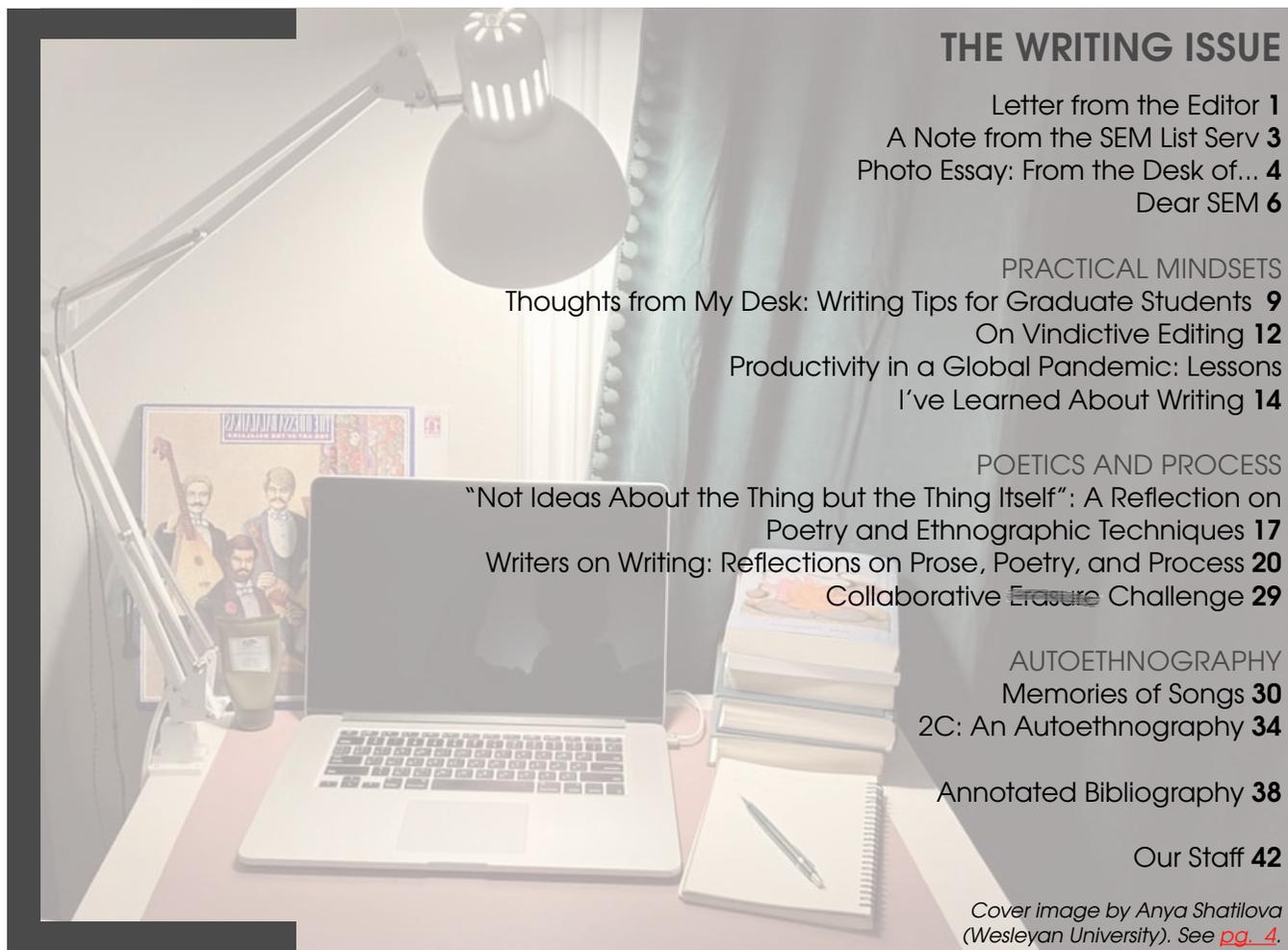


SEM {STUDENTNEWS}



THE WRITING ISSUE

Letter from the Editor **1**
 A Note from the SEM List Serv **3**
 Photo Essay: From the Desk of... **4**
 Dear SEM **6**

PRACTICAL MINDSETS

Thoughts from My Desk: Writing Tips for Graduate Students **9**
 On Vindictive Editing **12**
 Productivity in a Global Pandemic: Lessons
 I've Learned About Writing **14**

POETICS AND PROCESS

"Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself": A Reflection on
 Poetry and Ethnographic Techniques **17**
 Writers on Writing: Reflections on Prose, Poetry, and Process **20**
 Collaborative Erasure Challenge **29**

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Memories of Songs **30**
 2C: An Autoethnography **34**

Annotated Bibliography **38**

Our Staff **42**

Cover image by Anya Shatilova
 (Wesleyan University). See [pg. 4](#).

Letter from the Editor

In thinking about this issue, and what to say about it here, I realized—I don't know how to write a "Letter from the Editor." Every time I approach this process, all I know is how I want to feel and who I want to be (in that momentary construction) as I respond to the articles and columns featured. For me, the best way to write this summary—a literature review in which I am intimately familiar with the short pieces highlighted—requires acknowledging my extreme gratitude to all our authors and editorial staff. They have been willing to collaborate throughout the publication process, devoting their thoughts and creative talents to the issue. But, every time, I'm grateful a little *differently*, responding to the particulars of each theme, article, author engagement, and editorial suggestion; as well

as current events and cultural considerations that also shape my life as a whole—and I endeavor to be generous through that gratitude as I write.

This begs the question—how do we write our way to a *feeling*, in this case, gratitude; and how can we be generous in using our writing skills to invest in a response that truly "sees" the works in front of us, and gives our own knowledge, writing habits, and interests latitude to repay another writer in-kind? Though this discussion may sound far more akin to the *SEM Student News* Fall/Winter 2019 issue [15.2 "Music & Affect,"](#) understanding the affective implications on our writing practices and investments can lead to a more positive, creative relationship with writing, as [Sunaina Kale](#) notes in her piece. More and more, issues related

continued on next page . . .

Letter from the Editor

... continued

to burnout—physical, emotional, mental, spiritual—have been discussed in a variety of settings due to the varied but far-encompassing experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. “When the pandemic began,” [Jon Bullock](#) writes, “graduate students across the globe were met primarily with one response from various levels of faculty and university administrations: stay productive. Many of our financial and family situations became more precarious than ever before, and yet we were supposed to just keep writing.” Bullock notes that he eventually found a kind of peace throughout the pandemic in letting go of his perfectionist instincts as a writer—but he highlights that this has not been the case for many graduate students.

In these negotiations of affect and identity we are often looking to represent who we want to be in our writing (or, sometimes, betraying our less-generous selves in ways that we, as authors, cannot see). [Jesse Freedman](#) mines the doldrums of the writer/editor paradigm, where we can get lost in our own editorial tendencies to the point of erasing empathy for our own, and others’, work. And, in this negotiation of self, even outside of our roles as “writer” and/or “editor,” we can also use writing to kaleidoscopically redefine ourselves. This is sometimes explored using poetic means, as [Kevin Parme](#) points out in his article centered around poetry by Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery. And [Anya Ezhrevskaya](#) ponders her relationship with her family’s past through Jewish-authored Russian war songs, showing how autoethnographic efforts can deeply address questions about lineage; whereas [Shirley Syper](#)’s third-person autoethnographic take on a life lived in performance, teaching, and scholarship bends ideas about self-representation, family, disability, and personal faith.

Gratitude and generosity are not always about congeniality, leniency, or a “nice” response. I find that often we are most generous with our responses when we engage fully with someone’s writing—especially writing that has moved us—in order to question or nuance the structures it contains, the suppositions it posits, the argument and latent affect. Sometimes that generosity is especially effective when it is incisive, surgical, rather than totalizing and dismissive. It is important to be aware of what scholarly instincts—to eviscerate someone’s work, rather than offer more delicate interventions, for example—may be fueled by our own insecurities and myopic investments. Along that path lies only destruction and cynical narcissism, the kind of self-interest hallmarked by the “I have more of a comment than a question...” Q&A preamble, or particularly hurtful list serv posts or Letter to the Editor rebuttals. It has taken me a long time to realize how much my affective baggage (public and private) was integral to how I approach the thought experiments that make up my scholarship; sometimes in ways that are defensive, non-productive, or hurtful to others and/or detrimental to my own mindset. This is something that I have been trying to acknowledge and unpack a little bit every day when I write.

Each act of composition requires the author to construct their own “problem set,” with rules that firmly situate their thoughts with whatever ideas have sparked their interest. We are very lucky to have three excellent ethnomusicological writers and professionals—Dr. Deborah Wong, Dr. Julianne Graper, and Dr. Tomie Hahn—willing to walk us through their writing process by responding to a piece of their own previously-published work in [“Writers on Writing: Reflections on Prose, Poetry, and Process.”](#) In their responses, they talk us through some of the very personal aspects of their own approaches to writing—as do Dr. Elizabeth Clendinning and Dr. Chad Buterbaugh in [“Dear SEM.”](#)

I don’t know how to write a “Letter from the Editor.” But maybe that’s ok—ideal, even. Because each time I sit down to start, I begin by thinking about contributors’ and staff’s remarkable efforts to make the publication possible. As I read the issue proof, I feel the joyous responsibility to be generous—with time, with investment, with emotional labor and semantic acrobatics—to respond without a mandate or formula in an attempt to honor our contributors’ work. I hope that is part of what we do as scholars—reinvent the wheel each time to hone our skills, and then openly share those skills to spark others’ generous scholarship. 🐾

Eugenia Siegel Conte
(University of California, Santa Barbara)

A Note from the SEM List Serv

Greetings to the readers of *SEM Student News*. We hope that you have been able to successfully navigate these unprecedented times. Like so many other institutions, the Society for Ethnomusicology has begun long overdue conversations concerning issues of diversity awareness and improving the climate of tolerance and respect for all voices within our organization. As part of this ongoing process, SEM has revised our Listserv for Announcements and Discussions. For those of you unfamiliar with these forums, the SEMAnnouncements-L is a moderated email list intended for the distribution of announcements of interest to the professional ethnomusicology community. SEMDiscussions-L is a moderated email list intended for discussions of interest to the professional ethnomusicology community. Both of these forums are “closed” and moderated lists, meaning that subscriptions are approved by a List Moderator. The list is open to subscriptions by both SEM members and non-members. “Moderated” means that messages to either forum are approved by a List Moderator before they appear on the list.

SEM put out a call for nominations for Moderator positions, and three candidates were appointed. Justin R. Hunter holds a PhD in ethnomusicology and is a professor of music and department administrator at the University of Arkansas. His research focuses on the transmission of tradition and communal memory, specifically among Indigenous Ainu of Northern Japan and, more currently, with folk musicians from the Ozark Mountains in the United States. Maureen E.C. Pritchard holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology and is an independent researcher with an interest in using the arts, especially music, to promote a human rights-based approach to healing and mental health. José R. Torres-Ramos, PhD in ethnomusicology, is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at Hiram College whose scholarship focuses on teaching and learning the music of Mexico’s mariachi tradition.

We invite all interested students to subscribe to the SEM Announcements and Discussions electronic lists by visiting the SEM website and going to the Resources page. With the appointment of SEM-L Moderators, we hope that these two forums will offer a platform for engagement among all members and interested non-members of the Society for Ethnomusicology. For any further questions or comments, feel free to email: listmoderators4sem@gmail.com

SEM-L Moderation Team

Justin R. Hunter
Maureen Pritchard
José R. Torres-Ramos

Photo Essay

From the Desk of...

On Facebook, we asked our readers to post photos of their work setups, with short discussions about how and why these curated spaces work to help inspire your writing practice. Responses showed how these scholars have both practically and theoretically approached teaching and writing during the COVID-19 quarantine period in 2020–21. Several of the authors who submitted photos have pieces featured in this issue—look for links to their articles in their captions!



Image. “I have two sides to my desk. I sit on the right to write my dissertation and on the left for everything else. It helps me to have a designated spot. Featuring *Hungry Listening* (Robinson 2020) and poetry by Alok Vaid-Menon.”

–Sunaina Keonaona Kale, Staff Contributor
(University of California, Santa Barbara)

See Kale’s article on [pg. 9](#).



Image. Above my workspace I have an affirmation board I created my first year of graduate school. It was made at a time I wasn’t sure I belonged and felt without community. Five years later, it’s surrounded by photos of family and friends, reminding me of my support system.

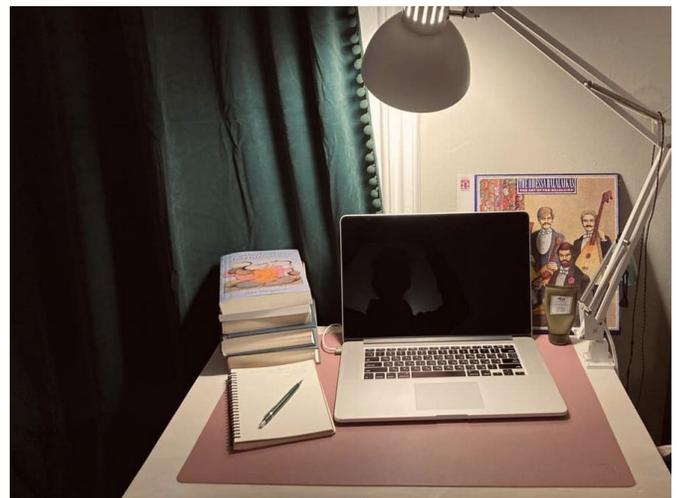
–Jessica Gutierrez Masini
(University of California, Riverside)



Image. “My quarantine work space while it snows outside in Philadelphia. Usually there is a cat sitting up here with me, but she was having a snow day nap at the moment this photograph was taken.”

–Jesse Freedman, Assistant Editor
(University of California, Riverside)

See Freedman’s article on [pg. 12](#).



Cover Image. “A self-made PhD desk—the size of which prevents from excessive accumulation of items. #minimalism”

–Anya Shatilova (Wesleyan University)

continued on next page . . .

Photo Essay

From the Desk of...

... continued



Image. “I don’t have a desk at my home, so I work either at my kitchen table (pictured) or on the left side of my couch (I reserve the right side for recreation). Tea is always a part of my writing ritual. Listening to the water boil helps me sink into the right mental space for productivity.”

-Dr. Julianne Graper (Indiana University)

See Graper’s reflection in
“Writers on Writing” on [pg. 20](#).



Image. “I’ve got a few areas in my house where I like to write, and this one has taken over the dining table. To be honest, my favorite place to work when I’m especially stressed is the floor in front of my couch, propping the laptop on the seat cushion; though this double-screen setup is probably better for my back!”

-Eugenia Siegel Conte, Editor
(University of California, Santa Barbara)

SEM
SN

The hyperlinks highlighting page references in Student News articles provide links between the text and other related articles. Use this link to jump to the related piece. When you have finished investigating that article, click on the reciprocal link provided to return to the article that you were previously reading.

Dear SEM,

A Response Column by Jesse Freedman (University of California, Riverside) and Eugenia Siegel Conte (University of California, Santa Barbara), with Dr. Elizabeth A. Clendinning (Wake Forest University) and Dr. Chad Buterbaugh (State Folklorist, Maryland State Arts Council).

