

INTRODUCTION

ON WRITING AND WRITING WELL

Ethics, Practice, Story

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Scholars have always been writers. Anthropologists are no exception. We research. We teach. We write. We figure things out in part by writing about them. Writing is thus not merely the reporting of our results but is as much process as product. However, we have not always paid attention to writing as craft or practice, rather than thinking of it as a (formulaic) vehicle for communicating knowledge. In many disciplines, thinking of writing as a core part of scholarship is a relatively new development. Historically, some anthropologists wrote well or wrote across genres or broke conventions, but such writing was not expected. This has now changed. A narrative turn in the 1970s and the literary turn in the 1980s brought new collective energy and attention to writing, and to writing well. Writing takes time. Writing well takes time and practice. This book is about both.

What counts as good writing changes over the years. In some periods, cultural anthropologists favored a detached social scientific voice. In others, we valued a more conversational, narrative style. Currently, we've moved to a more humanistic style of writing. Yet such a style can also be found throughout the discipline, going back to the nineteenth century. We need to be careful not to homogenize writing in the past as opposed to writing now. A twenty-first-century publication date is no guarantee that a text will be livelier or more compelling than something written in the early or

mid-twentieth century. Individual style and skill are involved, as is a willingness to meet or exceed current expectations. Developing one's own style as a scholar is not a project with an end. Writing styles evolve in relation to research foci, methodological sensibilities, theoretical affinities, and, of course, the times. Over the course of a career, the aesthetics of our writing—voice, language, and imagery—may shift as much as the content, both with and against disciplinary norms.

Putting pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, is often an exercise in both joy and pain. We delight in having time to write but can be quickly frustrated by the realities of thinking through arguments, deliberating over words, and crafting and then editing sentences, paragraphs, and chapters in an effort to get them right. In this, there is a lot of history: our writing is situated in the discipline, in the community, and in our own experiences. We write for, we write with, and we write against. A lifelong love of books often prepares scholars for this. In an essay on reading and writing like a Black girl, anthropologist Signithia Fordham reflects on her efforts to write to transform the world: “The pen is the most powerful weapon of human civilization, the instrument that can be used to enslave, emancipate and everything in between.”¹ As scholars, we can use our knowledge in ways that affect people's lives, and there is thus great responsibility in writing this knowledge to be both useful and efficacious. It is our job to conduct ethical, rigorous research and to present it through clear, compelling writing.

We write as experts, experts who are perpetual students perhaps, but experts nonetheless. Expert knowledge requires a convincing demonstration of authority and thus credibility. Different audiences have their own ways to recognize and measure authority. Writing for a judge in a political asylum case is different than writing for a peer-reviewed journal, and both are different than writing an online essay for the public. Across these audiences, authority is recognized differently. Within cultural anthropology our case for ethnographic authority and knowledge involves showing the immediacy of “being there”: showing that you the researcher, the author, were in the field long enough to produce professional research. Good research might not always lead to good writing, but it is surely a precondition.

I once asked Lily King about this. She is the author of *Euphoria*, a novel about the research connections and love triangle between anthropologists Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Reo Fortune in 1930s Papua New Guinea. In 2016 King was a special guest at the American Ethnological Society annual meeting, where she spoke to an anthropological audience about her book for the first time. “For anthropologists,” I said to her, “the notion

of ‘being there’ is crucial, showing that you’ve spent enough time in the field to have gained deep knowledge. When writing *Euphoria*, what were your strategies for convincing readers that you had been there in this way?” Her facial expression revealed that this was not something she had considered, and after a pause she replied: “I didn’t want the reader to feel that I as author was there but that they were there. The goal was for the reader to feel they were there. That is what fiction does.” The need to generate this sense for the reader was as obvious to her as showing skill in being there as scholar was to me. Establishing credentials as a scholar differs from demonstrating skill as a writer of fiction. There is something to be learned here about being both a writer and a reader.

What fiction does is not necessarily the same as what anthropology does. Yet writing well matters to both. Writing amplifies what anthropology and other forms of scholarship can and should do. Writing well is also part of the desire for our reading to be enjoyable: enjoyable not solely in the sense of theoretical argument matching empirical data but also in the sense of giving pleasure in itself. If we write to be read, and not just to be counted, then how we write matters as much as what we write.

