SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Luca and Toby: Dear reader, welcome to this special issue on *Trans autoethnographies*. We, as special issue editors, are happy that you have found your way here and excited to introduce the many fantastic contributions – academic articles, *Frispel* texts and artworks – that together provide a plural and thought-provoking understanding of the theme "trans autoethnographies". In this introduction, we will discuss how the various approaches, styles, and arguments in these contributions have touched and provoked our own thinking about this theme.

In keeping with our idea for this special issue to provide a space for exploration, we have decided to write this introduction as an exploratory dialogue between the two of us. First, we will discuss our inspirations for turning to autoethnography in our own work, as well as our experiences of promise, ambivalence, and vulnerability in doing so. Secondly, we address the different ways in which we conceptualize the connection between the "trans" and the "autoethnography" in "trans autoethnography". Through this dialogue, we will also illustrate how we read and are inspired by the five academic articles (Jilkén; Miskow Friborg; Amm; Mustasaari; Baird and Ghorbanpour), the four *Frispel* texts and artworks (Lönnlöv; Andersen; Lönnlöv; Holmegaard), and the artwork on the cover by Zafira Vrba Woodski.

Autoethnography is often introduced as a diverse collection of methods and approaches for drawing on personal experiences to enhance description and understanding of cultural experiences and social structures (Adams and others 2015; Holman Jones and Harris 2019; Bylund and others 2021). Autoethnographic approaches shape, in a plurality of ways, both the *process* and the *product* of art, research, and writing (Ellis and others 2011). We indicate only these wide

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and open 'definitions' of autoethnography, as we do not want to start our exploration from a point of fixity. Rather than pinning down "trans autoethnography" as a singular and stable concept, we want to promote the political potential that lies in plural and fluid ways of conceptualizing and doing trans autoethnograph*ies*. Given this aim of ours, we have found it fruitful to embrace, rather than resist, how this introduction has grown into a fragmented account (compare Markham 2005). Further, by discussing our thinking and choices through the process of editing this special issue, we hope to open spaces for critical and reflexive reading (Markham 2005: 815).

Stories of arrival

Toby: "Every research project has a story, which is the story of an arrival" (Ahmed 2012: 3). A story of arrival speaks not only to how and why one has been moved to embark on the journey of a particular research project, but also to how that journey has been shaped by one's various ambitions and encounters (Ahmed 2012: 4-6). For these reasons, I want to start off our dialogue with a story about my arrival to this special issue and its theme. When I tell this story, I often begin with how and why I turned to autoethnography in my own research. This turn was motivated by feelings of discomfort and doubt.

During my first years as a PhD researcher, I was struggling with the toll of encountering an intensified stream of transphobic and trans-exclusionary arguments given my choice to research the topic trans-inclusive gender equality work (Odland 2025: 136-139). I turned to autoethnography to try to deal with feeling isolated and being uncertain about how to proceed. At some moments, I felt stuck and it felt impossible to proceed. One of the first texts that I encountered was Ruth Pearce's "A methodology for the marginalised" (Pearce 2020). In this article, she argues for autoethnography as i) an ethical stance not only towards others but also towards oneself, as well as ii) a foundation for a supportive community of scholarship. Encountering this text transformed my research practice, as well as my understanding of autoethnography.

Another important encounter in my turn to autoethnography has been reading Arthur P. Bochner, who argues for autoethnography as "a genre of doubt" (2017: 77). I have come to draw on autoethnography to account for messiness and contradiction in my own accounts, as informative and with care (Odland 2025: 165). Turning to autoethnography has provided me with tools and inspiration to turn towards when I feel stuck and lost (see also Lather 2007; Koobak 2014). Tools without which there would have been no thesis.

A particular site of complication for my research has been fears of letting others, especially other trans people, down. Struggling with such fears has,

many times, created knots in my thinking and writing. Questions about such struggles are addressed in Sebastian Lönnlöv's *Frispel* essay "Skriva fritt – men för vem?" where he discusses ethics and responsibility in what he calls "minority writing" (*minoritetskrivande*). This essay speaks to the desire to be true to one's experiences and ideals while knowing, and worrying about, what will happen when one's words about minority experiences are filtered through a majority gaze. Lönnlöv writes insightfully about the knots that these worries produce, and about how feeling responsible for how one's words may affect others can be, at the same time, a source of strength *and* a site where writing processes get stuck. In fiction writing, he argues, authors need to handle the inevitability that someone will be let down by our words.

