Personal Effects
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As the social structures of affiliation become more abstract, more diverse, or distant, we find ourselves dashing headlong in retreat to symbols of connection that are increasingly familial—and defensive. Baseball, that great repository of nostalgia, has, for a long time stood as an icon for the intimate and enduring relations of small town life. *Bring the Dodgers back to Brooklyn!* And even I, who forswore the sport after the Dodgers left, worry that the Yankees will move to New Jersey. If the Marlins could move from obscurity to the playoffs through the purchase of “free” agent Livan Hernandez for 4.5 million dollars, then maybe like the rest of our culture, the slowest game in the world is speeding up.

But it is the freedom of Miriam Carreras, the mother of Livan Hernandez, and their reunion that provided the excitement for the ‘97 World Series and its narrative. Livan, who defected from Cuba to Mexico in 1995 “made eye contact with his mother for the first time in almost two years,” just before the game started. Just two days before the game, Miriam Carreras had received an emergency visa from the United States Interests Section in Havana, promoted by Florida’s Governor Lawton Chiles. In sunny Florida, basking in warm waters of the post Cold War world, absent an evil Empire, Castro steps up to the plate first as the villain of the piece and then, with Governor Chiles, as guardians of the mother and child reunion. It is a reunion that thrills the Latin American immigrants in the Miami bleachers as well as retirees in their Florida condominiums pining for their children, still ensconced in Cleveland and Pittsburgh. This year we were mesmerized by another parent child drama in the reclamation of Elian Gonzales by his father from his Miami relatives after his mother drowned during her flight from Cuba with Elian.

The call of home, sounding through sports, politics and media was projected on to the best seller list in 1997 in the novel, *Cold Mountain*, the saga of a reunion of lovers, and reunions between them and the land? Ada, a city girl from Charleston, living in rural North Carolina during the war learns to put down her books, her music, and drawing pad, for agrarian self-sufficiency. Her reunion with the earth is paralleled by Inman’s journey away from the war, back to his home and her:
Bleak as the scene was, though, there was a growing joy in Inman’s heart. He was nearing home; he could feel it in the touch of thin air on skin, in his longing to see the leap of hearth smoke from the houses of people he had known all his life. People he would not be called upon to hate or fear. . . . It was to Cold Mountain her looked. He had achieved a vista of what to him was homeland. He looked out at this highland and knew the names of places and things. He said them aloud: Little Beartail Ridge, Wagon Road Gap, Ripshin, Hunger Creek, Clawhammer Knob, Rocky Face. Not a mountain or watercourse lacked denomination. Not bird or bush anonymous. His place. (281)

In *From Where We Stand*, Deborah Tall offers us a fascinating history of nostalgia:

The word was coined in 1678 for the disease of homesickness. Its symptoms included insomnia, anorexia, palpitations, stupor, and the persistent thinking of home. Nostalgia was described in European medical encyclopedias up until the nineteenth century as fatal . . . Armies were frequently beset by the malady, leading one Russian general in 1733 to announce that “any soldier incapacitated by nostalgia would be buried alive.” (121)

Tall comments that the meaning of nostalgia has shifted from being a primarily geographical disease to a psychological one rooted in time, the loss of home collapsed into a yearning for the past, particularly childhood. The field of education has been beset with nostalgia as Allan Bloom and company have attacked our contemporary diversity with idealized versions of their intellectual histories.

The politics of reunion haunt our work as well as loss of place, loss of relationships and loss of symbols for and of connection, are powerful and pervasive themes in curriculum and in the autobiographies and ethnographies that speak of the experience of education.

What are our attempts to recuperate our losses in our work as educators, as teachers, as researchers?

