‘You want to be careful you don’t end up like Ian.
He’s all over the place’:
autobiography in/of an expanded field

(the director's cut).

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Abstract..?
This working paper was originally written as a chapter in a forthcoming book called *Autobiography in geography* edited by Pamela Moss. The book chapter is a heavily edited version of what follows. In fact, it’s little more than the first 7,000 words of what follows. There wasn't room in the book for any more. What you've got here, then, is the 'director's cut', or the 'full monty' if you like. And I don't want to summarise either of these versions here. What each is 'about' has a lot to do with you and what you think about while you're reading them. That's the point. I hope you don't mind. See what you think. It's all very 'autobiographical' and 'geographical', of course. And that's where this idea of the 'expanded field' pops up. Honest. What is a Baxi Bermuda, though?

*Keywords*: autobiography; expanded field, Baxi Bermuda.

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**Figure 1:** Not very eye-catching is it, this photograph of my PhD thesis?
It might look a bit more interesting as you read what follows

**Situate yourself . . .**
OK. I’m writing this chapter at a strange time. Seven and a half years after starting my PhD research, and three and a half years after first submitting my PhD thesis, I’m waiting for the official confirmation from Bristol University that I can call myself ‘Dr. Cook’. Just before Christmas last year, I received a letter from the Higher Degrees office saying that I would be awarded my PhD if I corrected some ‘errors of substance’ in my re-submission. I did this in January and sent a hard-bound copy to the University as requested. It’s the end of March now and I’m waiting. At the moment, I *am* ‘Dr. Cook’ on the sign on my office door, on my Department’s web-site, on my most recent cheque book, and on the CV which I submitted with my latest job application. I’m not sure how fraudulent this is. I haven’t dared to ask. It’s a
strange time.

My thesis had, in large part, been a critique of the politics of academic knowledge which had made it very hard for me to do a PhD. But, I’m currently on the verge (maybe, hopefully) of being awarded a PhD for writing about this. Yes, my ‘anti-establishment’ thesis is on the verge of being given the stamp of approval by part of the ‘establishment’ which it criticised. So, once I can ‘really’ call myself ‘Dr Cook’, I can no longer be a postgraduate railing against ‘the system’. Instead, I’ll be part of it: stamped, approved and able to trade in my plain black ‘mortar board’ for a rather fetching velvet hat (maybe, hopefully) for the next graduation day procession at Lampeter. Even if worn at the jauntest of angles, this won’t hide the fact that I’ll be well and truly part of ‘the system’ by then. And, of course, it’s not just a matter of hats. Part of the critique in my thesis had concerned the politics of PhD supervision. During the viva, my examiners had argued that supervision was often a difficult experience for supervisors as well as for their students. They told me that I’d understand this better when I had my own students to supervise. I didn’t then, and I didn’t by the time I re-submitted the thesis in May of last year. However, as I write this almost a year later, I’m six months into supervising ‘my’ first two PhD students. This is a time of transition, and not just for me.

Why are we reading about you in this book, then . . . ?

From what I understand, I was recommended to Pamela the editor by a former lecturer of mine at the University of Kentucky where I’d done an MA in Geography at the end of the 1980s. He and I had kept in touch after I’d gone to Bristol and, after I had moved to start my first teaching job at Lampeter, he’d visited the Department while on sabbatical in Ireland. He’d shown him a copy of my first PhD submission. So, he knew that I’d written an autobiographical PhD in a Geography Department, found out later that Pamela was editing a book on Geography & Autobiography, and put us in touch with each other. She contacted me from British Columbia and, when I asked her for some advice on which part(s) of my thesis might be most appropriate for this book, she gave me an address in Austria where I could send her a copy of the whole thing to read. She made some suggestions and, after further discussions, we settled on my writing something like this. Since then, I have sent her a couple of drafts and, between us, I’ve come up with exactly what follows.

Yes, but why write autobiography in geography . . . ?

Oh. That’s a harder question to answer. And I don’t want to answer it just yet. You need to know what my PhD research was about, first. To cut a long story short, it was supposed to trace connections between the retailing of one kind of fresh tropical fruit which was being sold by the major British supermarket chains in the early 1990s, and the people who were involved in growing it on two Jamaican farms. This was an ethnographic project in which I wanted to
make, and think through, connections between the overdeveloped and underdeveloped worlds, between rich and poor, between production and consumption, and between the everyday lives of people working throughout a commodity system. In the process of doing this research, though, I passed through and was connected with all kinds of other locales (physically and otherwise). And all of these movements and connections had affected what I had been able to do, to learn and to write.

There was, for instance, my departmental ‘locale’ where, among other things, I had been under pressure from the very start to submit my PhD on time, where I was struggling to convince my supervisors that I could do this with the research I planned to do, where I had to justify my study within often unfamiliar academic literatures, where I also became convinced that I was failing to perform cleverly enough in front of them and their colleagues, and where these kinds of tensions were continually under discussion among the postgraduate community, within and beyond the department. There was the locale occupied by the funding body which paid my fees, gave me a maintenance grant, provided my research expenses and set the outer bounds of my research through regulations which, for instance, allowed funding for just one overseas research trip and one overseas conference. On another scale, this body (the UK’s Economic & Social Research Council or ESRC) also largely determined and determines the structure of postgraduate human geography research in the UK through setting performance targets for departments concerning, amongst other things, completion times and completion rates for PhDs. With their ability to impose sanctions on those departments which didn’t and don’t meet these targets, this is why most if not all full-time human geography postgraduates in the UK were and are faced with the pressure — whatever the topic of their research — to submit a thesis within four years of starting (a.k.a. ‘on time’).

So, when it came to doing the preliminary research with fruit trade people working in the UK, these locales became folded into each other in intricate ways. For instance, I always had plenty to report when I returned to Bristol after talking to the contacts in the fruit trade which I’d taken time to develop. But my supervisors never seemed to be as excited about what I had found out as I was. What these fruit people had told me was all very interesting, but would it produce a PhD which would get done on time? What exactly was I going to study and how was I going to do this? Time was slipping by, and I still hadn’t and wouldn’t tell them. But I wasn’t prepared to produce the detailed research plans they demanded - like timetables for doing the research, or chapter outlines for the thesis - when I knew so little about how British supermarkets sourced their fresh fruit. Without knowing much more, I couldn’t even begin to plan out my research. And then there was the issue of who would let me talk to them about which parts of this business anyway. I didn’t know what was practically possible. So, I couldn’t even come up with a simple research question. This (and I) was a problem, then. I had had to register for an MPhil and, if I didn’t get my research sorted out by the end of my
first year, I would not be upgraded to a PhD and would not be funded to continue my study. The completion times and rates of MPhil theses were not counted by the ESRC in its recognition exercise. Not upgrading an MPhil was a ‘way out’ for all concerned. And, that year, my supervisors reminded me of this almost every time we met to discuss my research.

This is a relatively uncomplicated illustration of how different ‘influences’ came together through/in my work. I could add to this influences from the conferences I attended, and the reaction to my performances both there and back in the department; the bits of writing I sent to academics outside Bristol and the comments I received in return; the people concerned with the submission of my Kentucky MA which was still unfinished when I started at Bristol; the people I met during my ‘field work’ in Jamaica; the ways I have since taught parts of what I learned in the process to undergraduate students in Lampeter; reactions to those aspects of this process which I have attempted to get published; the ways I have tried to make sense of this process to those who might want to employ me; and, indeed, those involved in the rest of my life, none of whom could be separated from this. But I don’t have the space, here. I had much more space in my thesis. You could try to get hold of it if you’re that interested. But you might not be. So, I’ll make the point here that moving from place to place, making connections with people in different places, negotiating the discourses and ‘opportunity structures’ within and between such places, and living out the contradictions which inevitably result from this is part and parcel of the life we all lead as we try to do research, to get things published, to gain qualifications, to carve out a career path and, maybe, to make a difference to ourselves and to other people in the process.

So, this is the ‘expanded field’ and you write your way through it autobiographically..?