I believe that Lönnlöv's essay provides important tools for writing about, and from, trans experiences both in and outside of academia. It is by engaging with other scholars and writers that I have come to turn towards, instead of away from, my fears of letting others down. I believe that thinking about the inescapability of failing one's ambitions and ideals (in research and otherwise) can, and should, inform a sense of responsibility rather than functioning as an excuse. However, thinking of doubt as a resource rather than as a failure, does not mean that dealing with doubt becomes easy. I have come to think of autoethnography as a tool both for handling doubt, and for handling desires to escape doubt. When editing this special issue, it has been important for me to hold space for such ambivalence.

How about you, Luca? How would you tell the story of your arrival to this special issue and to the theme "trans autoethnographies"?

Luca: Coincidentally enough, our very different individual stories of arrival to autoethnography are partially a shared journey – one of my first, or at least most memorable, encounters with trans autoethnography was the same beautiful text by Ruth Pearce (2020), which I read as part of a PhD course some years back.

Although, I think that my story is in fact less of an arrival than a continuing journey, still finding my way through the doubts and discomforts in my work. And still seeing what research practices might help me navigate them. Even before the course I mentioned I had both implicitly approached my own research from an autoethnographic stance and struggled with finding space and expression for my personal investments in my research topics. Rather than facing hostile arguments against my work, my moments of discomfort have often come from my own bodily presence. Being the only trans man in a seminar room full of cisgender women and talking about trans penises does place one in a rather specific, and less than completely comfortable, position. In these spaces I become to embody my research regardless of whether or not I explicitly

position myself in connection with my topic. My quest, then, became one of finding agency over assumptions and telling my story in my words and in my own way. So much like you Toby, working on topics and questions close to myself and my experiences as a trans man and a trans scholar have often made me second guess or doubt the validity of my work. In this, autoethnography has offered me a frame within which to place my approach, as well as what I would consider a kind of validity. Validity not only in connection to myself but also in connection to possible skepticism coming from the outside towards either autoethnographic practices or trans studies as a field, or both. Autoethnographic approaches have given me the tools and formulations for reflecting my own practice in a transparent and ethical manner, as well as a space for including myself in my work, of writing myself into my research.

My quest for a place for myself includes not only my research or myself as a specifically gendered researcher, but my political convictions that often seem to be in conflict with the neoliberal nature of universities as institutions. Not only did Pearce's work provide a very well-formulated example of a particular approach to research and writing, it opened up the connection between a practice of doing and writing research, on the one hand, and taking a critical and ethical stance towards the neoliberal university, on the other hand – two seemingly different levels of engagement with academia and knowledge-production. I found myself highly moved by Pearce´s arguments for a re-formulation of academia through ideals of care and inclusion (2020). While discussing this together, Toby, it has been interesting to see how different aspects of Pearce's writing spoke to us both while struggling with different considerations and concerns. This, I would argue, points to the value of Pearce's writing – I think having both had our own personal struggles during our doctoral research projects, we were delighted to see academic writing that also considers our lives and belongings in our communities outside the walls of universities.

As a trans scholar, I come to my research from a specific lived and embodied reality and experiences. And of course, in a wider sense, as a feminist scholar I have never believed in objectivity of knowledge production, following in the footsteps of Donna Haraway (1988), arguing for the relevance of situatedness, which to me also requires accountability. These positionalities unquestionably inform and guide my research practices and ethics. As we all exist at the crossroads of intersectional differences, the main question is not that of objectivity, but of transparency and critical self-reflection. Reading through the contributions in this special issue, I have been impressed and inspired by seeing how different authors have addressed and navigated these same questions in their artistic and academic work.

Toby: Turning to autoethnography has provided me with important tools for actually doing situatedness in practice and for thinking more concretely about how to take accountability for, and through, my work and writing (Ellingson 2006; Markham 2017).

Since turning to autoethnography, I have found it interesting how also in feminist research environments – where situatedness is valued – hesitancy and skepticism stick to ideas about 'autoethnography'. From conversations with colleagues, as well as with several of the contributors to this special issue, I note that many of us are *used to* having to defend our autoethnographic practices. I have come to ask myself: What do such habits do with, and in, our work? Asking that question, it is important to keep in mind that one might also need to defend turning to trans studies or research on trans experiences, as you mention Luca. When *writing about* autoethnography becomes consumed with quests of *arguing for* autoethnography as valid and fruitful practice, I believe that it also becomes more difficult to "stay with the trouble" as Haraway (2016) famously put it.