I have thought for a long time that both parenting and education inevitably involve this project of recuperation. To live with children or with students of all ages is to revisit the processes of one’s own formation. You hear your mother’s voice sail right through you in moments of frustration or worry: You got in at 4 a.m. and you’re going out again? You worry that they will not secure the approval you sought from your father or your uncle. You stop yourself from grabbing them off diving boards, off horses, and elections platforms. You wince when they commit your particular brand of indiscretion. There iterations are exasperating, inevitable, and beautiful. They are the mimesis that extends the dance of families through time. In the intimate life of families, between each day’s waking and lying down, we walk, and talk, and eat, we
stand and dodge and dream together and maybe we plan and promise, graceful
or clumsy, light or plodding, we dance the gestures of our parents and grand-
parents with our children. And even when we buy new dancing shoes, no taps
for me, we liken our new dance to theirs.

Schooling, on the other hand, offers us more distance, if we would take it. It
provides the stage for the same transferences as the kitchen and the living
room, but the players are different, and if we are fortunate, more various. They
have their own moves. The family personae are all there, costumed in the char-
acters of the play of school, waiting to be performed, but schooling is lodged in
the liminal space between the family and the workplace, and it is the privilege
and responsibility of schools to offer teachers and students opportunities to
play with the relations rather than to repeat them obsessively and slavishly.
Because no families are ever exactly alike, not even happy ones, this gathering
of students and teachers from many families invites us to write the story of
coming to form once again, redefining the goals of development and the paths
we will walk to reach them.

I do not say that schools are a *tabula rasa* for our imaginings of new ways to
be human together; they mimic other institutions, churches and synagogues
and mosques. Malls and factories, hospitals, museums, and internment cen-
ters. School time is still modeled on the labor needs of an agrarian past, school
space on pews facing an altar. For few of us are these schools strange. They may
be sad, but they are familiar and invite collusion with the politics of power
contained in the architecture, and their rituals. Nevertheless, strong as these
patterns of school culture may be, and as vulnerable as we may be to the
*mise en scene* of our early hopes and disappointments, I can not believe that they
exert a mystification equal to that of family life.

Because curriculum gives a name and form to what goes on in schools, to
what they are supposed to be about and to the relationships and interactions
that support and result from this purpose, it gives us a way to name the past
and the present. Genres of curriculum operate in schools the way they do in
literature. The familiar form, whether it is the lesson plan or the one-act play,
provides what Frederick Crews calls a countercathedected system, “a coded assur-
ance that psychic activity will be patterned and resolved along familiar lines”
(20). Because the genres of the classroom are more deliberate, because they are
created and sustained in public by debate and negotiation, their function and
effects (even when produced by manipulations calculated to dominate and
deflect other constituencies) may be more visible to us than the forms and
relations that contain our lives in families.

It takes a long time for new genres of curriculum to take hold. We are still
experimenting with cooperative learning as if it were an unstable element,
threatening to blow up in our faces with any prodding or poking. But the genres that we employ to study schooling are more dynamic. In the mere 25 years since William Pinar and I published *Toward a Poor Curriculum* in 1976, urging recourse to autobiographical investigations of educational experience, autobiographies, memoirs, recollections of all sorts have proliferated. The call of narrative is so strong and pervasive, that we even find it projected in a *New York Times Magazine* Section advertisement created for that great recollector of *le temps perdu*, Ralph Lauren:

> Only in America. Plaid flannel shirts, soft and worn. Jeans that are broken in, unbridled, no restraints. Clothing with the kind of honest, timeworn patina once achieved only through years of wear. Each piece is a rugged individual. There are clothes that tell a story, rich in atmosphere and character.

> Double RL by Ralph Lauren

The Marlboro man has traded in his smoke for a madeleine.

Let me recover, briefly, the genres of autobiography in my own work, for it has moved from a phenomenological inquiry to a feminist project and now is heading back to its origins.