Yes it is, and yes you can, but you’d probably have to justify this in ‘the literature’. This is my experience, at least. And describing these connected spaces as an ‘expanded field’ is not my idea. I’ve borrowed this from Cindi Katz (1994), and I’ll talk more about her work later, too. But both she and, more recently, James Clifford (1997) have made much of the kind of account I’ve offered above. They’ve used this kind of thing to critique the dominant convention of ‘the field’ being seen as a separate space in which research is done. They have pointed out the importance of the complex ‘spatial practices’ of ethnographic research, and of the politics of translation within and between the wide variety of locales which make a difference in such work. But there’s also the related politics of knowledge which affects what kinds of research gets done, on/with what groups of people, in what kinds of places, by what kinds of researchers, from what kinds of places, for what kinds of reasons, and with what kinds of audience in mind. So an important thing to ask is who gets to ‘do’ and who gets ‘done’ in the expanded fields of ethnographic research? These arguments are addressed, to a certain extent, in those parts of the anthropology literature in which the idea of ‘traditional’ single-locale
‘fieldwork’ has been opened out through debates about reflexivity.

Here, researchers have been urged to write about their involvement in their own research because they may or should feel that they have to try to make sense of the tricky circumstances in which they studied before claiming to know anything about what they have studied. Here, I imagine that you’d agree that relationships and interpretations developed within any ‘field area’ can never make sense in and of themselves, just then and there. Researchers’ relationships and interpretations always stretch and/or leak out of that space and time, as do those of the people whose lives they study. So, one argument that can be made to justify a multi-locale approach is that the modern world is organised and experienced through local accommodatons of, and contributions to, distanciated social/cultural/economic/whatever relations. Any ethnography in and of the modern world, so the argument goes, must therefore reflect this through its research design. But calls for the multi-locale ethnographies which could do this have not just been calls for studies of different groups of people in different locales as their lives are related to one another. George Marcus (1995), for instance, has called for work in which the multiple sites which a research project might be stretched between are not set out beforehand, but emerge through the process of following ‘emergent objects of study’ and seeing what networks can be traced out in the process. These ‘objects’, he has suggested, could be people, metaphors, conflicts and/or things.

It now seems that I had set out to follow a fruit thing, and then found out that the locales connected through this process extended beyond the ‘thing system’ I had intended to trace out. I had started out trying to organise the first kind of multi-locale research and had ended up with a project which was much more like the second. The worlds which were connected and, indeed, which blurred into each other through this process all had a bearing on what I was able to study, how I was able to study it, how I was able to (mis)understand this, and how I was able to represent and perform this (mis)understanding to others. Looking back on this, my ‘emergent object of study’ — the only ‘thing’ that connected the multiple locales of my research — was ‘me’ (whoever and whatever that might be). So, I could say that writing your ‘self’ through the ‘expanded field’ of your work can be justified ‘academically’ as a way of writing reflexive, multi-locale ethnography. I’d like to believe that this is ‘true’. The literature that can allow me to think that I might not be alone in this is growing (with the help of writers like Clifford and Katz). The production and consumption of this book is hopefully part of that process. You are welcome to refer to this chapter if you think it might give your own writing some more credibility. It might not, of course. We’ll wait for the reviews.

Is that the reason that you did it, then . . . ?

Nope. Writing autobiography in/of this expanded field was not something that I chose because it might be interesting, because esteemed people were clamouring for it in ‘the literature’,
because it was the latest clever, ‘cutting edge’, groovy thing to do. Things were much more
desperate than that. In the third year of my PhD, I had found myself unwilling and unable to
write up most of what I’d found out -- a.k.a. the ‘data’ I’d helped to construct -- in Jamaica.
This was caused in part by a crisis over the transcription of the interviews I had conducted with
farm workers in an ‘english’ that I could only partly understand. Here, I was stumped by the
problem of how to understand and to represent what I’d (mis)understood in our discussions. I
thought I’d found a way of getting around this problem by paying a linguist from the
University of the West Indies at Mona to transcribe these tapes in Jamaican so that I could read
them carefully, and quote from them at length. She told me that some of my
misunderstandings were so bizarre that she and her husband had rolled around on the floor
laughing at them. I asked her to annotate the transcripts when this happened. And I could just
about afford this specialist transcription. But the sudden devaluation of sterling on the ‘Black
Wednesday’ of Autumn 1992 -- just after I’d returned to the UK -- meant that the transcription
costs of the tapes which remained with her in Jamaica had rocketed. I spent a great deal of
time and effort desperately, and unsuccessfully, trying to find the extra cash to have them
‘done’.

This was not the last of my worries, though. In the January of the following year I
presented a paper about this research at the IBG’s annual conference. I’d been placed in a
session entitled "Bringing the 'exotic' back home" with a paper entitled “Constructing the
exotic: the case of tropical fruit”. The session drew a large audience to what was the first
conference paper I had given in the UK. It was also the first and only time that I have tried to
write a whole fruit-thing-system paper. I found this an almost impossible thing to do. There
was so much to fit in and, in the paper I prepared to speak from, it really showed. I was going
to read from a text which was about half as long as this book chapter. The arguments were just
as carefully made. I would have to read it word for word. But, I had only the usual 20 minutes
to present. I was incredibly nervous and far too eager to be liked by the audience. So, in the
presentation, I rose to the laughter which greeted some of the things I said and went off on
some anecdotal tangents from the text. If I were a stand-up comic, I’d probably refer to this as
‘playing the audience’. But I was a third year PhD student giving a talk about globalization,
iequality, structural adjustment, the experience of deepening poverty, the strict supervision of
labour, and the politics of race, gender & class which ran through this - that kind of thing. I
don’t think that I even got half way through what I wanted to say before I was asked to stop.
Time was up. You might have been there. I hope not. I found the audience’s reactions to my
performance extremely disturbing both in questions after the paper, and then the comments
which rolled in after the session was over. Perhaps it was just me, though, who thought this
was disturbing.

I had faced this audience as yet another white middle-class English male academic who
had done his research in the 'Third World'. To those who were most offended, I seemed to have managed to present myself as someone shoring up the kind of white middle-class male English privilege that I thought I was undermining. I was told that I seemed to be totally oblivious of the power relations which had worked through what I had been able to do in my research. And along with many members of the audience, I was accused of finding racism ‘funny’. I had screwed up, big time. And it was humiliating. But then, later, a number of people told me that the paper had been interesting and/or humorous and/or a bit of ‘light relief’ in the midst of a typically dry and tedious conference. A woman who I had never met before stopped me the next day and said something like “I think of myself as a feminist but, after what that woman said to you yesterday, maybe I shouldn’t be.” Oh. A supportive comment was most welcome at the time. But this was a difficult one to respond to. That hadn’t been my intention - to turn academic women (or men) away from feminism. Believe me. That’s a frightening thought. Under the circumstances, perhaps ‘Oh’ was the best response. But what made my anxiety that much more acute was the fact that the criticisms were published soon afterwards in the IBG’s *Women & geography study group newsletter* (Madge 1993; Superville 1993). A friend who had also done her PhD research in Jamaica while I was there was in this study group. She phoned me to break the bad news. I wouldn’t believe it but she’d prefer that she told me rather than someone else. She read it out on the phone and then sent me a copy in the post. I was horrified. For months afterwards, I asked myself how I could have seen myself as being anti-racist, anti-sexist and so on while others saw me as reproducing white racist discourses and male privilege through what I said and did? What was it about me? And what could I do about it? My supervisor advised me not to worry about it. You get used to being trashed at conferences. It happens to everyone. But I couldn’t help worrying about it.