In my own work, I have discussed how difficult it can be to stay with the trouble, and how seductive it can be to produce polished and smooth accounts (Odland 2025: 148). I have found it both inspirational and reassuring to see how other scholars contributing to this special issue encounter and handle such challenges. In the article "Låt dem undra?", Lo Jilkén discusses autoethnography as a way to question the logics of conventional ethnography, for example that the researcher is understood *as separate* from what they study. Arguing that valuable lessons can be learned by examining moments of discomfort and disorientation, Jilkén turns towards their own emotion work during field work in spaces where LGBTQ-certification processes are taking place. This article highlights both the benefits and difficulties involved in letting feelings of discomfort guide one's work and academic practices (see also Ahmed 2012; Bochner and Ellis 2016; Diallo and Miskow Friborg 2021). Through their autoethnographic exploration, Jilkén provides important insights for understanding the situated labor and experiences of marginalized researchers (see also Pearce 2020; Harju 2023).

This special issue has been a project of ours for some years. In writing and reshaping our dialogue in this introduction, I have been able to follow how my conceptualization of autoethnography, and of the role I want the special issue to play, have both changed significantly over time. While I might have set out with an ambition for the special issue to be some kind of defense of autoethnography, and trans autoethnography in particular, I am now doubting the fruitfulness of such a framing. I am happy that we have arrived at shaping the issue into a space where authoethnography does not need to be defended, and in

which reflections about both potentials and risks involved in autoethnographic practices are welcome. A space for being curious about ambivalence, doubt, and hesitancy. As Bochner (2017: 77) puts it: "The shape of autoethnography is not the exclamation point (!) but the question mark (?)".

Luca: I love that quote, Toby. And agree on the importance of creating a space for considering the possibilities as well as the challenges of autoethnographic practices without the need for justification. Feeling defensive is not a creative or hospitable starting point for research. For me personally the hesitancy in leaning into an autoethnographic practice has, I think, been more around questions of how much of my own self and my own embodied experiences I want to write into my work as it will of course make private public. Especially as my current research addresses transmasculine embodiment on quite an intimate level, the scope of consideration needs to also include my partner, not merely myself. It is a curious question then how to approach my own experiences – ethically, I think there should not be a difference between those of other people (whether written or interviews) and my own. I was particularly inspired by Marie Andersen's *Frispel* artwork in this special issue. They speak to this same question but come from a very different angle, "Skridt" contributes to the long lineage of feminist "pussy prints" by including trans genitals in the form of beautiful and deeply personal watercolor prints. In the short text accompanying the images, Andersen carves out the historical and current connections between feminist art and medicalization of trans and intersex bodies through discussing invisibilities. I am always impressed by the ways in which artists address questions through their embodiment in much more concrete ways than I do as a researcher. In Andersen's work, the images themselves already make a clear and potent intervention into cisnormativity of (even feminist) art. This takes autoethnography as an embodied practice to a completely different level.

But I do also understand the general concerns or considerations connected to deciding whether, or how, to use autoethnography in the face of debates about what constitutes a "proper" research method or practice, as you also mention Toby. I would say, especially as early-career scholars, we tend to be more aware of, and vulnerable to, being questioned as credible and valid scholars in our respective fields. However, regardless of one's academic rank, it does require continuous self-reflexivity and critical awareness to use one's own experiences in a way that connects to wider discussions and understandings of the world in a meaningful manner (see for example Adams and Holman Jones 2011). Then again, as I pointed out above, no research is ever objective, or void of one's own biases or viewpoints, so for me the closest one can get to "good research" is to

be open and reflexive about one's own position. This has been important for me throughout my studies and research, even before I came across autoethnography as a method. And by "good" here I mean ethical.

Toby: I agree! Squeezing autoethnography into some positivist framework to earn it the badge of 'real science' is a cul-de-sac (Ellingson 2006; Bochner 2017; Holman Jones and Harris 2019). This point becomes especially pertinent when autoethnography is employed in world-making to bring about more just futures. Several of the contributions in this special issue showcase precisely the kind of work that is needed when one's aim is for research endeavors to be *ethical as well as transformative*. When employing autoethnography in pursuit of such aims, critical self-reflexivity and intersectional understandings of privilege and oppression (one's own and others') become crucial, both ethically and politically (Nicolazzo 2019; Johnson and LeMaster 2020; Raha and Van Der Drift 2024).

