

An (co)autoethnography story about going against the neoliberal didactic machine

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Abstract

The article is an (co)autoethnography story about a project that conducted as a teacher at the University of Szczecin in Poland. Technically, the project consisted in creating a (co)autoethnography text. The story in this article attempts to raise the question of the relationship between (co)autoethnography, emancipation and resistance to the neo-liberal didactic machine.

Keywords: autoethnography, neo-liberalism, higher education, emancipation

“Teaching is messy. Dealing with other people is always tricky: You never know for certain what they are thinking or how they will act” (Waite, 2014, p. 267).

Prolegomena to Any (Future) Resistances

We lost our voices
We are losing are voices
in the academia
academia brings for us
social dead
... neoliberal academia
individual and collective

silence

brings for us

lots of words without life

Introduction for academics

This article consciously desists from discussing the topic at the philosophical level as it would be easy to demonstrate both the emancipatory and the subordinate nature of (co)autoethnography. Beyond the real experience, chaos of life, the problem will be reduced to finding good arguments or/and reference to particular ontology and so on. In theory:

“autoethnography and critical autoethnography can be read as methodologies of resilience, resistance, and remembrance (Poulos, 2017, p. 307).

And:

“teaching the practices of autoethnography can support the development of intellectual and discursive skills that resist the neoliberalist tendency to reduce human life and meaning to a series of economic exchange (Foster, 2017, p. 321).

“Can be” does not mean “have to be”. What is clear on the theoretical level is not clear on the practical level. Emancipation is only a possibility, and everything can happen in real life. My goal is to show what had happen to/with me, when I started an autoethnographic project with students. It seems that "can be" sometimes changes to "cannot be", or, mostly, "hard to tell".

The "Autoethnography of Study" project was launched in 2013 as part of the Department of General Didactics. It takes place in Andragogy classes. It covers the students of master's degree programs. The task of the participants is to create

an autoethnographic text for study that would be a chapter of a joint book (until now only one 18-person group has created a joint book to be published in next year).

Organization of work is flexible and subject to constant negotiations. Students can write on their own or in a group. The problem of autoethnographic article also gets on its own. It is possible to withdraw from the project. This flexibility caused the number of the group to fluctuate between 40 and 5. Most of the participants were women. Most students came from small towns and villages located near Szczecin. There was also a student from Ukraine, who resigned from writing due to poor knowledge of Polish.

Organization can be chaotic. There is no one method, each group requires a different approach, students bring different troubles and issues, they like or do not like / understand or do not understand (co)autoethnography (or just do not like me or do not understand me). In fact, every meeting was/is an event. Each event is unique. As an event, meeting with another person is also unclear, confusing and mysterious. I try to show it in this article.

What I experienced during meetings with the group modified my original assumptions. It is at the level of relationships, meetings, that reveal what really matters. And it was my experience of working with students that made it impossible for me to clearly and accurately answer the question of the emancipatory character of (co)autoethnography. Some of reviewers say that they are confused reading this text. Good. Me too. I was confused while making this project and writing this article. One of them said also, about the original version of this article, also that it is not clear, that it failed as a pedagogical experiment ... so confusing... Honestly, I do not know. I just share my

uncertainty, experience. I just invited you to participate in this event hoping you feel it.

The Project is not (I hope) a scientific experiment, it is also not evidence-based education, “which we can see that it produces the effects we want it to produce” (Ruitenbergh, 2017, p. 2), it is not “social engineering” (Ibidem, p. 3), but it is (I hope) a study (Lewis, 2013).

I do not even know how actually this method was used by the participants. I have to deal with flexibility, experimentality of the autoethnography and with problem of the criteria (whether it is good autoethnography or not; a reflexive note or a scientific article). As Adams, Jones and Ellis stressed: “evaluation criteria are political: they privilege some voices and research projects while discouraging and silencing other voices and projects” (Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015, p. 102).

Philosophical, theoretical certainty has replaced creative uncertainty. Since I believe that every good autoethnography has to be a co-autoethnography, and because the project taught me humility and awareness of the particularity of my knowledge, I invited one of the project participants to share her story. It is possible that she also brought not only her opinion ... or ... maybe... she brought something else. The passages written by the student are marked in italics.

This article is (co)autoethnographic, experimental writing, not a report. In my opinion writing in a non-auto-ethnographic way about autoethnography leads to contradictions resulting from important assumptions about science or writing. It needs to be stressed, that “writing is not an innocent practice” (Denzin, 2009, p. 116).

Science, writing, research, interpretation, teaching - all of them are deeply political. Choosing a non-traditional report and construction of article denied making a clear, solely intellectual interpretation; it is political act. It is act against the commodification of knowledge and research as power.

If I choose a typical, positivist scientific style of narration I will have lost the truth of event. “we can never predict what other people might think, say, or do. Nor can we establish singular, stable, or certain “truth” claims about human relationships. Social life is messy, uncertain, and emotional. If our desire is to research *social* life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion” (Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015, p. 9). So, I write (co)autoethnography as a text as the best way to show what happened. It is open to chaos, event, other voices... it is performative writing. Denzin stressed: “(...) performative writing is evocative, reflexive, multivoiced, it crisscrosses genres, is always partial and incomplete” (Denzin, 2009, p. 231). Such writing creates space for other voices, experience, and invites the creation of own story. Because it is not only one story, it is a mix of many stories.

There are a lot of voices. All of these voices I hear, might hear, should hear. I note them during the project, I remember from my dreams. But, these are not all voices. There are much more... I think so. Voices I have never heard. Voices whispered in the dark. In secret communities that I do not have access to.

