to the earlier publication of Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story, an ethnography which Behar combines with a self-reflexive “shadow biography.” A large part of Behar’s project in both instances is to illustrate that the forms of academic writing we are most used to seeing, and the forms of rationality this writing represents, are historically constructed, neither universal nor inevitable. And her essay illustrates how this writing has traditionally been constructed: for
example, by considering the myriad ways in which patriarchy has affected her own personal life and professional work, she puts into practice Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “epistemic reflexivity,” and reveals the “social and intellectual unconscious” of patriarchy “embedded in (the) analytic tools and operations” (Bourdieu 36) of anthropology itself.

Behar treats her relationship with her father, in particular, as an object of scholarly inquiry, an object which she illustrates can lend powerful insights into some of the ideologies that influence how women write, and are written by, culture in the academy. As she chronicles the fracturing of her family and suggests how it is related to discourses like patriarchy and immigration, Behar also acknowledges the multiplicity of her own writing self. Identifying herself as storyteller, anthropologist and daughter, she is writing not only about her parents and how her relationship with them has affected her professional life; in a way, her parents appear as one of the audiences for her writing:

It dawns on me that I include my parents too much in my professional life. But how could I not? I’m still my father’s daughter. I carry his name. And I allow my parents to have a claim on my work. I not only send them reviews of my book . . . I can’t stop writing about them. Immigrants succeed through their children; they sacrifice, they invest, so their children will succeed. And the immigrant daughter, who worries about surpassing her parents, keeps trying to include them in her work, to throw a raft their way, so they can sail together on the choppy seas of the academy. (72)

In the context of her self-reflexive writing projects, Behar’s relationship with her parents thus serves as an illustration of how—both inside and outside the academy—the pressures of patriarchy compel women scholars to “write in (their) fathers’ names” (79). Beyond this, however, the example of Behar’s writing might also suggest the gains and the risks involved when a scholar writes both about and to intellectual fathers within the institution, at the same time she is writing both about and to other kinds of fathers (or mothers) beyond its walls—and writing in ways that acknowledge the “claim” these extra-academic audiences have on her work as a scholar.

Behar’s use in her writing of the example of her relationship with her parents—an example that helps her to illustrate the impact which cultural ideologies have on her scholarly work—seems, interestingly, to lead her at least in part to the assumption (or perhaps leads her to reveal the assumption) that her parents might share with her and her professional peers the same interests with regard to such an analysis. In fact, an apparent assumption that her parents would want to “sail (with her) on the choppy seas of the academy” collides head-on in her essay with the frustration both of her parents seem to feel because of the ways they see themselves being represented in her “shadow biography”:
Mira, I’m going to tell you something, Rutie,” my mother announces. “La mierda no se revuelve, porque apesta.” Don’t stir up the shit, because it will stink. “You know, Rutie, I’m not a typist. Ya es la segunda vez que los dices.” It’s true, I’ve twice described my mother in my writing as a typist rather than by her title, Diploma Aide. I try to apologize, but my mother is not done with me yet. “And why did you have to tell everybody your father was ashamed that his father was a peddler in Cuba? That wasn’t nice.” I wish I could get my mother to understand the poetic logic of my storytelling. “Mami, don’t you see? My book is about the life story of a peddler in Mexico. And my own grandfather was a peddler in Cuba, but Papi was always so ashamed of his origins that he couldn’t even talk about it. Don’t you think that’s interesting?” But I can’t convince her. Writing about the shame seems only to compound the shame of the shame. (66-67)

In describing this clash of perspectives, Behar takes great pains to insure that her writing ‘self’ makes itself accountable to the risks involved in writing to extra-academic as well as to academic audiences. She goes on to say that as a consequence of this conflict of perspectives, she has adopted a strategy of “silence, exile, and cunning” with regard to her writing, so she might hide from her father and mother the fact she continues to inscribe “the story of (their) dissolution as a family ever more irrevocably into the academy” (82). Behar’s desire to hide her words from a particular, intimate audience is echoed, though not entirely paralleled, in Richard Rodriguez’s Hunger of Memory. After a confrontation with his own mother about a published account of their family’s life, Rodriguez admits he “probably . . . will never try to explain (his) motives (for writing publicly about his personal life) to (his) mother and father” (176). Opting instead to write to “public readers (he) expect(s) never to meet” (177), Rodriguez defines this audience of “strangers” in ways that evoke an “essayist prose style” model of literacy, where the reader “is not an ordinary human being, but an idealization, a rational mind formed by the rational body of knowledge of which the essay is a part” (Gee, 63). Rodriguez thus conceives of his audience vis à vis an uncomplicated, though perhaps not uncommon, notion of the “public reader”:

I write today for a reader who ïexists in my mind only phantasmagorically. Someone with a face erased; someone of no particular race or sex or age or weather. A gray presence. Unknown, unfamiliar. All that I know about him is that he has had a long education and that his society, like mine, is often public (un gringo). (182)