In their article "Tender and transformative care", Nico Miskow Friborg argues for the transformative potential of t4t friendships and explores autoethnography as a collaborative practice. At stake in their work is how normative structures such as whiteness and nationalist exceptionalism seep into trans care projects (see also Miskow Friborg 2023). This article provides novel insights and guidance for unlearning some of these normative habits by letting mundane care practices within the context of t4t friendships spill into wider trans coalitional organizing. Exploring how a collaborative autoethnographic project was transformed by the devastating loss of their friend, collaborator and trans kin, Miskow Friborg shows how autoethnography can provide tools for healing on the individual level as well as transformation at the structural level.

I read this article also as contributing to scholarship that forwards the world-making potential of autoethnography by exploring sites where loss, vulnerability, and ethics become intrinsically connected (Lykke 2018; Pearce 2020; Mustasaari this issue).

Luca: In addition to a collaborative practice, this world-making potential can mean creating space for us to write ourselves into our research and the world around us, and for the readers to find themselves in our writing – to see themselves mirrored back, whether similar or different. It can inspire readers to "reflect critically upon their own life experience, their construction of self, and their interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts" (Spry 2001: 711). As Miskow Friborg describes in their article, this reflection can include those we do research with. In addition, Jules Han Amm in

their article "On sticky encounters with transmedicalism" offers us a unique viewpoint through their considerations on a more uneasy collaboration of working with people who are from one's own community but with whom one does not necessarily share political or other views. Amm writes about the tricky questions of balancing between solidarities, uneasiness, ethics and academic accountability, pointing also towards the ways in which autoethnographic practice can create understanding through both mutuality and contradiction. Methodologically, through this balancing between refusal of either/or positions, and sticky encounters with their interview partners, Amm formulates their understanding of trans autoethnography, or autoethnography as a trans method.

If we consider the multiple embodied, lived and felt differences relevant in connection to the people we write about, how could we ignore their relevance in relation to ourselves? Citing Paaige K. Turner and Kristen M. Norwood,

> When we engage in reflexivity regarding positionalities, we tend to keep off the page the embodied experience of research - the feel, sight, and sound of it. ... the racing of our hearts as we experience anxiety, elation, confusion, and humility. We leave out how our bodies were questioned or unquestioned by ourselves and our participants. (2013: 696)

We can think here through Sara Ahmed's chair metaphor (2017: 122-123), her description of what I imagine as an old worn-out armchair that has been molded in the shape of a particular body but feels wrong and uncomfortable to others. I like this very simple illustration of how we fit or do not fit into the world - and how it can help us think about the ways in which that (un)fitting impacts our ways of interpreting, experiencing and understanding the world.

As Turner and Norwood outline above, research is often seen as merely an intellectual endeavor, but I would like to point to the physicality of it. For us as researchers, the ways in which we write and the topics we choose are always affected not only by our positioning within a theoretical field or discipline, but by our positions in the world surrounding us. We navigate the world differently, thus also navigating our research in different ways.

Connecting back to the question of ethics as well, many forms and practices of autoethnographic work can be quite material or concrete; descriptions of spaces or surroundings where we write in or anchor our reflection in, – thus bringing us back to bodies, our own and those of others. All of the knowledge we absorb, I would argue, gets filtered through our embodied experiences.

For me the specificity of trans embodiment is also important in connection to understanding or formulating trans autoethnography. What would you say, Toby, how do you approach autoethnographic research as a specifically trans practice?

Conceptualizing trans autoethnography

Toby: For me, the connection between the "trans" and the "autoethnography" in "trans autoethnography" concerns how I, as a trans studies researcher, can become privy of the *mechanisms* that Ahmed calls "the politics of comfort" (2017: 123). Some of my own embodied experiences of comfort and discomfort as a trans person can provide insights for understanding how social norms such as cisnormativity operate as "trodden paths" *(upptrampade leder*) (Bremer 2011: 40) where some bodies (cis as well as trans) will feel more comfortable, and be more recognizable as intelligible subjects, than others (Bremer 2011: 16). However, such insights have primarily informed my development of the concept *a phenomenology of breakdowns* and my methodological approach *thinking with friction* (Odland 2025: 61-63, 154-158).

In other words, it is my research *process* rather than my research *product* that is autoethnographic with respect to my experiences as a trans person. With Harju (2023), I opt to give less of myself, in this sense, in the writing up of academic texts. This choice has also made me approach and reflect about the role of language and storytelling in autoethnographic research about trans experiences, livability, and intelligibility.