An Ethics of Writing

Anthropological writing is a form of accountability and an ethical practice. We write to share scientific findings, to tell stories that matter, and to share new insights about the human world that might change it for the better. In anthropology there is an idea that, at a minimum, a fuller, deeper understanding of the breadth of human life is useful knowledge. At a maximum, we believe this knowledge can be transformative. As an anthropologist and historian, I think of myself as a guardian of other people’s stories. The responsibility to tell the stories trusted to us is substantial. Many scholars share a sense of writing as commitment to the communities in which and with whom we do our research. Politically engaged, public scholarship requires this. It requires a commitment beyond funders or evaluators to the people whose stories we are telling, or, as my colleague Jason De León succinctly put it in a conversation we had about writing, “Writing is a commitment to people.” Yes. In my research experience, people who have taken the time to share their stories with me have done so in part because they wanted them to be known by others. Tibetan resistance army veterans told me again and again they wanted their stories to be told, to be in a book so that people around the world would read and learn their stories and, hopefully, act upon

them.² My responsibility is thus to collect stories and then to tell them, to think with them, and to do so in ways that honor the commitments I made during my fieldwork.

To do anthropological research is to learn and then tell people's stories. However, although many anthropologists currently practice anthropology this way, such has not always been the case. In earlier decades, social scientific styles of writing were more detached and were often about structures and practices rather than about the people who lived the very structures and practices the anthropologist was describing or explaining. People were part of the research but not always part of the story. I like to think that this is a past-tense thing, the sort of practice that anthropologists no longer conduct. But that is not true, as some still do. This volume is composed of scholars from across the subdisciplines who write on a wide range of topics and for whom telling people's stories matters. Telling people's stories is what we do. Who we tell them to is another important part of our scholarship.

Who makes up anthropological audiences? What audiences do we imagine, and how do they access our writing? For decades, anthropologists have fretted over how to get nonacademics to read what we write, to take anthropological knowledge and put it to use in effective and needed ways. We may agree that it is a scholarly responsibility to share "anthropological knowledge in straightforward, powerful ways," but it is not always easy to do so.³ For example, Helena Wulff writes of publishing in newspapers and magazines where her fieldwork community would actually be able to read her writing.⁴ From 1962 through 1978, Margaret Mead famously wrote a monthly column in the women's magazine *Redbook*, writing anthropology for a broad audience.⁵ Two twenty-first-century examples of anthropologists writing regularly in mainstream media are Thorgeir Kolshus's column in *Aftenposten*, the largest Norwegian newspaper, and Gina Athena Ulysse's essays in the iconic *Ms.* magazine, now collected in her book *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives*.⁶

Potential nonacademic audiences vary depending on one's research topic, but often include policy makers, journalists, politicians, one's relatives and friends, and, of course, the "general public." I always envision my students and academic colleagues as audiences, but my primary audience and first readers are from the Tibetan community with whom I do my research. Social media makes this possible, as does widespread community fluency in English, the language in which I teach and publish. Getting one's writing to dispersed and diverse communities is easier now than ever before. Yet this still requires initiative. Often it is not only about postpublication reading. It

is about sharing drafts and writing together. It is getting feedback on one's writing while it is still in progress. After writing sketches of people, I often read those passages aloud to their family members. Over the phone, sometimes across countries, I ask if this sounds like their loved one. Laughing, one woman says to me after I read some draft text aloud, "Oh yes, that's her."

Writing for nonacademic audiences and thinking of research as collaborative are not new to anthropology. The writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Laura Bohannan and Ella Cara Deloria alone make these points. However, the mid-twentieth-century adoption of a new social scientific writing style changed anthropological writing—think of the detached observer, claims to objectivity, and a mostly dry, affectless, and thus "authoritative" writing voice. Jonathan Spencer described this as "ethnographic naturalism," in which peoples are homogenized, singular claims to truth cancel out other possibilities for interpretation (anthropological or local), conditions and procedures of actual research are obscured, and an invisible, omniscient narrator speaks from a generalized point of view.⁷ As a result, instead of us writing for multiple audiences, our presumed audience shrunk as did ideas about who scholars were and how they should write. Some communities were to be researchers, and some were to be researched. Ethical standards at the time did not necessarily include communities of research as scholars or as readers.