Rodriguez’s text describes the “public” reader as virtually uncomplicated in subject position, and exceedingly unfamiliar—a ‘faceless’ reader who could not possibly be more different from his own parents. At the same time, he depicts himself, as the author of his text, as also unfamiliar and, in one sense, as ‘voiceless’ within the context of his own family:
I think my mother sensed that afternoon that the person whose essay she saw in a national magazine was a person unfamiliar to her, some Other. The public person—the writer, Richard Rodriguez—would remain distant and untouchable. She never would hear his public voice across a dining room table. And that afternoon she seemed to accept the idea, granted me the right, the freedom so crucial to adulthood, to become a person very different in public from the person I am at home. (189-190)

While Behar, therefore, comes to the conclusion that because of the conflicts it creates, she must exclude (however much she desires to do otherwise) this most intimate of audiences—her family—from her writing, Rodriguez excludes his family as one of his audiences because such an exclusion is “crucial to adulthood,” and to the process of becoming a “public” person.

Behar’s reasons for the (ostensible) exclusion of this intimate audience is perhaps more akin to Nancy K. Miller’s reasons for excluding her father as one of the readers of her own autobiographical essay, “My Father’s Penis.” Miller’s exclusion, like Behar’s, is prompted by a concern about the effect her writing (“born of the troubled intimacies of the autobiographical penis and the theoretical phal-lus” [Personal, 146]) might have on the intimate audience that is her father:

Had my father still been able to read, I would never have written about “the penis.” By going public with the details of domestic arrangements on Riverside Drive, I was flying in the face of the parental injunction not to “tell” that had haunted my adolescence and continued well into my adult years; the panic my parents felt that they would be exposed by us; the shame over family secrets. But he was down in his reading to the occasional newspaper headline and, I think, at his end, despite a finely honed personal vanity, beyond caring. He had become no longer himself, and I needed to mourn his disappearance. (146-147)

Miller’s exclusion of her father as one of her readers is facilitated by her father’s physical decline, the same decline that accounts in part for her “need” to write the essay. And like Behar, this exclusion of one, particular intimate audience is her response to the sense that her writing is “flying in the face of the parental injunction not to ‘tell’ . . . family secrets.”

It may be possible, however, to see ways in which, as a scholar, Behar (if not Miller) both succeeds and fails as she attempts to “hide” her words from the extra-academic audience comprised of her parents. (The French scholar Alice Kaplan and Rodriguez, too, may be said to both exclude and include their families as one of their audiences, an interesting move in the context of memoirs that recount their own exclusions, as children and as adults, by members of their families.) Through her use of dialogue like that above, I would argue Behar’s text does indeed inscribe her parents as an audience, and in so doing begins to confront one of the scholarly biases that Bourdieu argues blurs the
“sociological gaze,” as she begins to examine how her relationships to her family and to her family history have framed her own intellectual work. Such an examination might, in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s terms, include both a consideration of the “enabling” and “disabling” biases that such a family history brings to her work as an anthropologist.

But Behar’s example, like Kaplan’s example in her memoir *French Lessons*, also perhaps illustrates that scholarly autobiography, or autobiographically inflected cultural criticism—like all scholarly writing—is not without its limitations. Like other texts, self-reflexive texts can result in reductive representations of others’ subject positions. Owing in particular to what Bourdieu might identify as the “intellectualist bias” threatening to blur the “sociological gaze” of scholars, self-reflexive texts—no more than ‘traditional’ texts, although perhaps in more highly charged ways—can risk “collapsing practical logic into theoretical logic” (39-40), with the result being a reductive (albeit theoretically ‘logical’) representation of the actions and attitudes of o/Others, including intimate others. Behar’s desire to include her parents on her journey across rough academic waters, for example, as well as her attempt to get her mother to see the “poetic logic” of her writing, may signify an over-identification with these others that in some ways denies the differences in their subject positions. The autobiographical texts I examine here, in other words, vary widely in the degree to which and ways in which they explicitly examine the competitive and collaborative relationships among different subject positions or ‘voices’ within the text, as well as the degree to which they explicitly examine relationships between such voices and the audiences they inscribe.