At this point, I’d prefer it if you didn’t feel too sorry for me. Worse things have happened to plenty of people. And these criticisms were part of much larger debates, anyway. But, given the difficulties that I had had (and helped to create) throughout this PhD, this felt like a ‘final blow’ to me. I was ready to ‘submit’, but not in the sense that I had been ‘advised’ to do so often, i.e. within 4 years. Picture yourself in these shoes, then. You have nine months of writing time left before your funding runs out. Only a tiny proportion of your data is in the kind of state which would mean that you could happily analyse and write about it. You have been rocked by the reception of your first attempt to make sense of this in a conference performance. You have managed to get a lecturing job, though, which will start when your funding runs out. Unfortunately, this will take up most of the following year. This is the year whose end must see the submission of your PhD ‘on time’. But it doesn’t really matter whether you meet this deadline as the University’s submission deadline is another year away. And the fact that your late submission might push the department back on to the funding body’s ‘blacklist’ might not seem like a bad thing to you. But, of course, a late submission
might just mean that your supervisors’ initial concerns that you wouldn’t finish on time would be proved right. That’s the last thing that you want. You had refused their ‘advice’ from the start to cut down your research to a single locale study because that wasn’t what you had applied to do. And you’d blamed much of your slow progress on their style of supervision, which you had openly criticised. So you decide that you will write the only PhD that you can hand in ‘on time’. This will explain why your proposed PhD research couldn’t be written up and handed in ‘on time’. It will include an ‘auto-ethnography’ of the process through which you struggled to do your PhD. This will include, but by no means be limited to, accounts of your ‘supervision’. And it will also be the place where you try to write your way out of the ‘identity crisis’ provoked at ‘that’ conference. You’ll try to do this by constructing an account of your childhood and adolescence in South West England, and then try to make a better sense of it through talking about ‘cannibals and missionaries’, Tarzan books and films, the Scouting movement, and Stanley’s ‘adventures’ in Africa which were part of this (you’ll know more about this later, if you get that far). And you’ll conclude the resubmitted version, at least, by discussing an undergraduate course which you subsequently taught in a small Welsh University. Hopefully you’d never want, or have, to do anything like this. But the point here is that I felt that I did. Who on earth would set out to write a thesis anything like this from the start? Not me. That’s for sure.

So, we need to be careful we don’t end up like you, then . . . ?

In many senses, yes. But, in others, maybe not. See what you think. I’ve used this warning once before in the title of a talk I gave in the Easter break of 1994, six months before my 4 year submission deadline. And I think it’s apt here, too. Then and there, I had been invited by my (then remaining) supervisor and a fellow Bristol postgraduate to talk at a conference for first year human geography PhD students. The session that they were organising was called ‘What happens when things go wrong?’ As you might now appreciate, they had invited a speaker with considerable expertise in this area. I took this as an opportunity to put together the arguments which would explain and justify what I planned to write up that summer. But it was also an example of how these arguments emerged out of, and were performed as part of, movements through the expanded field of my research. It’s quoted in full in my PhD thesis. There’s not enough room for it here. But I’ll try to conjure up some sense of what it was about using the following words (and what you can read into them, of course).

Imagine yourself in a small banked lecture theatre in a manor house owned by a large university in the South of England and run as its rather plush conference centre. You are a first year human geography PhD student and are in an audience of perhaps 30 people. Most of them are also at the same point in their research careers, but some are lecturers in the departments which make up the consortium that has organised the conference. One might be
your supervisor. You are about to be told about ‘things going wrong’ by the three speakers who are sat behind a table at the front. They’ve all just about finished their PhDs. You would like to be in that position one day (in less than four years’ time, of course). Attending this conference is part of your research ‘training’. One of the speakers is a tall, white, scruffy-looking 28 year old English male. He is the last one to speak, and does so from a script where what he says is apparently written word for word. He won’t stand up, or even sit on the table. He is really nervous. He’d had a rough ride with his last conference presentation. He is reluctant to look up from his script as he speaks. He grins a lot, but not because he thinks what he is saying is particularly funny. Or at least that’s how he remembers it four years later, as he’s writing a book chapter like this one...

He begins with an anecdote from his time as a postgraduate in Bristol. In his third year there, a story had come his way of a fellow postgraduate who had been warned by a member of staff ‘You want to be careful you don’t end up like Ian. He’s all over the place’. He says that he’s going to use this rather flippant point to address the issue of ‘things going wrong’ with PhD research. He tries to situate his arguments in ‘the literature’ within and beyond geography where the politics and ethics of ethnographic research have been discussed. He suggests that, while you have probably been encouraged to research and write about, through and against the ‘dodgy politics’ of the world around you in your work, you probably haven’t been encouraged to research and write about these politics closer to home, in your department and/or university for instance. He is about to do just this, though. He doesn’t believe in that ‘ivory tower’/’real world’ divide (and you probably don’t believe in it either). He has plenty of experience of academia as - in its own way - an exploitative and cut-throat business. He’d love to have read James Sidaway’s 1998 paper about ‘The production of British geography’ before preparing this part of the argument. It would have backed up his point really nicely, in ‘the literature’. It’s in Transactions you know. But the research for that paper was only in the early stages. Sidaway was at this conference and he would drag your speaker off that day -- or was it the day before? -- as one of the 40 interviewees for his project.

Sidaway mentions in the appendix to the paper he eventually publishes that “‘the research was informed by a literature written by geographers on interview strategies (notably Charlesworth 1994; and Cook & Crag 1995)” (p.498). That wouldn’t be the Cook who gave that talk to you at that postgrad conference all those years ago, would it? The Cook that had sent Sidaway an advance copy of that Doing ethnographies booklet? It’s categorised as a ‘book’ on Cook’s CV, you know. Has he talked about his CV yet? Is he the same Cook that’s writing this chapter? If so, that is what he’d call an ‘expanded field’. Or should he call it a ‘hall of mirrors’, or liken that geography of the sociology of geographical knowledge to one of those animals that can mate with itself, or a whole nest of them, travelling around in a wheelbarrow, or something else? Anyway, four years later, after being told by Sidaway that’s
he’s been quoted in the final paper, it’s out. But your speaker can’t work out which quote/s is/are ‘his’. He is anonymous, even to himself. And he’s making a call in this book chapter for exactly the kind of research and writing that Sidaway has just published. Now that’s what I call ‘all over the place’. Wow. That’s also the case in the other text where Cook was one of the researched, not the researcher. And Sidaway was interviewed for this one too. Cook asked Sidaway if this was the case, on the offchance, when he phoned him to ask if he minded being tangled up in this chapter. He was OK about it. Oh yes, the book they were talking about is called *Supervising the PhD* (Delamont *et al.* 1997). Cook and his supervisor had been interviewed for that one, in the first year of his PhD. You’d expect some distinctive and identifiable quotes to come through there. But they don’t, to him at least. And, coincidentally, Sidaway couldn’t find himself in the book either. He and Cook had a good laugh about that. So the point is that the scenarios that Cook wanted to outline in his talk to you, in that postgrad audience, weren’t that unusual. But ‘proper research’ undertaken that close to home and published where it surely must demand respect, hadn’t come out yet. So he can’t say that with much more than the authority of personal experience. He has to be a lot more speculative, provisional, suggestive. To you, he may not sound like he knows exactly what he’s talking about. But, there may be a spark or two of recognition as you catch various bits of what he’s saying. Your mind might wander off. Be careful. Stop doodling. You’re not an artist. Are you?

He mentions how the transition from being a postgraduate at the University of Kentucky to being one at the University of Bristol was difficult; how things went wrong ‘in the translation’ (so to speak) between two very different academic locales; how, in the process, he became a rather bitter and angry student who was a pain in the bum to supervise; and how things got worse during his third year due to a lack of funds and a disturbing reaction to ‘that’ conference paper. But he tries to make sense of this process not by reference to theories addressing the contemporary politics of education, but to a short passage taken from Michael Taussig’s (1987) book *Shamanism, colonialism & the wild man*. Here, he says, Taussig tried to make sense of the ‘cultures of colonialism’ and the dynamics of their (trans)formation by South American people and the Europeans who colonised their territories at the end of the 19th century. And he quotes Taussig’s argument that, there and then, there “were, in effect, new rituals, rites of conquest and colony formation, mystiques of race and power, little dramas of civilisation and savagery which did not mix or homogenise ingredients from the two sides of the colonial divide but instead bound Indian understandings of white understandings of Indians to white understandings of Indian understandings of whites” (p.109). He (Cook, not Taussig) then makes the point that, if you remove the physical violence and communication problems, and then substitute ‘cultures of cleverness’ for those of ‘colonialism’, you might have a useful way of thinking about the politics of postgraduate life in your department. It worked for him.
Sort of. To make the point as clearly as he can, he paraphrases Taussig’s argument by arguing himself that, on entering departments, first year postgrads are initiated into ‘cultures of cleverness’ which bind staff understandings of postgrad understandings of staff to postgrad understandings of staff understandings of postgrads. The way that he has written his paper will illustrate this point, if you don’t quite get it yet. He had to think about it for a long time before it clicked.