Opening

I want to tell you about voices. About the impossibility of speaking, and the desire for words. About the path that goes. About the desires that possibly were only mine. About the illusion of being together and that only trusting delusions enables them to be made real.

I want to tell you about the voices. Many voices. How we tried to restore their meaning, to listen to the stories and to create them, to change what we heard or even worse: leaving words deprived of the sense ... speech that always fits into what is. As if we could only say “yes”, never saying no. And our “yes” sounding like “ye-a” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 178). Our “yes” has become and becomes a denial of life; “yes” is giving consent to existential and social death. Consent to the “reduction of education to job training” (Lewis, 2012, p. 846) and to “survival-of-the-fittest ethos” (Giroux, 2016, p. 24).

I will start with the story of my educational path. How did it happen that I attempted to use (co)autoethnography in academic didactics¹. Then I will discuss what was going on when I invited others to come with me to get off the highway into the jungle, so we could make our path by walking.

Confession of partisan faith

I have no belief in the university as an institution. I am not filled and have never been filled with a pious feeling towards this illusory temple of knowledge. I also did not believe that there was an academic pedagogy that liberates (before something change in me... before I start the project). I saw the real emancipatory didactics in what Lewis describes as a pedagogy of the street: in radical democracies, in being directly on the streets, in the creation of the world (Lewis, 2012). I did not see emancipatory practice in the study of Marx’s “Capital”. Moreover, academic education was not only sterile but also dangerous. By learning to read properly, it was able to make Capital as a textbook to enslave, or just another theoretical work (Clever, 2000). Yes, you had to be suspicious, both towards the university itself and the knowledge it creates.

I see the university as an element of a capitalist society that subordinates people under capital. It works like a didactic machineⁱⁱ (Laskowski, 2011, Szwabowski, 2014a), which is modified depending on the transformations of capitalism. Whether we are dealing with citizens or the entrepreneurial self, it is produced for the purposes of state and capital (Althusser, 1971).

I sharpened my critical theory writing subsequent texts. Unfortunately, as a consequence, it only led to sterile resistance, which deepened my sense of hopelessness and resignation. Especially since my hope in radically democratic social movements has been extinguished by the growth of nationalist movements. Streets, like the universities, were taken over in Poland by the right wing.

Being an anarchist without a social movement and working at university, I asked myself whether I could take up resistance. I read books written by critical pedagogues, but it was difficult to translate this into concrete action. As a philosopher of pedagogy, I think, I was perceived by students as a man of abstract problems, someone who is multiplying problems that are not interesting for anyone besides himself and maybe a small group of similar freaks. "It is philosophy", students said. Which means: "It is not for us". My position in the university made it clear from the beginning that those who thought otherwise were silent, and refused to enter into discussion. Besides, whenever I entered into a discussion, questioning the ideology of students, there was resistance. We did not start on a common path, but we separated in apparent agreement. It was their survival strategy in a split, hierarchical institution where feminist views could bring problems during the exam. But I learned about it later when I started the project of "The autoethnography of study", as well as how quickly they learn to simulate dialogue in response to the pseudo-openness of lecturers.

My didactics was hopeless, I think, although the scores I've received have always been above good. (This is one of those administrative appearances, I score them, they score me, though we know it does not matter). I was copying the experiences I understood as examples of “good didactics”, I taught constructivism using transmission style; I taught critical thinking by providing ‘the proper interpretation’ of Adorno. My voice filled the room, time passed, lecture ended, and I could go back to more meaningful activities, that is, writing articles. I did not even think that I could actually support a neo-liberal machine.

But that’s how it was. I was not dangerous to the system, I did not contribute in any way to a utopia. At the same time I could not give up my dreams of a better world and a different education. This split caused a crisis. I began to feel constant tiredness, teaching became less and less a pleasant duty ... I became a word processor. With the increasing feeling of the nonsense of my work. Fewer and fewer students came to my lectures. I knew I had to change something ...

Eye opening

A breakthrough for me was when I discovered research called “workers’ inquiry”, especially in their radical version. Christopher Wellbrook notes that workers’ inquiry not only provides an alternative to traditional research but also shows the limits of academic radicalism. It is a tool to “rebuild the working class” (Wellbrook, 2014, p. 358), and not by external action, but by the autonomous activity of working people.

Autonomous activity leads to the abolition of division into researchers and those undergoing research, as well as into “intellectual and militant, discourse and practice” (Roggero, 2014, p.512). This abolition of division is very important. First, the division itself is the effect of capitalism, the element of the machinery of exploitation. Second, the transition to workers, to participation in life and

struggles, makes it possible to understand the practices and struggles of the proletariat (Pihet, Cavazzini, 2013). Workers' inquiry has no representation – these are not “researchers” that talk about “natives” but “natives” that speak for themselves. The Wildcat magazine emphasizes that research should not be made from the “outside”, but rather within the working class (Wildcat, 2007). When describing this tradition Jarosław Urbański states that:

“The question of what the working class is, was supposed to be answered first and foremost by the ones directly concerned. A researcher was to become one of them” (Urbański, 2014, p. 24).

By becoming one of them, the disappearance of division, establishes completely different relationships of power in the field of knowledge. First of all, the knowledge disappears, as does a privileged perspective - the differences are on the same level and they are of equal importance. In other words, all voices are allowed and they are not subject to hierarchicalization. Second, the research field is not considered as a space to acquire and transform knowledge into a commodity that is circulating in the academic market but as a learning opportunity where knowledge is produced and used by the producers themselves. Third, knowledge is not surrounded by the divine nemesis, raised to the altar nor praised by the faithful. It is not paradigmized and therefore not fetishised (Szwabowski, 2014b), but it is constantly profaned and thus freely available (Agamben, 2007). It cannot be used as an act of discipline, but as one of the instruments of emancipation.