In considering “writing”—as both a noun and verb—for this issue, the inherent process of development as a scholar, and how that relates to writing, seemed like an important narrative to feature and question. By asking professional colleagues how *they* conceived of their own writing processes, and how those processes have necessarily changed over time, we hope to highlight how the structures that govern writing in music studies can be engaged, questioned, supplemented, and subverted. We requested that they “write about writing,” asking, “*How has your approach to the writing process evolved or changed over time, and how do you see your writing engaging with discursive spaces within and/or outside the academy?*” Two responses, from professionals in different areas of our field, shed light on their struggles as graduate students in developing an effective personal writing voice and strategy—and how that process of discovery influences their approaches today.



NOTES FROM A LIMINAL STATE: MEDITATIONS ON TEN YEARS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

DR. ELIZABETH A. CLENDINNING
(Wake Forest University)

Last February, I rediscovered the most extraordinary field note from my dissertation research. It was a Word file containing one sentence only:

MY DISSERTATION IS DOOMED. |

My distress had been real. Facing intense personal pressure both in the field and five thousand miles away at home, the prospect of failure seemed overwhelming. What if I didn’t “find” anything in my research worth writing about? What if my thoughts weren’t good enough? What if everybody hated my work? What if I ran up too much student loan debt, didn’t finish my degree...? The list of potential doomsday scenarios was endless.

In retrospect, I was borrowing trouble; none of these fears came to pass. In fact, I found this file within weeks of submitting copy edits for my first monograph, a book based on that “doomed” dissertation which has served as the cornerstone of my tenure file. Further, I realized that despite my persistent qualms about writing, I had been publishing peer-reviewed academic work regularly since 2010. And peer-reviewed academic works were only the beginning: how many thousands of words had I poured into “humble” genres like class lectures, comments on student papers, emails, and every other quotidian part of the written life of a teacher-scholar?

Being a tenured professor is perceived as being “safe” in the academic world, and rightly so. The stability and academic freedom that the position entails is rare in the history of higher education and is becoming rarer by the decade. Yet, to be newly tenured is also to be in a liminal state, a time of ultimate transformation into a new role. In considering what this role might be, I’ve been casting a close look on my past habits to see what has changed (or what I want to change) about my writing practices.

My strongest self-critique is how much I’ve censored my own voice. I am not concerned about the times when I fell silent to help others speak, but rather times when I didn’t speak or write because I was afraid to be heard. Unfortunately, self-censorship both accompanies and increases vulnerability, and it has many causes: working with new subject matter, writing in an unfamiliar format, concerns about individual or systemic discrimination, having pressure placed on a certain piece of writing (a dissertation, an article, a book) to secure or maintain employment, and any number of other personal stressors.

Ultimately, this treatment of writing is but one way that the Western academic system conditions students to avoid failure rather than actively seek success. Innovation is rewarded primarily when presented in conformity to traditional hierarchies and venues of knowledge production. The constant need to please—coupled with relatively long hours, low wages, and being systemically separated from the rhythm of life outside the academy—makes it easiest to simply comply with others’ agendas. Academic faculty tend to perpetuate this oppressive system, imposing it not only on their own students but also on their colleagues and themselves.

continued on next page . . .

Dear SEM,

. . . continued

What can be done to break this cycle on a personal level? I find myself circling back to consider my first academic publication, a book chapter that I wrote as a master’s student ten years ago. How did I succeed? I wrote diligently; I sought external feedback; and I focused on enjoying and learning about the process, with little self-inflicted or external pressure to achieve a specific outcome. The challenge that I’ve found since is to replicate that initial positive writing process across a wide array of projects. Some people swear by scheduling regular writing time; others revel in a binge. I trick myself into writing, regardless of my feelings about my own work, by making promises to others to produce something (including this essay). I try to send that writing out into the world without burden or judgment; it will either fail or succeed in its aims. I can always revise, rewrite, and try again.

If I have one final observation about writing, it’s about genre and value. There are certain genres that are valued in academia more than others: the article over the conference paper, the scholarly monograph over the article, etc. There is a certain logic to this valuation, because attempting the “more prestigious” genres builds both writerly skill and professional visibility. However, adhering to these genres alone may reinforce inequitable principles of academic hierarchy, limit the vibrancy and variety of thought in our field, and reduce the potential impact of our work on the broadest possible audiences.

Given the meditations above, what do I hope for myself for the next decade of writing? To be more courageous in crafting and presenting my own writing; to be generous with my time and open in my vision when working with other writers, especially those in positions of less privilege; and to build a professional culture of joy and celebration around an inclusive craft of writing. This work begins here, with a reminder to myself and to the reader: my dissertation (article, book) wasn’t doomed—and neither is yours.

...adhering to these genres alone may reinforce inequitable principles of academic hierarchy, limit the vibrancy and variety of thought in our field, and reduce the potential impact of our work on the broadest possible audiences.



WRITING SHOULD FEEL GOOD

DR. CHAD BUTERBAUGH (State Folklorist, Maryland State Arts Council)

My dissertation was the worst thing I wrote in graduate school. It wasn’t bad, exactly. It just wasn’t in line with my values as a writer. It favored theoretical constructs over plain, descriptive language telling about what I encountered as a field researcher studying Irish storytelling traditions. It privileged storytellers’ positions in longer historical arcs of oral tradition but gave limited space to their everyday experiences and perspectives. Ultimately, it did what it was supposed to do, which was to allow me to add the letters *PhD* to the end of my name, a feat doubly valuable in that I was the first in my family to go to college, let alone graduate school. But, looking back, I wonder what I might have done differently to value the integrity of my writing above all else.

I was trained in folklore studies at Indiana University, where folklorists share space, curricula, and faculty with ethnomusicologists. I came to those five years of study from a career in journalism and instructional design, where, in terms of writing, I had been expected to get to the point quickly and clearly.

The rarefied prose of academic folklorists and ethnomusicologists was quite a shift. Even the title of my first graduate seminar, “Colloquy in Folklore & Ethnomusicology,” indulged in the kind of verbal ornamentation that

continued on next page . . .

Dear SEM, ... continued

would have cracked the enamel on my old editor's teeth. Yet I did not recoil. I put on a brave face, pretended like I understood what I was reading and talking about, and got to work.

A high point was certainly my qualification exams, "quals" in the vernacular, in which just one week was allotted for me to submit multiple interpretive essays as proof I hadn't been napping for the past three years. The tight deadline and big deliverables were exciting. I enjoyed metering out my days to focus intensely on writing, with just enough time left over for rest, exercise, and nourishing, intentionally-prepared meals. Had I been paying more attention to my pleasure centers at the time, I might have logged the value of that experience and used it to build a rubric for how I would write my dissertation. However, I was still convinced that academic writing was something that I had to change myself for, rather than something I could draft in service to my own strengths. Plus I was just tired, as we all are by the end of coursework.

The advice I would give to people starting graduate school today is: a great writing project lies in front of you. What you produce in these years is not an end but an exploration. The point of all this is not to please the discipline but to find a way for the discipline to amplify the strengths that you're bringing in with you. You are enough, exactly as you are. Remember that. Consider treating yourself as the most important factor in your graduate experience, and it's likely that truthful, uplifting writing will follow. In other words, writing should feel *good*. Think twice if it doesn't.

Folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and our ilk tend to get hung up on the idea of authenticity. Sometimes we even talk about authenticity as if it's an objective quality, like the color of a barn (i.e., that thing over there is "authentic," but that *other* thing over *there* is "not authentic"). For me, the last word on the matter came in the pages of *Destination Culture*, where Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that authenticity is a process that happens inside each of us as we're responding to art (1998).

This framing shows us that authenticity is subjective, not objective. In other words: you get to decide what it means for you. Do you feel like short, punchy sentences tell the story you want to tell? That's your authenticity. Do you feel like long, elegant, string-of-pearls prose expresses the nuance of your research? That's your authenticity. There's no wrong answer, as long as you're being true to yourself. As in life, love, and happiness, be authentic also in writing. Figure out what feels most like you, go toward that, and let nobody lead you astray. I'll be over here in Baltimore, happy to talk to any of you on the other side.

Work Cited

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1998. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

You are enough, exactly as you are. Remember that. Consider treating yourself as the most important factor in your graduate experience, and it's likely that truthful, uplifting writing will follow. In other words, writing should feel *good*. Think twice if it doesn't.

At SEM Student News, we try to address the most pressing issues and diverse research fields.

Please email your suggestions to semstudentnews@gmail.com.

Thoughts from My Desk

Writing Tips for Graduate Students

By **Sunaina Keonaona Kale (University of California, Santa Barbara)**

Until graduate school, I hated writing. I would stare at a blank page, paralyzed, for hours. Squeezing out words was extraordinarily painful. Even in elementary school, when we were supposed to be writing in class, I remember just sitting and staring at a page and being unable to write. It was so bad that in the fifth grade, my teacher decided that I needed to skip an outdoor activity to talk to a writing teacher about a particular assignment because everyone else in the class had made progress except me. Writing is easier now. Being forced to write copious amounts in graduate school, this paralysis has substantially lessened. However, it still gets in the way sometimes. I often wait too long to write down thoughts, and get caught up in making sure that I have preempted every criticism that could be launched at my work.

I am currently in the middle of writing my dissertation, and I've been thinking and learning about writing quite a bit over the last year. I've attended a number of writing workshops and a dissertation writing seminar offered in my department, and have also been part of a small community of graduate students who are working on their dissertations. Here, I outline some strategies that have worked for me in the dissertation writing process, a period when there is very little structure and guidance imposed by graduate school. I am not an expert in writing by any means. These recommendations have been supported widely by experts; however, writing is a personal, difficult, and emotional endeavor, so do not follow advice that does not work for you. Additionally, strategies that work now may not work later and vice versa. This has happened to me many times, not just due to the constant changes in my life surrounding my writing, but also because my health and skills have changed drastically over time.

I have noticed that this sort of advice is typically absent from graduate school curricula, so I offer it here in the hope that it could help someone at any stage of the process. I'm especially hoping that this could help people who are not white or middle class, and also assist first generation college students or otherwise minoritarian groups who are particularly hurt by this dearth. I also hope that this can be helpful during COVID-19, as I know that writing has been challenging for many people during this difficult time (including me). I also recognize that these suggestions are not feasible for many people and require varying amounts of privilege, like enough money and time, an available space, personal capacity or bandwidth, and the proper equipment to write—so take them with a grain of salt.

Write **regularly** for small amounts of time

This requires starting on a project far earlier than you would have ever anticipated. Sometimes start times cannot be helped, but try if you have control over it. This is the only way that I have avoided any measure of the horrible stress and the ensuing burnout of cramming things at the last minute. As you work on something, it may feel like you are not making much progress—but it adds up over time. For some perspective, I work on my dissertation for four hours a day. (I am privileged to not be teaching at this time.) One of my friends, who is the most productive and organized writer that I know, only works for two to three hours a day. I generally work from Monday to Friday and take weekends off. Sleeping enough, and doing other things besides school, are necessary for your overall health and the sustainability of your writing. Work-life balance makes writing better and more enjoyable.

Designate a **writing time** that works for **your body**

Figure out when you are most effective at writing. I find that I am the most awake around 9 a.m., so I work around that time and then in the early afternoon. I essentially fall asleep in the afternoon and then recover a bit in the evening. Everyone is different, however. Do not try to fit yourself into a mold that does not work for you! For example, I can only edit effectively in the morning, as I need the most brain power for that activity. However, I find that being sleepy dulls my perfectionist tendencies, so I find simply getting words out on the page to be the most effective when I'm in that state. Also, make that time as sacrosanct as possible. If you start to schedule other events during this time, you will not write as much because your writing time will have disappeared.

continued on next page . . .

Thoughts from My Desk

... continued

Develop **systems** of **accountability**

Having systems of accountability got me out of a recent rut of non-productivity. I have two writing groups that I attend over Zoom every weekday. This may seem intense, but it is what I need—I will not work if left to my own devices. I also typically do not work outside of this time. Accountability will look different for everyone, though; for instance, I have a friend who sends me writing every week. I do not read it, but the system is in place to motivate them to complete something.

Create **small** and **constant** tasks or goals

Deadlines paralyze me and cause me to stop working, staring at my computer screen for hours and not getting anything done. Often, I go in thinking I need to “finish this chapter” or something on that scale. However, starting a writing session with a known specific task, like checking if a specific citation is correct, allows me to enter writing and then allows me to feel accomplished once I have completed that task in a comparatively small amount of time. Small tasks finished regularly add up.

Remember that **everything** is writing

This is especially important for big projects like dissertations. Count every task that is related to writing as writing, including research, reading, taking notes, and outlining. You need to do all those things in order to write anyway. It also keeps you moving forward because you know that you’re making progress.

Keep working—but you must **take breaks**

Stopping working will bring your productivity to a grinding halt, and sometimes just getting anything onto the page is what you need to continue moving ahead. Working on multiple sections simultaneously or jumping between different tasks can help keep your attention if you find it hard to continue with a given task. Some people have success with free writing, where you’re writing in a stream-of-consciousness mode.

I also use the Pomodoro method, which involves working in twenty-five-minute increments broken up by five-minute breaks. There are a number of timers available online that will automatically go off in these blocks. I work in two-hour chunks, with at least an hour break in between. I find that these short breaks make all the difference in avoiding burnout and being able to pay attention to writing for a longer period of time.

We **discover** what we are trying to say **through** writing

In other words, you need to write something bad before it can be good. As someone who has struggled with crippling perfectionism for her entire life, which has historically been badly triggered by writing, this realization has totally changed the way I think about the writing process. Everything you do for writing is simply a step that must be taken to finish a piece of writing. What you have created at any point is not bad—it is just unfinished. You are completing a necessary step toward finishing the piece.

Similarly, it is frustrating to be in the middle of writing a piece and feel like you do not know what you are saying. It is even more infuriating to feel that way after you have already finished. This is an absolutely normal part of the writing process. Very few people go into writing a given project with their argument neatly drawn out. In fact, writing allows you to think through how ideas relate to each other, and also allows time for your ideas to percolate and synthesize.

Talking through your ideas with other people has a similar effect. My friends in graduate school and I have found it helpful to talk through concepts that we are having trouble putting into neat sentences. Other people can provide an outsider perspective on what you are thinking about, and sometimes they can see the forest when you might be stuck up a tree. Have trusted people read your work before sending it to a more intimidating critic, and reorient your views of trusted critique as *help*, rather than criticism. After all, you cannot know everything by yourself—knowledge is formed in community.

continued on next page . . .

Thoughts from My Desk

... continued

It's done when **you say** it's done

Eventually, your writing just needs to be done. You will work on the piece for the amount of time you allow yourself to do so. It will never be perfect, no one can ever be perfect, and perfection isn't useful anyway.