Ethnographic writing clearly demonstrates changes in ethics over the decades. The best way to see this is by reading. One course I teach for undergraduate anthropology students is Reading Ethnography. A main course goal is to determine what makes something sufficiently ethnographic in contemporary anthropology. To assess this, we read ethnographies from the 1980s to the present, along with a series of essays about ethnography and ethnographic genres. We compare ethnographies from the 1980s and 1990s with ones from the 2000s and 2010s, consider the experimental and *Writing Culture* moment, discuss the simultaneous omission and contributions of feminist ethnography, and compare aspects of "realism" in ethnographic fiction and nonfiction. The first time I taught this course in 2012, my students and I made a list of what made something ethnographic then (as opposed to earlier decades). Our list for what ethnography needs in the present was this: anthropological purpose established via research question and argument; a direct address of issues of local concern; the articulation of insider/native points of view; a focus on ethnographic realities, on life as lived, on everyday life and ordinary time; showing people as named individuals rather than only as belonging to descriptive categories (e.g., kin or occupation); a clear

demonstration of the production of ethnographic knowledge (i.e., of how the anthropologist knows what he or she knows); the provision of sufficient context and background in terms of the literature, history, theory, etc.; a clear explanation of the ethnographer's relationship with the community about which they are writing (e.g., how trust was gained, how relationships of care were forged); and the author's scholarly credibility established such that the reader trusts their credentials.⁸ This list has held its form in my classes ever since, although I can see changes taking place in the discipline and world right now that a future list will need to name.

A shift in ethics is the most prominent difference between the 1980s and the current moment. Ethics is no longer reckoned only in an academic scientific sense. Research is expected to be collaborative, worked out in part with the community with which a scholar works. In ethnographic writing now, community is present. When we read an ethnography, we expect to meet people, not just categories of them. And we expect that some of the people we meet are those to whom the scholar is accountable, by whom the research will be assessed as it unfolds. This accountability is part of research design. We are accountable to the discipline, to our funders, and to the community in which we conduct research. Anthropological research needs to matter to each of these groups, but more so than ever before, perhaps, it needs to be considered valuable and necessary by members of the community.

Transparency and trust are also important in new ways. As readers, we expect to learn clearly the scholar's relationship to the community. How were they positioned by the community, and how did they develop relationships that led to the production of this knowledge? Ethnography as method is experiential, and this aspect is newly foregrounded in our contemporary writing. The rigor and challenge of using oneself as the instrument of knowing continue in the writing process, as some authors explore in this volume.⁹ This is unique to ethnography but also true to what we know of cultural life as systems of lived contradiction. One result is that good ethnographic writing acknowledges not only hierarchy but also discomfort. Tracking both is a job for the reader. Learning how to read ethnographies is something I teach my students, starting with the cover of a book. We discuss both the title and cover image, then turn to the back cover to consider the summary, as well as the "blurbs," as part of an academic economy of authority. We then open the book and move through the front matter to the acknowledgments. How, I ask the students, do you decide if the research is valid? Ethnographic research cannot be replicated in a laboratory sense. Instead, we have different markers of credibility such as correspondence with related scholarship.

Other classic markers of validity are thick ethnography, rigorous theory, and excellent writing. All of these can be persuasive.

A sometimes overlooked source of insight for assessing credibility is the acknowledgments section. It is in the acknowledgments that thanks are given, intellectual networks sketched out, and fieldwork communities honored. Acknowledgments reveal the heart of a book's production: who enabled this research and participated in it, gave their trust and their stories to the scholar. This is one place where authors move beyond a sense of "being there" to a sense of trusting and being trusted, and thus toward establishing integrity. This is part of the commitment we make to people to tell their stories, and to tell them well.

A Writing Practice

Anthropology is a writing discipline. In the field, we write constantly. We write down results and observations, interview and survey data, questions and concerns. We write field notes. We write grant proposals to get funding for research. We write seminar papers to advance us to the grant-writing stage. All of these are important, and each represents a different genre of writing. Of them all, field notes are perhaps most unique to anthropology. "Write your field notes every night," I was told by multiple professors before going to the field for my first summer of research as a graduate student. Don't sleep on it, I now tell my own students: write your field notes every night. If you wait until the next day, you will lose things. The stories you want to write down will turn to fragments or, worse, to information. You will end up with staccato notes that will not make sense to you a few months from now. Things you think you could never possibly forget will slip away with time. This daily research method of ours, to capture all that happened in a day, all we learned, the questions we still have, the confusions that persist, is a crucial part of anthropology as both a scientific and humanistic investigation.

What is your writing practice? There is no right way to write, no magic formula for how many minutes or words or pages you should write each day. Some days the writing will flow. Other days it won't. Not all you write will be usable, but save the text you cut rather than deleting it. I call this rejected text my "outtakes," files of text that didn't make the final cut for one project but that might work elsewhere; in some cases, upon revisiting files you might find yourself glad you deleted them in the first place. However, either way—whether you are writing good text or bad text—writing as practice is good. Writing moves your thinking forward, and writing improves your

writing. The more you do it, the more you think about it; the more you seek out guidance, the better your writing gets.