Workers' inquiry is the expression of the left-constructivist paradigm in education: workers' knowledge is not considered as worse, or as an expression of false consciousness. On the contrary - it is valued and their experience can be the only basis for the development of emancipatory thought. In addition,

knowledge is not something that exists outside the world, but it is part of everyday life, developed through dialogue and experimentation with ways of life. Due to the equality of voices, the teacher, the intellectual person disappears as a separate figure. In workers' inquiry everyone is a student, and everyone is a teacher - everyone learns from each other in the militant community of friends (Colectivo Situaciones). Stephen Shukaitis, David Greaber, Erik Biddle in the Constituent Imagination handbook state that:

"Militant research is not a specialized task, a process that only involves those who are traditionally thought of as researchers. It is an intensification and deepening of the political. Militant research starts from the understandings, experiences, and relations generated through organizing, as both a method of political action and as a form of knowledge" (Shukaitis, Greaber, Biddle, 2007, p. 9).

As ironically noticed by the editors of the cited handbook, such research raises the imagination, transforms the world around us and is based on the direct experience of living people rather than being objectively referred to in scientific journals. Workers' inquiry, especially in its modern, radical varieties, falls outside of officially established science, and even opposes it, especially the positivist model. Workers' inquiry is not a method in the traditional sense; it is rather a perspective, a philosophical attitude that uses and modifies qualitative research techniques. Autoethnography, which is much more present in Polish pedagogy (see. Szwabowski, 2016), seems to be one of the methods that interacts with the spirit of inquiry.

In the perspectives of workers enquiry and autoethnography we deal with:

- Valuing personal narratives
- Treating personal narratives as a source of knowledge and theory
- Valuing and strengthening the voices marginalized before

- Blurring the division between science and art, social and personal, private and political, cultural and biological
- Problematizing the status of researcher
- Questioning the traditional division of disciplines
- Rejecting classical forms of evaluation
- Emphasizing the practical nature of the inquiries carried out
- Responding to the “representation crisis”
- Political involvement on the part of democracy and those excluded (see. Szwabowski 2016, Szwabowski, in print).

The above harmony of perspectives was one of the reasons for choosing autoethnography as a method in a given project. First of all, autoethnography seemed to me to be a very democratic method and quite cheap to use. However, it does not mean it is easy. I am far from stating that this is not a method for everyone. Maybe not for everyone at any time and place. After all, we do not always want or have the power to speak. Nevertheless, it is possible for anyone to be able to tell about their experiences, their reflections. In this sense, (co)autoethnography can be a practice to develop and strengthen knowledge/democracy rather than knowledge/power (Biesta, 2012). Second, autoethnography seems to be democratic and emancipatory just by starting from one’s own knowledge, experience, where I study myself, not others. It is therefore self-education, which abolishes the division, deprives us from knowledge, understanding, the story and thus life, community and the world.

When planning and running an autoethnography project, it seemed to me that autoethnography would trigger an educational process, an alternative learning that would be transformative in the aforementioned sense. It would make

academic education more personal and more practical - although not necessarily in the market sense.

“We tell stories in order to live” (Didion, 1979, p. 11 cited in Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015, p. 1). This quote opens up the latest autoethnography handbook. These few words reflect the essence of the research undertaken within the project. I wanted to start living in the academy again, I wanted to make knowledge more alive ... In a divided, isolated world of lonely individuals, I wanted to create space for the community. (Co)autoethnography was supposed to be a realization of the pedagogy of solidarity.

“What autoethnography is teaching me today is this: telling our stories is a way for us to be present to each other; the act provides a space for us to create a relationship embodied in the performance of writing and reading that is reflective, critical, loving, and chosen in solidarity” (Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015, p. 5)

The Cartesian division, manifested both in the vision of science separated from the arts, the mind from the body and the emotions, is not only theoretically wrong but destructive to the human personality (Damasio, 1995). The cutting that is the part of adapting to the existing social order leads to the breaking of the relationship, the establishment of the society of war and division. Personal and social reintegration is both the transformation of the self and society as such (Gilligan, 2011). Thus positivism, which has gone far beyond the revolutionary spirit of Comte, and which appears to be apolitical, is in fact a methodology that supports conservative positions, reactionary and repressive policies both in the field of science and beyond. Denzin and Lincoln, after Lather, call this weave the “Bush science” (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005).

Autoethnography breaks with this understanding of science, destroys it by proposing its own concepts of knowledge, research or involvement. There is no such thing as objectivity, a fact independent of the observer, the context.

Knowledge is not just data, information, but emotions, something that has a subjective character, is part of life. The research is not only a reflection of what is, but an attempt to understand what is experienced - and interference with this experience.

Dwayne Custer defines autoethnography as a transformative method that transforms a writer, his (sic) understanding of time, spaces, himself (sic) and others. It is the processing of trauma, as well as the development of sensitivity, the creative power that allows to influence the surrounding world.

"Autoethnography is a transformative research method because it changes time, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honors subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits."(Custer, 2014, p. 11).

The emphasis was placed on (co)autoethnography, which was supposed to further enhance the transformative, pedagogical and political dimension of research (Chang, Ngunjiri, Hernandez, 2013). (Co)autoethnography requires recognition not only of one's own voice, but also of others' learning, and developing forms of communication that do not marginalize or favor any voice. It teaches negotiating meanings through confrontation, as well as respect for the delicate interior of others, and trust by opening oneself.