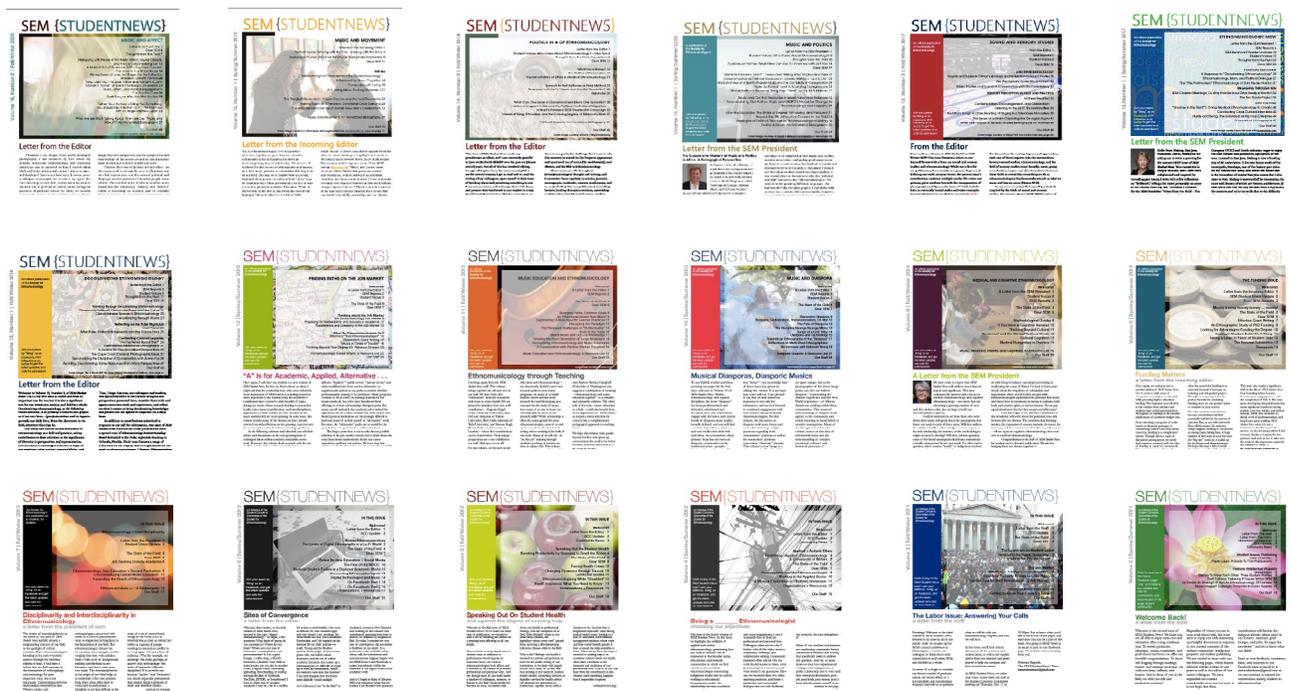
Everyone is in the **same boat**

Writing is difficult for everyone—you are not alone! Writing can be enjoyable, but that does not mean you are inspired and productive all the time. If you feel that you are a slow writer, as I often do, remember that there are many other people who write like you too, and there's nothing wrong with it. You may also have spurts of productivity followed by fallow periods, and some types of writing simply take longer than other types. Over the past few months, I have been incredibly frustrated at how long it takes to write literature reviews—you have to read the literature, then decide how you feel about it, and finally, figure out how it fits into your larger argument. In comparison, I fly through case studies or ethnographic vignettes because I have already internalized them, and the experience is much more enjoyable. I have also had fun writing about people that I like. Introductions and conclusions go fairly quickly because I write them last and so I know what I want to say, though it can be frustrating because I often get hung up on wording.

Learning writing is also a life-long journey, and writing is a skill that gets better with practice. My experience with writing has improved over time, becoming faster and more predictable. Hopefully, these suggestions will make your experience a little easier and a little more enjoyable. Happy writing!

SEM Student News Archives

Over the last nine years, we have touched on many topics, including sound and sensory studies, decolonization, the job market, health, diaspora, interdisciplinarity, funding, and more. You can check them all out by visiting semsn.com.



On Vindictive Editing

By Jesse Freedman (University of California, Riverside)

One of the more complicated experiences I have had as a graduate student involves getting frustrated at my students' writing. I typically only share this with my most trusted colleagues, but I have a suspicion that many of us have succumbed to an editorial impulse, at its mildest, perhaps, something like *annoyed*; at its worst, *vindictive*. Although I take the charge of teaching with the greatest sense of responsibility and compassion, sometimes I cannot help but fall into a kind of negative relay loop with my students when they turn in writing that demonstrates little in the way of care, interest, and/or mechanics. I have had students who have produced writing that has deeply moved me and forced me to rethink my own assumptions or ideas about a topic. I have also had students who have produced writing that has been so infuriating to read that it has brought out my worst and most vindictive editorial impulses—impulses, I imagine, that we all possess, but about and in which few spaces exist for discussion.

For me, the most salient expression of this vindictive impulse comes at the end of the semester, when I pore over that stack of 100 essays over the course of an hours-long, mad-dash grading sprint. On the one hand, this period has always felt like a kind of rigorous “feat of strength,” one often marked by a celebratory beer with the rest of my TA cohort or, at least, a good night's rest equally commensurate with having performed some strenuous physical exercise. On the other hand, as I get more frustrated with each and every passing typo, missing punctuation, or...

In my own writing, for example, I often forget that editing can—and maybe should—be playful, open-ended, and dynamic. Instead, a critical and vindictive voice, always whispering in my ear as I write, internally stokes that same complicated pleasure between a kind of punitive release and a sense of shame.

Wait, did they really not think I was going to notice that their body paragraphs were copy-and-pasted from Wikipedia? ... the more I feel like a failure as a teacher. This tension between the feeling of power that comes from wielding that red ink—producing *épée* while slashing through so many of those pages with vindictive abandon, as well as that disheartening sense that I have failed a group or an individual that I deeply care about, is what makes this frustration about my students' writing so complicated. As outwardly vindictive editing turns inward, it becomes replaced with feelings of shame and guilt.

As the present issue of *SEM Student News* was coming together over the past several months, I have been forced to rethink my experience with “vindictive editing” through my position as *Student News* Assistant Editor. Whether in experiencing frustration with my own writing, my students' written efforts, or in working with authors and peers whose creative visions I am tasked with stewarding, there is frequently a wide oscillation between editing as a means toward creating a product; and editing as a process, to be valued for itself. The latter tends to operate from a much more generous orientation than the former. In my own writing, for example, I often forget that editing can—and maybe should—be playful, open-ended, and dynamic. Instead, a critical and vindictive voice, always whispering in my ear as I write, internally stokes that same complicated pleasure between a kind of punitive release and a sense of shame.

continued on next page . . .

Interested in becoming a *Student News* associate editor, writer, or researcher?
Contact the editors at semstudentnews@gmail.com to apply or to learn more.

On Vindictive Editing

. . . continued

In editing this publication, the staff is enmeshed in networks of geography, positionality, and history. Our efforts to foreground “alternative” forms of writing have (at least for this editor) necessitated a “leaning in” to the messy, the processual, and the fleeting aspects of these connections. Vindictive editing practiced without empathy assumes a clinical and product-oriented relationship with writing and, while occasionally useful, cannot be the only channel by which we connect with the written world around us.

What feels different here is that participating in networks of editing and writing, of anger and exuberance, of frustration and hopefulness, has made me much more aware of the space between my most flawed and petty editorial impulses and my most empathetic ones. In other words, I have been able to participate in these writings with the fullest version of my imperfect self. If editing is supposed to be the Apollonian counterpoint to writing’s Dionysius, it seems more generative to support the fluidity between these positions and attempt a style of editing that privileges the fears, circumstances, strengths, and possibilities from which it emanates. As we produce and revise within our respective academic spaces, any “perfection impulse” is untenable. Not only because even the best version of any creative work is imperfect, but also because it is precisely our imperfect selves that allow us to most fully engage with our creative processes and communities. As we wrap up this issue, filled with powerful and beautiful work produced through many imperfect exchanges, I look forward to the next batch of grading and the next opportunity to get frustrated with my students. Only this time, hopefully, I will do so with a bit more empathy and recognition of those indispensable flaws on both sides of the editing process. 🐼

Our efforts to foreground “alternative” forms of writing have...necessitated a “leaning in” to the messy, the processual, and the fleeting aspects of these connections. Vindictive editing practiced without empathy assumes a clinical and product-oriented relation with writing and, while periodically useful, cannot be the only channel by which we connect with the written world around us.

SEM
SN

We welcome and encourage submissions in a variety of formats, written and otherwise. If you are interested in contributing an innovative written, photographic, audio/video, or multimedia article to *SEM Student News*, please contact the editors at semstudentnews@gmail.com.

Productivity in a Global Pandemic

Lessons I've Learned about Writing

By Jon Bullock (University of Chicago)

I feel it only appropriate to begin this piece by apologizing to any readers who may have come here looking for a more standard “academic” approach to writing. This piece does not make use of that approach. Instead, it is far more personal, reflecting, I suppose, on the new ways we have become accustomed to seeing tiny glimpses of each other’s personal lives and spaces on a regular basis (courtesy of Zoom), even as many of us are now sensing the physical distance separating us from colleagues and loved ones more than ever before. Beyond just the style of this essay, the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic has also inspired its subject matter. In the following paragraphs, I describe three lessons I have learned about the writing process over the last few months. I make no claims to great profundity in these lessons, but in sharing them, I hope they might provide the validation someone somewhere might need (as I did) to navigate the pressures we’re all feeling to produce in these uncertain times.

Lesson #1

Writing is part of the process of knowledge production, not its culmination.

Like many of you, no doubt, I had high hopes for 2020. I was to spend three months in Iraq conducting a second round of dissertation research, as well as short stints visiting archives in various cities in Europe. I had no immediate plans to begin writing the dissertation (in fact, I was terrified to begin writing), but at least I would be able to ask more questions, schedule more interviews, and visit more archives before being expected to offer anything to my newly formed committee. Time was exactly what I needed, I told myself. I would improve my Kurdish. I would conduct more research. *Then* I would write—clearly, informatively, and creatively. These expectations seemed reasonable enough, yet, as you already know, this wasn’t how 2020 panned out. I wasn’t able to “finish” conducting research, nor to attain the elusive feeling that I had actually learned something worth writing before being expected to simply write.

In those early days of the pandemic, it wasn’t the immense anxiety I felt over canceling plans that I had painstakingly crafted over the course of months, or even the sadness I sensed at not being able to see the friends I had expected to visit again in the spring, that troubled me most. I simply couldn’t escape one problem in particular: how on earth would I ever begin to write?

After conferring with my committee members over the following several weeks, I realized that writing a chapter of the dissertation was exactly what I was supposed to do. Each member kindly assured me that I already had “enough stuff,” and yet I just couldn’t shake the imposter syndrome. I’ll admit that throughout much of my previous graduate career I had tended to think of the dissertation (and most pieces of academic writing) as a sort of culmination of intense research, deep thought, and mastery of the subject matter at hand. This is why I was so shaken at the prospect of having to write after only three months of fieldwork: I simply didn’t know enough.

Despite my own fears, I followed several friends’ advice and finally began writing, filling pages with words I knew I would later change or delete. Although

Despite my own fears, I followed several friends’ advice and finally began writing, filling pages with words I knew I would later change or delete. Although I still hadn’t learned the answers to all the questions I felt I needed to answer in the dissertation, I finally accepted the fact that I had to begin with what I already knew.

continued on next page . . .

Productivity in a Global Pandemic

... continued

I still hadn't learned the answers to all the questions I felt I needed to answer in the dissertation, I finally accepted that I had to begin with what I already knew. As the weeks went by, I revisited previous seminar and conference papers, as well as fellowship and grant applications, occasionally copying and pasting entire sections into the growing chapter. Gradually, general themes began to emerge in my otherwise messy writing. I began to identify which research questions were most essential (as well as which questions I could actually answer given the various restrictions on travel and research), and I began to reshape the various theoretical and logical arcs framing the chapter, which I submitted to the committee in draft form in late September. In this way, the writing process became its own sort of teacher. For the first time in a long time, I no longer felt guilty about the folder(s) on my computer full of unread PDFs I'd been "needing" to read. Instead, I enjoyed finding and utilizing resources in a way that grew out of my own writing and thus felt more organic.

Lesson #2

Writing is an inherent part of graduate students' careers.

Several years ago, during a casual conversation over lunch, a tenured music professor suggested to me that it may be helpful for graduate students interested in careers in academia to think of their time in graduate programs as the first years of their career, rather than as a time of preparation for their careers. I have thought about that advice often since then, but never has it seemed more relevant than in the past few months. Before I entered a PhD program, I worked full-time in the field of mental health. One of my reasons for leaving that career in order to return to grad school was that, as a member of the management team, I no longer had any control over the invasion of work into the rest of my life. I was always on call. Eventually, I decided that my life, my partner—and yes, my pets—were far more important than struggling to hold onto a career I didn't enjoy. Given this decision, the lesson I took away from that lunchtime conversation, then, was not that I should sacrifice things I love for the sake of "success," but rather, precisely the opposite: that

I would need to guard my time, my family, and my mental and emotional health from the demands of a new career.

When the pandemic began, graduate students across the globe were met primarily with one response from various levels of faculty and university administrations: stay productive. Many of our financial and family situations became more precarious than ever before, and yet we were supposed to just keep

I found in the very expectation that I keep writing during a global pandemic the freedom to keep that writing in perspective: in other words, to write whenever and however I could while also allowing myself to practice compassion and self-care in the process. And generally, I have kept writing.

writing. Although it may seem cynical, these demands ultimately helped to temper my own views about devoting entirely too much time and mental energy to every single piece of writing I produced. In the very expectation that I keep writing during a global pandemic, I found the freedom to keep that writing in perspective; in other words, to write whenever and however I could while also allowing myself to practice compassion and self-care in the process. And generally, I have kept writing. Much of it hasn't been great. Most of it has been submitted just moments before (or even after) the deadline. But I have learned to put my insecurities about writing on hold, knowing that on one level, my writing is simply something I produce as part of a career (and will continue to produce as long

continued on next page . . .

Productivity in a Global Pandemic

... continued

as I am involved in this career), not a reflection of my inherent knowledge or value. Some days and some writing will be worse than others, but there will be more time to learn, and always more things to write. And not one of them is worth sacrificing the well-being of ourselves or our loved ones.

Lesson #3

Anxieties about writing can sometimes lead to positive results.

When I say that writing is simply part of our careers in the academy, I don't, of course, intend to diminish the ethical implications of writing, particularly writing focused on ethnographic representation.¹ Anthropologists, (ethno)musicologists, and scholars in numerous other disciplines have discussed these implications for decades now, and for many of us

As time went by, however, I watched many in our field turn the challenges of the pandemic into opportunities: by reaching out to strengthen personal networks of care, by talking openly and honestly about the difficulties facing all of us in the current crisis, by using the current moment to challenge our own discipline's analytical and conceptual frameworks.

they are often linked to economic and other forms of power inequality, whether those between us and our interlocutors, or those between our interlocutors and others in their immediate or broader communities. The pandemic, of course, has only intensified the everyday effects of these inequalities, including those reflected in our research and writing. For me personally, grappling with this issue in relation to my own privilege while trying to write a chapter based on what I felt was incomplete data initially left me feeling as if I simply couldn't write anything at all. As time went by, however, I watched many in our field turn the challenges of the pandemic into opportunities—by reaching out to strengthen personal networks of care, by talking openly and honestly about the difficulties facing all of us in the current crisis, by using the current moment to challenge our own discipline's analytical and conceptual frameworks.

It was largely through these colleagues' example that I realized that even as many of us grapple with the questions of access made so illusory by the pandemic—of how and when to travel, of how long to stay, of how to conduct ethnographic research and access data virtually, of how much fieldwork is “enough,” of how to write when all these questions still loom large—these struggles have the potential to force us to productively reassess and interrogate what we think we know about fieldwork and the implications of ethnographic representation. To this end, I have tried to learn to sit with the discomfort I sometimes feel during the writing process and to use it to reflect on these implications, rather than allowing it to keep me from writing altogether. For the field as a whole, my hope is that in spite of all the heartbreak the pandemic has brought us we might continue to take advantage of the unique opportunities afforded by this current moment of disruption to reaffirm our commitment to fighting the status quo and to taking action aimed at reducing the inequalities so characteristic of the world around us.

¹ Nor do I intend to downplay the struggles of women and non-binary scholars and scholars of color who are regularly expected to exceed the expectations of their white, male peers in the academy, and whose contributions are not often enough awarded equal recognition.