When I try to remember what I was up to in 1975 I think that I was literally trying to change the subject of educational research. Research in the early 1970s was still dominated by quantitative studies. Analytic philosophy dominated foundations studies. The appeal of autobiography in education was the call of the humanities, specific, detailed, and organized to express the subjectivity of the learner. Phenomenology provided both goal and method. If there was a project of recollection it was the reflexive turn that recuperated the moment of intentionality; it was the desire to catch oneself in the act of thought, rushing like Sartre’s wind through consciousness toward the object of interest. I never knew whether to call what I did research or pedagogy. When I worked with students it was pedagogy. When I wrote about the work it was research. As I responded to student narratives with questions, the functions of research and teaching blended. Ten years ago, I described working with a student’s narrative this way: “She writes as an artist, rid of all preaching. I read as a scientist looking for the meanings both common and uncommon. My reading of her text must enter its world. I join her in a hermeneutic stroll, meeting the relatives, the neighbors, locating the object, educational experience within her horizons, her body, her language. She joins me on an epistemological perch, from which we survey the territory that she has traveled” (Grumet 1990, 120).

Over the decades that I did this work, I rarely taught a course without asking students to write three autobiographical narratives that re-presented their experiences of the phenomena we were studying. I didn’t care whether these
experiences they recounted had ever really happened, because I was not interested in their psychology. I was not trying to find out why they thought as they did or what events in their lives had made them the personas they were. I was interested in what and how they thought about the world, and I was interested in asking them to think about this thought. In that way the inquiry became more philosophical and phenomenological than psychological or sociological, for it was about meanings, not causes. An interesting project for people who want to teach other people about the world, don’t you think? But I did not ask them to tell me what they thought of education, and the last thing I wanted to know was their personal philosophies of education. That invitation would have elicited the latest piece of popular psychology, or the old formulaic homilies that were substitutions for thought. My own scholarship involved investigating taken-for-granted assumptions about education by offering reading of narratives that challenged them and, reciprocally, of bringing questions to the narratives provoked by educational theories.

The narratives were not limited to stories of schooling. Narratives of educational experiences addressed mundane experiences like walking the dog, traumas like car accidents, adventures in mountains, on oceans, in foreign countries. Stories were told about love and crime and birth and death. The pedagogical motive was constructive, however, as well as descriptive, for students were always asked to bring these narratives into another conversation. Thus, the grand narrative of the course would include philosophical texts of Plato, Dewey, and Sartre, or literary autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin, John Stuart Mill, James Baldwin, or Sylvia Ashton-Warner. The task was not parallel play; it required them to blur genres, to challenge their narratives with these other readings and to challenge the assumptions and assertions of these other texts with their readings of their own stories. The final paper was, in my view, a linguistic bridge from the symbolization of experience they had called private to the ways of knowing we call public.

It is telling that whereas the word public functions as a noun in this phrase and in everyday speech, the word private rarely is seen as a noun outside the context of this opposition, except when it refers to a military recruit, or as a euphemism for genitalia. It is characteristic of our gendered society that the private should function as an index to unnamable contents, an adjective to an absent noun. Feminism has taken up the task of naming the private, taking an inventory of its contexts, and of exploring the relation of this category to the public, its putative antonym. Because schooling and education are the processes through which persons move from the domain of family—the private, to the domain of work and knowledge—the public, the experience of education has served to strengthen the opposition of these categories. Once
feminists had revealed these categories as cultural constructions, rather than natural or universal necessities, feminist educators began to address the ways that schooling and informal education could undermine, rather than strengthen, this opposition and provide continuity and reciprocity between public and private experience.

The struggle to connect public and private labor mirrored the project of consciousness raising that developed in the Sixties and the Seventies, expressed in the women’s movement’s slogan “the personal is the political.” In professional meetings and in everyday life, women met to speak and study what had been kept secret in their lives. The history, function, and cultural processes of the separation of the public and the private were explored in the significant works of Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Mary O’Brien, between 1976 and 1981. The psychoanalytic and object relations theories, as well as the scholarship in political economy developed in this era moved the feminist analysis of educational experience from the liberal emphasis on rights and power to the discussion and analysis of desire. Influenced by Lacan, this analysis lodged power in the imagination, believing that it accrued to certain people or to people who were male or tall or mature because of the projections of others, as they associated power, privilege, superiority, and resources to be associated with men and not with women. As analysts studied the motives for these attributions, consciousness raising invited women to come together in their everyday lives to talk about their lives and to see how they had been complicit in the arrangement that oppressed them. The autobiographical voice was invited not only to speak in public of the experience considered private, but in the process of that speaking which served to resymbolize experience, to formulate a story and a theory that would extend the knowledge and experience of private life into the public life of communities, knowledge, and government.