The (co)autoethnography approach involves not only what is intellectual, but also what is emotional. At the same time, however, it combines the social and the individual. "To write about the self is to write about social experience"

(Ellis, 2004, p. 34). By studying one's own situation, we study the social context, one's own location in the whole (Hold, 2003). It is a writing that involves emotions and also wants to influence the recipients. This is writing from the heart (Keça, 2014). Writing, which not only informs, is not only emotional, but also performative, which also reveals itself when trying to impact the recipient. The reader is neither passive nor pure minded, but an intellectual and emotional participant in the text, who contributes to it enabling emancipation and solidarity (Sparkes, 2000).

Florelle D'Hoest and Tyson E. Lewis note that studying experience requires a different practice of writing, a break with the typical way of constructing scientific texts (D'Hoest, Lewis, 2015). The projects undertaken by the students and me are consistent with the method of creating non-reports, non-articles, which are reports-articles. Such writings are based on another vision of science. First, it breaks with the masochistic belief that the more boring (for the author and the reader), the more academic it is; the less personal, the more true; the more references, the smarter. Second, it treats writing not only as information, but as an experience that changes individuals. Evocative, experimental, non-emotional writing not only blurs the boundaries between art and science, not only questions the social divisions within the scientific field, but also the private and public division, thus problematizing the work of late capitalism - this is political intervention in separation (Clough, 2000).

Autoethnography itself can also be the basis for critical teaching. Danuta Gołębniaak notes that it can be a method in which everyday knowledge is combined with academic knowledge. Knowledge in autoethnography is not an abstraction, but it becomes existentially significant and immediately practical (Gołębniaak, 2014). In addition, as we have mentioned earlier, the use of (co)autoethnography as a method and the basis for teaching requires the

development of specific relationships within the group (Ellis, 2004; Chang, Ngunjiri, Hernandez, 2013). In addition, it requires modifying the disciplinary division of space, time, knowledge, experience. It leads to power relations, both in the classroom or in the lecture/exercise room, in the broader context of the institution and the social system. In a soft sense, autoethnography challenges the bureaucratic university with its education and the production of “dead letters”.

Autoethnography postulates cooperation in the place of competition which is promoted by neo-liberalism. It reproduces bonds against capitalist isolation, and points to the link where extreme individualism is promoted. When starting with ‘self’, it sees this ‘self’ in the context of the environment, which determines and prevents certain ways of life, shapes us, transforms, distorts ... In place of knowledge for statistics, knowledge without subject it develops forms of cognition that have existential and political significance. Autoethnography is a call for a bottom-up transformation of self, science, university, and the world. Rebuilding “the broken rhizome”, it is “communist pedagogy” (Pospiszyl, 2016, about the broken rhizome see also Deleuze 1998).

... but it can break this rhizome, isolate, support
‘self’ separated from the environment ... nomads are protected only by thin tent
material ... and their mobility ...
...autoethnography, another subordinate tool for us students, us humans, to teacher, to
his visions ...
... another way to take away what is intimate in us, to publicize, to display, to judge ...
after all, he judges us ...

In (co)autoethnography I saw the method, the path of emancipation. Something that opposes the vampire-university and social and existential death that the neo-liberal teaching machine spreads. Something that will make sense of our words, our stories, our meetings and work inside the academy. As it turned out

it walking this path was not as easy as I thought. I'm not sure if it brought me where I wanted. I'm not sure if I could recover my words, if we met. If our research ... if we researched ... or if we created forms of knowledge and organization? I do not know. I'm still walking on the back roads, we're still walking, not sure if it's the right path. Or if we walk together on the same path.

The Voices

One of the purpose of the project was activation of voicesⁱⁱⁱ. I treated my students as dispossessed, exploited folk of academy. And the voices were activated. From different sides. The voices, which were coming from unknown places, the voices in my head. There were not only recorded voices, laying into a story, but also voices spoken during and after the project. Voices of participants, as well as outside voices, professorial voices, voices of power, voices of the spirit of academic prestige...

FIRST VOICE

I am telling a story to get you out of the way. I do not know why I am here, why you talk to me, and why we have to talk to each other, multiply difficulties that do not translate anything. I already said when and why I came to university, what activities I had. And you ask about the meaning when it all ...

SECOND VOICE

Well, supposedly, why I should speak from myself, these are studies, it's not a therapeutic group. Do I really have to give everything for power, even myself, under the guise of some emancipation? Do I have to open myself to strangers, show my feelings, enter into the most intimate areas, because he wants it, like a man, access to me, and he demands with a smile, more and more deeper, open yourself more. I look at the ceiling. I answer the half-signs. He pretends to have an orgasm.

THIRD VOICE

(sitting girl with folded arms)

Shall we finish it?

FOURTH VOICE

So the university still exists. This meeting ... finally something different than the mechanical rewriting of textbooks read aloud. There is still a place for the meetings in the university, for the community.

FIFTH VOICE

I will not write ... there is no community here. There is no space for my and others voice. Is it possible to be honest in the crowd?

PROFESSORIAL VOICE

Why would I read that? What do they, these students, have interesting to say. Well, unless you do some analysis, because that's how it will be. In my opinion it is a waste of time. It is some kind of fun, not serious science. You should focus on your tenure-book.

DEAN'S VOICE:

I heard that you instructed students to write and publish texts that were critical of our university. We are really worried about it, if you know what I mean.

SIXTH VOICE

What do we learn from this? What do we need it for?

SEVENTH VOICE

The curriculum should be realized. Prepare us for the exam.

EIGHTH VOICE

Do I need to correct it? How many times? We are not on the journalism studies.

OTHER PROFESSORIAL VOICE

Their true stories are somewhere else than you think. It is not the text you read. Their autoethnography is a strategy of avoiding your project by taking part in it. That is what is happening next.

VOICE IN HEAD

These are not good stories, what I read... These are not autoethnographical texts...