Visit semsn.com to find back issues, submission guidelines, resource lists, and more.

“Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself”

A Reflection on Poetry and Ethnographic Techniques

By Kevin Parme (University of Texas at Austin)



Poetry can be one of the most daring and experimental forms of writing. Poets challenge conventions of rhetoric, narrative, and representation. In doing so, they pioneer writing techniques that authors incorporate into other literary genres. This essay explores how the use of bricolage and perspective in the poetry of John Ashbery and Wallace Stevens helps us understand our positions as ethnomusicologists and provides strategies for composing texts that address the complexity of our contemporary world. I begin with part of Wallace Stevens' poem “The Man with the Blue Guitar.”

For me, these lines encapsulate much of what we do as ethnomusicologists. In a metaphoric sense, we embody every subject position in the drama. As observers and outsiders with a privileged meta-perspective, we resemble the poet, invisibly and dispassionately documenting the encounter. From another point of view, as participants with desires and biases, we are like the audience members, asking that the musician make sense of our world. And lastly, we are the man with the blue guitar, mediating and transforming our experiences through music and writing, always failing to bring the world entirely around, but patching it together as we can. These subject positions also parallel the ways that researchers incorporate poetry into their work.

Social scientists use poetry as an analytical tool (the poet), object of study (the spectator), and influence on ethnography (the man with the blue guitar). These tendencies are the result of institutional and disciplinary histories. To give a few examples of such histories, folklorists of the 19th century turned peasant songs and oral performances into poetic texts to preserve them, establishing an analytic paradigm that exists to this day (Wilson 2006); ethnologists of the 1920s and 1930s had affinities with the French surrealist movement, resulting in an ongoing dialogue between ethnographers and experimental poets

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, “You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are.”

The man replied, “Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.”

And they said then, “But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are.”

(Stevens 1971, 165)

(Clifford 1981); and social scientists of the post-World War Two period borrowed writing strategies from poetic forms to address problems of representation in ethnography, introducing methods that later became standard in cultural anthropology (Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). Ethnomusicological literature utilizes poetry in many of the same ways. It is a standard practice in the discipline to transform songs into poetic verse for textual analysis, and authors often employ modernist writing techniques such as fragmented narrative, inclusion of the popular vernacular, and intimate confession in the construction of their texts. One of the founders of the discipline, the late Bruno Nettl, even published his own poetry (2010)!

In my own writing practice, I find that the poems of Ashbery and Stevens illuminate the possibilities within ethnographic accounts. As poets influenced by

continued on next page . . .

“Not Ideas about the Thing...”

. . . continued

surrealism, they assemble images and ideas in ways that surprise the reader and establish mood and thematic content. Consider the opening passage from Stevens’ poem “The Emperor of Ice Cream”:

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

(Stevens 1971, 64)

A voice who is never identified makes strange requests—that a cigar-roller whip curds, that the female servants “dawdle,” and that the boys fetch flowers. Experts on Stevens’ poetry agree that the descriptions refer to preparations for a wake, yet we learn almost nothing about the deceased nor read anything about the coffin, funeral veils, or other imagery associated with such events (Vendler 1993, 382). Instead, the scene focuses on peripheral activities, modeling a complex assemblage of actors and trajectories. As a result, the poem conveys a tone of vigor, abundance, and sensuality as it describes “muscular” men, “concupiscent curds,” and “big cigars.” Such imagery contrasts with the mournful theme of the wake, a distinction represented in the image of “flowers in last month’s newspapers,” a fleeting vitality wrapped in the dead past. Applied to the social sciences, Stevens’ poem highlights how focusing on the interactions among a group of actors can underscore themes that challenge conventional interpretations. This insight is particularly relevant considering the disciplinary shift away from macro-theoretical paradigms toward relational ontological perspectives like post-humanism, social ecology,

feminist material-semiotics, and actor-network theory. These approaches demand ethnographic techniques that “reassemble the social” (Latour 2005) through the “acknowledgment of conjunctions, disjunctions, and entanglements among all copresent and historically accumulated forms” (Feld 2015, 12). With its collage of images and contrasts in theme, “The Emperor of Ice Cream” invites us to imagine what such texts might look like.

Relational perspectives also present difficulties, chief among them being the inevitable reduction of actors and agencies in the process of writing. Sorting through the materials of the world is especially difficult in urban and/or touristic settings, where popular representations inform the construction of public spaces and people experience expressive forms as natural and inevitable. In my own fieldwork in Oaxaca City, 20th-century representations of Mexico influence how the city is collectively imagined and produced. There is always a temptation to write a text consisting solely of the agave plants, folkloric dress, cacti, and skeletons from Post-Revolutionary art, rather than the smart phones, Nissan taxis, Dragon Ball merchandise, and corporate logos that equally contribute to the landscape. To avoid reproducing hegemonic representations, I draw inspiration from poetry’s ability to break with convention. For example, John Ashbery’s “Daffy Duck in Hollywood” begins:

Something strange is creeping across me.
La Celestina has only to warble the first few bars
Of “I Thought about You” or something mellow from
Amadigi di Gaula for everything—a mint-condition can
Of Rumford’s Baking Powder, a celluloid earring, Speedy
Gonzales, the latest from Helen Topping Miller’s fertile
Escritoire, a sheaf of suggestive pix on greige, deckle-edged
Stock—to come clattering through the rainbow trellis
Where Pistachio Avenue rams the 2300 block of Highland
Fling Terrace.

(Ashbery 1977, 33)

continued on next page . . .

“Not Ideas about the Thing..”

... continued

The poem takes its title from a 1938 “Tex” Avery cartoon, and indeed the collision of historical registers, high- and low-brow culture, and languages invokes the free-associative and dreamlike qualities of early animated features. In a sentence, La Celestina, a character from a medieval Spanish novel, sings “I Thought About You” by Johnny Mercer and selections from George Frideric Handel’s opera *Amadigi di Guala* while “everything”—defined in the poem by Ashbery as a collection of household items, Speedy Gonzalez, the writings of Helen Topping Miller (a 20th-century novelist), and “suggestive pix”—comes “clattering through the rainbow trellis.” Ashbery is not trying to mediate his experiences through the text in any way that one would consider ethnography. Yet in its freedom of form, “Daffy Duck in Hollywood” suggests possibilities for an ethnography that reflects our experiences in increasingly unstable fields of meaning and practice. In my opinion, the poem is more effective than novelistic writing at conveying the dizzying simultaneity of the information age. Reading it makes me wonder how I might experiment with arrangements of narratives, objects, ideas, and forms to express the overlaying of histories, cultures, and ideologies in globalized spaces.

Ultimately, the arguments in this essay are not exclusive to the works of John Ashbery, Wallace Stevens, or even poetry in general. Rather, they highlight the value of experimental genres in keeping ethnography relevant to a rapidly changing world. Social theory has been of incalculable value to ethnomusicology and continues to provide new concepts that articulate the contours of heterogeneous realities. Equally important are the ways we construct texts, the aesthetic decisions that carry the substance of the worlds that we discuss. In that sense, poetry, novels, and other literary forms add to our repertoire of analytic techniques and strengthen ethnography’s capacity to be a form of testimony, argument, and representation.

References

- Ashbery, John. 1977. “Daffy Duck in Hollywood.” In *Houseboat Days*, 33–36. New York: Open Road.
- Cahnmann-Taylor, Melisa, and Kent Maynard. 2010. “Anthropology at the Edge of Words: Where Poetry and Ethnography Meet.” *Anthropology and Humanism* 35:1, 2–19.
- Clifford, James. 1981. “On Ethnographic Surrealism.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23:4, 539–564.
- Feld, Steven. 2015. “Acoustemology.” In *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, 12–21. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nettl, Bruno. 2010. *Perverse at Eighty: for Family and Friends*. Champaign, IL: Elephant & Cat.
- Stevens, Wallace. 1971. “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself.” In *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 534. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- . 1971. “The Emperor of Ice Cream.” In *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 64. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- . 1971. “The Man with the Blue Guitar.” In *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 165–184. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Vendler, Helen. 1993. “Wallace Stevens.” In *Columbia History of American Poetry*, edited by Jay Parini. New York: Columbia University Press, 370–394.
- Wilson, William A. 2006. “Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism.” In *The Marrow of Human Experience: Essays on Folklore*, edited by Jill Terry Rudy and Diane Call, 108–123. Logan: Utah State University Press.



SEM
SN

At SEM Student News, we try to address the most pressing issues and diverse research fields for our student body and broader readership. Want to get advice and insight from our network of peers, colleagues, and mentors? Please email your questions to semstudentnews@gmail.com

Writers on Writing

Reflections on Prose, Poetry, and Process

By Eugenia Siegel Conte (University of California, Santa Barbara) with Dr. Deborah Wong (University of California, Riverside), Dr. Julianne Graper (Indiana University) and Dr. Tomie Hahn (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute).

"How did they write that?" "Are they just *inspired*?" "They make it seem so easy."

Often, at seminar tables and in lecture halls, we are asked to consider the writing process through the lens of other scholars' writing—and, consequently, graduate students can be convinced that good writing just *happens*. In an effort to demystify the writing process in a way that shows different approaches to structure, technique, and argument construction, *SEM Student News* invited established authors in our field to outline how they produce written work, to show that all writing involves *process* (rather than some kind of "miraculous inspiration"). We did request edits and cuts to these authors' responses, creating a fascinating feedback loop of dialogue between creator and editors that, in some cases, mirrored the discussions embedded in their response pieces. This cycle—of generation, questioning and commentary, and judicious authorial reconsideration—is at the very core of how discussion within the writing and editorial processes function, and we are delighted to highlight those processes here.



Dr. Deborah Wong

(University of California, Riverside) reflecting on an excerpt from her 2015 article, "Ethnomusicology Without Erotics." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19, 178–85.

I wrote that passage in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, long before I wrote the article in which it landed. I hand-wrote it in my notebook and then transcribed and edited it later for the 3,000-word article published in *Women and Music*. The passage looks like field notes but isn't.

I write constantly in several different ways and the hardware makes a difference. I write in a notebook, on my iPad, and on my laptop. I keep two journals in the cloud, and I mostly add to them on my iPad. My laptop is for scholarly writing of all kinds—letters of recommendation, editorial and committee reports, etc.

My notebook is my favorite place to write because I give myself permission to wade in with no stakes and no responsibility. Not being able to delete anything makes a difference. I can cross things out, but everything is visible, from mistakes to changing my mind. Conferences are my favorite notebook

Listening to Erotics

What might this kind of ethnographic interpretation look and sound like? I am sitting in an art center on the first day of the Guelph Jazz Festival listening to a solo free improvisation by Dutch cellist Ernst Reijseger. He is astounding: his technical chops are flawless; he has a stunning ability to flip between rhetorical gestures; and he is fully in control of his own narrative moves in the ways sounded only by the most experienced improvisers. For the first half hour, he simply sits and plays, sometimes plucking, sometimes bowing, often using extended techniques; it's all about "the music." As his set goes on, though, he draws more and more on theatrical flourishes. First he begins to use facial expressions while playing—he grins, he grimaces, he looks rapturous. Then he stands and begins to walk around the room while playing. He walks off stage into an adjoining room, still playing, and suddenly screams, making the audience jump and then laugh. He comes back into the room—still playing—and wanders through the tight aisles of the full house. About eighty audience members are packed tightly together on folding chairs, and I think we're all waiting

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

writing environments. I take notes like mad while listening to someone present their scholarly work. Seizing their ideas through my pen is fundamentally important for my comprehension process. Most of the time I simply “take notes,” i.e., write down the gist of what the speaker just said. But unless I’m under some responsibility to pay close attention, I also allow myself to follow the path. If the speaker drops a great idea that sparks something for me, I start writing about it, right then and there. I usually put brackets around such writing [so I can go back and find it later].

The selected passage from my *Women and Music* article describes an improvised performance I attended at the Guelph Jazz Festival in 2014. I hand-wrote my experience of it a few hours later in my notebook. I simply tried to describe and recreate what I had seen. At that point, I had been immersed in all things improvised for several intense days: I was part of a big multicampus research team in critical improvisation studies headquartered at the University of Guelph, so I was keenly aware that my notebook writing was improvised and responsive. I was in the zone. All my critical neurons were firing.

I love Ernst Reijseger’s work and had already seen him perform several times, though never solo or for such an extended set. In writing about it, at that point only for myself, I just wanted to sit with the experience for a little longer, to stay in the powerful grip of Reijseger’s musicality and improvisational skill. His intense lyricism, whether bowing, plucking, or strumming; his ability to let an idea play out. But the more I wrote, the more I was simultaneously describing, interpreting, and reflecting on what I had experienced, which is basic to the hermeneutics of both witnessing and writing.

I didn’t write with the intent to address heteronormative erotics, but as a feminist scholar I think about such matters all the time. I don’t turn that critical lens on and off: I don’t literally ask myself, “What’s going on here with gender and sexuality?” I’m always thinking about that; it’s always on. I was intrigued from the get-go by Reijseger’s ability to deploy heterosexist moves in ways that seemed improvisationally designed to leave the witness uncertain whether the moves were ironic. I now wish I had made this more apparent in what I published.

for him to accidentally stab someone with his bow. He finds one of the few empty folding chairs in the room, stops, puts his left foot on the seat, props the cello horizontally on his knee, and starts playing it like a guitar. Suddenly he reaches out and grabs the hand of the young woman sitting in the next seat. Clearly startled, she laughs but doesn’t resist. He takes her hand and starts rhythmically strumming the cello strings with her fingers while pushing out the chord changes with his left hand on the cello neck. It feels like a cowboy ballad. He smiles down at her in a goofy romantic way. Her hand is his hand, they are hand in hand, she is playing him, or perhaps it’s the other way around. He lets go of her hand, and she starts to draw back, but he shakes his head vigorously—she’s supposed to keep strumming. He’s Harpo Marx, wordless but not silent, crazily sweet but also a little weird, a little scary, because you know he might do something inappropriate like throw his leg over you. He’s a guy sweet on a girl; he’s a guy in control of a girl; he’s a guy relying on a girl to let him control her. Or are these gendered and eroticized terms simply built into the music? Communicating through smiles and nods, he leads her into a *ritardando*, then a cadence, and the piece ends. The audience bursts into pleased laughter and applause. He doesn’t bow or acknowledge it: he smiles at her and then works his way back up to the front of the room, still in character but not the same character.

Was Reijseger aware of the complicated narratives he improvised through and with the hand of the young woman? I think so, but I’m not sure. This funny, beautiful, masterful, heteronormative improvisation moved, amused, and dismayed me because I have internalized the terms for spectating.

(Wong 2015, 183–84)

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

Writing now, reflecting on what I wrote six years ago, I am back in the loop of re/interpretation that shapes all writing. The question is whether [the writer] [I] know(s) it and invites it or [is] [am] simply at its mercy.

Some of my published text about Reijseger's performance is from my notes, but I revised the material quite a bit once I decided I wanted to take it further. The progression from straightforward description to more and more feminist analysis is deliberate, and some of that was in my original notebook jottings. Writing prompts reflection. The act of describing something I witnessed led to interpretation and reflection on my own act of interpretation. Description is never separate from interpretation, but I have been writing for long enough that I'm attuned to my own moves even as I make them, and I know how to pick up on something that's happening as I write, and to see where it takes me.