He then goes on to say that he takes the staff/postgrad binary with a pinch of salt, that these aren’t the only people whose understandings of each other’s understandings help to create, sustain and transform these ‘cultures’, and that these relationships have to be seen as situated within the wider cultural politics and political economies of higher education. There are, for instance, still far too many white middle-class men like him, and perhaps like you too, teaching and researching in geography departments. This is certainly the case in the UK. He also knows exactly what feminist geographers like Linda McDowell mean when they criticise these academic ‘cultures’ as being invariably ‘masculinist’. He quotes one of the quotations that she uses to make her point. This describes postgraduates’ initiation into such ‘cultures’ as learning the:

"process of one-upmanship by which we learn to be critical thinkers. In graduate school we are taught that the measure of our intelligence is the extent to which we can show others to be wrong. Thus the best students are those who can offer the most masterful critique, pointing to the methodological flaws, finding gaps in the argument, and using the most sophisticated language. One consequence is an enormous loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, so that it is the unusual student who emerges from a graduate program as a confident scholar who feels good about herself or himself” (Anderson in McDowell 1992 p.402).

This neatly encapsulates his experience of being a PhD student, and it’s nice to know it’s not just a Bristol thing (it’s all over the place) and he’s not an unusual student. When he first read this passage it was, at once, a depressing and fantastic thing to be told. He thinks that this passage may have a similar effect on you. He can’t possibly know, though. But he then goes on to talk about how the rules governing the allocation of funding in higher education have a huge effect on what any of you, and he, can do. He is on much safer ground, now. What he is saying is probably more obvious to more people. It’s one of those important but boring things, to him at least.

He then tries to up the tempo. In one of his characteristically long sentences, he says that, through writing about postgraduate research as embedded within the kinds of tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies which constitute these structures of power/knowledge -- through ambivalent complexes of accommodation and resistance, through contextual performances of identity, and so on -- he believes and/or hopes that you (or at least he) can
capture, think about and, at least partially, deal with what goes wrong with such work in such work. The point he’s making is that, when you think that things are going ‘wrong’ with your research, they might be going ‘right’ if you think about them differently - as something that you can learn from and perhaps follow up. And he would like you to learn from his ‘mistakes’ in this respect, if you can and want to do so. He argues that reading about the ‘expanded field’ is useful training for these mental gymnastics, and recommends that you read Katz’s (1992) work in particular. By design and by accident, he believes that there’s much to learn if you tackle head on the ‘fact’ that your research is almost inevitably going to go, and going to be, ‘all over the place’. He seems to want to turn this criticism into an observation, or perhaps even into a compliment. But images of him as a mood guru assuring you that you can ‘Turn your frown upside down’ flash into your mind. There’s a briefer flash of a car sticker saying ‘Don’t worry, be happy’. You think of a moving TV drama where a hero had triumphed over adversity, against all the odds. It could be you. It could be him. Maybe you should you just try to concentrate a bit harder? But he’d probably like your mind to have wandered off to a seaside resort where you saw a baseball hat in a shop with ‘Shit happens’ written on it. This is closer to what he’s trying to argue, but it’s not quite the entire message. You could have imagined him there too, as a rather serious shop assistant arguing that neither of you should just accept that ‘Shit happens’. Your daydream gets more surreal as you then notice he’s wearing a hat that looks suspiciously like a PhD thesis. He seems to be buckling under its weight. And it won’t keep the sun out of his eyes. Luckily, you wake with a shake just before he finishes his talk.

So, he said that you can always somehow turn your shit around . . . ?

I’m not sure, I wasn’t really paying attention. And I’d prefer it if you didn’t use such ‘street talk’ in an academic book. But you should already have an idea about the theoretical positions that he cobbled together to make sense of his research from ‘the literatures on’ reflexive/multi-locale ethnography, cultural politics, political economy, and Taussig (wherever he fits in). Actually, he’s probably ‘all over the place’ as well. You want to be careful you don’t end up like him, too. I hope he won’t mind me saying this. But, maybe you should be careful that you don’t end up like yourself, too. But -- going back to ‘me’ talking about ‘me’ rather than ‘me’ talking about ‘you’ (not) listening to ‘him’ (Cook not Taussig, that is) -- I want to get serious now. Please concentrate. One of the things I was trying to piece together in this talk was a way of thinking about the ethics of my activities in/between this expanded field. But I didn’t then have the confidence and, more importantly, hadn’t done ‘the literature review’ to tackle the issue of ethics head on. This is a part of my research - then and since - which I’ve been reluctant to stake out for inspection by people I don’t know, by people who might not give me the benefit of the doubt, by people who might want me to have a crystal clear position. Where
could this reluctance to talk for fear of being humiliated come from, you may wonder? Perhaps I’ve already told you. And where does this chapter fit into all of this? I’m sure that, by many people’s standards, the research which I have done and the way that I have written about it could be labelled as ‘unethical’.

Anyway, close to home, I had effectively conducted covert participant observation in the department where I did my PhD research. And, even though I took the usual steps to throw readers off the scents which would clearly identify the key characters in this account, most human geographers (in the UK at least) wouldn’t have to hire a private detective to know who was who. Closer to home, I wrote an account of my childhood and adolescence which, among other things, picked apart the everyday moralities through which my parents had tried to bring up their three boys to ‘do the right thing’. Not many parents have to face up to such an analysis in print, and I hadn’t asked their permission to do this. And, further away from both of these ‘homes’, I’d had to negotiate the ethical minefield of my ‘proper’ research in and around London and, in particular, in and around the two fruit farms in Jamaica. Then, for instance, the question of what I should say to people in one part of the fruit system based on what I’d learned from people in another was constantly on my mind. By accident and by design, there were many things which weren’t, and weren’t supposed to be, known by everyone involved. Yet, I was piecing this knowledge together for a thesis which could, eventually, be read and acted upon by some more than others. And I’d spilled some beans along the way. Power and knowledge were everywhere. So, a number of ways of being ‘me’ were (un)ethically experienced, challenged, performed, negotiated -- take your pick -- as I moved through this expanded field to do my research.