VOICE FROM NOWHERE

It is not this.

NINTH VOICE

You say that it is not my voice, that you do not like what I wrote. Or maybe that is exactly my voice. Maybe that is how I am narrating. Maybe this is my existence. So ugly for you. For your schoolmates. Too flat. Not really subtle.

TENTH VOICE

Would you finally start teaching us? It could have been fun for a while. But it is no fun anymore. It is already exhausting.

ELEVENTH VOICE

We just want to pass. C grade is enough for us.

WORKMATES VOICE

I heard that you tell students to write some weird texts, apparently some complaints were made. Be careful.

TWELFTH VOICE

I sneak by the story. Silence is my shelter. My liberation from the command to speak, which later is graded by such Szwabowski, analysed in his emancipatory labs. He takes my story away, or, when I say it, he transforms it to fit in with his thinking about freedom.

THIRTEENTH VOICE

I will no longer write anything. I had to write something so I wrote. I do not want to change anything about it.

FOURTEENTH VOICE

We would work on it for sure. Finally we could talk about what we really think. Stop pretending. Because you also do not pretend that everything is fine.

FIFTEENTH VOICE

I cooked the soup. What's great about this? I went to the class. That's it.

SIXTEENTH VOICE

I know that you would not like my voice. So fill me with words that you like.

“I would prefer not to” (Melville, 2009, p. 26)

“When on the first Andragogics class, Dr. Szwabowski started talking about the project, I did not know what he wanted from us. He was talking and talking, he was spinning around the subject with no result. He was talking for 1.5 hours,

about the same thing, and still we did not understand him. On the next class we had to make a decision. We did not take it - he kept talking. We have decided that we would write half of a page and see what would come out of it"

(Wolinska, in print)

He spoke spoke, spoke

He spoke endlessly

He filled us with words

Why ... Why do you say nothing? I want to hear your voices so much...

ALL VOICES

But we are talking. (Moment of silence) What is wrong with you again?

VOICE OF READER

This is... is very confusing... could be clarified... what... what is happening here?

Paulina: *Why we are asked about being silent "on paper"? Why did not Oskar Szwabowski (hereinafter referred to as PhD) speak? Why did he only "repeat" so often? As though he was afraid to realize his "dreams" ...As though he was afraid of us.*

Unfortunately, when we try to convey new thought or idea we have to become "leaders" of the whole "rebellion". And here I have to point out that there has been quite a big misunderstanding. So PhD has become a "leader" even without knowing it. This happened because the part of people who did not understand that the guiding idea was "giving voice for students", found another idea and pinned it to the PhD. O. Szwabowski and made him "the leader" of anti-

university revolt. From my observation, that PhD's project was treated as only his project so unfortunately it was considered to be compatible with the views of its founder.

Leadership should consist of conveying your thought and idea in the most credible and clear way. Attempting to take a "subversive" action must involve an open and honest message about what is going to happen. Non-standard actions cause resistance - it is not known if the person behind these action is not "crazy".

... I also was not sure if it is not crazy. The project was one big chaos, which was led differently in each group and modified during the course. It was not planned. Only three elements were repeated: introduction to the method, writing and commenting. The rest was completely chaos... or (no) cooperation.

And so many voices in my head.

Illusions

I meet a student who fell in love with (co)autoethnography. I tell her that this year the project is constantly falling apart. I cannot make contact with the group, that I get texts that are nothing; it might be noticed that they were written under pressure and they are deprived of their own voice. Every meeting with these students is a struggle against resistance to the project. They supposedly agreed, but now they behave like they are forced by me. The student said: maybe you should sit with them and present your vision. I answer that in my opinion it is too late. Let them just hand over the papers. Let it be over. Another group is better, they work better. The student curses involuntarily. I just do not have the strength, I cannot make contact with them, I add. She nods and she leaves. And we were about to create an academic utopia, an academy of friends.

They come. They leave.

After the semester, most of us do not talk to each other. Maybe because we do not have to. We become strangers again. In the crowd, on the cramped hall, little courtesy.

....

Paulina: *I accept the invitation. I appear as a person. I think and tell the story, I analyze, I try to be in a relationship.*

Feeling the impression of strangeness may indicate that there was no real "intimacy". However, what "we are creating" is a manifestation of the evolving community. That was not created already, actually it could not be dissolved ... This "academy" is just beginning to form. Common writing and listening to "words" is not an illusion it is reality.

I will tell a story that has changed something in my life, a story that goes on and almost unnoticed removes the chain of "academic label" from me. Assuming that a person cannot be completely objective, I have no right to speak for others. All I can do is to describe what I've heard and seen and felt. I am reading:

I.
Pretending
to be doing
overlapping narratives
nodding
which does not mean agreement

multi-voice - because I did not take the pills

because silence is cold

hush is insult

refusal and resistance

escape into silence and escape in speaking

personal mystification of reality

II.

Pretending

to be involved

something changes,

something's transformed into something

someone in something

something in someone

that politics, pedagogy, emancipation and science

III.

hallucinations

maybe ulcers

crisis

indigestion

depression

pretending

that truth

that graphomania

that pretence

II.

a few words

between

and some shaking hands

A lot of strands to cut

A lot of

...

“I know that some of the students from this academic year have a frivolous approach to the matter and wrote the paper during the break before class. I know that for the part of writing half a page was a challenge, no one likes to write about themselves, share their thoughts. Autoethnography is talking about oneself” (Wolinska, in print)

Paulina: *I answer.*

PhD tells us about (co)autoethnography, his project and his idea. These classes are not different from other "ordinary" classes. Nothing catches, rises, provides the atmosphere of tension (or any other atmosphere). I do not understand much. Perhaps it is because the PhD is obviously exhausted with didactic work (at least I was thinking like that then). I said "well. Okay. Interesting (I guess) idea. I went home and read what was going on with all of that. I have just realized a little and I have found it is really worth to get involved. The professor's fault was that he could not explain what he meant by talking about the project (about book written with (co)autoethnography method)... And unfortunately, the problem was also that some people were not going to find out what they were really about to do and what it really was about.