Once I realized I was simultaneously impressed by Reijseger's improvisational skills, moved by him, in thrall to him, and troubled by him, I was eager to look more closely at the moments when he seemed to play with heterosexist expectations. When writing about it a few hours after the event, I was still unsettled by his bold improvised move of making the young woman his accomplice, and her decision to go with it, and the audience's pleasure in it. I wrote that out, and the writing of it—right then and there—left me vexed and troubled, because I love(d) his musicality and improvisational savvy, and I felt betrayed. A year later, when writing my short essay for *Women and Music*, I remembered the complexity of my reaction to that performance and decided to pick up where I left off.

I no longer like the writerly gesture of dropping field notes into critical writing. That shift in register, *often flagged with italics so the reader won't miss it*, was experimentally useful in the 1990s when ethnographers' subjectivities were still the going concern. Thirty years later, that move doesn't play out in the same way. To me it now seems affected: it was important then but now must be done well to seem anything more than a bit mannered. I chose not to include it in my article as *fieldnotes*. Instead, it grounded the rest of the article by showing that the triangulated capacity of performer, audience, and ethnographic witness co-creates the heterosexist contract in a lot of music. When I revised my original notebook writing, that's what I pulled forward.

Late in my process of writing this essay, I suddenly remembered having to chop that article down to size. The amazing editor Emily Wilbourne had told the contributors we each had 3,000 words maximum, including all notes and citations. I submitted 4,500 words and was gently sent back to work. I kept most of the section on Reijseger but cut a lot of repetitive argumentation, and the article is the better for it.

I wrote a first draft of this essay over three sessions totaling about nine hours on a Saturday, a Thursday, and another Saturday while standing at my iPad, looking out the window and making lots of tea while thinking and writing. During that week, I was reading Bryan Washington's novel *Memorial* (2020) and Denise Gill's *Melancholic Modalities: Affect, Islam, & Turkish Classical Musicians* (2017), and a little bit of both writers' styles, and their extraordinary abilities to draw in close to the sociality of longing, percolate through my writing on this page. On the evening of my third extended work session on this essay, I sat down at my laptop to edit and fact-check it. I then worked on revising it a few more times over several more days. I deleted sentences and phrases; I reordered paragraphs, and sentences within paragraphs. I pared everything down ~~again and again~~. I submitted it and then cut 500 words at the editors' request. Once again, I worry I have disrespected Ernst Reijseger, because I love his work. I wonder(ed) whether the witnessing that becomes writing that becomes complicity isn't the most important and honest writing possible.

References

- Gill, Denise. 2017. *Melancholic Modalities: Affect, Islam, and Turkish Classical Musicians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Washington, Bryan. 2020. *Memorial: A Novel*. New York: Riverhead Books.

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

The story of Austin's bridge bats is important not only because it helps us to reconsider the relationships between humans and non-human species but also because it helps us to recognize that these relationships are present in all kinds of environments, not simply those considered "traditional" or "indigenous," as early writings by Steven Feld or studies in ecomusicology might tend to suggest. In fact, the presence of non-human species in the Austin area has been crucial to its identity as an urban, 21st-century city. Such interspecies ties not only clarify and help establish its locality, but also articulate a form of alterity in the face of the globalizing present. As Latour pointed out in the early 1990s, the fluid relationship between nature and culture is a feature of the antimodern present throughout the world. While we might characterize modern, urban environments as lacking the influence of the "natural" world, we really "have never been modern," but remain deeply connected parts of the ecosystems that surround us (Latour 1993: 46-47).

Most importantly, in the case of Austin, these complex negotiations are drawn from processes of "becoming with" that result from mimetic representations of bats in visual and sonic media. Thus, the relationship between Austin's music scene and bats is not arbitrary, but is in fact necessary for understanding how human beings and non-human animals are situated within complex nature-cultural ecosystems. It is through aesthetic practices that these relationships are negotiated, defined, and revised.

(Graper 2018, 29)



Dr. Julianne Graper

(Indiana University) reflecting on conclusions, in response to her 2018 article, "Bat City: Becoming with Bats in the Austin Music Scene." *MUSICultures* 45: 1-2, 14-34.

Before I studied ethnomusicology, I earned a BA in Biology, something that has made a surprising impact on the quality of my writing. The reason is this: scientific papers have a rigid organizational structure, which is believed to produce clarity, consistency, and contribute to the allegedly objective nature of research by eliminating any distracting verbiage. Because the discipline of ethnomusicology had a close relationship with the sciences in its formative years (see any Introduction to Ethnomusicology seminar) we, too, expect our papers to have this same structure, though we don't always identify it in this way. Whatever your opinions may be on the relationship between ethnomusicology and the sciences, I find that being attentive to such rigidity in structure can be helpful in developing a writing project, particularly when it seems difficult to know where to begin, or how to complete, a project.

For me, attending to the scientific aspects of writing is directly related to the subject matter of my research, which concerns understanding scientific approaches to sound from a cultural perspective. I believe strongly that the methods we use to disseminate information should have a direct relation to the information itself. As in the excellent piece by Dr. Tomie Hahn (see below), I too, believe in experimentation with form and in the generative power of many different sites of knowledge production. Vershawn Ashanti Young's piece "Should Writers Use They Own English?" (2010) and Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening* (2020) have been particularly enlightening for me in considering the relationship between form and writing. This essay, then, is not meant to be dogmatic in espousing a scientific approach to writing, but merely an acknowledgement of ethnomusicology's debt to scientific modes of knowledge production and an effort to speak to my own experiences navigating what expectations we have of graduate student writing, but sometimes do not explicitly state.

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

When I was an undergraduate, a professor explained to me that the general structure of an academic paper could be likened to an upside-down triangle: You begin with the broadest view of your topic and present progressively more specific information throughout the body of your paper before finally arriving at the “point.” The “point” of the triangle is, of course, the “point” of your paper and while it should be introduced in the beginning, it should also be clearly articulated right at the end.

For the most part, this model works well for me, but I typically conceive of the conclusion as a smaller, right side-up triangle at the bottom of the paper’s larger structure. The “point,” then, occurs right at the beginning of the conclusion, which I then expand back outward in the mirror image of the introductory paragraph, making a kind of hourglass shape for the overall paper. I demonstrate the “mini conclusion triangle” in this excerpt from my 2018 article—the first paragraph details the particulars of the case study (the Congress Avenue Bridge); the second expands their significance out to concerns articulated in existing scholarship; and the third articulates a broad theory about nature-culture relations.

In a scientific paper, the mini conclusion triangle appears in what is called the “discussion” section of the paper, a term that I think highlights its function slightly better than the more commonly used “conclusion.” This final section is where you discuss what whatever you observed actually *means*. Put another way, the discussion/conclusion is where you address the perennial “who cares?” question. For the remainder of this essay, I’ll continue to refer to the final section of the paper as the “conclusion,” but I encourage you to interpret this word a bit more broadly to encompass its relationship to the concept of a discussion.

As with the introduction, your audience should be able to read only the conclusion of your paper and get a sense of what it is “about.” While “aboutness” is a concept that has been thoroughly critiqued by Gus Stadler (2015), among others, it is nonetheless useful in the writing process *before* you begin deconstructing your findings. While it would be nice to assume that every reader will take the time to study the minutiae of your every carefully coded phrase, the reality is that many of them will read only the introduction and conclusion. You want to make sure that if they do so, they take away what you think is the most important thing about your work.

However, sometimes it’s difficult to know the answer to the “who cares?” question until you’ve actually written the paper. To solve this issue, I am a big fan of the “crummy first draft” approach.¹ To write a CFD, after some careful outlining, you write uninhibitedly from the beginning to the end of the paper. Once you have a general structure, you can then nitpick the details of your argument, its support, and the general structure of the paper.

In my writing, a large portion of the nitpicking involves toggling back and forth between the introduction and the conclusion to make sure the claims match. While you certainly want to take your reader on a journey throughout the paper, ultimately, you’ll need to make the same claim you made at the beginning of the paper that you make at the end. Typically I use my conclusions to revise the initial claim I made in the introduction, but it does go both ways. It’s important not to be afraid of changing your initial statements once you’ve finished a draft of the paper; you want to adjust your broader claims to match the evidence you provided, not the reverse.

However, there is also a danger of making the introduction and conclusion too similar. Think of it this way: in the introduction, you spell out what you want to do, why and how you’re going to do it. By the time your reader gets to the conclusion, they will have (hopefully) read all of the evidence in support of your argument and been enriched in the process of doing so. The job of the conclusion is not only to restate your central argument, but to briefly address the steps by which you arrived at the “point” of your paper.

The conclusion’s function is to situate your findings more broadly in the discourse of the field, positioning your work vis a vis more expansive discussions about genre, philosophy, or any number of other intellectual constructs. In the above excerpt from my article, I did this by calling on discourses about modernity, the natural, and finally,

¹ Most people I know use a slightly more colorful epithet to describe this process.

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

Donna Haraway's theory of "becoming with" (2008). The order in which I presented each of these three concepts matters within the paragraph as much as in the ordering of the paragraphs; they go from the narrowest to the broadest, in the shape of the triangle.

Once you have stated your central "point," how you got there, and what it means, you can then begin to complicate or expand outward from your central thesis. I like the idea of "conclusions" plural, rather than a single conclusion, in the sense that we might draw multiple conclusions from the work we do, rather than a single one. These multiple significances should come after you have clearly stated what you intended to do.

To conclude, I'd like to model exactly the kind of conclusion that I think is most useful in writing academic papers:

The conclusion is the part of an academic paper where you discuss the significance of your findings in as concise and clear a manner as possible. The concept of a scientific "discussion" can be useful in articulating the function of the last portion of your paper, which addresses the significance of your findings rather than simply ending the paper. First you will want to verify that your initial claims match your ultimate findings by toggling back and forth to the beginning of the paper. Then you will then restate the evidence you presented throughout the paper that helped you reach those findings. Finally, you will situate your findings in the broader significance of the field. By doing this, you will be able to orient yourself and your research in wider discussions regarding the status of ethnomusicology as a field, as well as the various precepts upon which it bases itself.

References

Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stadler, Gus. 2015. "On Whiteness and Sound Studies." *Sounding Out! A Sound Studies blog*. <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/07/06/on-whiteness-and-sound-studies/>

Young, Vershawn Ashanti. 2010. "Should Writers Use They Own English?" *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 12:1, 110–117.

continued on next page . . .

SEM
SN

At SEM Student News, we try to address the most pressing issues and diverse research fields for our student body and broader readership. Want to get advice and insight from our network of peers, colleagues, and mentors? Please email your questions to semstudentnews@gmail.com

Writers on Writing

...continued

One Eyebrow Raised

A Recipe for Movement and Sound

Warning: The following recipe may raise concerns about the meanings of movements or sounds. To avoid jumping to conclusions or making random associations, allow, for example, a raised eyebrow to be a lifting of a muscle of the brow. Nothing more. Nothing less. Meanings may be folded in later and served at room temperature.

1.

Select one body part that you are able to move easily.

As you move it, imagine the sound that it utters, but only inside your body-mind.

Listen.

Repeat.

Can you vocalize this sound?

Re-sound.

Coordinate the movement with vocalization.

They needn't match of course.

Become fluid and skilled.

Remain calm.

What do you notice?

Does the movement change... waiting for sound?

Does the sound change... meeting the movement?

Notice timing.

Expressivity.

2a.

Assemble a group.

Without sharing sound-movement elements (from #1)



Dr. Tomie Hahn (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) reflecting on her 2015 recipe-performance, "One Eyebrow Raised: A Recipe for Movement and Sound." In "Special Issue in Honor of Suzanne G. Cusick." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19, 15–17.

I appreciate the invitation to write about my writing practice. I offer my thoughts in an informal essay, hoping that my voice and conversational tone adds lightness. To be honest, I have not always enjoyed writing. I struggled terribly. However, thanks to my fascination with sensory transmission, I somehow *tricked myself* into a state of intrigue concerning a paradox—how to express and display embodied knowledge. I opened my personal bag of tricks and found a few prompts to share. They may not be useful for everyone, but if something seems helpful, run with it.

Persistent rituals

Every morning, I set aside a little time to free write on a topic *unrelated* to my current project. The practice helps me loosen up, be creative, and initiate a playful flow. The night before, I assemble a few prompt words, a topic, quote, or activity. In the morning, I select a prompt and write for thirty minutes, then put it away. Periodically, these jottings become full papers, poems, or performances. Most important, these free writes reveal what inspires me.

Practicing

As musicians, we know how to practice. I definitely embody what I practice; persistence helps me move forward, and being humble invites me to set aside judgment in the form of disabling self-criticism.

Telescopes

I parse ideas into smaller sections that are easily achievable for my time allotment (what I can write in the next twenty minutes, day, week, and

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

before-
hand,
stand together
and
begin to re-sound.
Repeat and continue...
looping
for
at least one to two minutes.
Perform variants to extend the time...
How slowly can you stretch the sound-movement
exploration?
Can you change the quality?

Notice.
Do the movements and sounds change over time?

2b.
Does noticing change the experience? The
performance?

3.
Name it.
Really!
Sally, x-47, Exercise #1...
you
decide.

4.
Add an outside presence to your re-sounding...
an audience member who observes,
a video recording,
a plant or tree.

5.
State the name, then
perform.
Does the outside presence shift the experience?

6.
Serve
often.

(Hahn 2015, 15–17)

so on). I always note the relationship between these smaller units and the larger ideas so that my various theoretical frames and points of view align. I think of writing this way as connecting ideas through a continuous, focus-to-blur telescoping process.

Expressivity

Often I become enamored or inspired by a particular voice, style, quality, or compositional form. I keep those in a grab bag and see which one is appropriate for what I am working on.

Multiplicity

I play with as many different voices as possible. As a multi-racial artist, I regard the notion of multiplicity in voice as very real, challenging, and empowering. Because everyone embodies an array of identities, it can be helpful to explore ways to express such complexity. In the actual text, one voice might be appropriate for opening a piece, then another voice emerges after a subheading. There is no one “scholarly” style or voice that is acceptable or appropriate in most cases. For example, when asked to write an article on reflexivity and feminist ethnography (Hahn 2006), I embraced reflexivity directly. The article opens with a humorous tone—a conversation with myself—as if readers were privy to my internal ruminations. The text soon changes voice to briefly discuss reflexivity historically, then incorporates other authors’ voices, followed by case studies. I wanted to reveal the nature of shifting voices to model multiplicity and code-switching.

Pleasure in Form

I enjoy playing with form. As an example, I have written several essays that are nonlinear, allowing readers to traverse the essay in any order they prefer. The form challenges me to consider interactivity. Here are some examples of how nonlinear essays support contrasting thematic ideas: I encourage movement and embodiment in Hahn 2018a; and Buddhism and the paradox of time in Hahn 2016. You will notice that these essays share some passages. I believe this repetition links the array of themes in different publications, as a kind of meta-dialogue.

continued on next page . . .

Writers on Writing

...continued

Displaying

Display is important to me. How the words and other materials sit on the page, the spacing, how the words sound, how the text embraces a photograph, chart, or figure. Sometimes I use a fieldnote, image, or sound from fieldwork as a direct prompt for writing (Hahn 2018b). Similarly...

Writing is only one way of transmitting embodied knowledge

Because I think about transmission all the time, I ask myself: Are the words/images organized in a form that reinforces and reflects the ideas I am exploring? It is not important to me that readers realize that the form that I am playing with reinforces an idea—that is just how I write. I ask myself: Is the concept better suited as a performance rather than publication? How about the style? In some cases, a text needs to be precise and sharply logical. In other instances, ambiguity might be more appropriate because the abstract language offers an open, unresolved, even mysterious sensibility that challenges readers to interpret and interact with the text. Writing about engaged embodiment continues to be a profound challenge for me. A number of years ago I became attracted to recipes, instructions, as well as text and graphic musical compositions, because these forms demand that the reader interact with the text. My words, then, only become alive because the reader imbibes and actively interplays with what I am offering.