Location, materials, sounds, time of day—all of these things matter. I wrote this in my home at a table my friend made, looking out at the national forest. But sometimes I like to write outdoors or away from home. Think about where and how you write best. On a computer or by hand? And in what font or with what sort of paper or pen? Attention to such details can shape your writing and ground it in productive ways. Rituals might also be part of your practice. Making coffee or tea first. Making offerings. Music might be playing, or you could be surrounded by white noise from a café or by silence. So many things can affect what is right in any given moment: the quality of light, your mood, what it is you are writing about.

Know your writing needs, and meet them. Change them as needed. Some writers like to make outlines. I play endlessly with titles and subtitles, collecting long lists of titles for articles and books I'd like to write one day. Recognize when you need to stop writing to think or to read more or to exercise or talk with a friend. Sometimes what I need is to go back to my field notes. Rereading these, thinking again of different moments and lessons from fieldwork, of conversations and dialogue recorded, and of questions along the way is one of the best writing prompts we have. Good field notes are a gift we give to ourselves whose value is rarely expended. Then, after stepping away, you can get back to the writing, refreshed and ready.

Surround yourself with good writing. Read broadly. Read your own writing out loud. Don't start in the beginning. When I was a graduate student, I asked several of my professors for writing advice. Twenty years later, I still use the tips they shared with me. One professor advised me to always read outside of anthropology—fiction, poetry, nonfiction—and to read things that were well written. Another professor advised writing at the same time each day and to count editing time as writing time. Have a handful of good ethnographies nearby as you write, suggested another. But the piece of advice I share most frequently with my own students is this: read your words aloud as you edit. Hearing your language and arguments enables a different sort of editing than does seeing them on paper or a screen. Along with having a set of trusted readers (what I call “internal peer review”), reading my own writing out loud is my single most effective writing strategy. Finally, if you're sitting down to write and don't quite know where to start, one piece of wise advice I received is to not start in the beginning but somewhere else, in a place where a story needs to be told.

Writerly Confessionals, or Introducing Ruth

One genre of writing in anthropology is biography, including stories of the anthropologist becoming a writer. Some individuals arrive in graduate school as already accomplished writers, but others do not become writers until further along in their careers, in grad school or even later. For me, it was later. One issue for many scholars is that writing is not taught; one is expected to know how to write; one is expected to be a good writer. Right now, writing matters, and this is reflected in much of contemporary ethnographic writing. Of course, beautiful writing is not enough, but in the hands of a skilled ethnographer and thoughtful theorist, good writing honors the people whose stories are being shared.

How do you learn to write? Again: by reading good writing and through the practice of writing over the years, but also increasingly through courses and writing workshops offered at universities and conferences. Discussing writing, not just theoretical arguments or disciplinary history, is a part of all the graduate seminars I teach. In 2016 the anthropologist and writer Ruth Behar came to our campus to give a talk and lead a writing workshop. Her tips from the workshop are included in this volume (“Read More, Write Less”). As a graduate of the University of Michigan, where Ruth has long taught, including a course on ethnographic writing, I was asked to introduce her when she came to the University of Colorado. Here is some of what I said about Ruth, her writing, its mark on the discipline, and its influence on me as a writer:

“What people remember is Ruth’s reflexive writing, such as her story in *Translated Woman* of receiving the MacArthur Fellowship (popularly known as the Genius Grant) and then tenure. They remember passages from *The Vulnerable Observer* that are intimate and conflicted, and that others read as sensational and scandalous. Ruth has indeed embodied certain aspects of the reflexive turn, including, in her own words, the “emotional hemophilia” involved in the telling of stories. But her oeuvre goes well beyond this. Her scholarship consists also of deep genealogies and tributes to those writers and scholars who came before. There was a moment in the 1990s when she and many other anthropologists thought that attentiveness to writing as craft was going to be run out of the discipline, that a dry, utilitarian way of writing would win, that we would lose the beauty of language in favor of the function of it. They were wrong, and happily so. In thinking of a writer like Ruth, this is best explained in a way inspired by her writing style. It is best explained with a personal story. So here is a story that is mine to tell, but one I have never written about before, although I think of it frequently.

“The summer before I started graduate school, I was out at a bar with a group of friends, and I overheard two of them, both aspiring novelists (and one my then-boyfriend), talking about writing. I’ll call them Brian and Susan because those were their names. Susan said to Brian, “Carole is a writer too.” And he said back to her: “Carole is not a writer. She’s an anthropologist.” I got to Michigan, and those words haunted me. “Carole is not a writer.” Anthropologists aren’t writers. Or at least not *real* writers.”