Kaplan’s memoir *French Lessons*, for example, in articulating an often antagonistic relationship between her own experience with learning French and her students’ experiences learning the language, might be said to discourage an examination of the relationship between different ‘student’ voices in the text. Kaplan’s representation of her teaching practice, for example, seems often to involve imposing desire on her students: “I, Madame, have to make their mouths work. I walk up to a student and I take her mouth in my hand; I arrange it in the shape of a perfect O” (134). With her student’s mouth in Kaplan’s hand, both the student Kaplan once was (a student who learned French by “shaping” her mouth herself, to suit her own purposes in the context of relationships with the friends and lovers described by her memoir), and the younger student sitting before her in the classroom, are at risk of falling mute. Because diverse student voices fail to sound, at junctures such as this in the text there seems to be little room for the kind of double-voiced (much less multi-voiced) discourse that Bakhtin describes, discourse that might be productive of new or alternative knowledge about teaching and learning, for example.
In other words, by not making explicit the ways in which her own learning (through sensual experience) and her students’ learning (in the classroom) might intersect as well as diverge, Kaplan’s text at times masks the presence of a mix of voices capable of acknowledging the contingency and multiplicity of self, and of the self’s relationship with the world. I would suggest that in such moments in Kaplan’s text as the one I cite above, these voices and the attendant relationships among (and within) them are hidden from view by a “form of analysis” that is more “conventional” (Holquist 69) than it may at first seem; an analysis that in a sense ‘forgets’ the material and emotional details surrounding Kaplan’s own learning, neglecting the ways in which these contingent details might apply as well (though not necessarily in the same ways) to her students’ learning.

While Kaplan’s text may thus preclude fuller acknowledgment of the commonalties between her own ‘student’ subjectivity (or voice) and the subjectivities of her students, Jane Gallop’s autobiographical text, Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment, in a sense functions in the reverse. Chronicling her own experience of being a student in college in the early 1970s, and of gaining access simultaneously to feminism, “to real learning and to active sexuality” (5), Gallop goes on to chronicle her experience in the 1990s of being accused by two female graduate students of sexual harassment, and proposes in her book to “produce an understanding of sexual harassment based . . . upon the limit case of a feminist so accused” (7):

I was construed a sexual harasser because I sexualize the atmosphere in which I work. When sexual harassment is defined as the introduction of sex into professional relations, it becomes quite possible to be both a feminist and a sexual harasser. (11)

Gallop contends that being a “feminist sexual harasser” is a “contradiction in terms” (7), though, because gender is the key factor in a (feminist) definition of sexual harassment (24). Beyond this, however, Gallop’s text comprises a challenge generally to condemnations of sexualized relationships between teachers and students, through its examination of her own past, personal experiences with feminism, pedagogy and sex—experiences which she says were “empowering” (43) for her, and which she seems to offer in illustration of their potential benefit for others.

Gallop’s use of her own experience, however, may lead her, like Kaplan, to an analysis more conventional than at first it might appear. By neglecting how the details of her own students’ psychologies and histories might differ from her own, for example, the potential for a mix of diverse ‘student’ voices to emerge in the text is diminished, if not erased entirely. Instead, it is Gallop’s
own ‘student’ voice that sounds alone, even as it is other students’ desires which ostensibly are being articulated:

Nowadays, women’s studies is a lot older and more established; it doesn’t feel so much like a bold experiment. While it still is said in women’s studies circles that feminist teachers and students ought to have a nonhierarchical relation, ought to work together as sister seekers of knowledge, in fact the relation between feminist teachers and students is not what it was when women’s studies was young.

Yet my students still want a feminist education that feels like women’s studies did to me in 1971. And so do I, deeply. I want it for them and I want it still, again, for myself. (19-20)

In particular, remembering specific ways in which discovering feminism was for her also about discovering (and feeling) “brave new possibilities” (18)—which included teacher-student sex—Gallop posits her own ‘student’ subjectivity as “choke or origin point” (Lutz 255) for conceptualizing the subjectivities of her students twenty years later.

In other words, Gallop’s insistence that it is not necessary for her text to acknowledge in specific ways how her own subject position (past and present) differs from the subject positions of her students, I think bespeaks what Bourdieu has identified as the scholarly bias “more profound and more distorting than those rooted in the social origins or location of the analyst in the academic field”—that is, the “intellectualist bias which entices (the scholar) to construe the world as spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically” (39). As part of a February 1998 electronic exchange on the Pre/Text discussion list, Gallop explains in this way her text’s lack of attention to her accusers’ subjectivities:

Because I was not writing about the case in and for itself but only for the light it could shed upon larger issues, there were many things about the case I did not discuss in the book. I chose only to discuss those things, those details that when interpreted could yield wider understandings, understandings that could produce new knowledge . . . in the theoretical debates I wanted to enter. Which is why I don’t talk about the students. To me the fact that they accused me of things I didn’t do is not very theoretically interesting. . . . It is not unusual for students to find negative evaluations intolerable and to get angry and want to hurt the teacher back. But it didn’t seem something that would produce much knowledge. I only could have counteraccused them, written a book about what bad students they were and blind, angry people. I thought that would be tacky, beneath me, so I chose not to discuss that.

In one of her last posts to the list before signing off, Gallop adds an “important, because both obvious and neglected, point about teaching,” which may shed
some light on why she felt that her options in writing (about the subjectivities of her students) were so limited. As she expresses them, again during the Pre/Text discussion, her reasons seem to have to do with her sense that perhaps relationships between students and teachers are, after all, not the “consensual amorous relation(s)” (57) between two “empowered” (though perhaps differently empowered) individuals posited by her text, but are instead relations between individuals with considerably different amounts and kinds of power and agency:

All the emphasis on the teacher’s power in contemporary pseudo-political discourse on pedagogy neglects perhaps the most essential thing. And something we might not want to neglect in our politics. LABOR. Teachers labor for students. Students do not labor for teachers. Students benefit from our labor; we do not benefit from students’ labor.