I have explored conceptualizing "trans autoethnography" as the connection between autoethnography and *trans studies* as a research field, by turning to conceptualizations of the connection between autoethnography and *queer studies*. For instance, Holman Jones and Adams propose that autoethnography is a queer method in how it "hinges on the push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural and political concerns" (2010: 198). Advocating for an open and flexible definition of *queer autoethnography*, they argue that such a method and sensibility can allow researchers to document journeys of self-understanding by attending to how language fails to capture and contain ourselves (and other selves) when we interact via socially established categories (see also Butler 1997, 2005). Holman Jones and Adams (2010) stress that through such failures of language we can notice how it also fails to relate to subjugated and situated knowledges (see also Holman Jones and Harris 2019). They argue for conceptualizing queer autoethnography as an approach that "looks to self and structures as relational accomplishments and takes seriously the need to create more livable, equitable and just ways of

living" by embracing fluidity and moving towards definitional indeterminacy and conceptual elasticity (Holman Jones and Adams 2010: 211).

Inspired by Holman Jones and Adams (2010), I have come to conceptualize "trans autoethnography" as an approach for asking *critical questions* about the limitations of language and about what socially established categories do with and to trans people and our self-understanding (see also Zimman 2018; Konnelly 2021). Another crucial aspect of how I have come to conceptualize "trans autoethnography" is as an approach for asking *curious questions* about what we as trans people can do with language and categories (see also Wojahn 2015; Cordoba 2023).

Such critical *and* curious questions are explored by artist and activist Zafira Vrba Woodski in their artwork that is on the cover of this special issue: *Pine is my pronoun* from the "Pronoun Series" (*Pronomenserien)*. The series, as Vrba Woodski explains in the section "Några frågor till konstnären om omslaget", was born out of coming up against the limitations of language. It is frustrating how even the most common pronouns are perceived as difficult, and in addition, Vrba Woodski argues, this obscures, for example, that nonbinary identities are much more complex and revolutionary than what some small word can capture. Vrba Woodski's "Pronoun Series" provides a beautiful and thought-inspiring embrace of fluidity through an exploration of kinship beyond the human as inspiration for possible pronouns. On this topic, I want to recommend Vrba Woodski's book *Transtillstånd* (Vrba Woodski 2023) in which they use the concept "contemporary archeology" *(nutidsarkeologi)* to guide their exploration of transness as a "hinge", to speak with Holman Jones and Adams (2010), between the self and various societal, political, and spiritual structures and events.

I am thrilled that Vrba Woodski's artwork on the cover also speaks to our wish to give a nod to the autobiographical *roots* of trans studies (for example Stone 1992; Feinberg 1993; Stryker 1994). Trans people have needed to be (we still need to be) inventive and creative when giving an account of ourselves and telling our own stories (Horvat and others 2019; Honkasalo 2023).

Luca: I also really love the cover image where trans bodies, at times considered unnatural, are so tenderly placed as part of nature (see for example Stryker 2020). And, as you mentioned, the image takes our minds to roots and growing. We can think of trans studies as having several roots; ones in different forms of autobiographical writing as a way of bringing the previously silenced trans voices into the conversation, and slowly starting to be heard and acknowledged as producers of knowledge rather than mere objects of research. And other,

maybe more tangled, theoretical and political roots that can be traced back to queer theory. And yet other roots growing from trans activism and collectives outside of the academia (see for example Feinberg 1997; Stryker 2008).

The roots in queer studies we could also see through a kind of a story of arrival – trans studies making a critical intervention into queer theory which has been seen as privileging theoretical formulations of gender fluidity, transgression, and performance while ignoring or forgetting the lived and embodied realities of actual trans people (see for example Prosser 1998; Namaste 2009).

The specificity of trans experiences and their complex and often undeniable connection to embodiment is also reflected in and accommodated by autoethnography as a research practice. Pearce, for example, has discussed the impact of the "powerful hate" aimed at trans people and trans scholars as well as the people and communities we work with (Pearce 2020: 814). I would argue here that trans autoethnography diverts from queer autoethnography, mirroring the diverting paths of wider queer studies and trans studies – while queer theory predominantly builds on deconstructing identity categories, trans studies consider the corporeality of embodied experiences, moving also from a preoccupation with sexuality into the realm of gendered subjects. Citing Cáel Keegan (2020: 66-67), "[m]oving beyond nominal examination of the transgender object, transgender studies is an interdisciplinary critical project that takes up the subjectivities of transgender people to theorize a host of relations among gender, culture, science, knowledge production, and power".