I publicly told this story to Ruth on that day in Boulder to explain, twenty years later, why I never took her seminar on ethnographic writing, my one real regret from grad school. But I got the syllabus for the course and read everything on it, talked with friends about writing, and even secretly wrote poetry (none of which appears in this or any other book, and thus fits into an anthropological tradition of writing outside of conventional genres and then publishing those writings under pseudonyms or not publishing them at all). Simply being in that space she created where anthropology was writing, and where writing was about craft, had a deep impact on me. It took getting through grad school, getting to the point where I was writing about research I had done with people about whom I cared deeply, for me to consider myself a writer.

There is no single way to write anthropology; I am indebted to Ruth for insisting on this. Instead, styles and genres and voices are particular to scholars and to projects. Variation enlivens our writing, yet consistency is also important. Whether I am writing an online essay, a conference paper, a peer-reviewed journal article, or a book, my voice should be consistent; a reader should recognize an author’s voice as she moves through different genres. My scholarship takes place in all of these forms. However, for a long time not all forms have counted or have counted in the same way. Alma Gottlieb writes poignantly of not putting her coauthored 1994 memoir *Parallel Worlds* into her tenure file although it was published by a top anthropology press.¹⁰ Although such writings were once excluded from tenure files, there are now formal AAA guidelines for how to count such public scholarship at tenure and promotion.¹¹ Sometimes anthropology is written as literature, and sometimes it is written as science, and each of these has its place in forming and sustaining the discipline.

A Note on This Volume

Most of the essays in this volume were part of a series on writing I edited on the group anthropology blog *Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology* from 2014 to 2016. Although writing had become an open topic of con-

cern in anthropology, I was hungry for more conversation about it. I wanted to think out loud about writing, but I mostly wanted to hear and learn from others. Knowing that colleagues craved the same, I created a weekly space for anthropologists to write about writing, and I invited scholars from across subfields, generations, and countries to contribute essays to the series. Some are known for being leaders in, and even pioneers of, ethnographic writing. Others were scholars I knew who were good writers or who I thought had something valuable to say. These were not necessarily the “go-to” scholars for a conversation on writing. This volume puts together new essays with many of the original and revised essays from the series. All are short, roughly 1,000–1,500 words, and are examples that showcase the possibilities of the (then new) online essay genre. My instructions to the authors were simple: write something on writing. All of the authors responded to that request in their own creative, inspired way.

The book you hold in your hands, or read on your screen, compiles these essays in one neat but untidy package. Here are fifty-three essays, spilling over into one another, some contained within their own narrative, others deep in conversation with what came before, yet each offering us new thoughts, prompts, and agitations for writing. The essays are organized in ten sections: Ruminations; Writing Ideas; Telling Stories; On Responsibility; The Urgency of Now; Writing With, Writing Against; Academic Authors; Ethnographic Genres; Becoming and Belonging; and Writing and Knowing.

Section 1, “Ruminations,” sets the tone for this wide-ranging volume. Ieva Jusionyte reflects on the varied shapes and realities of writing during fieldwork, especially the shared experience many of us have, often again and again, of trying to figure out what and how to write in the field. We move next to questions of ethnographic possibility in an essay from Sasha Su-Ling Welland on lists as types of anthropological writing. Lists as cultural forms, writes Welland, “can distill a life in a few short lines.” How to tell the story of someone’s life is a lesson Paul Stoller learns in the field from Adamu Jenitongo, including how his own story must also be considered in the process. There is the process of writing, and then there is the experience of it. In “The Ecology of What We Write,” Anand Pandian contemplates the circumstances of our writing in relation to the company we keep. Even though our writing is most often done alone, scholars find ways to socially measure and share it. Kirin Narayan explores word count as the most recent way to do this, reminding us that not all words are equally measurable.

Read more, write less—this is the message (and title) of Ruth Behar’s essay that opens section 2, “Writing Ideas.” Her advice on reading in a writ-

erly way is followed by her workshop tips for ethnographic writing. This gift is followed by another: C. Anne Claus's reflections on taking a writing course with a professional writer while writing her dissertation. Such training is often missing from our graduate training, so we often craft our own writing strategies, sometimes more successfully than others. In the next essay, Kristen Ghodsee shares her ten-step process for writing a book, distilling this intimidating and sometimes debilitating process into a manageable list of tasks (in which Stephen Hawking even makes an appearance). Teaching others how to write involves the somewhat lost art of quiet, slow reading, contends Michael Lambek. One cannot be a good writer if not first a good reader. Reading as an art of writing is also part of the Writing Archaeology course that Zoë Crossland teaches. Course readings address relations of form, intimacy, and narrative, whereas assignments build community as a way of addressing the vulnerability of writing through the generosity of reading for others.