I would read the scene of work which Gallop sketches out above as one in which the teacher is the subject of high modernism: a coherent consciousness capable of producing knowledge, and of engaging in labor in ways which are not contingent on the collaborative labor of students. In such a scene, one which seems to be replicated in Gallop’s text at several junctures, at most a single voice sounds—the voice of Gallop as the teacher.

Behar’s desire to include her parents on her voyage through rough, academic waters, too, may be peculiarly academic, and bespeaking the “intellectualist” bias that Bourdieu points to as the central challenge for the scholar aiming to develop a rigorous self-reflexivity. (Pointing to a perhaps parallel, although not identical, challenge confronted by white, middle-class teachers of adult basic education students, Lester Faigley cites Linda Brodkey’s findings that “in spite of their energy, dedication, and commitment to universal education, [these teachers] could not admit that their lives were very different from those of their [students] because there was no space in their discourses for the subjectivities that their working-class [students] presented” [35].) All of these examples suggest the difficulties scholars face in order to acknowledge differences in subjectivity between themselves and intimate O/others, including family members and students, an acknowledgment nonetheless crucial for scholarship in which such others figure prominently.

Writing reflectively thus presents scholars with a significant dilemma. For, according to Bourdieu, an “epistemic reflexivity” involves subjecting the social, academic and “intellectualist” positions of the scholarly observer to the same critical analysis as that to which the (constructed) object is subjected, in order to “theorize the limits of anthropological knowledge” (42) associated with the analyst’s “membership and position in the intellectual field” (39). Making a distinction between epistemic and textual reflexivity, however, Bourdieu critiques the use of the first person in sociological analysis, and the “postmodern”
notion that the writing of a text is itself implicated in the construction of reality. Rather, Bourdieu argues that “it is not the individual unconscious of the researcher but the epistemological unconscious of his discipline that must be unearthed” (41) if the reflexive return is to enable the intellectual to escape the “delusion” (which Bourdieu says is dear to both intellectuals and Westerners generally) of being free and undetermined, while at the same time not encouraging him to fall into “the game of intimist confession” (44):

Intellectuals are particularly inventive when it comes to masking their specific interests. For instance, after ’68, there was a kind of *topos* in the French intellectual milieu which consisted in asking: “But from where are you speaking? From what place am I speaking?” This false, narcissistic confession, vaguely inspired by psychoanalysis, served as a screen in the Freudian sense of the word and blocked a genuine elucidation, that is the discovery of the social location of the locutor: in this case, the position in the university hierarchy. . . . I deliberately constructed (the) notion (of the field) to destroy intellectual narcissism and that particularly vicious legerdemain (escamotage) of objectivation which consists of making objectivations either singular, and here psychoanalysis comes in handy, or so broad that the individual under consideration becomes the token of a category so large that his or her responsibility vanishes entirely. To proclaim “I am a bourgeois intellectual, I am a slimy rat!” as Sartre liked to do, is devoid of implications. But to say “I am an assistant professor at Grenoble and I am speaking to a Parisian professor” is to force oneself to ask whether it is not the relation between these two positions that is speaking through my mouth. (193-194).

According to Bourdieu, objects of inquiry do not call for distanced observation and theorizing, because such observation and theorizing is impossible: the intellectual has interests which affect how she constructs such objects. At the same time, Bourdieu equates the framing of those interests too individually with “narcissism,” and too broadly with an evasion of responsibility, an equation often used by other critics of reflective (scholarly) writing such as Margery Wolf and Daphne Patai.

However, where I think Bourdieu’s critique proves inadequate with regard to examples of contemporary, reflective writing like those I have examined here, is in the fact that it does not fully take into account scholarly texts that explicitly address audiences beyond the walls of the university. It is increasingly common to hear academics acknowledge that, for reasons often having to do with political survival, they need to speak to audiences beyond the institution. I would situate many contemporary scholarly memoirs like Kaplan’s and autobiographically inflected essays like Behar’s along with other reflective, multi-voiced texts such as Patti Lather and Chris Smithie’s *Troubling Angels*, within this larger context; as such, these reflective, academic texts necessarily inscribe extra-academic
audiences. That these audiences are frequently familial perhaps should not be surprising: the family may very well represent the extra-academic audience which an intellectual knows best, thus not only comprising a focus of both personal interest, but representing as well the concerns of constituencies outside the academy’s walls which the scholar may need or want to address.

Attending to such (an) extra-academic audience(s), however, necessitates a more complicated, though not necessarily more narcissistic, reflexivity—focusing on and beyond the writer’s social position in the intellectual field, and geared toward an explicit formulation of an ethics for the writing.