I also like how we are making visible the plurality of trans autoethnography by bringing in considerations of different aspects of the practice here, such as those of language and embodiment. I have previously argued that material and discourses can be seen as not separate but always tangled and overlapping, even if they are at times in a strained relationship with each other. Considering Foucault's (1997) formulation of discursive power, but thinking through the creative rather than the restrictive, I have described discourses as "technologies of constructing our being and articulating embodied possibilities" (Tainio 2023: 120).

Thinking through these possibilities, ideally, trans autoethnography as a practice could create concrete space for the variety of trans embodiments and experiences, through opening up discursive space. Here, I also come back to the idea of writing ourselves into the reality and culture around us.

Toby: I have found it useful to draw on perspectives from *critical phenomenology* to approach and take seriously that tangled messiness between dichotomies such as material/discursive, body/mind, sex/gender, and so on (Odland 2025:

16-17, 45-46, 48-49). The world, in being rendered comfortable, familiar, and predictable for some bodies, is *recursively* rendered uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and unpredictable for others (Ahmed 2006, 2007; Ngo 2017; Weiss and others 2019). It is essential to consider these recursive mechanisms when thinking about the possibilities for trans people to give an account of ourselves and write ourselves into the reality and culture around us (Salamon 2010; Baril 2015; Bettcher 2019).

In the *Frispel* artwork *Före-efter I-III*, Sebastian Lönnlöv interrogates linear stories about transness positing one distinct and singular 'before' and one distinct and singular 'after'. Such stories, he argues, lock trans people and our lives into stories about what we are *not*. To allow ambivalence to be part of the story, Lönnlöv lets different facial images, from different periods in the same life, become partially merged together in a digital collage. This photo series speaks to me in how it highlights the emotional and material *labor* of engaging in storytelling with respect to such severely circumscribed representations of trans intelligibility (see also Straube 2014; Honkasalo 2020; Lundberg and others 2022; Schmitt 2023).

Navigating inflexible environments, discrimination, ignorance, and powerful hate, becomes what is familiar and ordinary for many trans people (Bremer Gagnesjö 2021; Huttunen 2022; Monakali 2024). Our storytelling takes place in contexts where trans and queer embodiment and subjectivity is under scrutiny, in particular when it comes to if someone should be granted state recognition, assistance, and protection. Regulation and routines are put in place to investigate and assess trans and queer *authenticity* (Bremer 2011; Linander and others 2017; Kehl 2020; Gröndahl 2023).

There is a double-bind in how trans people need to prove our authenticity by following desire scripts and fitting into pre-determined categories (Bremer 2013; Linander 2018), but at the same time those accounts are judged as less valid because they are deemed as 'subjective'. This double-bind bolsters the tendency you mentioned before Luca; how marginalized groups are perceived and treated only as objects of research, not producers of knowledge. Further, this double-bind shores up conceptualizations through which trans existence can only be understood only as a problem, crisis, or threat (Bettcher 2007; Pearce and others 2020; Bissenbakker and Raun 2023). I see a parallel between, on the one hand, disciplining critiques of autoethnography as being too subjective (as discussed earlier in this introduction), and, on the other hand, the disciplining and policing of trans and queer embodiment and intelligibility (as discussed here). Neither autoethnography nor trans and queer lives are in need of more policing and disciplining.

The severe consequences of the policing of trans lives is a theme that is explore by several contributions to this special issue. Another article that draws on experiences of dealing with devastating loss, is Sanna Mustasaari's "Post Mortem". In this article, Mustasaari reflects on her own and her late daughter's experiences of intersecting forms of violence, trans medicine, and the livability and unlivability of trans lives. She writes about feelings of guilt and rage as a young person does not survive her encounter with society's incompetence when it comes to handling sexual violence and when it comes to providing space for those who fall out of the systems that police trans authenticity. Every time I read this article my eyes fill with tears and my heart with rage. It provides another example of how autoethnography can provide a space for simultaneous personal reflection and a call to arms to undo societal injustices and build a more livable world.