**Did you illustrate how you dealt with this, then . . ?**

Yes, in a small way. The presentation included a section where I talked about the way in which I’d responded to a challenge made by two white Jamaican men, one an estate owner and the other a farm manager. They were ‘friendly rivals’ in the export agriculture business. Let’s call the estate owner ‘Tim’ and the farm manager ‘Jim’. In the early stages of the farm research, I rented a room in Tim’s ‘Great House’ where the person who’d sent me the report about my conference presentation was also living while doing her PhD research. I wanted to live there, too, so that I could cycle to the neighbouring valley where Jim managed his fruit farm. Tim had helped me to gain Jim’s consent to study what went on there. And later I had the opportunity to ‘house-sit’ a property owned by Jim’s brother and his wife in the grounds of his farm. I got to know Tim and Jim very well through my research, both as people from whom I learned a great deal about fruit farming in Jamaica, and as people who I would hang out with socially. But, as my research progressed there over a period of six months, the hospitality and frankness which they had initially offered became increasingly punctuated by
their anger over the ‘brass-necked’ nature of what I was doing. What, they argued, gave me the right to swan into their lives, look closely and critically at their finances, business methods, family lives, and, perhaps most sensitive, ways of dealing with their increasingly impoverished workforces and then fly away and write about this as if I didn’t equally owe my livelihood to the ugly means of exploitation I obviously saw in theirs? Given that, at that time, my parents had been running their own business for 32 years (it went bust in my first term at Lampeter), their most disturbing question concerned whether I would even consider researching how they had made their money off other people and then speak about it critically in an academic arena. And, although much of this line of argumentation could be seen as tactical -- their playing off what they saw as my ‘misplaced socialist idealism’ against what they knew about my family background to persuade me where my ultimate loyalties should perhaps lie -- I could not deny that they had a fair point and this was something which, if these ideals were to remain somehow intact, I would have to deal with in my work. By the way, I’d ‘revealed’ these ‘socialist’ leanings by being thoroughly depressed by the 1992 UK general election, where the Labour party had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in a spectacular fashion. I’d watched the whole drama unfold live via satellite in Jim’s family’s TV lounge. At a polo match the next day, one of their friends tried to console me by saying that Jamaica had had 'socialist' governments in the past, and they’d been dreadful. Maggie Thatcher had been a great leader. It was impossible to hide the fact that I totally disagreed with this.

Anyway, in the presentation, I dealt with this through talking about how I’d adopted an identity politics in which, among other things, you try to state exactly where you’re coming from. Few people are going to be able to tell from just looking at you that you are working from and through, for instance, an anti-racist standpoint. It’s also possible that few people would be able to tell this from seeing you present a paper at a conference - particularly if it’s one of those ones that goes wrong. You can’t assume that people will just assume your position, as you understand it at least, even if you wear that ‘Shit happens’ hat. You could be wearing it as an ironic statement, or to keep the sun out of your eyes, or both. Would all the people in the audience get the/a ‘joke’? It’s not just a case of making a simple statement of where you think you’re coming from, then. That’s not the answer. bell hooks had put this really well, so I quoted her advice on being serious about anti-racism:

"only a persistent, rigorous, and informed critique of whiteness could really determine what forces of denial, fear, and competition are responsible for creating fundamental gaps between professed political commitment to eradicating racism and the participation in the construction of a discourse on race that perpetuates racial domination. Many scholars, critics, and writers preface their work by stating that they are white, as though mere acknowledgement of this fact were sufficient, as though it conveyed all we need to know of standpoint, motivation, direction. ... Committed cultural critics - whether white or black, scholars or artists - or both - can produce work that opposes structures of domination, that
presents possibilities for a transformed future by willingly interrogating their own work on aesthetic and political grounds. This interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention, fundamentally fostering an attitude of vigilance rather than denial” (1989 p.162-163 & 164)

And, if this kind of interrogation made sense - as it did to me - then so did others concerning our genders, sexualities, class positions, ‘cleverness’, (dis)abilities, and other axes of difference. That’s what I said. And a vigilant interrogation of where I thought I was ‘coming from’ - i.e. writing my ‘self’ through critical autobiography - was a way of dealing with the ‘ethics’ of what I ought to say and do in/of the expanded field of my PhD. Tim and Jim had argued that I shouldn’t write about their lives if I wouldn’t write equally critically of my own, my family’s, all that. So I did. And I could think of my auto-ethnographic writing as part of this, too. Together, this writing allowed me to respond to their challenge, but I added even more. My thesis was like a ‘baker’s dozen’.

Tim and Jim probably wouldn’t have expected me to build in an argument about ‘colonisations of the self’ which I could identify in my own childhood through the ‘fun’ that my brothers, friends and I had had with images of missionaries in ‘cannibal pots’, watching Tarzan films on the TV, the jokey use of the phrase ‘Dr Livingstone, I presume’, and being involved in the cub scout movement. But, that’s what I did. I’d like you to trust that this makes sense in the context of how the thesis is written. This is something else that I don’t have the space to discuss here. Sorry. But the point is that, at least in my own mind, I didn’t have to feel so bad about writing about Tim, Jim, their families, friends and the way that they managed their farms. I have steered clear of doing much of this so far. That’s the next big project. And these weren’t the only ‘multi-locale’ ethics that were arrived at, anyway. There's more. And, to illustrate this, I’m going to try to bounce you around my expanded field like one of those chrome balls on a pinball table. Brace yourself. One of my fingers is poised over a flipper button, the money’s gone in, and I’m pulling back that spring loaded launcher.

**Do we really have to follow you here . . ?**

No, but I’m going to write it anyway. But I won’t take the analogy too far. I think that it’s quite a good way to conjure up a feeling for the relationships between ethics, research and writing that developed in the expanded pinball table of my research. Me and my ethics were catapulted all over the place. I got dizzy from it. I often set off unexpected and/or shock reactions from the bits of the expanded table I bounced off. I scored a few points in the process (like getting my PhD, perhaps). But I did long for the flippers to miss me once in a while so that I could disappear back into the safety of the table’s innards. As with most analogies, though, this one falls apart quite quickly. But you might wish to take it a bit further if you’re very religious, and/or if you’re a conspiracy theorist, and/or if you know more about
pinball and its tables. Who designed the table? Who put the money in? Who’s pressing those flipper buttons? But maybe pinball - - like shit -- just ‘happens’. And maybe we should ignore this and get back to the argument.

In the ‘ethical’ chain of events that I’m about to spin out, we’ve already taken the first step from Jamaica to the county of Devon in South West England where I grew up in a seaside village. It’s the fall of 1994 and I’m in Lampeter, in West Wales, about 200 miles away. I’ve finally finished the first draft of the autobiographical part of my thesis. I have sat on it for a few weeks, but I know I have to send it to my parents to read. In part, it’s because I could have made some mistakes. But, although I had felt that I had little choice but to write about this (for both the practical and ethical reasons already mentioned), I’m dreading sending it off to them. But the deadline is approaching. It’s now or never. I go ‘home’ to Devon for the weekend on the train. Over that weekend, I mention that I’ve got something that I’d like them to read. But I never quite get around to handing it over. I’d hate to watch them reading it. Eventually it gets to the point where my Dad is dropping me off at the train station for the trip back to Lampeter. Only as I’m getting out of the car do I hand over what I’ve written. It’s in a plain brown envelope. I nervously ask him if he and Mum can read it over and let me know what they think. Then I get on the train, and worry about this all the way home and for several weeks afterwards. And I do this as I’m trying frantically to finish off the rest of the thesis. I can’t bear to phone them, and they don’t phone me. I get increasingly worried that they might hate what I’ve written, though they’ve always supported me in my rather unusual career path. But could I have taken this too far, as far as they were concerned? I call my sister-in-law who, with my older brother and their baby daughter, lives in the same village. I ask if she’s heard anything about what they think of it. She’s heard nothing at all, good or bad. So I eventually have to bite the bullet and find out for myself. The submission deadline is coming up soon. By now I am far more terrified of this phone-call than of any viva I could have. I had taken a huge risk in writing this. It was much more of a risk than the one I took in writing about my department, for instance. That put things in perspective a bit. When I did eventually call, I was shocked, relieved and fascinated to find that they quite liked it (I’ll talk more about why later) and this meant a hell of a lot to me. But they had found some things that I’d got wrong, so I asked them to write down their corrections and comments in the margins and send their copy back to me as soon as they could. Unfortunately, when this arrived I didn’t have the time to change the main text in this part of the thesis to make it more ‘accurate’. So I just typed their corrections and comments word for word as footnotes in the relevant places. Very shortly afterwards, two copies of the thesis were on their way to Bristol by motorbike courier to be submitted at the very last possible moment.