Unlike Behar, in her memoir Kaplan includes only fleeting images of her own father, together with a few more, mostly sketchy, representations of other family members. While periodically making observations that connect her school experience with her experience at home (“I had come from a house where the patterns had broken down and the death that had broken them was not understood. Now I loved the loudspeaker and the study hall and the marble floor because they made me feel hard and controlled and patterned” [53]) these brief reflections most frequently elicit only a terse comment from her. Of her sister’s objections to her project (“‘You’re turning the family into a research project. . . . It’s underhanded. And it’s cold’”), she says simply: “But I didn’t feel cold, I was burning” (202). Such an unelaborated response, including neither a description of her sister nor a description of her sister’s specific reasons for her objections (in her “Acknowledgments,” Kaplan says only that her sister’s “story of (their) family is different” [221]) is another example of how Kaplan’s memoir eschews explicit theorizing.

Interestingly it is Kaplan’s students, whose appearance is the most prominent element of the book’s final chapter, with whom she represents herself finally as communicating best and as having the fullest ‘familial’ kinship. It is in the classroom, then, that Kaplan says ultimately she feels the least like she is “in exile from (herself)”; and it is in describing at least a few of these classroom scenes that the text includes an explicit and detailed interpretation:

Then something will happen, in the classroom, and I’ll see this French language as essential in its imperfection: the fact that we don’t have as many words is forcing us to say more. The simplicity of our communication moves us, we’re outside of cliché, free of easy eloquence, some deeper ideas and feelings make it through the mistakes and shine all the more through them.

In French class I feel close, open, willing to risk a language that isn’t the language of everyday life. A sacred language. (210)

If French then is always “not-quite-(her)-own-language,” a language with which Kaplan in some ways “gags” (210) herself, she explains it is also a language
that allows her to express the “deeper ideas and feelings” that she isn’t able to
express in English, an expression that perhaps goes against the grain of her desire
to forget the past. And it is during at least some moments in class, while she is
sharing this “imperfect” language with her students, that such expression occurs.

Kaplan describes just this kind of moment in a passage in the memoir’s last
chapter, where she describes having assigned her class a novel to read that she felt
she didn’t really understand: “it seemed too simple and I didn’t know how I was
going to teach it” (211). In the novel, a crime has occurred in the narrator’s
childhood; during class, one of Kaplan’s students explicates the passage in which
the narrator recounts watching adults as they arrive one night at his house. The
narrator says he is surprised that after the crime he was not interrogated by the
police because “children watch. They listen, too” (212). But it is Kaplan’s stu-
dent who, for her, expresses the “deeper ideas and feelings” embedded in the
imperfection of this language: “What he really means to say is that they write.
Children grow up and they write about what they saw and heard” (213).

In one of the most emotionally inflected passages of her book, Kaplan theo-
rizes about this moment in class, seemingly taken aback by the intersections
between her own complicated subjectivity (as not only a scholar and teacher,
but also a child who watched her father die) and the ‘reading’ of text and expe-
rience which her student brings to the class:

I cried, not sorrowful tears but tears of happiness from discovering something I
hadn’t known about before. Why was I so moved by what she said? . . . She had
explained to me (the author’s) sense of a past that can’t be erased but which is
always incomplete. . . .

Maybe it was simpler, what moved me. I was thinking about being a child myself
and seeing and hearing but not being able to say yet, not having the words for what I
saw. Or having them, but no one asked. No one asks the child what is going on, and
the child sees, and listens, and engraves those memories and those people one after
another in a private language. It’s only later—maybe it’s too late—that the pain of
those memories is brought forward to the present time of writing. (213-214)

Kaplan here both connects the events of her own childhood to this other set
of events, events in the classroom, while she also abstracts more generally
about the effect on children of the loss of a parent.

Within the memoir and the classroom, therefore, part of Kaplan’s intellectual
work in (an “imperfect”) French becomes theorizing—albeit sporadically—
about the effects of her own father’s death; as, conversely, does her work in
French become part of her emotional experience of his death. In studying and
speaking French with her students Kaplan “discover(s) something (she) hadn’t
know about before”—i.e., that her memoir is in part a record of childhood losses
which had been hidden away by her use of French. As readers we know more, finally, of her sense of the personal and professional consequences of having watched and listened while her father died, of having his death engraved in her own private, secret language.

AN UN-‘PROFESSIONAL’ PRACTICE: TELLING STORIES OF LOSS

Kaplan’s memoir therefore explores the imperfections of her experience as a student, scholar, and teacher of French, by portraying—often in exquisite detail—scenes of personal and professional loss. Depicting such scenes may be one of the most controversial aspects of scholarly memoir, for telling stories of loss is an especially rare practice within the academy. Even in the face of a number of contravening tendencies functioning in academic culture, however, the recent field of scholarly memoirs provides us with many different examples of theorizing the intellectual relevance of such stories. Building on the work of Carolyn Heilbrun, I would like to suggest new ways of reading these memoirs and stories of loss, both of which suffer from a relative lack of “critical or biographical commonplaces” that for other kinds of texts have been “elaborated over generations of critical activity” (18-19).