Luca: Understanding autoethnography not only as a stance towards one's research but as an embodied practice, and taking the researcher as the entry point into considering autoethnography within the field of trans studies, the method offers not only a way of understanding certain phenomena through one's own experience, but a way for the researcher as well as the readers to understand themselves. I wonder if there is a way to navigate the double bind you mention in productive and creative ways? By offering the readers a possibility to see themselves reflected in our experiences even when those are not shared, to find themselves in those crossroads and overlaps of what Marcelo Diversi's and Claudio Moreira call our common humanity (2019: 545). Citing Judith Butler (1991), by following and repeating normative scripts of femininity or masculinity we become recognized as gendered subjects. In other words, through stories we tell we emerge as intelligible beings. But there is always also the possibility of re-telling, of telling differently, of reclaiming our bodies and experiences. Thinking here also back to Amm´s understanding of autoethnography as a trans method, and to the *Frispel* artworks of Andersen, Vrba Woodski and Lönnlöv. Through an optimistic lens, creating an archive of trans experiences and embodiments, written into existence through autoethnographic practices, we might be able to change the narrative and to widen the spaces where we see ourselves reflected back, seen as valid and acknowledged.

But through maybe a more pessimistic lens, even if from where we are now, the roots seem to reach far back, that can be a dangerous illusion. Even though we have made progress in establishing trans studies as an academic field as well as in connection to trans politics and rights, the gains do feel fragile. As we are living in times of political backlash and global move to the right, any

marginalized community will inevitably feel vulnerable and threatened (see for example Butler 2024). It is hard to feel safe when human rights are rolled back and debated.

Toby: For these reasons, I am glad that we have arrived at shaping the special issue as a space where we do not need to *defend* neither autoethnography nor trans existence. By making the special issue a space for exploration, we have sought to hold space for plurality and ambivalence. It has been a true joy every time I have been able to communicate to one of the contributors that our aim is to create such a space. In times when trans antagonistic and exclusionary narratives and anti-gender politics are on the rise in the European context (Alm and Engebretsen 2022; Berg and others 2025), it becomes even more important to not opt for smooth and linear stories but to hold space for how difficulty and risks often exist in a tangled messiness with possibilities and potentials.

Luca: I agree, maybe especially now autoethnographic work is highly relevant and important as a way of keeping our voices heard and our experiences seen. When trans bodies and lives often are debated as questions of opinion, rights and medicine, our own words can open up new and more nuanced understandings, as demonstrated by the poem "No face, no match" from Luka Holmegaard's beautiful book *Havet i munden* (which you find in the *Frispel* section). In the poem Holmegaard confronts the violence of the medical gatekeeping system by bringing in feelings, needs, wants and desires, the very things denied from trans people when we are reduced to diagnoses, symptoms and aetiologies. While illustrating the significance of trans voices, he also points out that writing about trans experiences is not always the same as writing about *one's own* experiences.

As we wrote in the call for papers for the special issue, "autoethnographic analysis/research can be a tool for approaching both marginalization and privilege". Thus, if only majority scholars (cis, white, able-bodied, straight, etcetera) do (autoethnographic) research, that also reflects in how we see and understand the world. Through autoethnographic practices, trans lives are being written into the collective consciousness, archive of lives and ways of being, our culture and reality. This does not only include ourselves as researchers, but those around us. Through our differently marginalized positionalities and perspectives we can write back and trouble the normative, or even hostile, narratives about our lives and bodies. However, as mentioned earlier, there is vulnerability as well as possibility in writing yourself and others into existence – especially during times of political backlash.

This also brings me to questions of solidarity reaching outside our own communities. We have so far mostly discussed autoethnography as a way of writing oneself into academic research and into the culture at large, but I would like to think more about building solidarity through autoethnographic practice. This, I would argue, is connected to Pearce's formulations on rethinking the academia and our accountability both towards our immediate scholarly community, but also as part of a global academic community. I am thinking here through my own experiences as part of the Academics for Palestine group in the university I have worked during the unfolding genocide. Facing the willful ignorance of (white Swedish) academia, I wonder, what are the possibilities of situated knowledge production as an ethical lens? Writing oneself into the world one inevitably also writes others into the world through oneself.

Understanding academic freedom as not only a right pertaining to ourselves but as a responsibility towards those whose freedom is threatened, a responsibility of creating supportive global scholarly communities that reach outside our own universities. And on an individual level, accountability in our academic practices. Echoing here Adams and Holman Jones' writing on stories as a way of creating "a little humanity, a little room to live and move in and around the constraints and heartbreaks of culture and categories, identities and ideologies" (2011: 109). Especially in the context of Palestine, where the very question of humanity is at stake, I would argue (or hope) that through practices of situated knowledge-production we can offer a way of seeing the humanity of others through our eyes. This is also where embodiment takes a different, concrete, form in the context of encampments, demonstrations and strikes - where our bodies become not only locations of knowledge-creating, but sites of resistance in an academic space. So, what I am arguing here is the necessity of a wider understanding of Pearce´s methodology for the marginalized – a methodology for solidarity, perhaps.

