

Bootcamp Introduction

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Our approach in introducing the concept of Autoethnography was to provide a direct experience of the method of reflection right from the first moments of the bootcamp. This was followed by a simplified historical perspective of Ethnography's transition into subjectivity. This brief text highlights our approach to introducing the subject. The main concern in the bootcamp was to provide experiences which can be key to understanding the reason and usefulness of this methodology.

The introduction to our bootcamp was held inside of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater's large great hall (Image 1). As participants entered the hall they were greeted individually by the bootcamp faculty. We asked common questions about their travels to Estonia, what their first impulses were of the city, and did they have any immediate questions or concerns. They were then requested to take a seat on the main stage where chairs had been placed in semi-circle form facing the large empty room.



Image 1

Estonian Academy of Music and Theater's Great Hall

After a brief introduction to our academy by Professor Kristel Pappel (Head of the EMTA Doctoral School), the bootcamp immediately started with an interactive exercise. Participants were asked to do a common improvisation exercise titled 'sensing a minute'. In this exercise individuals are asked to attempt to feel when one minute has passed while sitting in silence, without the aid of a clock. It should be stated clearly that the main objective of the exercise is not to guess one minute perfectly

in sync with a clock. After the individual feels one minute has passed, they raise their hand. The leader of the exercise sets a clock hidden from view in order to keep track of the general time and document the individual responses. Typically, every individual's sense of one minute is different and no one person ever senses the correct duration. Once all participant's have raised their hand the exercise is over, and a questions is posed: "*Why does the sense of time vary so uniquely from individual to individual*"?

The underlining intent of this introduction is multilayered. The use of the great hall was intended to initiate the bootcamp with a space which has a bold socio-cultural function for music students (both in terms of those who feel included in or excluded from such environments). This space would serve as an example later on in the bootcamp as a representational space for several issues concerning the formation of identity through culturally significant places. Several students noted the appearance of the hall as already having an impact on their impressions of the bootcamp. Greeting participants individually was done to establish a cooperative impression of the bootcamp, we wanted our participants to sense our faculty first as human beings, and secondly as teachers. It was our hope that establishing such a relationship would allow us to feel like a group exploring together. It also allowed individuals to present themselves to us as singular identities. This was a less intimidating way to get to know each other than the typical individual to group introductions.

The one minute exercise was presented to elicit an understanding that all individuals have a varied sense of time, and to question why this subjectivity exist and if it should be considered a flaw. Immediately, participants understood that there are aspects to their own identity/physical bodies and cultural surroundings which contribute to sensing time. Such an exercise leads directly towards the main concerns of Autoethnography, and though it does not provide any answers or clear research objectives, it allows the participant to see how our identities, space, and cultures shape even our most fundamental of experiences. Certainly the exercise would seem banal during a more in depth conversation on the topic, but starting a bootcamp on the subject allows the participants to get into a real experience as an introduction to Autoethnography.

Our main concerns when introducing the purpose of Autoethnographic research was for our participants to understand that their subjective experiences could be seen as representational of their culture. In order to arrive at this point a short overview of Ethnography can be useful. The general notion communicated was that, historically, ethnographers distanced themselves from the culture which was under investigation (Adams, Ellis, Jones 2015: 9). However, this distancing led to some skepticism regarding the interpretive capabilities of the observing ethnographer (Adams, Ellis, Jones 2015: 10). Furthermore, the simple presence of a foreign observer inside of culture potentially modifies the behavior and routines of those being observed. In such cases Autoethnography was thought to introduce an opposing view. This field takes the premise that only the individual subject

of a particular culture is capable of decoding its structure and analyzing its effects (Adams, Ellis, Jones 2015: 10-11).

In the case of artists, the application of such an idea blends perfectly with several artistic practices which are inherently subjective in nature, and were be explored further in the bootcamp. The following videos in this collection provide some general overviews of the types of questions and/or themes an artistic researcher may want to develop when conducting an Autoethnography. In depth theoretical discussions of the methodology were avoided in order to create an environment which promoted applied practice of the method, experimentation with interpretation, and questioning of validity. While doing the actual practice and methods of an autoethnographer, theoretical questions arrive quite naturally regarding validity and purpose. In such cases this should be seen as an advantage to our approach as it allows the participants to directly experience how the theory applies to the practice.

Bibliography

Ellis, Carol; Adams, Tone E.; Jones, Stacy Holman (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.