First of the tendencies which make difficult within the academy telling (and hearing) stories of loss, is our impulse as (Western) scholars to dichotomize concerns of a professional, or intellectual, nature, from concerns we might characterize as more personal. Again, this tendency is one which feminist scholars both in Composition and across the disciplines have struggled with for some time now, and from various starting points. Such a tendency is embedded both in the concrete practices and in the discourses of our profession, relying as those practices and discourses do, for example, on thinking through binaries—such as the binary of the ‘personal’ and the ‘professional.’ David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University,” for example, might be said to invoke such dichotomous thinking (and I acknowledge here the contradiction in my stance, entailing as it does what Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede would call disciplinary critique in “traditional agonistic fashion” [169], at the same time that critique is aimed at binary thinking). Bartholomae’s essay invokes multiple dichotomies—between student writers and professional writers, between writing in a ‘personal’ voice and writing in an ‘academic’ voice—as it argues that “to speak with authority (student writers) have to speak not only in another’s voice but through another’s code; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom”(156) (emphasis mine). The title of Peter Elbow’s “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals” might be said to invoke a similar kind of thinking, although even as he presents this opposition and the “specific conflicts” it
raises in the teaching and designing of a first year writing course, his own text explicitly prods him: “everyone says, ‘Don’t give in to binary thinking’” (73).

The second (though perhaps not final) tendency within the academy which makes difficult an exploration of the professional and intellectual significance of telling stories of loss is the presumption that loss is unspeakable, a presumption which is perhaps stronger within the institution’s walls than it is beyond them. The strength of this tendency may be rooted at least in part in an institutional ideology which posits scholarship as a progressive series of ‘gains’ in knowledge, an ideology which serves to erase or to diminish an acknowledgment of the losses which are an inevitable part of academic (or any) life. Such an ideology of gain affects our ability to conceive of an individual career—and of the development of professional authority within the trajectory of that career—as marked both by meaningful gains and by ‘meaningless’ losses.

Richard E. Miller’s analysis of Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, has Bourdieu pointing to “the impossibility of radically reforming any highly developed educational system, since that system will, of necessity, be predominantly inhabited by individuals who have profited from that system, who are invested in that system, and whose felt sense of distinction has been established and certified by that system” (26). Yet many of the reflective texts that I examine in this essay—particularly memoirs written by women and scholars of color—describe and theorize instances of professional and personal dissatisfaction, and experiences of exclusion or loss, often at the hands of a system from which these scholars nonetheless have profited and in which they are deeply invested.

I would begin to read such texts as hybrid, incorporating many of the conventions of traditional forms simultaneously with oppositional discourses that challenge various widely-held assumptions about professional life—assumptions not only from which as academics we have profited, but also by which we have been constrained. I would argue that the ideology of gain to which I have referred is just such a constraint, increasing as it does the difficulty of putting into practice a feminist epistemology that affirms the myriad connections between the personal and the professional, and contributing to a feminization in the academy of ‘personal’ writing—including scholarly memoir—which often is the kind of writing reserved for recounting the stories of loss that we do tell. At the same time, such an ideology may add to the anxieties inherent in professionalization generally, and specifically to the anxieties that are a part of such highly charged “rites of passage” as the job search and the tenure process.

Some of the workings of this ideology of gain are unveiled in a recent article in *CCC* by Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede. In a brilliant re-vision of another essay which they had co-authored together a decade before (“Audience
Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy”), Lunsford and Ede examine what they call the focus on “success in communicating with and persuading others” (173) in academic literacy broadly, and in the rhetorical tradition more specifically. These authors’ “self-critique” (168) finds evidence of this impulse toward “success” in their own earlier essay, but avoids the easy tendency toward either/or dichotomizing, “resist(ing) the lure of totalizing, oppositionalizing readings” (169). Instead, the authors reflect on the consequences for their writing of their own “personal identification with schooling,” (173) and suggest how their own particular subjectivities were shaped by western individualism and an emphasis on “success”:

Academic good girls, we studied, even excelled, and in so doing we came to associate both schooling and the writing we did in school with a positive sense of self, a means of validation and “success,” and of hailing appreciated audiences. So powerful was this identification, in fact, that we recast those painful memories of struggle that we could not repress, reinterpreting experiences that might have led to resistance and critique as evidence of individual problems that we could remedy if only we would work harder, do (and be) better. Such an approach is congruent, of course, with the individualism inherent throughout our culture, educational institutions, and scholarly disciplines, an individualism that traditionally writes the kind of struggles we experienced as students as inevitable, even necessary and salutary, aspects of the western narrative of individual success that (our previous essay) implicitly endorses. (171-172)

Lunsford and Ede suggest that the narrative of individual success which they point to as implicitly operating within their own (previously published) essay, “inevitably, albeit silently, casts misunderstanding, miscommunication, disagreement, resistance, and dissent as failure and, as such, as that which is to avoided or ‘cured’” (173-174). In much the same way that the narrative of “success” which these authors point to serves to exclude alternate narratives, so too would I suggest an ideology of gain embedded in academic culture serves to exclude from our consideration a wide range of professional and personal stories.