The fact that someone did not find out - it's nothing. The fact that he or she continued writing without knowing it was a problem. Continuous questions: "But what is going on? Oh God...eh." And various incomprehensible phrases addressed to the unaware author of the project (PhD). Some fear, the appearance of the relationship ... the inability to break through the wall of "the department". The emancipatory project started within a rigid collar of traditional education. It is as if the wedding began with a funeral march. I thought it was not good. But still nothing lost. There is an idea somewhere, where a grain has been thrown.

We have determined what we would be writing about, but we have not determined much about how we should write it and basically why. It should have been said openly (but it was not). Maybe for PhD it was somehow understandable what he meant, but for me, without psychic ability, reading in other people's minds was impossible. It looked as though the PhD wanted to say something, but at the same time he did not want to, because he was afraid that then he would impose the way of thinking on us and that everything would end in a catastrophe. And so he introduced the strategy of "resistance." And suspected us of doing the same. No conversation means reluctance to talk. Does he not want to talk? So what does he want? The apparent stoppage of the project was due to the fact that a real dialogue had not started. As if each side was afraid of something.

I did not suspect PhD of a secret experiment or for writing something because he had to. I knew he was headed by an idea, but I did not know what. How could I know that it was about "liberating" students, giving them the right to speak, if PhD seemed to be equally enslaved. What did I feel? Uncertainty. A bit like when someone says: jump, it is safe, but he does not jump himself.

Splitting hands?

What is the strength of our voices? What can change our stories? Do they transform us? Do students start to see the world differently, or can they become convinced in their beliefs? Or maybe nothing changes? Words have been spoken ... and that is enough. We listened to ourselves, but did it change our worlds?

Paulina: *The success is that those who could not speak so far start talking. The creation of space for forgotten voices is the second - after the idea-manifestation of emancipation. No one would go out on the streets, fight for their rights if they had no hope and faith in what they were doing. Another noted pages... It was my-our- "street". By analogy with trying to show my views on the street, here I had a lot of fears. Whether I had anything to "praise" or "stigmatize," I was supposed to be me - so subjective (because I think) I am.*

Griff Foley notes that emancipation is not a linear, smooth process. It is not something we get, once and for all (Foley, 1999). We also do not have a recipe for emancipation. We are not in a position to draw up a technical description of the didactic process to liberate. This is a process made by the enslaved authors.

While the propagators of the (co)autoethnography point to its emancipatory and transformative character, its link with democracy and social justice, the launch of excluded voices, and the rise of social sensitivity, it is important to emphasize that this is merely a postulate. (Co)autoethnography is not an automatic method. Its implementation is a project exposed to many problems. This is not a positivistic method, which can assume a certain result after the execution of certain instructions. (Co)autoethnography is experimenting, wandering, creating. For this reason it is difficult to determine whether it is indeed emancipatory. My project experience indicates that this is not always like this..

Sometimes even some stories reinforced stereotypes, they were exclusionary or market-oriented narratives. For example, one of the students wrote about beneficiaries of social assistance using neo-liberal rhetoric (Animucka, Kupis, in print).

In another text, a student described a pupil with mental disorders that she had met during internship, compared him to an animal and treated him as an obstruction to the teacher's work^{iv}. Moreover, while writing a report, one of the participants compared me to Steve Jobs, and described the entire project as a process of emancipating from a bureaucratized university that does not fit to the market (Kaczmarek, Madys, Pławski, et al, in print). In such situations, someone else had to appear and start a dialogue. That person confronted the narrator with their story. We went beyond autoethnography. And sometimes we just drift apart.

Of course you can say that a good autoethnography manifests itself in its emancipatory, pro-democratic and prosocialistic nature. The only problem: how to measure it? How to measure the power of emancipation? It seems that there is no such measure. Sometimes our emotions are invested too much in non-genuine illusions, and our narrations are masked, becoming invisible for the narrator and for the listener, becoming social structures supporting inequality. For example, Ellis's thoughts on the transformation of academic work imply a vision of "good work" that would support exclusion by non-questioning, not challenging one's own academic identity (Ellis, 2011).

Paulo Freire notes that sharing experiences, and concentration on individual experiences brings education to group therapy, to improving the well-being of participants. Freire believes that exchanging experiences requires a social and political context (Macedo and Freire 1995). It seems that autoethnography, if it

would not be an autobiography, also requires a broader context, placing its situation on a broader social and ideological background. Few participants have reached this stage. As if their ego lived in much narrowed relationships, limited to a narrow group. The cultural, social or institutional and inhuman ideologies – all of that were somewhere beyond in their stories, functioned in another reality. As if what was personal existed in its own kingdom and it was subject only to its own laws. Possibly, the theories were added on the basis of dead references. They entered to the text as a separate narrative. There appeared summaries and reconstructions, but they did not interact with parts of their own experiences, in no way transforming their understanding. Most of them were not able to work with theory of using autoethnography. Those who succeeded did not always go to change their own awareness, and sometimes even stiffened their worldview. Both in the texts and in the project discussions, they used market discourse. My interventions either reinforced one's worldviews by citing references, research references, narrative sharpening, or silence, refusing further discussion. It seems that both the division of reason and feeling into the personal and social story and the theory, as well as that the ideological video and schemas are so strongly rooted and that transformational work requires much longer time and engaging not only words but also body. It also requires respect for others' ideology, and working with them, not as they know less, but as they know different, with the hope that solidarity is a value stronger than emotional investment in specific world views.