For example, in *Sensational Knowledge* (2007) there is a short piece called “First Orientation, the body in text” (19–21). I ask readers to take a drink of water, to imagine the practice as a ritual, to consider the sensory nature of the seemingly common activity, and to ponder how to write about such a personal, sensual ritual. Similarly, sometimes I insert a recipe at the opening of an article, to encapsulate the article’s point in an embodied practice (Hahn 2017). The recipe format has permeated many arenas of my life, from seminars, writing, to performance. At one point I realized that I had written close to a hundred recipes! I collected forty for a forthcoming book *Arousing Sense*.

“One Eyebrow Raised: A Recipe for Movement and Sound,” in the special issue of *Women and Music* dedicated to Suzanne Cusick (2015), is an example of a recipe-performance. At first glance it appears to be a poem because of how the words sit on the page, yet it is intended to be actively performed with a group to playfully question word-sound-movement relationships, embodiment, and dichotomies. The text is an example of a sparse, fragmented writing style that leans toward ambiguity, specifically to offer space for readers to insert themselves, to perform the piece and make it their own.

In parting, I want to acknowledge how isolating research and writing can be. Actively searching for what rituals support me—ranging from the right kind of writing group to specific prompts—continues to urge me on.

References

- Hahn, Tomie. 2006. “Emerging Voices—Encounters with Reflexivity.” In “Women, Arts, Politics/Power,” edited by Jayne Wark and Roberta Lamb. Special issue, *Atlantis: A Women’s Studies Journal / Revue d’études sur les femmes* 30 (2): 88–99.
- . 2007. *Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- . 2016. “Shadowing the Ephemeral—Embodied Emptiness Through Form.” In *Dancing with Dharma: Buddhism, Movement, and Dance in the West*, 200–7. Edited by Harrison Blum. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press.
- . 2017. “Layered Listeners: Lessons of the Land, Air and Sea.” In “Teaching Ecomusicology,” edited by Stephen Meyer and Rachel Mundy. Special issue, *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 8 (1): 86–90.
- . 2018a. “Stalking Embodied Knowledge—Then What?” In *The Sentient Archive*. Edited by L. Haviland and B. Bissell, 28–45. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- . 2018b. “Sputtering Rituals: Remembering Pauline Oliveros.” *Critical Studies in Improvisation Journal / Études critiques en improvisation* 12 (2): 1.
- . Forthcoming. *Arousing Sense: Recipes for Workshopping Sensory Experience*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Collaborative Erasure Challenge

As early as the 1960s, erasure poetry appeared as a creative found art practice. “Erasure poetry may be used as a means of collaboration, creating a new text from an old one and thereby starting a dialogue between the two, or as a means of confrontation, a challenge to a pre-existing text” (Academy of American Poets). Erasure has been used as an artistic practice to dialogue and collaborate with an author and text. During times of struggle, artists have performed erasure on controversial texts to make statements about its content. In some cases the practice can even be cathartic (two examples: Executive Order 9066 regarding the internment of Japanese Americans, or any of Donald Trump’s speeches—see Stone 2017). I find that there is a creative processing, collaborating, and a sense of connection with an author that one is performing an erasure with. I am aiming for such a collaboration with anyone who wants to try this challenge.

Specifics: Use page 115 from the book *Sensational Knowledge* (provided [here](#) as a PDF), create a new piece through erasure process and submit it as an electronic file (PDF or JPG preferred) and perform your erasure on this text. An example of an erasure is included [here](#). It is only intended to be an example.

Eligibility: Any current undergraduate, graduate, or independent study student may participate

Deadline: June 30, 2021. Do not include your name on the erasure piece. In a separate document, include your name, school/independent scholarship, and preferred email address. Send both documents to semstudentnews@gmail.com with “Erasure Challenge” as the subject line.

Several of the new works submitted will be published in the Spring/Summer issue of *SEM Student News*! Also, an array of prizes shall be showered on the top three new works based on: the new text, creativity of erasure process, and visual display. Looking forward to your erasures!

Tomie Hahn

References

- Academy of American Poets. <https://poets.org/glossary/erasure>.
- Hahn, Tomie. 2007. “revealing lessons—modes of transition: visual, tactile, oral/aural, & media.” In *Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance*, 70–145. “uttering expanses—oral/aural transmission,” 115. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Stone, Rachel. 2017. “The Trump-Era Boom in Erasure Poetry.” *The New Republic* Oct. 23, 2017. <https://newrepublic.com/article/145396/trump-era-boom-erasure-poetry>.

Memories of Songs



By Anya Ezhevskaya (Dallas International University)

In “(Un)doing Fieldwork,” ethnographer Michelle Kisliuk explores alternative modes of ethnography that might “erase the dichotomy between ‘experience’ and ‘scholarship,’ between ‘fieldwork’ and ‘writing’” (2008, 184). After all, researchers are not mechanical analyzers removed from the phenomena they study. Their interest in the subject matter is often born of personal experience, a cultural or historical connection, a family tie. Writing ethnomusicological work from a more subjective vantage point is challenging, “but if we proceed with caution (and practice),” Kisliuk posits, “we can use poetics—steeped in experience—to convey in writing what otherwise might never come across” (197). This essay is such an exercise in poetics, interweaving my own family story with a short history of Russian wartime song writing.

Two memories. The first: Marching through the sun-bleached grass towards our dacha with my grandfather Vika. Our bravado-infused steps—his, true and strong; mine, appropriately fluid for my eight-year-old frame—are synchronized by the wartime song Grandpa is belting out in his commanding baritone. “Prepare the charge! Prepare the shells! The shrapnel and grenades! Aim for the target, hit the mark, without undue debates!” With beach towels slung over our shoulders, we parade into the sunset flip-flopping in our sandals—though they could have been boots; and over our shoulders, not towels—but rifles.

The second: Grandpa Vika bent over his writing desk, scribbling what will become a celebratory poem dedicated to Victory Day, the most important holiday in the USSR commemorating the day we stormed Berlin and ended the Great Patriotic War. He writes vigorously while humming a familiar tune—a nostalgic wartime love-song about the passion for a soldier’s beloved that burns, even on a cold winter night, as the squad recovers from battle in an unwelcoming, barren clay dugout. An entire nation easily recognizes this melody from its first waltz-like bars.

My grandfather, Viktor Moiseevich Gurvich, fought as a young man in the Soviet theater of World War II. He wrote poetry and earned his degree in economics, but couldn’t obtain a position in a big university after demobilization because he was a Jew. After storming Berlin, this native of Leningrad could teach only in the Soviet Far East. His odd fate as a

Jewish-Russian academic was common: thousands of Russian and Soviet Jews fought in WWII on behalf of the Motherland (Arad, 1-7), only to be marginalized by the Stalinist regime of the late 1940s and early 50s.

Although both the military input and the political loyalty of Soviet Jews are well-documented,¹ an arguably more important but less known contribution to the USSR’s history was made by Jewish-Russian composers and poets who wrote a disproportionately significant number of military songs. According to the Soviet census, in 1939 there were three million Jews living in the USSR out of the total population of 170 million, or about 1.7%. By the author’s estimate explained below, this small percentage wrote at least half of the best-known war songs—compositions that boosted morale and invigorated those on the front lines and at home. The tunes were the lifeline of the army, propelling the troops to action and capturing the patriotic spirit of the country (Khasin, 2020).

An illustration of the disproportion can be observed in a survey of ten significant Russian wartime songs assembled by “the country’s [self-proclaimed] most important history portal” (Konovalov, n.d.). Of these songs, seven were either written or composed by Russian Jews—a fact that can be uncovered by studying their biographies, but which is not stated overtly in the article. These seven are:²

continued on next page . . .

1 See, for example, [this article](#) on Jewish anti-Nazi movement in the Soviet Union included in the Electric Jewish Encyclopedia, or consider the critical roles played by Leon Trotsky, Yakov Sverdlov, Moisei Uritsky, and Grigory Zinoviev in the Russian Revolution.

2 Links to video performances are provided in each highlighted song title. The author has also provided detailed translations for many of the songs mentioned in this piece [here](#).

Memories of Songs

...continued

“In the Dugout”

Konstantin Listov (*composer*)

“Katyusha” and “Wait for Me”

Matvei Blanter (*composer*)

“Farewell to the Rugged Mountains”

Evgenyi Zharkovsky (*composer*)

“The Blue Scarf”

Ezhi Petersbursky (*author*)

Yakov Galitsky (*composer*)

“The Accidental Waltz” and “The Road to Berlin”

Mark Fradkin (*composer*)

TASS, one of Russia’s oldest news agencies, has assembled its own compilation of the “most famous songs dedicated to the [Great Patriotic] war” based on its archives. Of the ten songs highlighted, five were either composed or written by Russian Jews. These include “The Accidental Waltz” and “Katyusha.” Another example of the prominence of these songs is observed in an interview with contemporary musicians that “Echo Moskvyy,” Russia’s premier independent radio station, did in 2010 about WWII songs. Out of the six songs

mentioned and performed during the show, three were from the list above: “Katyusha,” “The Blue Scarf,” and “In the Dugout.” In addition, from my personal experience as a Russian I can attest that if asked about nationally-beloved wartime songs, Russians will list most of the titles above (Polyudova, 5).

The words to the song “In the Dugout” that Grandpa hummed were penned by Russian poet Aleksei Surkov in a letter to his wife from the front. “Sometime in February of 1942,” the poet recalls, “the [Jewish-Russian] composer Konstantin Listov...came to our front-line outfit and started asking for [text] which he could put to music. Fortunately, I remembered the poem...Listov glanced over it, murmured something under his breath and left.” The poem described Surkov huddled over a fire with a few soldiers in a

small, clay-built hut, dreaming about a warmer place in the embrace of his wife. A week later, the composer returned to the headquarters and performed the new song titled “In the Dugout.” In Belovolov’s history of wartime songs, Surkov recalls that “Everybody who was not working listened to it with bated breath... Immediately they knew that it was a keeper” (Surkov, 1975). Indeed, it became one of the most beloved songs of the wartime era.

Many other military songs were written and composed by Russian Jews. Perhaps the best-known is

“Katyusha” by Jewish-Russian composer Matvei Blanter with text by Mikhail Isakovskiy. It epitomizes the Russian spirit and serves as a melody to rekindle patriotism, a jingle for new verses written in school hallways, and an evocative leitmotif in mainstream and avant-garde Russian art. Blanter came to be a celebrated composer by creating songs that deeply touched the Russian people. Though he was lauded as a renowned composer of the Soviet Union, what happened to thousands of other Russian Jews in the USSR following Victory Day was less glorious.

Driven to folly by paranoia and

a desperate need to maintain power, Stalin initiated programs that exiled large portions of the Jewish-Russian population to the newly created republic of Birobidzhan—ostensibly the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, but in reality a remote, joyless territory in Siberia. Later, many immigrated to the freshly minted Israeli State while others remained in Birobidzhan or slowly made their way back to the capitals. There, Jews continue to be discriminated against, overtly and covertly, into the twenty-first century.

Grandpa Viktor sang his war songs with gusto and conviction until the day he died, writing many verses of poetry in celebration of the USSR, which was ambivalent to him at best. Several years after his passing, I preserve his memory in writing as I consider

Grandpa Viktor sang his war songs with gusto and conviction until the day he died, writing many verses of poetry in celebration of the USSR, which was ambivalent to him at best. Several years after his passing, I preserve his memory in writing as I consider what it was that enabled him...and many other Jewish writers, to capture the Russian soul through music and verse.

continued on next page . . .

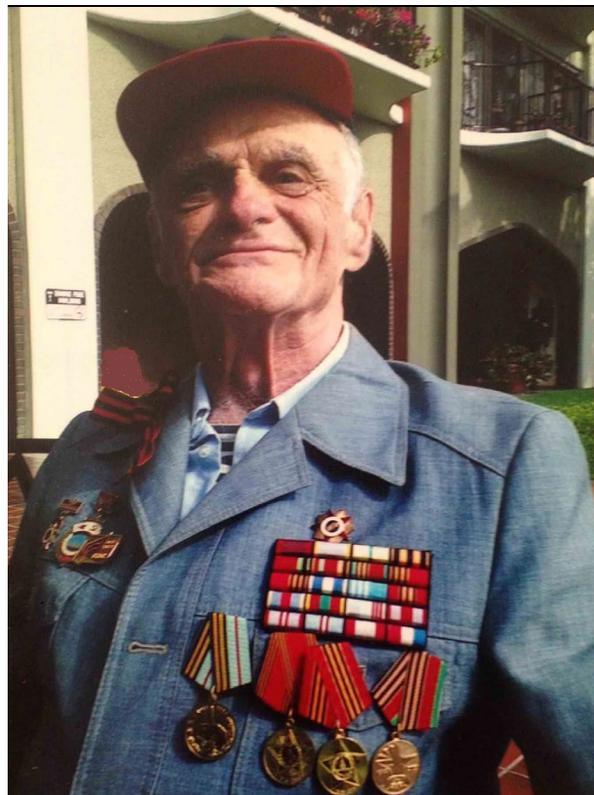
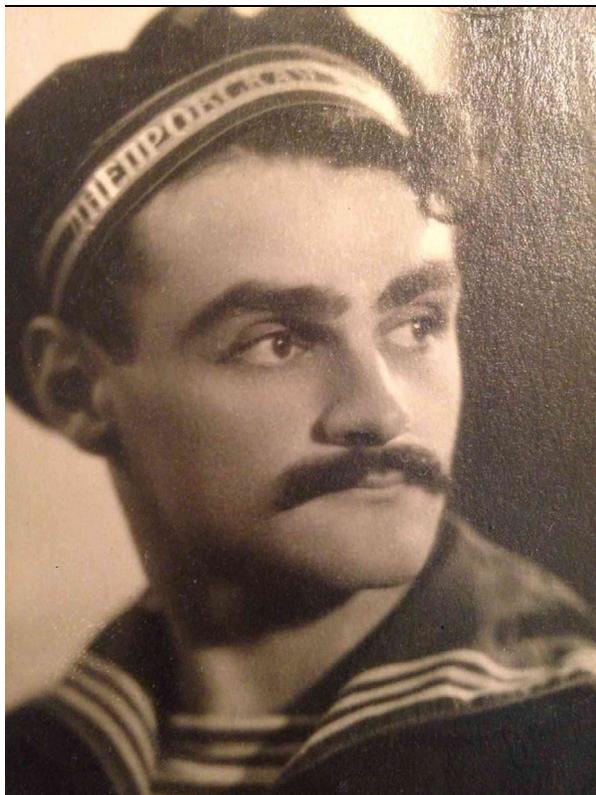
Memories of Songs

...continued

what it was that enabled him, Matvei Blanter, Konstantin Listov, and many other Jewish writers, to capture the Russian soul through music and verse. Was it their biculturalism and the contextual flexibility associated with living in a liminal space as a transplanted people (Kim 2018, 16) that enabled them to be especially creative and attuned to the mood around them? Was it a particular knack for assimilation, having practiced coexisting with foreign cultures for millennia, that helped these composers and poets to fully internalize the Russian melos? Perhaps it was simply that these individuals, ethnically Jews, became cosmopolitan citizens (Morris, 4) who lived fully integrated into the Russian community and therefore were able to express its geist authentically. I hypothesize that the explanation for the disproportionately large numbers of Jewish-Russian wartime musicians is a combination: to capture the spirit of a nation in a given historical time, the composers and authors above needed both an empathetic ear and generative pliancy gained through living as strangers in a strange land. But also they, like my grandfather, needed to be inwardly committed to that land and its people.