In my own work the feminist projects invited me to recuperate the discourse of reproductions for education. The arrogation of that word—reproduction—to the neomarxist critique of the ways that schools extended the means and methods of production, has dramatized the extent to which reproduction, a theme in human consciousness, has been effaced in educational theory and literature. *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), my book that grew out of this discourse raised a number of questions about the experience of reproduction, of being a child of one’s parents, or a parent to one’s children and about the relation of these experiences to the ways we work with other people’s children. The book raised questions about the motives that we bring from those experiences to our work in schools and universities, projects of differentiation that have led us to repudiate what we know in favor
of the abstractions and canonical texts we find in school. The phenomenological project joined an analysis of identity, for what it meant to be a man or a woman has a great deal to do with how human beings think about and experience our worlds. Our sex endows each of us at birth with a set of possibilities related to our anatomy, our hormones, our capacity to procreate. These differences between men and women assume different meanings in different times, different cultures, in different families. Just as the small child learns to discriminate mama from the lady next door, learns not to run into the street, and learns to tell a dog’s bow-wow from a cat’s meow, that child is also learning that he or she is male or female, and what being male or female means to people with whom he or she lives. Because knowing is always situated, sexuality, class, race, religion, ethnicity are all necessarily themes that shape our attention to a world that is the object of intention and desire.

It was important to me then, as it is now, to bring the autobiographical voice into the theoretical discourse of *Bitter Milk*. It was important to resist the impulse to hide my femaleness, my motherliness, so that I would pass. I was afraid that by relinquishing the distanced stance of an abstract supposedly universal speaker (otherwise read as male) I would trivialize the work, consigning it to *Good Housekeeping’s* compendium of women’s confessions. I was afraid that if I mentioned the birth of my children, the life of my family, the text would be taken as a call for a return to compulsory heterosexuality and nuclear families, as it was read by a number of feminists and young women who understood the women’s movement as liberating them from having to identify with procreation and child rearing. One journal’s referee rebuked me for telling my middle class story here and there without including as well the stories of women of color, women of poverty. He was not, I believe, concerned about the exclusion of the narratives of women of wealth.

Some of those who welcomed the presence of narrative in the text wished that I had not contaminated it with educational theory. They liked the image of my working at the dining room table, but didn’t want to plow through my ideas of what that all had to do with Piaget or Lacan or object relations theory. In elevators at the American Educational Research Association’s annual convention, people would read my name tag and tell me about their dining room tables and the birth of their children, but few commented on the book’s thesis that our education work is motivated by our desire to contradict our relations to our children and our own parents, relations profoundly influenced by our sex and gender. Well, it was an academic convention.

When that work was first published, first as essays, later as a book, the act of mixing genres was still pretty unusual in professional scholarship. Some feminist literary critics such as Elaine Showalter and Jane Gallop provided models,
but educational texts tended to be either anecdotal or theoretical, not both, and rarely both working off each other. I have taken some time to talk about the style of this text for it is the ambiguity of style or double discourse, if you will, that, for all of its ambiguity, I miss in much of the contemporary work in educational narrative.

Before I lodge my complaint against the current rise of autobiographical studies in education, let me celebrate some of its achievements. The feminist project to bring women’s voices into public discourse and to broaden that discourse to include accounts that had been silenced by the private/public split and the privileging of male discourse has been and continues to be important. There is now an extensive, persuasive, and poetic literature that testifies to the exclusion of women’s experience, and particularly of our domestic experience from the texts and glossaries that constitute the disciplines of knowledge. In literature, in sociology, in anthropology, in philosophy, psychology, history, physics, biology, political science, women’s standpoints are those which honor the material, concrete particularity of everyday life and honor the connection and intimacy between those who share the actual time and space of everyday life. The power of those who bear the babies and nurture them, who order the provision of food, decide what is clean and dirty, who wash the sheets and care for the aged is palpable. Repressed, this creativity has been repudiated by the myth of immaculate conception, the myth of menstrual contamination; it has been inverted into violence and destruction; it has been appropriated by abstract disciplines of knowledge, bureaucratic systems and the projection and collection of things calls property. We are still in the midst of that wave of revelation, and it is interesting to speculate about the degree to which these narratives have influenced changes in policies and law that address domestic violence, abuse, divorce, and sexual harassment.