As we are not doing our research nor writing this editorial outside of the world, we also wished to include the feminist solidarity statement in the special issue (which you find in the *Frispel* section).

Toby: Thank you for making these important points, Luca. I really like the idea of autoethnography as *a methodology for solidarity*. I think this idea contributes to scholarship that discusses building solidarity through community (Bochner and Ellis 2016; Holman Jones and Harris 2019; Pearce 2020).

Autoethnography involves introspection, which can be at times isolating and uncomfortable. I have found that turning towards discomfort, doubt, and failure has also been a way for me to enter into a *collective realm* rooted in feminist histories and traditions of troubling 'objective' and disembodied

knowledge claims (Odland 2025: 165). If I think back about our discussion these last couple of years Luca, I think that the potential of building solidarity and finding collective support has been a key driving force for us in editing this special issue, and in organizing of a number of workshops and panels on the theme "trans autoethnographies". This organizing has often been done with our friend and trans studies colleague Nico Miskow Friborg, whose contribution to the special issue explores precisely *collaborative* autoethnographic research practices. I have also learned a lot about collaborative autoethnographic writing by writing this introduction to the special issue with you, Luca!

Luca: I definitely agree, I have learned a lot from not only reading the articles, but the practical work of discussing and commenting them as well as writing this introduction together. I without a doubt continue my own work with new ideas and understandings of collaborative and situated research practices.

In addition to thinking autoethnography as a way of embedding us in our communities, one of which this special issue has also become, and the world around us, Josephine Baird and Kamyab Ghorbanpour explore the possibilities of autoethnography as a specifically *collaborative method* in their article "A queer duoethnography of *Final Fantasy VII*". This way, they bring yet another important viewpoint into thinking about the effects of autoethnographic research on those around you and the multiple different collaborations formed during autoethnographic research. Baird and Ghorbanpour demonstrate through their own experiences of playing the same video game in different times and places how autoethnography can reach across geopolitical and temporal distances. If autoethnography involves analyzing personal experiences to understand social and cultural phenomena, then duoethnography provides additional tools for allowing ambivalence and complexity to be valuable aspects of our analyzes.

Toby and Luca: The making of this special issue on *Trans autoethnographies* has been a thoroughly collaborative process involving a large number of people. We are grateful for the labor of all scholars, writers, and artists who have made contributions to this special issue. We are also grateful to those who have done work in the background, such as peer-reviewers, translators, the TGV editors, layout editors, and others. A lot of the labor that has been crucial to the *process* of making this special issue is not visible in the published *product*. We are critical of the ingrained tendency of academic publishing to rely on unpaid and invisibilized labor, and how this puts, in particular, marginalized scholars in precarious positions (Ahmed 2012; Pearce 2020; Harju 2023). We are painfully aware of our complicity in reinforcing this tendency.

This is not a special issue on autoethnographic research in general, nor *only* on writing through and about one's experiences of transness. Rather we have tried to carve out the difference between doing autoethnography while trans and *trans autoethnography* as a collection of methods and approaches for engaging with broader questions such as i) how to be ethical towards oneself and others, ii) how to write about that which borders one's own vulnerability, discomfort, and grief, iii) how to work out knots in both one's experience and writing, iv) how to explore avenues for representing and visibilizing trans lives and for telling our own stories, v) how to consider one's embodiment in connection to one's knowledge-production and vi) how to work ethically towards more just worlds. The plurality in the contributions to this special issue has convinced us further of naming it trans autoethnograph*ies*. In this way, we want to contribute to the extensive scholarship that emphasizes the importance of plurality in autoethnographic approaches and methods (see for example Ellis and others 2011; Adams and others 2015; Holman Jones and Harris 2019; Bylund and others 2021).

Plurality in trans autoethnographic ventures is also produced through the ways in which readers engage with these accounts and build on them in their own work. While the publication of this special issue is in some sense an end-point to this particular project, we hope that it also can be a point of departure for further engagements with, and conversations about, this theme. We look forward to seeing how the various approaches, styles, and arguments contained in this special issue will come to act as encounters that inspire many more stories of arrival to this theme.

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