Grandpa Vika was my hero. In recalling fond memories of singing together, I cannot untangle his beaming smile and bright hawk eyes from the courageous young men who fell during the war, fueled and inspired by the songs that are still loved three generations later. When trying to “get as close to truth as possible,” as Michelle Kisliuk indicates, “we move beyond an objectivistic style of writing...[and] boundaries between fiction and nonfiction can become blurred” (2008, 199). But it does not mean that I write fiction. I was there. I saw his love for his country, heard his songs, and they pierced my heart like they pierced the hearts of millions. This is my true memory of that, together with a brief exploration of the documented history behind that memory.

So I leave you with a writer, exhausted after battle, in a cold hut with a love that burns bright and warm. I leave you also with a curious pair: a strong man and a little girl, sand bucket in hand, RIGHT-LEFT-RIGHTing to a secret song shared between them.



Images. The author’s grandfather, Viktor Moiseevich Gurvich. One was taken in Berlin in May 1945, shortly after Soviet forces stormed the city, which effectively ended WWII (L). The second was taken seventy years later (2015) in San Diego (R).

continued on next page . . .

Memories of Songs

...continued

References

- Arad, Itzhak. 2011. “Они сражались за Родину: евреи Советского Союза в Великой Отечественной войне” [“They Fought for the Motherland: Jews of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War”]. *Mosty Culture* [Cultural Bridges].
- Surkov, Aleksei. 1975. “Как сложилась песня” [“How the Song Came to Be”]. In *Истра [Istra] 1941*, edited by I.V. Belovolov, 231–34. Moscow, Russia: Moskovsky Rabochii.
- Echo Moskvу. 2010. “Песни военных лет—Редкая птица—Детская площадка—Эхо Москвы, 09.05.2010.” [“Wartime Songs—Ptitsa Edition —Playground—Echo Moskvу”]. Accessed December 27, 2020. <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/children/677368-echo>
- Electronic Jewish Encyclopedia. n.d. “Сопrotивление антинацистское” [“Anti-Nazi Resistance”]. Электронная еврейская энциклопедия OPT [ORT Electronic Jewish Encyclopedia]. Accessed December 27, 2020. <https://eleven.co.il/jewish-history/holocaust/13902/>.
- Khasin, Gregory, interview by the author, November 1, 2020.
- Kim, Joy Hyunsook. 2018. *Diaspora Musicians and Creation Collaboration in a Multicultural Community: A Case Study in Ethnodoxology*. Dallas, TX: Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics.
- Kisliuk, Michelle. 2008. “(Un)doing Fieldwork: Sharing Songs, Sharing Lives.” In *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Second Edition, edited by Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, 183–205. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Konovalov, Aleksandr. n.d. “Kak pesnya pomogala pobezhdat’: 10 pesen voennykh let” [“How Song Helped to Win: 10 wartime songs”]. Accessed 12/26/2020. <https://histrf.ru/biblioteka/b/kak-piesnia-pomoghala-pobiezhdat>.
- Morris, Hilary Brady. 2015. “State of the Field,” *SEM Student News* 10.
- Polyudova, Elena. 2016. *Soviet War Songs in the Context of Russian Culture*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- TASS. n.d. “Музыка победы: песни, посвященные Великой Отечественной войне” [Music of Victory: Songs dedicated to the Great Patriotic War]. Accessed 1/28/2021. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/1949403?page=2>.



SEM
SN

Visit semsn.com for the latest and past issues, calls, announcements, cross publications, supplementary materials, and more.

2C

An Autoethnography

By Shirley Syper (University of Hawai'i, Manoa)

The sound of a rooster crowing awakened her. She cupped her hands together in the mode of the praying hands image on the wall and asked God to feed people all over the world. Then she prayed for herself.

“Tootsie!,” shouted Papa in an excited voice, “Tootsie!” (Whom we shall henceforth refer to as 2C, because that is actually the way her family pronounced her nickname with a lot of fun puns like, “What would you like 2C?”)

2C knows Papa knows that her regular hangout is in a little alcove in the back of the family’s sprawling two-story farmhouse. Her days were pretty much “Comme si, comme ça,” which in their family language means “so-so.” 2C’s father had proudly told her many times, “We are of French Moroccan descent. Never forget that.”

There were eventually twelve children in her family, and farmyard chores were shared among them, except for 2C. At ten months of age, she became afflicted with polio, a condition that was not evident until she started to walk. There was much sadness when it was discovered that both of 2C’s feet were deformed.

But *now* here is Papa, with more urgency in his voice, which dictated 2C must get a move on. She pulled herself up by kneeling on one knee, then the other, to determine which leg to push up on. She began her normal hobble from side to side toward the door, left hand clutching her book and right hand leaning onto whatever chair arms and support handles were available.

Just as she arrived at the entry, Papa burst past her holding a medium size box. He made his way to an end table and placed the box there.

“What is it, Papa!?” 2C asked. “What’s that?”

continued on next page . . .

This autoethnography, written in the third person by Shirley Syper, chronicles a remarkable life lived through performance and personal faith. Syper’s engaging authorial voice traces key episodes from her youth, life as a professional performer, and, more recently, her ethnomusicological scholarship. Throughout, we also include short clips of Syper talking about her experiences and approach to writing in video clips featured alongside her words, along with stylized images from Syper’s storied career(s). In these clips, Syper is interviewed by *SEM Student News* Copy Editor Kate Morics (Independent Scholar).



Image. “A tourist shot the photo of me POSING at Ala Moana beach park (Honolulu) in 2019.” Photo courtesy of the author.

First Writings

Shirley Syper (University of Hawai'i, Manoa)
interviewed by Katherine Morics (SEM Student
News Copy Editor, and Independent Scholar)



Video link. “First Writings”

2C

...continued

Papa grinned his infamous contagious smile and said, “This is for you, my little one. A client was going to throw it out. When I said, ‘No, no,’ he said I could have it.”

“Papa!” demanded 2C, growing impatient.

“It’s a Tele!” beamed Papa. “And, here, let me hook it up. The man showed me how to do it.”

2C looked on quizzically with wide eyes. “What’s a Tele?” she queried.

“Oh, you’ll see!” answered Papa. She watched in awe as Papa took out a medium size black object, attached something that looked like two wiry rabbit ears, then plugged a long cord into the wall socket.

The most amazing thing happened. When Papa turned a knob, a line appeared and *then*, images began to appear and move on the “Tele.”

“Oh my,” exclaimed 2C who had dropped to the floor still clutching her book.

Papa turned another knob and to 2C’s joy, she heard voices coming from the images. People were moving and speaking!

“Wow!” she said. “How do they do that?!” It was as if her storybook characters had come to life!

On the one channel that appeared clearest, 2C watched, with keen interest, performances by Rudolph Nureyev, Sammy Davis Jr., and Mahalia Jackson. She looked in awe at dancers and singers; those were her favorite shows to watch. She began to envision herself in their roles and she thought, “If I had the chance...”

As she gazed at the images in awe, Papa smiled with joy that he had just given his daughter a new lease on life. Now 2C would have something more to do with her time. Little did Papa know the importance of his gift. The Arts were in store in a very huge way. 2C began to study violin and classical singing. She began to dream.

When 2C was fourteen, two doctors from the Polio Children’s Foundation told her they heard she wanted to be a singer and a dancer. They’d already spoken to her parents, but needed 2C’s permission to operate in hope that she might one day walk normally and be able to achieve her dream. 2C hesitantly agreed because she did not know what “normally” meant.

The operations on her feet were extremely successful! 2C had to convalesce for six months. Later, the doctors prescribed playing tennis or dancing to build up the muscles in her atrophied legs. The muscles in 2C’s legs began to build up and her voice became clear as a lark’s. People began to say she had a special gift. Still Papa, nor 2C knew of the magnitude of her gift. She was taught to carry herself well, never hold grudges, always forgive, and to always remember her beginning. As a result, she always forgave those that chased or taunted her, even as she was forced to awkwardly flee their bullying.

continued on next page . . .



Images (counterclockwise from top right). “Me singing in 80’s at the Hanohano room Sheraton hotel; me and son Jonathan when he was six years old; my boys and me in ‘83; and me with my daughter in the ‘80s.”

Writing in the Third Person

Shirley Sybert (University of Hawai‘i, Manoa)
interviewed by Katherine Morics (SEM Student
News Copy Editor, and Independent Scholar)



Video link. “Writing in the Third Person”

2C

...continued

Over time, 2C forgot about the bad times at school and those three images on the Tele. Life had its twists and turns. In her junior year of college 2C got married. She had a son but had to withdraw from college in her senior year due to not having family support in raising her son. 2C and her husband divorced two years later.

Amazingly, when 2C was twenty-four, a recruiter saw her perform with a light opera group in Benson Hall at Stanford University. She was given one night to decide if she would join the cast of the show *Catch a Rising Star*. Go figure!

By then 2C was working for IBM. The next day when her colleagues heard her story, they shouted, “You get on the phone and tell them ‘YES!’ We’re giving you a leave of absence!” At 3 p.m., the staff presented 2C with a cake that read “2C Superstar!” as if they knew what her future held. The kindest twist of fate: After *Catch a Rising Star*, 2C was asked to join another professional show, taking on a starring role in *Jesus Christ Superstar* on Broadway. And 2C was going to turn it down until she was told Sammy Davis Jr. had performed there. La!

Choreographers remarked, “You dance so well! Where did you go to school?” 2C was dumbfounded. She had no idea people went to school to learn to dance. She’d programmed the moves of Nureyev and the ballerina in *Swan Lake*, as well as Sammy Davis Jr’s awesome tap dancing. Little did she know, she’d learned from them. Whenever she could, she watched and memorized their moves, over and over again, as she sat in her wheelchair in front of the Tele.

Four years later, after *Jesus Christ Superstar*, 2C auditioned successfully for a contract to sing for a year at the Grand Ole Opry. One Sunday afternoon, Minnie Pearl approached and cupped 2C’s hands in hers. She remarked, “Child, you can sure sing some gospel! You remind me of our Mahalia!”

2C stood mute. Her eyes filled with tears as she remembered her beginning. Yes, Mahalia Jackson had been one of her favorites on the Tele.

2C moved to Hawaii in 1979, and, along with teaching with the Department of Education, she started Vocal Expressions (now Vocal and Dance Expressions), her private performing arts business. Her children, Catherine and Jonathan, as well as many of her students became performers and educators.

Sadly, 2C had a relapse in the form of post-polio syndrome from 1999–2011. From 2006 to 2011 2C used a motorized scooter. The pain from the late effects of polio was excruciating, and 2C felt she was no longer effective. Because her feet had reverted to their original deformity, she was once again walking on the toes of her feet and had to wear very high heels for balance. She felt she couldn’t go on.

One night in October 2008, 2C thought, “I could pray for a miracle. Better yet, I could believe that a miracle is possible. When she said the



Image. “On my motorized scooter. In 2006 I paid \$1,700 for a motorized scooter. Medicare couldn’t help me because I was still teaching 6 hours a week. Also, I was only supposed to use the scooter AT HOME...a travesty.”
Photo courtesy of the author.

Writing Tips

Shirley Sypert (University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa)
interviewed by Katherine Morics (SEM Student
News Copy Editor, and Independent Scholar)



Video link. “Writing Tips”

continued on next page . . .

2C

...continued

word believe, she felt a sweet, warm sensation in her womb. She closed her eyes and prayed, “Oh, dear God, I don’t want to have a baby!” The sensation was just like conception, she’s often told her sisters.

Then she wondered, “What would the miracle be for? I’ve had a wonderful life.” Nevertheless, she cupped her hands together and asked God to give the rest of her life to another energetic young teacher, or (she whispered faintly) “grant me a miracle.” God heard her whisper.

At approximately 1 p.m. on September 12, 2011, at the Waiialae Country Club in Honolulu, Hawaii, after a guest speaker at her Rotary Club of East Honolulu meeting said, “We are all meant to be messengers,” 2C felt a gentle, and oh so sweet, serum enter and begin to flow at the top of her head. She knew something special was happening.

The serum continued to smoothly course through her entire body. When the meeting was over, she stood and noticed she felt no pain. When she began to walk, because she’d vainly left her motorized scooter in the car, she noticed she was not limping nor was she asking to lean on anyone for support.

One of her friends was speaking of a miracle that had recently happened to her son. Maybe it was a reminder of what was soon to happen. Who knew?

Just as 2C and her friends neared their car, a huge burst of warmth came from the back of her head and slowly swooshed into her womb. It began to flow throughout her torso. At that moment 2C had a vision of two of her father’s sisters walking with baskets on their heads in Morocco. She saw the ocean behind them and the Sahara desert to the left. It was when she saw the baskets on their heads that 2C felt the loving hand of God realign her spine. What a feeling! She then felt a dull sensation in her right hip and she felt her right leg lengthen.

While 2C’s friends were still talking, 2C was receiving the miracle she’d prayed for in 2008.

After a fifty-year hiatus, 2C was now back in college seeking an elusive college degree, though she knew she was truly blessed with the most precious degree/gift...renewed health. She was restored, energized, and eager to share.

Recently, 2C had to withdraw from college due to swelling feet from sitting long hours at the computer during online classes and uploading files. It took weeks for the swelling to subside.

2C still loves learning and is blessed to have maintained a decent GPA.

2C is grateful for this opportunity to once again share God’s amazing grace—for the gift of music that became a dream come true.

While many people insist that she needs the experience of acquiring a diploma, others question why she, with so many accomplishments, would pursue a degree at the age of seventy-five.

Will she obtain a college degree? Does it matter?

What do you think?



Image. “Me with my ballet students, learning movements in support of a vocal student solo—‘She’ll be Coming ‘Round the Mountain.’” Video still courtesy of the author.

Music and Message

*Shirley Sybert (University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa)
interviewed by Katherine Morics (SEM Student
News Copy Editor, and Independent Scholar)*



Video link. “Music and Message”

Writing Approaches & Practices

An Annotated Bibliography

By Subash Giri (University of Alberta) and Anna Wright (University of British Columbia)

As the pandemic has spread, writing in and through various forms of media has been both a primary outlet and one of the few sources of community and companionship for many of us musicians and scholars. The following annotated bibliography considers what “writing” means to us, especially as we all take steps to decolonize our curricula, and to make the academy more accessible and diverse.

To this end, we have included a more “traditional” array of entries on academic writing and writing strategies, as well as a number of entries that we feel either challenge the boundaries of academic writing, or seek to cultivate community in ways that academic writing perhaps cannot. As we reflected on the exclusionary nature of the academy, and how academic writing contributes to gatekeeping in the academy, we were particularly interested in examples of documentary process (such as various forms of sonic or visual art outside of the written word) that have the power to reach audiences to which a journal article or book may not appeal.

This annotated list therefore contains multiple examples of writing that we find particularly exploratory, relevant, or boundary-challenging. These examples of writing, alongside more traditional academic styles, are aimed at readers of this journal who may be encountering writing projects in their schoolwork and research. This list addresses these traditional and alternative writing styles in order to blur the lines between what is considered academic and what is commonly excluded from academic discourse. We invite readers currently in the process of writing to include citations that challenge their own preconceptions of what is acceptable to include in an academic submission.

We hope that this list inspires our readers, as it inspired us, to experiment with our own writing and explore the power that writing holds in both creating community and fostering communication among and between those inside and outside of the academy.