Storytelling is the focus of section 3. In the opening essay I argue that we write and teach anthropology as a form of theoretical storytelling but that this narrative, storied component of our practice is underappreciated. Ethnographic writing requires narrative, argument, and context, and thus, Donna Goldstein contends, is a uniquely powerful genre for biography, for bringing people to life through writing. Along with people, places are central to ethnography, both of which the reader wants to know. Sarah Besky suggests that in order to flow, our stories need to be grounded in place, somewhere they too can live. One writing mentor for many anthropologists is Kirin Narayan, who when I asked her in an interview "Why ethnography?" answered this way: "For the discipline of paying attention; for learning from others; for becoming more responsibly aware of inequalities; for better understanding the social forces causing suffering and how people might somehow find hope; and most generally, for being perpetually pulled beyond the horizons of one's own taken-for-granted world." The specific truths and possibilities of ethnography are a shared theme of this section, including in Sienna Craig's closing essay "On Unreliable Narrators." What, she asks, are our strategies for trustworthy storytelling in a world that is often anything but reliable?

What are the responsibilities of the scholar as writer? In her opening essay of section 4, "On Responsibility," Marnie Jane Thomson argues that being a good listener is one requirement. Listening enables dialogue in the writing such that ideas and theories are situated in their moment of generation by those peoples in the field with and from whom we learn. Writing with community is one way that archaeologist Sara Gonzalez works to restore justice to history, connecting past stories to peoples in the present. Writing during

fieldwork often extends well beyond field notes. In the context of Bhopal, Kim Fortun reflects on disaster and the necessity of writing alongside colleagues in the field, as well as against and past “the formative conditions of our times.” Alongside the conditions are the technologies. In “Quick, Quick, Slow: Ethnography in the Digital Age,” Yarimar Bonilla suggests that recognizing digital platforms as socially complex enables responses to fast-moving stories that preserve the depth of slow, contextualized ethnography. Context and complexity are part of Maria Vesperi’s deliberations of whether a difficult story should be written as ethnography or journalism. She chooses ethnography, explaining that it will help her readers “to share the tools to see and interpret, to spot fire and give it a name.”

Writing in a moment of crisis or distress is not classic anthropological writing. Instead, the essays in section 5, “The Urgency of Now,” consider the need to speak to unfolding or troubling events. Kristen Drybread takes us through dilemmas of style and voice in writing about violence, and of discerning and analyzing differences between the emotional and the visceral. Distance and time can often help with writing on difficult topics, but this combination is not always possible. In “Writing about Bad, Sad, Hard Things,” I share experiences of writing political asylum reports and the difficult responsibility of witnessing through writing another person’s gruesome suffering. Sometimes we write about crises, and other times we write during them. Watching the events of Ferguson, Missouri, unfold and trying to write in a period of “injustice, racism, and death” felt paralyzing to Whitney Battle-Baptiste. Her essay “Writing to Live” is a poignant and intimate look at how family stories of race and trauma helped bring her back to words once again. After her father’s death, Chelsi West Ohueri found it difficult to write. In “Finding My Muse While Mourning,” she shares her ideas for writing with grief rather than through it. Learning how to do this is not a process with a definitive end, as Adia Benton’s essay on being a survivor also reveals. Making use of anger and grief is sometimes exactly what our writing can best do.

Affect and emotion are a bigger part of our writing than we often realize. Section 6, “Writing With, Writing Against,” opens with Carla Jones’s essay on agitation. Being annoyed, especially by mistruths across cultural and political divides, drives her to write in an effort to bridge gaps and to bring shared sensibilities to light. In his essay “Antiracist Writing,” Ghassan Hage speaks of a similar desire to write against, specifically against racism. As a form of antiracist writing, he contends, anthropology has a responsibility to write “to address, understand, and struggle to transform.” How might those

things we hate inform our writing? In his praise of the sentence, Bhri Gupta Singh writes against writing that is overdone, that is too writerly, and he instead pulls us back to the humble possibility of a single sentence conveying ethnographic insight in the form of “love for this world.” Singh’s challenge to not inflate ourselves and our findings has its pair in the disciplinary gate-keeping criticized in Alan Kaiser’s essay “Peer Review: What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Stronger.” Taking on issues of justice and gender in a long-accepted plagiarism case, Kaiser encounters strong opposition to righting the record. Similar forms of disciplinary resistance to criticism underlie a joint essay from Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar. What internal but not necessarily visible structures of power, they ask, shape and constrain our writing in ways that we need to challenge?