Over the last decade, the literature of women’s experience has been enriched and differentiated by texts detailing the lives and experiences of teachers and students of color. In Learning From Our Lives (Neumann and Peterson), Gloria Ladson Billings describes the efforts of Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith to create Black Women’s Studies, a discourse situation apart from white women’s racism and black men’s sexism, a discourse dedicated to revealing the relatedness of race, class, and gender within and outside the academy. In the same volume, Martha Monteiro-Sieburth speaks to her Latina experience, the importance of language communities, and the importance of standpoint discrimination, insider/outsider perspectives on education and research.

Autobiographical writing became one strand in the project to dignify the professional work of teachers during the last decade. Teachers’ narratives were
elicited in order to display the complexity, ambiguity, creativity, or teaching. Narratives were elicited as well to convey the loneliness, frustration, and subordination of teaching. Bringing teachers together to write and to read each other’s texts reinforced the collective creativity of the Bay Area National Writing Project as well as the calls for creative responsibility in the work of Maxine Green’s existential challenge, Donald Schön’s well received construction of the reflective practitioner. Janet Miller worked with teachers to elicit their understanding of their work, interested in building school communities from groups of teachers whose reflections would generate a common project. Connelly and Clandinin approached autobiography as a method to encourage teachers’ reflexive grasp of their teaching, the ways they understood and constructed curriculum within the context of the school.

Teachers’ narratives were elicited to provide the processes of community, literature, and knowledge that would remedy the sexism, classism, and downright sadism that had consigned the knowledge of teachers about children, knowledge, instruction, the politics of schooling and community to girl talk, rushed conversations in the halls, the lounge, long conversations over the phone, late at night. Let me make it clear that I am not denigrating the function of this writing or of its community building. It has brought some of the energies of consciousness raising to the communities of teachers and contributes to the ongoing work to recognize the dignity and challenge of this work.

But now, as I leaf through the articles, book titles, chapters of education literature I feel as if I am drowning in narrative. I, Miss Subjectivity of 1978, find myself scanning the memoirs, rushing past gritty scenes of urban density, languid landscapes of rural loneliness, skimming accounts of inspiring mentors, desperate differentiations. My eyes move up and down the pages seeking that shibboleth of poststructural criticism, the generalization. What’s the point, I want to know. What can we make of this? What difference does it make to education? Maybe my impatience comes from this work I remember doing, administering a school of education in Brooklyn, New York where there is, to put it mildly, a lot to do. Maybe, as I age, ricocheting between the deaths of my mother and older colleagues, I am losing existential courage, knowing that I too will disappear into the moments and particulars, I seek the comfort of the large idea, the marker, so long live this, and this gives life to thee.

I am not alone in my resistance. Poststructuralist critics of autobiography have expressed their suspicions of all these scribbling selves, challenging the spurious unity of the narrating self and its linear psychology. Accompanying the logic of its narrative, is, they assert, a naïve conflation of viewpoint and truth, as if the risk of confession and the discomfort of disclosure were sufficient to confirm the veracity and authority of its judgments. This critique challenges the
reliance on reflexivity that came to dominate the discourse of teacher education and development in the 1980s, as well as educational research in the 1990s. Lacking theoretical scaffolding as well as identification of educational aims, reflexivity, on its own, can dwindle into the paralysis of infinite regression or self-absorbed trivia. In response, feminist educators have pointed to the irony that postmodernism arrived to erase the speaking self just at the moment when women had seized the podium (Brodbribb). This sardonic observation is accompanied with a serious concern that the activist and political expressions of feminism will not survive the assault on the psychological self, which for all of its suspect cohesion, sustains the public identity and commitments capable of, and necessary for, social action.