(Co)autoethnography turns up the multiplicity of equal voices, tense diversity and fragile commonality. We used the strategy of taking into account the diversity of voice and their equality, allowing for different narratives of the project by writing the joint report “Kolektywne majsterkowanie” [Collective tinkering] (Kaczmarek, Madys, Pławski, et al, in print). In addition, as Carol Gilligan notes, psychological resistance may turn into political resistance

(Gilligan, 2011). It is possible that the division of the rhetoric is accomplished through social order and the necessity of resigning from one's own voice. And it is a condition for the political resistance of transformative character. Or otherwise, if the reproduction of production conditions is primarily related to the establishment of a specific subjectivity (Althusser, 1971), autoethnography can reveal the artificiality of our self as well as the mechanisms that create it and thereby open up the utopian perspective of subjectivity.

It seems that there is no necessary correlation between autoethnography and emancipation. But its power lies in the launch of voices and the creation of space for a more horizontal relationship. Piotr Kowzan notes that the basis of didactics is to create relationships. Critical didactics would require work on the creation of radically democratic networks, communist relations. Creating an educational community is an effort that must be made every time. The community is not only a learning network but also, if not primarily, a place of existential survival and the experience of another life. Of course, the creation of such communities does not go without problems (Kowzan 2017).

By creating space for a free exchange of ideas, even in the therapeutic dimension, the principle of pedagogy of solidarity is realized as the launching of mixed stories (Denzin, 2016). In my naive narrative, the project makes some people aware that there are no irrelevant voices. Although they resonate in cracks that are constantly at risk: either through direct intervention by authorities that do not like when somebody does something else; whether by functioning of the university: Who creates only in the cracks and for the cracks will be quickly removed, as ineffective, as a superfluous ballast with nothing to do with real science, or to earn points for publications. They are also threatened by us: fear of contact, irrational commitment, careless listening...

When I think about the (co)autoethnography project, I primarily think of those relationships that have been successful. (But also those that did not succeed). I think about the community that I have been working with and which is not a consistent, united mass, but a fragile hybrid that we continually glue through personal engagement. Are we creating the inoperative community, “community of studious play”, against the operative community “Where everyone has place within an ordered, measured whole” (Lewis, 2013, p. 139)? Are we creating the University of Friends (Rutkowiak, 2010) against neoliberal separation? Maybe this may be the power of (co)autoethnography - sometimes it creates relationships beyond the market, relationships of friendship and cooperation. It creates gaps in which alternative ways of learning can be developed and more or less successful expeditions provoked into the Empire. That may not be much. But perhaps it is in these gestures, in the splitting of a few hands, that the roots of a radically democratic social movement or even a vaccine against a nationalist and neo-liberal plague are created.

There is no need for dependency between autoethnography and emancipation. It is also difficult to separate what limits the liberation within a particular project: its organization, misunderstandings, or inadequacy of the method in a given situation, or perhaps some aspects of the method or personal issues of the participants. There is no rule for emancipation, maybe only for the bureaucracy. When we deal with real people, everything can happen. The event is mysterious, unique, unexpected. Relations between people cannot be measured. In my opinion, based on my didactic projects, co-autoethnography is not social engineering, but a practice when we try to walk together. And things just happen.

-Are you sure about it?

-I hope so. But... I do not know... maybe... my companion is only my shadow.

-Maybe, ask them.

-They lie. To me. I am not they pal.

It is worth pointing out that the university creates a hierarchy that is very difficult to be broken. Stephen D. Brookfield notes that “teachers cannot simply wish away students’ perception of their superior status” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 10). No matter what they do “teachers are viewed as different” (Ibidem, p. 11). In addition, the Polish university is much more formal and divided than the European or the American ones (Kwiek, 2015). As Marek Kwiek writes, these are university professors (Kwiek, 2017). It is a normal practice to exclude students from the academic community and to treat them as lower beings. The tradition of discipline in which he/she works is also important. Pedagogy cultivates the division into pupils (the linguistic habits they call students) and teachers. Although as a PhD I am also excluded from the academic community, my attempts to overcome the division convinced a few.

I know one thing: the project did not work for everyone the same (what was showed above in the part call “Voices”). Also the attitude towards autoethnography and the ability to use it was very different. I do not really know whether something in their awareness has changed and whether it was emancipatory. I can only say what the application of (co)autoethnography and project management has changed me. First of all, I changed my attitude toward students and teaching. At this point I have to agree with those who think that autoethnography is perfect for examining their own teaching practice (Hold, 2003; Kincheloe, McLaren, 2005; Denzin, 2006; Dyson, 2007; Miller, 2017). It must be stressed, however, that only when it becomes (co)autoethnography does

it gain transformative power. When the voice of others breaks down our self-narrative.

Paulina: *My emancipation is writing things I would not have the courage to say. It's interrupting those that I have been afraid to interrupt before.*

I think and I'm even sure that what the PhD writes is true. This project, this text has liberated him. He stopped appearing to be a "figure" and began to take on human form. I am also emancipated by (co)autoethnography but gradually in a certain way, "gently", otherwise it would not be possible.

The text we have written has become a street. The street on with the voices of: sadness, sorrow, irritability, joy ... Every voice was important – each voice belonged to someone. It is not easy to talk about yourself, but "real" talking opens us up to others. If both sides have pure intentions then the other person's words will be able to make the source of one's own reflection.