Academics are a certain sort of author. This premise grounds section 7, “Academic Authors,” which opens with Jane Eva Baxter’s eulogy for her coauthor. How does one approach writing “alone” after doing it together for years? In anthropology, coauthorship is an underconsidered type of writing. Unsatisfied with formulaic expectations for multiauthorship, biological anthropologist Matt Sponheimer reflects on strategies to make such writing truly collaborative in practice. Aspects of authorship evident to academics are not necessarily so to nonacademic authors. In her essay “What Is an (Academic) Author?” Mary Murrell presents the legal controversy over Google’s mass book digitization, arguing that academic authors’ concerns with sharing knowledge directly contradicted trade author and publishers’ concerns with profits. As the next two essays concur, this is “just one possible figuration of the academic author.” Noel Salazar challenges anthropologists to think more seriously about genre and audience in relation to what anthropology has to offer the world, and Daniel Goldstein ponders the sort of writing we do. Emails, memos, lectures, comments on student work, reviews, reports, and more are things that academics write all day, but are these sorts of writing “real” writing? Grants are another sort of writing that academics frequently do and with which some have a love/hate relationship. With this in mind, Robin Bernstein offers tips for grant writing that capture the excitement of research and thus, she suggests, perhaps even enjoyment in the writing.

What genres best suit anthropology? Certainly not only “scientific” writing, as contributors explore in section 8, “Ethnographic Genres.” In the opening essay, Nomi Stone suggests that poetry offers specific and even secret tools for helping anthropology “make a lived world” beyond our usual prose writing. Poetry speaks to materiality and the thresholds of the human in resonant ways, concurs Stuart McLean in his essay exploring the particularity of

the language of poetry. In their essay “Dilations,” Kathleen Stewart and Lauren Berlant consider resonance—that is, when something registers in and about the world that suggests something new about it. Their experimental writing continues a tradition in anthropology of play with form and genre. Fiction is perhaps the genre with which anthropologists have experimented the longest. In sharing her love and practice of ethnographic fiction, Jessica Marie Falcone explores “genre bending” in the discipline, asking and assessing how fiction in our scholarly writing can serve as a marker of value and integrity. Roxanne Varzi argues for the value of the “space between”—that is, writing fiction into our ethnography rather than having it be separate from it. Fiction, she argues, can give ethnography needed “space to breathe and to change.” This might be because fiction is magic. Or, as Ruth Behar explains, fiction possesses an inventive magic not possible in ethnography. Fiction, she learns, has lessons to teach us about meaning, the real, and temporality.

Section 9, “Becoming and Belonging,” takes us deeper into lessons of (and for) writing and anthropology. What does it mean to belong not somewhere, but somewhere else, and to write from this position? Uzma Rizvi asks just this in her essay on personal and professional issues of trust and privilege in the way that we live “cartographies of elsewhere.” Sita Venkateswar similarly seeks a way to bridge the personal and academic, turning to “memory-work” with family alongside, or even instead of, fieldwork. Katerina Teaiwa’s memorywork (and her elsewhere) are on her bookshelf. Confessing that scholarly and literary tomes are not always her reading material of choice, she shares how a life of expansive, eclectic reading grounds her being in the world. Such honesty in our academic persona centers Bianca Williams’s “Guard Your Heart and Your Purpose: Faithfully Writing Anthropology.” As she shares, bringing heartwork and academic writing together rather than keeping them separate can be an exercise in vulnerability. The work we do, and an awareness of why we do it, is at the heart of Gina Athena Ulysse’s written portrait of her journey as a scholar. Knowing oneself, and knowing the gendered, racialized obstacles of academia, are a key and ongoing part of her process. “The Anthropology of Being (Me),” as Paul Tapsell titles his essay that closes this section, is not necessarily a project of reflexivity. Instead, as Tapsell writes, it might be to rethink accountability, genealogy, and the idea that anthropology might be of use in a moment of crisis, only if we are willing to challenge and be challenged.