Education is about social action. We teachers and teachers of teachers are different from our brothers and sisters who pursue the disciplines of history and sociology, of anthropology, of philosophy, and literature without the educational prefix. We cannot ignore the implications of what we study for the events that are taking place in schools across this country as we read and write, interview and teach, as we visit schools and communities, archives and malls.

Autobiographical theorizing suits an educational arena that finally, in the words of Jerome Bruner, has recognized that “domain specificity [is] the rule rather than the exception in logical development [and] that the achievement of knowledge [is] always situated, dependent on materials, task, and on how the learner understands things” (132). For Bruner, it is the narrative construal of reality that can constitute accounts of situated learning. He argues for the isomorphism of the narrative and thought, and offers nine universals of narrative realities. It is his assertion of these universals that interest me more than their particular qualities. If we can recognize the structures of narrative, then we may examine the processes of our own subjectivities and of the education that has contributed to their shaping. Anna Neumann provides us with an instance of this awareness as she offers us readings through three separate narratives related to her mother’s experience of the Holocaust. One narrative is Anna’s, recollected from family knowledge. Another encodes her mother’s answer to questions in a family interview, and the third is an account that her mother produced in a document that was part of the process of applying for reparations. Neumann tells her reader that with each telling of the story, her understanding of her mother changes, and their relationship deepens. Neumann asks how these stories, told and untold, have not only shaped the consciousness of this woman but also structured the relations within her family. Judith Butler has argued that it is the performance of the narrative that constitutes our identity, and if we understand that performance as generated outside the fact of writing in the lived and discursive conventions of our many communities, then these
performances can help us to understand our own educational experiences and those we design for others.

Nevertheless, we are still nervous about holding the conversations that would help us to make some collective sense of these narratives, instances of what Seyla Benhabib calls “situated criticism.” We are worried about offending each other. If a text is an expression of identity, then what is it we criticize when we find it boring, or offer an interpretation that is not the author’s, or take issue with the way that someone has constructed the narrative of her or his own formation? And if that formation is situated explicitly as an expression of gender or ethnicity, how can we take issue with its assertions, if we do not share those characteristics. Our narratives have estranged us because they are defensively declarative. They preclude engagement and conversation. Their confessions display an intimacy that their rhetoric forbids.

Benhabib suggests that our postmodern passion for situated criticism (and I would add our avoidance of engaging each other’s narratives) expresses our nostalgia for home, “for the certitude of one’s own culture and society in a world in which no tradition, no culture, and no society can exist any more without interaction and collaboration, confrontation, and exchange. When cultures and societies clash, where do we stand as feminists, as social critics and political activists?” Benhabib asks (227). In Situating the Self, Benhabib articulated the concern that I am addressing here by calling for a conversation across narratives which she names “interactive universalism”: “the practice of situated criticism for a global community that does not shy away from knocking down the parish walls.” She describes the sometimes necessary exile of the social critic, outside the walls of the city, for “if cultures and traditions are more like competing sets of narratives and incoherent tapestries of meaning, then the social critic must herself construct out of these conflictual and incoherent accounts the set of criteria in the name of which she speaks. The hermeneutic monism of meaning brings no exemption from the responsibility of normative justification” (228).

From what ground can the critic of an autobiographical or situated text speak? If Benhabib places herself outside the walls of the city, McClaren places himself inside the walls, adopting the guise of the flaneur, to which he attaches a marxist eye. He offers us a text interrupted with journal entries from Paris, West Hollywood, Mexico, East Berlin, and Rio de Janeiro and asks whether we can “use new ways of organizing subjectivity to create a self-reflexive social agent capable of dismantling capitalist exploitation and domination” (228).