At the ‘proper’ viva the following Easter, I was surprised to find that these footnotes seemed to be what my examiners liked the most. This was ‘polyvocality’. I’d read about this
while I was doing my PhD. Phil Crang had written a great paper in Society & space in 1992. I’d written that Doing ethnographies book(let) with his brother Mike. It’s a small world. Is it beginning to sound like a boy’s world, though? You shouldn’t be too surprised by that. Anyway, my parents were ‘speaking back’ against what I’d remembered and written. They’d only picked out fairly minor things, but I’d introduced this ‘dialogue’, this ‘doubt. In a similar vein to my examiners’ comment quoted at the start, for instance, they told me that it’s hard to bring up three kids. I’d understand that when I had my own one day. This kind of dialogue and doubt hadn’t been introduced to the other parts of my thesis though. So my examiners thought that I should give my supervisor(s) a similar ‘right to reply’ in the places where they made appearances. This became part of the major overhaul which would be needed for the re-submission of the thesis before the new, final-final deadline two years later. Only if I did this to my examiners’ satisfactions could I be awarded the PhD. This was my second chance. There wouldn’t be a third one. This must have been a difficult PhD to viva, given both its content and the fact that it was effectively unfinished when it was handed in ‘on time’, the first time (it didn’t matter if it passed or failed after this as far as the department’s ESRC returns were concerned). But I’d really appreciated how they had given me the benefit of the doubt. They’d let me explain myself. They’d listened and argued with me (as opposed to against me). I could see where they were coming from with most of their instructions, particularly after I’d had the chance to think about them once I got them on paper. But there was a problem: I was determined not to give a voice to my supervisor(s). Yes, polyvocality is a means through which people traditionally written about can be given a voice in representations of their lives. This is something which has been denied to the relatively poor and powerless who rarely, if ever, have the chance to have a voice in such arenas. And it is a good, ‘ethical’ thing to do. But, as far as I was concerned, giving my parents a voice in my thesis was nothing like the same as giving one to my supervisor(s).

I need to tell you a little bit about my Mum and Dad here to make my point. They have spent almost all of their working lives in the plumbing and heating business. Along with my cousin John, I was the first person in the family who went to university. I’ve stayed there ever since. That’s what’s ‘unusual’ about my career path. My older brother followed my Mum and Dad into the family business, while my younger brother did a degree in Building and now works in that industry. Anyway, the ‘literature’ that my parents read includes local and national newspapers, magazines, trade journals, road maps, business letters, instruction manuals, gardening books, their grandchildren’s story books, bits of the Bible, that sort of thing. They write estimates, business letters, the odd personal letter, crosswords, that sort of thing. I’m sure that neither of them have ever read a book like this or written in one either. Lord knows why they’d want to. In the world(s) in which they live and work, they’re not poor and they’re not powerless. They’re back in business and doing quite well, thank you. But they
haven't had that much influence in the discipline of geography. No geographer that I have ever spoken with has been influenced by their work, or been helped to get a job because they wrote them a glowing reference. If they were asked to review this book, you probably wouldn't take their opinions as particularly authoritative. Imagine a review in *Antipode* of Moss, P (*ed*) *Autobiography in geography* by Peg and Geoff Cook (Cook’s Heating Services Ltd., Devon, England). Or let’s turn this around. Imagine a review in *Ecumene* of Cook, G *Estimate for the servicing of a Baxi Bermuda combined back boiler & gas fire for Mrs B. Nora of Babbacombe, South Devon* by (say) Professor Chris Philo (Department of Geography & Topographic Science, University of Glasgow, Scotland). You might read one or both of these, but how seriously would you take them? I think that Chris might relish the challenge. I phoned him to ask. But what’s the point in even thinking about this? It’s not going to happen, is it? Except as a ‘bit of fun’, maybe.

The point I’m trying to make is that my supervisor(s) -- whoever s/he/they might be, of course -- are quite likely to have a more powerful say in the discipline of geography than my parents. S/he/they have a more powerful say than I do and perhaps a more powerful say that you, too. In 1995, for instance, a book was published in which one had co-written a chapter. Among other things, this warned that reflexivity could be taken too far. Spookily, the hypothetical symptoms of this extremism read like a very brief summary of my PhD thesis. I was told by someone ‘in the know’ that I shouldn’t read too much into this. It was hard not to do so. But I think I managed. But this was certainly an attempt to trash the genre I had tried to write in, and this trashing would be far more widely read than my thesis. So, giving this supervisor, at least, a ‘right to reply’ in my thesis wasn’t anything like giving one to my parents. For one thing, I’d asked my parents to correct anything that I hadn’t remembered properly. The autobiographical part which they had a voice in was based almost entirely on my memory. The part which my supervisor(s) was (were) supposed to have a voice in was based on all kinds of ‘evidence’ -- the kind of ‘evidence’ you’d put together to make your case in any ethnographic write-up. In the re-submission, I described this part of my thesis as ‘auto-ethnography’ and the other as ‘autobiography’. But I haven’t explained why, yet. It’s all ‘autobiographical’, after all. But I chose to make this distinction in the re-submission to point out the difference between these two parts in terms of ‘methods’ and ‘data handling’. The ‘auto-ethnographic’ part was, therefore, chock full of supervisory voices, particularly in the form of quotations from the written comments I’d had on the work I’d handed in. As far as I was concerned, then, my supervisor(s) had said quite enough in my PhD research already. But would an offer to ‘speak’ in the final thesis have been taken up, anyway? Would I have had a ‘right to reply’ to their ‘right to reply’? Did my parents have a ‘right to reply’ to my supervisors’ ‘right to reply’? Would they all gang up on me, have a little scrap, or get on really well in the footnotes? Would Dad do one of them a special deal on a boiler service? I’m in
danger of getting carried away here, I think. I don’t actually know the answers to any of these questions. I don’t think I want to, either. Now, where were we?

Oh yes, the point I was making is that, while I tried as hard as I could to satisfy my examiners’ suggestions/demands in the re-write, the PhD was re-submitted without these extra voices. Again, this was done ‘just in time’, right on the re-submission deadline. It then went back to the examiners for them to assess whether this version justified the award of a PhD. This decision took ages to come through. But, after about seven months of waiting, I received a letter in December of last year from the University's Higher Degrees Examination Board. It had been decided at their most recent meeting that, on balance, I had done enough to merit a PhD. But I hadn’t done quite enough: I had to give ‘the department’ a voice in my thesis. Only if I did this, exactly as instructed, would I actually be awarded my PhD. And I was given yet another deadline. Their demand was couched as the 'correction' of six 'errors of substance', one of which involved the deletion of a footnote, and five of which involved the insertion of footnotes - whose wording was set out in my final examiners' report - stating that 'THIS POINT [OR THIS SENTENCE/ THESE SENTENCES] IS STRONGLY CONTESTED WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT'. These are their capital letters, and it’s their underlining. And I don't know why it's like this. But it seemed that not only did I have to include their voice, but it had to shout. And, I had to wonder, what was the DEPARTMENT doing re-examining my thesis and making these demands anyway? Had they all read it? I’d thought that that was my examiners’ job. I’d included and signed a standard ‘author’s declaration’ in which I’d stated very clearly that ‘The views expressed here are those of the author and not of the university’. But, I suppose, the DEPARTMENT and the university aren’t technically the same thing. Imagine if the UNIVERSITY had had to read the whole thing. That would have taken decades. But I wanted my PhD through quickly. I was applying for a job in which, so I believed, it was essential to have a PhD to even be considered for the post. Things had changed since I’d got my job in Lampeter. It’s much more competitive now. So I followed the instructions to the letter, convinced that the only thing that this enforced polyvocality would do would be to make the DEPARTMENT look interfering, daft, and SHOUTY too. This didn’t worry me too much. So they went in.