When do we know what we will write (versus knowing what we want to write)? Barak Kalir’s essay on writing and cognition opens the final section of the volume, “Writing and Knowing.” Writing, he claims, transforms our

thoughts beyond just putting them into words and is a lesson not as easily learned as it should be. Translation offers a poignant example of the relationship between writing and thinking. Reflecting on the difficulty of translating acts of self-immolation, Kevin Carrico returns us to contemplation as a critical component both of and beyond writing. Our writings for even a single project exist in many forms, often without easy transitions between them. In “Freeze-Dried Memory Crumbs: Field Notes from North Korea,” Lisa Sang-Mi Min reflects on the energy and labor needed to resuscitate field notes that one was not really allowed to write in the first place. Form may be fleeting and shape-shifting, but content preserves depth and clarity. Ann Laura Stoler next takes us to the “disquiets” of her fieldwork in colonial writing, asking how we account for uncertainty and uneasiness in others’ writing when we try to write about this subject ourselves. What we don’t know is not what we are supposed to write about, or are we? In the closing essay, “On Ethnographic Unknowability,” Catherine Besteman explores the tension between writing and knowing. As she asks, what is it that we, scholars, have a right to know, and what does it actually mean to know through writing?

Read, pause, write. Then read some more. Find the essays you need. Read to help learn where you are and where you want to go. Welcome. Come on in. Get comfortable or get disturbed, or both. Get writing. May your writing be good, clear, and satisfying. May it flow in all the right ways, including pausing from time to time so that you may tend to other things and then return to where you need to be in the writing.

Notes

1. Signithia Fordham, “Write-ous Indignation: Black Girls, Dilemmas of Cultural Domination and the Struggle to Speak the Skin We Are In,” in *Anthropology off the Shelf: Anthropologists on Writing*, ed. Alisse Waterston and Maria D. Vesperi (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 91.
2. Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
3. Maria D. Vesperi and Alisse Waterston, “Introduction: The Writer in the Anthropologist,” in *Anthropology off the Shelf: Anthropologists on Writing*, ed. Alisse Waterston and Maria D. Vesperi (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1.
4. Helena Wulff, “Introducing the Anthropologist as Writer: Across and within Genres,” in *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Helena Wulff (New York: Berghahn, 2016).
5. For a discussion of these columns, see Paul Shankman’s “The Public Anthropology of Margaret Mead: *Redbook*, Women’s Issues, and the 1960s,” *Current Anthropology* 59, no. 1 (2018): 55–73.

6. Thorgeir Kolshus, “The Power of Ethnography in the Public Sphere,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2017): 61–69; Gina Athena Ulysse, *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post Quake Chronicle* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015).

7. Jonathan Spencer, “Anthropology as a Kind of Writing,” *Man* 24, no. 1 (1989): 152–54.

8. For a fuller discussion of ethnography as a way of knowing, see Carole McGranahan, “What Is Ethnography? Teaching Ethnographic Sensibilities without Fieldwork,” *Teaching Anthropology* 4 (2014): 22–36; Carole McGranahan, “Ethnography beyond Method: The Importance of an Ethnographic Sensibility,” *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2018): 1–10.

9. On self as ethnographic method, see Sherry Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

10. Alma Gottlieb, “The Anthropologist as Storyteller,” in *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Helena Wulff (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 93–117.

11. See “AAA Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion Review: Communicating Public Scholarship in Anthropology,” accessed November 8, 2018, <https://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=21713>.

For Further Reading

Written guides to writing can also be useful. There are many: some for anthropology, more for academic writing, and a seemingly unending list of general writing books, including on narrative nonfiction. My favorite book on ethnographic writing is Kirin Narayan’s *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. This gem of a book provides guidance, motivation, and encouragement. Five sections deal with critical parts of current ethnography: story and theory, place, person, voice, and self. The book concludes with concrete, thoughtful, usable suggestions for the writing process—getting started, moving forward, dealing with writer’s block, revising, and finishing—all designed to cultivate an active, alive writing practice. It is also an excellent book to teach.

Below is an abridged list of articles and books I find useful on writing. In addition to this list, a good print thesaurus is a must, one that you can page through to encounter words for your writing. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is also on my shelf as the often final word on grammar and formatting. Explore and find the writing guides that provide you practical information, delightful inspiration, or both. Find your writing muses. Embrace those whose voice speaks to you; reshelve those who don’t. Trust that there is no “right” way, just writing and commitment.

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- Ghodsee, Kristen. *From Notes to Narrative: Writing Ethnographies That Everyone Can Read*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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- Germano, William. *From Dissertation to Book*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
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- Nelson, Priya. "How to Build a Book: Notes from an Editorial *Bricoleuse*." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 3 (2017): 363–72.
- Sword, Helen. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Sword, Helen. *Air & Light & Time & Space: How Successful Academics Write*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Good Writing in General

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LeGuin, Ursula. *Steering the Craft: A 21st-Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story*.

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Prose, Francine. *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for
Those Who Want to Write Them*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Rabiner, Susan, and Alfred Fortunato. *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great
Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.