I too ask the questions that McClaren and Benhabib raise as they try to find a place for themselves as readers of culture. They seek a position from which they can make judgments and comparisons, and a place from which their
understanding can project ideas and plans for a better world. I think that the position of critics is that of the reader and that the object of the critique is not the other, a hypostatized version of difference congealed into another person, but the text’s display of subjectivity making sense of the construction of subjectivity. Bruner associates this process with metacognition: the object of thought being thought itself. Nevertheless, in our anxiety about identity and in our political correctness, we resort to Crews’s anaesthetic criticism, “looking for motifs, inconsistencies, but avoiding the experience of being alone with a text, acknowledging its hold over us” (20). Crews sees every text as a negotiation between the fantasy of an infantile appetitive imagination and the compromises effected between those wishes and constraints of culture, achieved by a negotiating ego. These strike me as the struggle of education in a democracy, the struggle to construct a common conversation about what is possible in this place and this time for the great diversity of people who live in this community. What Crews’s position returns to us is a glimpse of subjectivity, historical, embodied, but still making things up.

That is what I think autobiographical texts do: they make up stories, selecting this episode, eliminating that one, exploring this moment in details, but glossing that. They structure the accounts into fictions of causality, with beginning, middles, and ends. They attempt to capture us, as readers, by attracting our sympathy, or shocking us into admiration, or humbling us by revealing our ignorance. They invite us to abandon ourselves to their worlds, that easy reunion again, or they hold us at a distance, proclaiming their distance and inaccessibility. They insinuate multiple references or meanings or stay tight to one horizon in diction and cadence.

Bruner reminds us that when conflicting construals of reality are brought into confrontation, what is at stake is more than a theory or a finding; perhaps it is a way of being in the world. But he reminds us also that there are privileged forms of confrontation, intimate friendship—psychoanalysis, for instance, “where prise de conscience is the objective of the whole exercise” (Bruner, 148). To capture consciousness, to understand it, is, in my opinion, the point of educational studies; consciousness is consciousness of the world and understanding that relation of knower and known is what our work is about. If the discourse of identity and education will continue and flourish, we will need autobiography to continue to proliferate and differentiate itself, hospitable to authors who will speak from the many places and positions that this wondrous world provides. We will also need autobiography to blur genres with curriculum criticism and foundational studies so that the particularity and process of an individual’s coming to know the world can be in continuous discourse with the world that presents itself to our experience.
Marilyn Brownstein offers the work of Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin as exemplars for this conversation with a person in the world. Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, and in Benjamin’s *A Berlin Chronicle* each portray an instance of what Brownstein calls a catastrophic encounter, a moment of vulnerability and ambiguity that is sensuous, embodied, and profoundly implicated in the social and ideological structures of their lifeworlds. These moments capture the contradictions that bind the speaker to the situation and generate questions about the world within which this encounter is nested. Two instances of this approach in our work come to mind. One is Jane Adan’s book, *Children in Our Lives*, where the narrative of a child’s dilemma is exquisitely investigated as it reveals the interpenetration of a child’s construal of reality with those of the adults who care for him. Another is Wendy Atwell-Vasey’s *Nurturing Words: Bridging Private Readings and Public Teaching*. Atwell-Vasey brings object-relations theory to teachers’ narratives of their own conflicted and ambivalent reading experiences to understand why teachers who love to read would embed books within curriculum that discourages the intense experience of texts that these narratives convey.

Maybe the reunion of Livan Hernandez and Miriam Carreras was one such moment of critical encounter, when they were reunited by the economic and political interests that had separated them. How would they tell that story? And how would you read it? In each case there is a double tension. There is tension in the original narrative and there is tension on the part of its interpreter/critics, who meet the text with body and soul, credulity and incredulity. For finally, the position of the critic/reader/interpreter is not a problem of placement, inside or outside the city walls, but engagement. Rather than parallel play, we must write narratives that pose a question about our experience in the world and invite our readers to join us in the exploration that results. It is a generous and humble act that displays one’s own vulnerability as writer and reader. The research of such an autobiography is indeed a reunion as the writer recuperates a wish and the struggle to negotiate its satisfaction in the world. It is a reunion when the reader following the arc of the writer’s question recovers a world worth knowing.