But the ‘errors of substance’ they identified were really strange ones. They were things that I remembered very vividly as happening and/or being the case. Fellow postgrads of the time could confirm this all, I’m sure. But they’d probably want to do this anonymously. That wouldn’t help me much. And I suppose I could have been pleased with myself for getting only five things wrong. After all, I’d made so many POINTS and so many SENTENCES that I’d hate to count them. Have you ever counted yours? And it was actually quite nice to see what I’d got ‘wrong’. It didn’t seem to be anything significant. For instance, the footnote that I had had to delete had simply said that one of my supervisors had never been to a single
presentation that I’d given. Maybe this person was in the room once but was wandering around, transparent, like Arnold Schwarzenegger’s character in that ‘Predator’ film. Or maybe there really was someone hiding behind that curtain that day? I’m getting carried away again, aren’t I? Perhaps I really have gone too far, now. But I think these speculations are just about as ridiculous as having to call 5 POINTS/SENTENCES in my thesis ‘errors of substance’ - especially those 5 points. In the very first sentence of the first draft, I wrote that I had started writing that PhD in 1992 and, later, that that dreadful conference experience had happened in the same year. These were huge ‘errors’, especially in a thesis where chronology mattered so much. In both cases, 1993 was the year. But nobody noticed, including me. Technically speaking, though, perhaps these weren’t substantial errors. As for the ‘real’ ones, you should have a look if you’re interested. You might get the chance one day. I still can’t get my head around this. Maybe it would seem less ridiculous to me if I knew what had gone on behind the scenes as this decision was made. And how about the other decisions - to actually pass the thesis, for instance? How on earth was that made, I wonder? But, maybe I’d have written about these things here if I’d known more? I might not have had any ethical qualms about doing that. So, if you were involved, would you tell me? But the fact remains that, as I write this chapter, I’m waiting for the letter to confirm that - because I have followed these rather bizarre instructions to the letter - I really do have a PhD. But I might not get that letter, of course. It’s a strange time. This sort of thing doesn’t happen to me every day. Has anything like this ever happened to you?

Oh yes, there’s another thing I want to say here: we’re talking as if there are only two sets of people who might deserve a ‘right to reply’ to my work. There are, of course, plenty more. In my PhD, it must be several hundred if not more. For this chapter, I estimate that approximately ?? people could recognise themselves well enough to merit a ‘right to reply’ here. Do you think that I should have contacted all of them? And how would I have dealt with their comments as I re-wrote this? How many footnotes can you stomach? And some people might deserve to be given more of a say than others. But how would I decide? And do I need your permission to write bits of this chapter, too? You’re probably getting ‘involved’ in it as you read it. I hope so. I’d really like that to happen. In some strange way, you might have recognised yourself in here somewhere. I’d like to think that that would happen with at least one of my POINTS in at least one of my SENTENCES. Has it, though?

You know, this whole thesis sounds like a hugely destabilising process . .

Oh yes, by accident and by design. And it’s hard to manage where design starts and accident stops. Just in case you haven’t noticed, in this chapter there are all kinds of stories, scenarios, tangents, fragments, thrown up and out, grabbed back, developed a bit more, contradicted, and/or left there. My thesis was written along similar lines, except there’s much more of it.
Imagine. And it’s much angrier, and less manic, than this chapter (to me, anyway). But there’s also something that keeps both of them together, somehow. In the process of doing the research, as I’ve said, it was mainly ‘me’ (although it could have been a tropical fruit, if all had gone ‘well’). But, in this chapter, perhaps it’s the binding together of ‘me’ trying to work out the most effective way to explain to ‘you’ what I’m trying to say and how ‘you’ have been trying to make sense of what on earth I’m saying to ‘you’. Taussig is back, and maybe it’s that quotation from his 1987 book that can keep us ‘focused’. Kind of. You might be flagging now. I would be. Have a break. Put the kettle on. Whoever you are. But my problem is that I don’t know who ‘you’ are, where you are, why on earth you’re reading this book, or what you might be making of this chapter. You might be reading this for a seminar or reading group. Has anyone provided a masterful critique yet? Did they use some sophisticated language? Were you impressed? Or were you the one trying to impress? Maybe someone reacted on a more ‘personal’ level? I can only imagine. As far as my audience is concerned, I haven’t got much to go on. According to the proposal which Pamela sent to me, this book will be primarily marketed in ‘English speaking countries with strong human geography traditions’. That’s Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US, and the UK. And I have to use ‘American English’ spellings. Not surprisingly, Jamaica and ‘Jamaican english’ spellings appear nowhere in the proposal. But you wouldn’t expect that, would you? Could the person who transcribed the farm workers’ interview tapes buy a copy at the UWI Mona campus bookstore? If so, I’d like to say hello to her and say I hope she and her husband managed to get up off the floor. Not surprisingly, there was no mention of the book being marketed to the plumbing and heating industry. My Dad asked me on the phone today whether it would be available in Exeter University’s bookstore. Exeter is in the county of Devon. He wondered if it might drum up a bit of business. Mum, Dad and I had a good laugh at that on the phone. I’ve lived in the States as a postgrad student, and spent quite a bit of time in Canada on holiday, visiting my then ‘chum’ (as they say in Quebec, apparently). In terms of working out who ‘you’ might be and how ‘you’ might read this, that’s something for me to go on. But it’s not much. You might say it’s virtually nothing. And I’m acutely aware of the possibility that what I might think I’m saying is not necessarily what you think you’re reading. And I haven’t helped things much by writing in a more colloquial style, a style which is closest to the way that I think about things as I’m driving to work. It’s a twenty minute journey. If I’m on my own, I usually have a think about what I’m going to do that day. What have I got to read? Who have I got to see? What am I going to say in that lecture? What admin have I got to do? How can I escape from this? Who am I going to phone or exchange some E-mail with? That sort of thing. It’s ‘personal’ and ‘academic’ at the same time. Like this. I might have to go on a diversion to get this much in in one journey. Maybe this book will simultaneously be published as an audi-tape. I could be reading this to you in stereo as you drive to work. There’s a thought. I’m not
a megalomaniac, though, by the way. Honestly. If this thought has come into your mind, you’re taking what I’m saying far too seriously.

One thing that can be said in favour of that ‘proper academic writing style’ - you know, the one that would get you past the referees and editors of one of the many prestige international journals we have to publish in if we want to get anywhere - is that it probably travels a lot better. It’s a lot more standardised, isn’t it? I had a paper back once where every “it’s”, “you’ve”, “don’t”, you know what I mean, had been ‘corrected’. You have got to appreciate that I would not have liked that a great deal. Would not you have been annoyed by this? I did appreciate the criticisms about my overly long sentences, my tendency to pack what I write with far too many references, and my tendency to write papers that are just far too long. I probably do have to do something about these things. I have here, I think (with one exception). Do you think it might be any better now? Imagine you’re the editor of one of these prestigious journals and you receive a manuscript written just like this (even if you were prepared to let those abbreviations slide). Maybe you are one of those people. I’ve begun to imagine this scenario more and more as I’ve been writing this chapter. Doing things this way has allowed me to say much more of what I want to say than usual, and I have found it much easier to write than usual. I’m really getting into this. But could I get very far in my career by continuing to write this way? What do you think? Do you know of any precedents? I’m grateful to be given my first chance, here. Thanks Pamela, I hope you don’t regret it. But, suppose I don’t want you to ‘fully’ understand what I’m trying to say? Suppose I’m not too sure myself? Suppose I don’t want to provide a ‘transparent reflexivity’ here -- the full, unambiguous and true story of my life and thoughts - even if I thought that I could? Gillian Rose (1997) has been writing about this lately, but not me. And suppose I refuse to situate myself through a review of the reflexive ethnography and/or autobiography ‘literatures’ here? I’ve already done this, though, haven’t I? What can you make of this chapter? What’s it ‘about’? I’m wondering. Have you tried to categorise ‘me’ as a certain kind of human geographer? Do you think I’m a ‘cultural’, ‘social’, ‘historical’, ‘economic’, ‘development’ and/or one of those new fangled ‘nature/culture’ geographers? Or am I some kind of strange physical geographer. Go on, ask me what’s my favourite soil? Or do you think that’s there’s another way you could categorise me? How about ‘Jack of all trades, master of none’? But how the bloody hell would you know that? Sorry for snapping there. That one really gets to me. Do you think I have any idea how to categorise myself? Would I want to? Please don’t start feeling sorry for me again. In the larger scheme of things, I can live with this. Worry about yourself. I would, if I knew what you knew. Probably. I can’t help it.