Many scholars, especially feminist scholars, have acknowledged the need to reflect on and theorize the ways in which personal history and experience shape the ‘subject’ and the form of professional work, and especially of scholarly writing. One sign of the seriousness—and perhaps again the anxiety—with which scholars have approached this self-reflective project has been the proliferation of terms to describe such critical work: literary theorists Nancy K. Miller and Susan Suleiman have written (about) the uses of “personal criticism” and “mediated autobiography” respectively; anthropologist Behar’s “vulnerable writing” has a reflexive quality in common with Linda Brodkey’s—and
Mary Louise Pratt’s—“autoethnography.” Feminist, social theorist Nancy Fraser describes the essays included in her text, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* as “exercises in situated theorizing” (7). Although these terms and writing tasks are various and differently inflected, I would suggest they all signify an alternative intellectual practice which attempts to make sense of the personally situated nature of scholarly work, and to theorize what Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie have termed, after Adrienne Rich, a “politics of location” (7) for that work. Mariolina Salvatori, in a review in *CCC*, describes recent “teacher texts” by Miller, Jane Tompkins and Jane Gallop as constituting a “theoretical phenomenon.” Describing these texts as “introspective accounts of how teachers bring their personal and academic lives together as they think about and theorize teaching,” Salvatori argues that the “varied nomenclature (of what she calls ‘practices of the personal’) may be taken to indicate the richness of the genre as a ‘category in process’ . . . (but) might also be taken as a sign of a certain anxiety about its functions and possibilities” (567).

This anxiety arises in part from the fact that these texts are accountable to a different kind of story than is often told in academia. The ‘professional’ stories we most often tell ourselves and each other are stories of accretion, stories which elaborate and focus on a progressive accumulation of achievements and gains: gains in knowledge achieved through scholarship, gains in professional status achieved through hard work, gains in prestige. The prevalence and quality of these success stories, and the timbre of the voices which they inscribe, stand in stark contrast to the stories and voices of professional and personal loss contained within scholarly memoirs and other “reflective” academic texts.

In such texts these stories often center on a professional loss, like the loss of a job. *The Cliff Walk* by Don Snyder details his experience of being fired in his third year of a job by a department in the midst of down-sizing. Torgovnick, in her collection of autobiographical essays, *Crossing Ocean Parkway*, describes the circumstances early in her career surrounding her loss of a child, and her subsequent experience of being denied tenure. While Torgovnick sees the two experiences and their consequences as drastically different, she is puzzled nonetheless at how often her colleagues seem to conflate the two. Theorizing that this may have something to do with how the “tenure process is surrounded by talk of ‘judgments,’ ‘destinies,’ and ‘fates,’” Torgovnick remembers how she, too, had experienced that process as a “sustained attack on (her) identity and self-esteem” (67).

The legal scholar Patricia Williams also examines loss within an institutional context, using an analytic lens trained on how “inept” pedagogies can kill—both bodies and minds—in her memoir *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*.
(which she subtitles “Diary of a Law Professor). Williams’s text comprises an analysis of how traditional legal discourse constructs racial and gender subjectivity as “irrelevant” (100), rendering the concerns of people of color and women, as well as these people themselves, invisible in the larger society. Like Mary Rose O’Reilley’s memoir The Peaceable Classroom, Williams’s text speaks, for example, of the losses incurred by law students when specific forms of assessment and specific pedagogies pretend to rely on neutral or unbiased languages, or presuppose that either students or teachers (or both) possess uncomplicated subjectivities that do not transcend the walls of the institution.

Since Williams’s examination and critique of law school discourse hinges as much on her familiarity with her students’ experiences—as well as on a reflection about her own experience and family history—as it does on her familiarity with the texts or discourses they encounter, her “diary” is a testimony to her own personal difference. While it might be a contradiction in terms within the context of a supposedly “neutral” discourse to be a “black woman law professor” with a great-great-grandmother who was herself legal property, within the context of her text’s discourse her own complex subjectivity is an indispensable resource for critiquing the biases in the law, and the subsequent ‘losses’ which these biases entail.