I can say that it the (co)autoethnography has the characteristics of true learning. Science does not offend the facts, does not scream: you cannot think or speak this way! True learning is open to the whole person, to his thoughts, heart, ideas. Scientifically, in the sense of derogatory terminology one could describe, for example, the functioning of the brain or the structure of a ship. However, social phenomena are governed by other laws and require the use of completely different methods, such as the (co)autoethnography, which in some way live on the "street".

The Street is a place that everyone has access to. It makes it unattractive for some people. This also happened with the project proposed by the PhD. Each of us could take part in it, everyone could write - express themselves. Massive

character has caused devaluation of the project itself. No "master of the ceremony", who would evaluate any word, who would say "this is good", "you have to think about it", etc. made that AE being treated in the wrong way. Finally, it seemed unscientific and "undemanding".

The Street is a dangerous place for those who do not follow the rules. Just as a public place requires the use of a label, the appropriate outfit. It is safer to walk on designated routes. It is more dangerous to destroy what is set by "power" as a decorative element - even if this element blocks the way to achieve the goal.

The Street is a public place in the sense that a witness of events, relationships and situations may be "theoretically every actor acting in this space" (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2005, p.104). Each exit to the streets entitles these "uneducated people" to reveal their views, for example by "demonstrations made by a single man on the street corner" (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005, p. 104). On the street there are also others "prepared", "dressed" ... Street is a place of public debate in the sense that the various types of statements (interviews) of these "wise people" also take place on the street. The danger lies in breaking rules ...

Destruction of what has been established by the "authority" - is, for example, this demonstration made by a single man (breaking a rule).

What happens when someone "unauthorized" starts talking in public (street)? His speech is distorted, the whole situation is muted, omitting something that can be called legitimate debate, e.g. in the media, in the press....

Protest

Attempting to show one's own experience has become a protest. But not against someone but something. I tried to emancipate "words". These are considered

"unreasonable", "unscientific", "non-valuable". If I gathered 1000 students and conducted research and showed some phenomenon such as depression among students, showed a tendency, etc., then somebody would consider it valuable. But writing about oneself is not able to show some principles or governing rules of the behavior of the commonalty (certain groups). Therefore, it is difficult to demonstrate the scientific value of AE, because it really is about the value of individual experience.

Pretence *What seems to be more scientific and credible? When I write that: me and my colleague from the study devote free time to e.g. walking. Or: As demonstrated by the analysis of one thousand million surveys, the most common way for students to spend free time is walking. Conclusion: Students most often go walking in their free time. But what students? Katarzyna from the Jagiellonian University? Roman from the University of Szczecin? That is why I think AE emancipates. In the sense that it draws individual experiences of a person from the sea of statistics, tables, charts. It makes the person - that was to become a machine part - a subject.*

Does anyone think of this if I write the same but this way?

When analyzing the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu, who notes that the scientific work "produces indissolubly both the legitimate product as such, i.e. as an object worthy of being materially or symbolically consumed" (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990, p. 39). It might be said that such a product is also a written "text". The text, which, if it would meet the criteria recognized by the authorities, would be literally fit for use. The author of the written text cannot decide about the usefulness of the text himself, since it is made by other actors separated from him, whose assessment is based on what was previously considered as socially valuable.

If the second form speaks more than the first one, it means that the AE is needed to "liberate" those who let themselves be "enslaved". I ask myself why something that would be written by somebody would be rated as little valuable (or not valuable if he did not invoke someone else's ideas). Whether sometimes the compulsion to search for credibility of one's own conception in other people's conception causes them to lose their original meaning ... More generally, the whole society loses something because the thought dies somewhere ...

We ourselves are afraid of stories. Our voice sounds so weak then. Taught that science is for the chosen ones, that science is only a difficult job without joy, requiring training in secret rituals and mastering a mysterious dictionary, makes us distrustful of our own stories. They gain meaning only after magical tricks. Even if you cite the “classics of autoethnography” (Sparkes, 2000; Dyson, 2007). Not only as a reference to authority, but an indication that work has been done, and that one of the magical rituals is known: directory search and abstract reading. If I am distrustful of the story, then the students recognize that I am not liberated, that I only value texts with abundant bibliography and magical words known only by the insiders? My not spoken fears may transform the project in a hidden way... The looks of students when I rate their autoethnography, when I say that it is too biographical, not enough ethnographic you ignore the social and cultural context and focus only about a narrow "I". Their look, sparkling amusement, slight disbelief ... I do not want to see their look, so I read their texts again, my voice trembles. I say that it must be stronger, more interacting ... I want this time to treat the method of autoethnography seriously. More method than their stories. They are smiling. They know it from other meetings...

Maybe I need students to liberate me, to trust the story, my own words, more than. Maybe the whole project is my way to achieve my liberation ... Liberation from being a neo-liberal didactic machine.

“Don't be afraid to make ethnography dangerous, political, and personal. Take risks.
Write from the heart as well as the head” (Bochner, Ellis, 1996, p. 42).

Notes

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- ⁱ The term didactics is more neutral word than teaching and learning. The last two are referring to didactics ideologies.
- ⁱⁱ Didactic machine work as a machine who closed world, show reality as a thing. The world is something what is given. Didactic machine made invisible process of production of the reality. Didactic machine works as a disciplinary practice, made people to fit to this world.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Other goals of the project, besides activating the voices, were the development of critical sensitivity; merging a split entity and breaking the sepulcher between "I" and "we"; treating knowledge as a part of being; developing local knowledge; recognizing the mechanism of enslavement; critical approach to student's knowledge and practice, creating horizontal relationships; promoting pedagogy of solidarity; inspiring to transform reality - utopian impulses.
- ^{iv} We do not have permission to quote this story.

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