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Being and Writing with Others: On the Possibilities of an Ethnographic Composition Pedagogy

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BEING AND WRITING WITH OTHERS:
ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF AN ETHNOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Being and Writing with Others: On the Possibilities of an Ethnographic Composition Pedagogy

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This dissertation uses theoretical explorations and participant conversations to consider the constitutive possibilities of ethnographic writing that works between students, faculty, and communities and uses those possibilities to describe the philosophy and key elements of an ethnographic composition pedagogy.

The project begins with an exploration of the emergence of contemporary ethnographic theory and practice in ethnography's fields of origin, and follows with an investigation of ethnography's roots and versions in composition. This work suggests two ethnographic imaginaries that describe and construct very different ways of formulating ideas, conceiving projects, and of *being* ethnographers: one is more closely tied to *method* and the *acquisition of knowledge* and the other is more rooted in *activism* and the *production of understanding*. The project's individual and group conversations explore the experience, philosophy, and approach of three participating compositionists, all of whom regularly employ ethnography in their research and teaching. These conversations underline experiential and theoretical issues of particular importance to participants' ethnographic and pedagogical practices, especially feminist theory, cultural studies, activism, and pragmatism.

The ethnography that emerges is thus rooted in collaboration, cotheorization, and writing that works between universities and communities. It is *created in community*

rather than *deployed to study* community. The pedagogy involves complicated understandings of reflexivity and positionality; theories of critique, cultural studies, and activism, which necessarily call attention to power; recognition of the inherently political nature of pedagogical and community work; and commitment to the idea that ethnographic writing should be *actual work* in the world. The collaborative writing at the core of this pedagogy is constitutive in nature; it works through shared agency, shared commitment, and shared humanity *to make* and *remake* the individuals and communities who engage in and with it.

Those who align themselves with the theoretical and activist positions I and my participants take here, especially those who are committed to community/university partnerships and to writing that works outside of the academy, might find value in a more intentionally artful, constitutive, collaborative, and activist ethnographic composition pedagogy.