In the context of published memoirs, professional stories of loss therefore are often also familial stories, involving intimate ‘others’ who either were never able, or who no longer are able, to be actual audiences for the text: Williams’s discerning of the “shape” of her great-great-grandmother, and of the “hand” (19) of the man who owned her (Williams’s own great-great-grandfather); Kaplan’s evocation of her dead father, “his image, silent and distant with headphones over his ears, a founding image for (her) own work” (197); British sociologist Carolyn Steedman’s evocation of her mother, suffering from an envy that in some ways succeeds in killing her; psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison’s description of her father’s “black and chaotic moods” (35); and Behar’s description of her frequently estranged father. Nancy K. Miller, in the concluding chapter of her book, Getting Personal, theorizes her relationship to “the autobiographical penis and the theoretical phallus” (146) in the context of her father’s illness and death; and Torgovnick, in the Epilogue of her text, examines her relationship with her father in the context of his final illness and death.

It is striking how often what my colleague Linda Bachman would call the “reflective gaze” around which these scholarly memoirs are constructed belongs, in fact, to an ‘other’ who is in some way absented or lost—either by illness, death or estrangement. And it is striking as well how often in these memoirs, many written by women who now are established in their careers, that this is an intimate ‘other,’ a parent, often a father—that parent perhaps
most often looked to as a model of professionalism. In an unpublished manuscript Bachman, drawing on the ideas of Peggy Phelan, writes that

the desire to represent the self in autobiography or performance more broadly emerges from a sense of loss engendered by the inability to see oneself. The reflective gaze of an “other” is therefore the necessary vehicle for autobiographical representation: “one needs always the eye of the other to recognize (and name) oneself . . . the external gaze is a compensatory way of returning a failed inward gaze” (Phelan 15).

So perhaps these texts suggest that while autobiographical, or reflective, practices function to (re)conceive the purposes of academic writing—establishing relationships between writers and multiple and complex audiences, supporting the aims of interdisciplinary and disciplinary scholarship, often concerning themselves with issues of social justice and ‘public’ accountability—at least in part they are also ‘personal’ attempts to see what can’t be seen, to recover what can’t be recovered, perhaps even to grieve what has been irrevocably lost.

My own interest in the practice of reflective writing is rooted as well in a desire to acknowledge the part loss has played in my professional life, and how that loss—which has included a distancing from family and friends, and exclusion from the working-class culture of my childhood—has shaped my teaching and scholarship. Turning reflectiveness in upon itself in this way has helped me to see more clearly, for example, how the experiences of students and colleagues as well as those of family and friends, simultaneously converge with and differ from my own—encouraging me to acknowledge all of these different groups as potential audiences for my work. I believe not only has this made me a better scholar and teacher; it has helped me to feel less isolated in my work, and more a part of diverse relationships which make great demands yet offer great intellectual and affective rewards.

I also have learned the value of writing and teaching against an ideal of scholarly autonomy. Richard E. Miller, having summarized Bourdieu’s sense of the impossibility of reforming educational systems since such systems are primarily populated by those who are invested in maintaining the status quo, concludes that “it would appear that no academic can escape the allure of this game, not even those overtly interested in fully democratizing current educational practice, since such activists implicitly believe that education is the pre-eminent site for organizing relationships between individuals” (26). The examples of reflective practice I examine briefly in this essay demonstrate, on the contrary, not only that many academics value relationships as integral to their scholarship and teaching, but also that they believe such relationships are located in various sites not only inside but also outside of higher education.
Unlike more traditional academic prose, these texts summon a language of loss—along with other languages—in order to frame relationships which thus are both personal and professional. In so doing they begin to illustrate how loss is both speakable and unspeakable, within the institution but also beyond its walls; how the complexity of loss can be revealed in the context of a discourse which is multiply-voiced; and how telling stories of loss perhaps opens up new possibilities for speaking to multiple and varied audiences. As examples of scholarly memoir such as those I have examined here speak to multiple and complex audiences—composed of students, of colleagues, and of constituencies outside the academy—they also speak, as Patti Lather might say, with “ears to hear” (“Clarity,” 538) the stories of loss these O/others have to tell.

Not alone, but as one practice among many, such speech compels us to acknowledge the connections between the individual and the collective; to examine our assumptions about what kinds of writing do and do not carry discursive authority, and why; to create, perhaps, what Fraser would call “bridge discourses and hybrid publics” (12); and so perhaps, too, to inscribe and collaborate with audiences both inside and outside the academy. Like the audience for this essay, such multiple and complex audiences have much to teach us—including teaching us about how and why to acknowledge the inevitability of loss as well as of gain.

Lather, with her co-author Chris Smithies, has just such a complex array of audiences in mind in Troubling Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS. The audiences for Lather’s and Smithies’s text include professional peers as well as women living outside the institution, many of whom are also negotiating—and grieving—the profound loss(es) which accompany illness and death. Lather writes that after the completion of their text, she and her colleague “continue to . . . construct risky practices of textual innovation in order to . . . be of use in a time when the old stories will not do” (“Clarity,” 541). We might look to Lather and Smithies, then, as well as to writers such as Kaplan, Behar, Torgovnick, Miller, Williams, and Lunsford and Ede, and to many other scholars writing reflectively across the disciplines, for alternative models of intellectual practice that can begin to fulfill such a need for innovation.