Annotated Bibliography

Belcher, Wendy Laura. 2019. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This book provides a strategic approach to writing for graduate students and junior faculty in the humanities and social sciences. In addition to practical skills such as developing a writing plan and best citational practice, it offers techniques for developing arguments and synthesizing information. The author offers a twelve-week plan to improve readers’ quality of writing, focusing on “the macro aspects of writing—argument, structure, and summarizing” (xiii) to make a publishable product from classroom essays, conference papers, dissertation chapters, and rejected articles. The author outlines five specific daily tasks for each week that encourage daily writing and provide instructions for building readers’ skills and confidence in their writing process, with the end goal of publishing a paper. Overall, the book may be helpful to graduate students who are working on their doctoral dissertation, who are ready to develop chapters into an article for publishing, or who have a conference paper or any existing draft that needs to be refined. It may be useful to faculty and aspiring scholars for producing publications seeking to gain more exposure in their field.

Bretag, Tracey Ann, ed. 2017. *Handbook of Academic Integrity*. Singapore: Springer.

This volume is a compilation of seventy-two essays—divided into ten sections—from diverse researchers and writers across the field of humanities and social, applied, and natural sciences. The essays in this volume offer a wide range of international perspectives and discussions on various writing issues, including plagiarism. Further, the essays also discuss discipline-specific approaches to academic integrity and their various policies. The volume is primarily aimed at researchers/practitioners and those new to the field, but students may also find it beneficial for broadening their horizons on different aspects of research integrity, particularly regarding issues in writing.

continued on next page . . .

Writing Approaches & Practices

... continued

Crawley, Ashon. 2020. *The Lonely Letters*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

The Lonely Letters is simultaneously a fictional story of young love and a commentary on “Blackqueer” life in the Black church. In this book, Crawley explores blackness and queerness in the musical and embodied experience of “Blackpentecostal” spaces and fictional writing as a way to explore lived Blackqueer experience through the letters that two characters write each other. This work has implications for the practice of writing, potentially as an escape from the restrictions of inaccessible academic writing. Moving towards a more creative way of writing, Crawley’s methods have the potential to make a huge difference in both reception and impact—crucial when writing about topics that are both close to our hearts and socially relevant.

Kevin Schreck, dir. 2021 (forthcoming). *Enongo* (film). Kevin Schreck Productions.

<https://www.enongomovie.com/about>

Sammus. 2017. *Pieces in Space*, commentary version (original album released in 2016). Don Giovanni Records.

Enongo is a forthcoming feature-length documentary about the story of Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, a rapper, producer, and academic who is also known by her stage name, Sammus. Lumumba-Kasongo deftly navigates the process of communication by incorporating different media as both an academic and as her rapper alter-ego. Through both of these personas, Lumumba-Kasongo utilizes academic writing, audio recordings, visual media, and live performance. Her performances are renowned for their dynamic stage presence and communicative power.

Sammus’ 2017 album, *Pieces in Space*, demonstrates this power through the addition of a commentary version that supplements the regular version released a year previously. In this narrative version, Lumumba-Kasongo alternates her songs with short narrative tracks related to each song. She discusses her inspiration, writing process, and thought process behind the production of each track. Including narrative tracks in this way makes for an engaging listening experience. These narrative tracks contextualize each song while providing a deeper level of personal contextual information that imbues each track with a unique significance and power. A preview of *Enongo* is available at <https://www.enongomovie.com>.

Fleetwood, Nicole, R. 2020. *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Marking Time is a series of case studies of artists living in prison and navigating incarcerated life. With restricted ways of documenting their own experiences or emotions, these individuals turn to art as a means of expression and preservation. Fleetwood explores the negative effects the incarceration system has on families and individuals by exploring the role art has to play in personal storytelling.

Art as a method of storytelling is not a new concept, but is an important one for the incarcerated individual. Looking at “art making” as a documentary process—and therefore a breed of “writing”—is a useful practice for opening up writing and other means of documentation to the illiterate, incarcerated, censored, and other disenfranchised groups.

Goodall, H. L. 2019. *Writing Qualitative Inquiry: Self, Stories, and Academic Life*. New York: Routledge.

This book offers tips, strategies, and guidance to scholars and students on how to become an accomplished writer by engaging with qualitative inquiry. The book’s principal argument underscores the power of narrative writing—narrative ethnography, personal ethnography, autoethnography, and so forth—to amplify one’s scholarship and contribute to fields in the social sciences and humanities. Further, it posits narrative writing as an epistemology that offers a range of forms and styles to explore meaning and communicate with readers. The book can be a good resource to any student, but is of particular use to students of ethnomusicology and anthropology, whose work is centered on ethnographic fieldwork, and any others who employ narrative accounts in their writing.

continued on next page . . .

Writing Approaches & Practices

... continued

Haviland, Carol Peterson, and Joan A. Mullin, eds. 2009. *Who Owns This Text?: Plagiarism, Authorship, and Disciplinary Cultures*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.

This edited volume examines the concept of text ownership—“defining text as property” (2)—and authors’ perceptions of the notion of ownership based on intellectual property law across diverse disciplines. The chapters in this volume discuss disciplinary definitions, practices, and traditions pertaining to the concept of textual/scholarly/academic ownership, and investigate questions of “what is owned and what is not, what can be taken and what cannot, and what can be appropriated and what cannot” (Ibid.). Further, the contributors to the chapters highlight the disparities between disciplinary definitions of practices related to the notion of ownership (for example, owning field data in sociology and archaeology or owning code in computer science), arguing that ownership is a complex issue that needs to be discussed and treated within each individual discipline. The book offers understanding of the concept of ownership within various disciplines. It also informs issues of plagiarism, appropriation, and transforming texts, objects, materials, and ideas.

Le Guin, Ursula and David Naimon. 2018. *Ursula K. Le Guin: Conversations on Writing*. Portland, OR: Tin House Books.

Le Guin is well-known as a writer of science fiction/speculative fiction. Her writing is always cleverly crafted and involves commentary on social issues such as gender and sexuality, the patriarchy, and colonialism. Similar to Crawley’s work, Le Guin’s writing shows that fiction is an emotive and powerful tool through which to explore non-fictional and conceptual problems.

Conversations on Writing was published posthumously and is a series of transcribed interviews with David Naimon. A rare glimpse into writing-as-practice from such an experienced writer, in this book Le Guin and Naimon discuss craft, aesthetics, and philosophy alongside excerpts of Le Guin’s fiction, poetry, and non-fiction.

Maalsen, Sophia. 2020. *The Social Life of Sound*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

In *The Social Life of Sound*, Maalsen draws on previous object scholarship, but alters her methodology and discourse to change the treatment of the “object” (in this case, sound). Through a combination of ethnography and a positivist approach, she attempts to shift the power dynamic in the subject-object relationship by recognizing sound’s agency. Maalsen describes her approach in *The Social Life of Sound*, writing, “what on the surface appears as a collection of case studies about music is in fact an argument for reconceptualising subject and object” (228).

Maalsen demonstrates others’ agency by positing “sound” as material, arguing that sound merits study not just as an object or as a social indicator, but as a living and evolving thing in itself, neither individually owned nor held, but multi-biographical, each new sound iteration or sample collecting a new layer of input and personhood as it is reproduced. Sound therefore morphs with each interaction or performance or listening, meaning different things to different people, being changed by people and in return changing them. Maalsen argues that sound has some degree of agency and influence—and to a more potent degree in the world of digital reproduction and sampling.

Maalsen’s work is particularly useful when considering writing as a practice, given the weight she places on sound’s agency. It is interesting to compare sound to the written word, and to consider the agency written words have once they are in print and how the academic citation process compares to the sound sampling process.

Martinez, Monica Muñoz. 2018. *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Injustice Never Leaves You is about the long legacies of violence against Mexican people on the Texas border. I was particularly touched by the way history was treated in this book—especially the relationship between written and oral histories. Martinez exposes the processes of silencing through “official” state records, and gatekeeping of history rooted in this process. Who writes these histories, why they are written, and how are they perpetuated? Martinez challenges this by returning to oral “grassroots” histories, citing generational trauma as an important factor in lived experience because of its ability to pass on and subconsciously remember histories that were purposely erased. This book is relevant to consider as we think about the writing process, particularly how it exposes some of the ways that the authoritative nature of writing can be used as a tool of erasure.

continued on next page . . .

Writing Approaches & Practices

... continued

PhDivas (Liz Wayne and Christine “Xine” Yao). 2020. “Degrees of Difference: WOC Graduate Experiences with Denise Delgado & Kim McKee (S5E15).” Podcast. Accessed December 4, 2020. <https://phdivaspodcast.wordpress.com/2020/09/30/s5e15-degrees-of-difference-woc-graduate-experiences-with-denise-delgado-kim-mckee/>.

McKee, Kimberly D. and Denise A Delgado. 2020. *Degrees of Difference: Reflections of Women of Color on Graduate School*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

This podcast episode discusses the experiences of women of color (WOC) in academia as they reflect on navigating graduate school and beginning their careers as junior faculty. Although this conversation is based on the book *Degrees of Difference: Reflections of Women of Color on Graduate School* (2020), the podcast is included as an annotation to bring attention to podcasting as an effective and inclusive method of writing. Skillfully edited and collected by McKee and Delgado, the book draws on the experiences of the contributors to create a collective voice. The editors of the book, speaking with PhDivas Yao, ruminate on the issues academics of color face, discuss what is at stake when WOC speak out, and underline that this topic is more important than ever in the current moment.

Both the book and the podcast are strong examples of how fruitful collective writing and conversations can be. Reading memoir-style writing and then listening to a conversation in real time gives the reader a sense of connection to the subject material by framing the discussion in a skillful, artful, and accessible way. Additionally, the collaborative nature between the discussants stands out from other writing, not just because of the extremely important subject matter, but also because of the demonstrated richness of thought collectivity and collaboration can foster, which is so important for writers of all genres.

Wulff, Helena, ed. 2016. *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Berghahn.

This edited volume by Helena Wulff is a collection of sixteen articles divided into four sections. Each chapter focuses on the issue of writing in anthropology and other disciplines involving ethnographic fieldwork in the twenty-first century. It aims to address two specific issues of writing: First, it identifies and discusses different writing styles and genres with which anthropologists engage, such as cultural journalism, fiction writing, and new media forms (e.g., blogs and social media). Second, it suggests considering new ways of writing across and within genres. The authors of this volume delineate the disparities between academic writing and other non-academic styles of writing, such as different genres organizing texts differently, limitations and control on texts and content, accessibility and attractiveness to a wider readership, and skills and strategies needed to work within these genres. This volume can be a very good resource for graduate students to familiarize themselves with different styles and genres, and to develop their own writing approach.

Visit *SEM Student News* at semsn.com to find cross-published articles, back issues, submission guidelines, staff information, resource lists, and more.

SEM {STUDENTNEWS}


Eugenia Siegel Conte, Editor & Design/Layout

Eugenia is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. After completing an MA in Ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University, researching identity in choral music and performance in Oahu, Hawai'i, she broadened her scholarly interests to include voice studies and sound studies, and how they may be applied to choral musical practice. Current projects focus on her fieldwork experiences singing with and observing semi-professional and professional choirs in North America and Europe.


Jesse Freedman, Assistant Editor

Jesse is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Riverside. His research draws on historical and ethnographic methods to explore the role of the *nueva canción* movement in the political identity of Chilean communities in exile in East Germany and other Soviet Bloc states during the Chilean military dictatorship. Jesse holds a BM and MM in classical guitar performance from Guilford College and the University of Southern California, respectively.


Katherine Morics, Copy Editor

Katherine is an independent scholar living in Austin, TX. She received her MA in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her master's thesis explored the concept of the local in contemporary ethnomusicological scholarship, and its potential utility in approaching the live music scenes of the border city of El Paso, Texas. She plays the violin, and was an active member of the *son jarocho* ensemble at UCSB.


Samuel Chan, Associate Editor

Samuel is a PhD student in music at New York University. He received his MA in music/integrative studies from UC San Diego and his BA in music with first-class honors from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has presented his work on musical hatred, vocal failure, sonic racialization, and digital circulation in conferences in Finland, Hong Kong, and around the US. His current research focuses on global music and voice studies, Sinophone studies, media anthropology, and gastromusicology.


Wangcaixuan (Rosa) Zhang, Associate Editor

Rosa is a PhD student in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh. She holds a BA in music from Emory University and an MA in ethnomusicology from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she completed her thesis, "Buddha's Songs: Musical Practices in Taiwanese Buddhist Renaissance." Rosa's primary interest is Chinese popular music and the rise of singing contest reality shows. She is currently investigating how reality shows construct a "Voice of China" and a narrative of the "China Dream."

SEM {STUDENTNEWS}



Niall Edwards-FitzSimons, Associate Editor

Niall is a PhD candidate working on unceded Gadigal land at the University of Sydney, where he also tutors in courses on Australian music, popular music, music media and digital music techniques. His doctoral research is focused on the concept of togetherness in Acehese sitting dances, in pursuit of which he has worked with dance groups across Aceh and in Jakarta, Sydney and Melbourne. He is a musician, beatmaker/DJ, and longtime broadcaster and volunteer with Sydney's Radio Skid Row.



Catherine Mullen, Associate Editor

Catherine is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at Indiana University. She holds a BA in ethnomusicology from Barnard College and recently completed a dual masters degree in ethnomusicology and library science at Indiana University. Her research addresses the intersection of popular music preservation and the digital, focusing primarily on the role of music archives and the affective dynamics and equitable capabilities of community-based archival initiatives.



Subash Giri, Researcher

Subash is a PhD student in ethnomusicology at the Department of Music University of Alberta. He holds three first-class Master's Degrees: Hindustani Classical Voice and Sociology from University of Nepal, and Music Management from University of Agder, Norway. He is a principal instructor of the Indian Music Ensemble at the University of Alberta. His research focuses on Nepal and India. His main areas of research interest are applied ethnomusicology; traditional music of South Asia; music and diaspora, music sustainability and cultural continuity; and music and community well-being.



Anna Wright, Researcher

Anna is a current student in ethnomusicology at the University of British Columbia, soon to begin her PhD at Brown University. She is originally from Scotland, and her research interests revolve around Scottish music (vocal and instrumental) and the ways in which this music interacts with individual and collective identity, politics, and nationalism.



Hannah Adamy, "Thoughts from the Field" Columnist

Hannah is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology and researcher for the Office of Public Scholarship and Engagement at UC Davis. She is collaborating with a group of women musicians in Sacramento as well as an international alliance of rock music camps for girls. Her research focuses on the politics of voice and voicing in intergenerational community organizing.

SEM {STUDENTNEWS}



Jon Bullock, Writer

Jon is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago. He holds a BA in religion, an MA in ethnomusicology, and an MA in music. His research interests include the interstices of music and nationalism, modernity, and global migration/diaspora. He has also written about music and religion, including music censorship within the Christian church, and various sonic phenomena within Islamic performative and theological traditions. The working title of his dissertation project is “(Re)sounding Tradition: Iraqi Kurdish Musicians and the Transformation of Musical Practice, 1923–Present.”



Sunaina Keonaona Kale, Writer

Sunaina (Kanaka Maoli/Native Hawaiian) is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She researches the ways in which reggae relates to Kanaka Maoli identity, local identity in Hawai'i and the global. She won the Robert Walser and Susan McClary Fellowship from the Society for American Music in 2019, and is currently a Charles Eastman Fellow in the Native American Studies Department at Dartmouth College.

Interested in becoming a *Student News* associate editor, writer, or researcher?
Contact the editor at semstudentnews@gmail.com to apply or to learn more.