If you’ve read any of my job applications, you’d probably say that I had categorised myself. I’ve applied for jobs as all of the above (except the ‘Jack’), in one form or another. In my current outstanding application, I’ve convinced myself - and hopefully the appointing panel
that I’m a combined ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ geographer. That’s one of the things that they wanted. And I can stretch to that. But what are they going to make of a CV where, on the first page, they see that I’ve got my PhD - good - but it’s called A grumpy thesis: geography, autobiography, pedagogy? It doesn’t look like there’s much ‘economic’ geography in there. But I do do ‘proper’ research, you know. It’s all been with other people, and it’s getting published. And it’s absolutely nothing like this. It’s very clearly ‘economic’/’cultural’ geography. Honest. This is what I’ve pointed out in my covering letter, and what I’ve illustrated in the ‘research publications’ section starting on page 2 of my CV. I’ve deliberately cornered myself here. I’m prepared to take that risk. I really want that job.

The more I think about it, though, I am a ‘cultural’/’economic’ geographer. That’s the area that I’ve been working in/between for ages. All of that other stuff was secondary. Honestly. But this chapter is also on that publications list as ‘forthcoming’. What if I get an interview? What if I get asked what this chapter’s all about? What am I going to say? I don’t really know. Maybe they’ll concentrate on the joint papers that are out and ‘forthcoming’ in those international peer reviewed journals that everyone talks so highly of? They’re much more important than a tiny little book chapter, aren’t they? To reflect this, I’ve clumped these journal papers together on my CV and put them first in the ‘research publications’ section. I’m not the only person who does this. And, strictly speaking, does this chapter count as ‘research’ or is it just ‘about’ research. But do you think what I’ve done in my application is ‘ethical’? Am I telling the ‘truth’? Is this the ‘real me’? I think so, and I’m prepared to tell them that if I get the chance. I think I’ve always been messy, inconsistent, ‘all over the place’ (oh, and argumentative and awkward). You ask my Mum and Dad. They’d probably expect you to mind your own business, though. Who are you, anyway? The police? But every now and again -- in my work life, mostly -- I have to ‘pull myself together’ (for a job application, for instance). I’ve tried accompanying my CVs with very long covering letters in which I’ve constructed a tale of academic progress which told how I had become such an expert in one area of geography and/or another. These didn’t go as far as to explain how and why I was ‘all over the place’, though. I didn’t think that that would get me very far. More recently, I’ve taken some advice and butchered this down to a short letter made almost entirely of bullet points listing discrete facts about ‘me’, my capabilities, and my potentials. They’re amazingly well matched to your department. It’s quite uncanny. For me, anyway. Either way, though, I have made myself make sense on paper and it’s quite satisfying. For a while. It doesn’t last, though. I think that’s one of the reasons that I’ve enjoyed writing this chapter so much. It doesn’t make sense, and that’s why it might last. Whatever that means. It sounds good, doesn’t it?

The point is that, only under certain circumstances am I prepared to risk getting cornered like this. I’ve had really humiliating and nasty experiences of being cornered, as
you’ll probably appreciate. And, if you and I were to meet, say, in the bar at a conference and you asked me about my PhD thesis, I’d probably suggest that you try to get hold of it, once it’s (maybe, hopefully) available on the shelf in Bristol University’s library. I’d probably claim that the answer to every question you might want to ask could be found in there somewhere. But I couldn’t be sure and I probably wouldn’t be able to be that consistent and disciplined in my answers. The more I talked, the more I might get worried that you might be able to ask a question that would stump me. You might be able to point out some vital debate which I’d neglected to discuss. That would make you a very clever person. Part of our initiation into the discipline is, after all, to get to know these kinds of things very well, to know their pros and cons, to discuss and debate them, to be able to place them as particular kind of work (as a new development in, say, ‘the geographies of consumption’), to have a position on how these kinds of work stand in relation to one another, to know where the exciting new developments are and who’s behind them, to be an expert in one or more named areas. If you picked my arguments apart in this context, you’d only be doing your job. If, in the future, you’d like to do this with my PhD thesis, I’d suggest that you concentrate on the literature review in the introduction. It’s written in that kind of style. It had to be. My examiners had required me to do it. And I don’t begrudge having to follow their instructions - I learned a lot from doing this. But, if you’re the sort of person who loves the ‘cut and thrust’ aggression of academic debate (a.k.a. that ‘masculinist’ culture I mentioned earlier), I’m not going to play your game here. I’m determined to make it as difficult as I can for you to corner me. I don’t want to go through that again. I’m setting the rules here, or so I’d like to think. That sounds a bit aggressive too. Maybe. But all I’m doing is saying that, yes, I might 'mis-understand' academic work, or bring together things that just shouldn’t fit. But they did help me to understand things better, there and then, and they do help me to understand things better here and now. You can’t really argue with that, can you? I’m the expert on how things make sense to me under circumstances that you haven’t encountered. I think you just have to accept that. If you want to trash this chapter, for instance, the best way you could do this would be to contact all of the people you could count here and then somehow co-ordinate all of their reactions to this chapter, and all of the reactions of all of the people who’ve read it (or at least a ‘representative sample’ of them). But what would you find? And how would you put this together as a coherent critique? I wouldn’t bother doing that at all. That's my advice. It’s bound to go wrong. Things never go the way that you expect them too. Or do they? Are you in control?

So, we just have to accept what you say, then . . .?

No. No way. Never. Yuk. You do not have to sit at my feet. Get up. Get a life. I’d really like it if you argued with me, rather than just against me. Like my examiners had. Remember? But preferably not in person. As I said before, I don’t know how you’ll read this. But I do
know how bits of my PhD were read by a number of people, and I learned a lot from this. And so did they, it seems, but they didn’t learn a lot only about ‘me’. I’ve already told you something about how my parents, my examiners, and the DEPARTMENT read parts or all of one submission and/or the other. But there are some other people to whom I ‘submitted’ the first version and whose comments I included in the second to help make an argument about what (not who) my autobiographical thesis was ‘about’. All, in one way or another, were co-habitants in/of various parts of my ‘expanded field’ over the course of my PhD. And I sent out photocopies of the whole thing to them, free of charge. One reason for doing this was that I wanted some assurance that, yes, the DEPARTMENT was just like that to work in. That might give me some extra confidence when it came to the viva. I was sure that my construction of its ‘culture’ would be the most hotly debated part of the thesis. I wish I’d been wrong there. It’s hard to believe that such a prestigious DEPARTMENT could have been such a dreadful place to study, however much ‘evidence’ I could muster. I knew that pretty much all of the other postgrads had thought this at the time. We had constantly moaned about this, I seem to remember. It’s amazing that we got any work done. There was ‘evidence’ of our dissatisfaction, for instance, in the minutes of staff-postgraduate liaison committee meetings that started only after we’d complained loudly and often enough. I’d quoted this sort of thing in the thesis. But had I conveyed what it felt like to be there at that time? PLEASE NOTE THAT I MAKE NO CLAIM THAT THE DEPARTMENT IS STILL LIKE THIS. I WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE TO THE VIEW THAT CULTURES ARE PROCESSES, NOT THINGS. THIS CULTURE HAS CHANGED. IT MUST HAVE. DID I SAY THAT LOUD ENOUGH? THAT’S MY DISCLAIMER. Anyway, maybe I’d missed something important. Had I forgotten things, exaggerated things, and/or were there things I hadn’t been told about which would add to what I had to say? Should I have been surprised to find that at least one other postgrad in the department had been warned not to end up like me -- you guessed it -- because I was ‘all over the place’? Not that, again. I hadn’t been told this at the time because s/he’d seen how livid I’d become when I heard it the first time.

But it wasn’t only people who I knew from Bristol who I sent this thing to, you know. There was a period in which I was prepared to make a copy for anyone that asked for one. And I obliged, precisely for the reasons I’ve outlined above. If people really wanted to know what my PhD was about, they’d have to read it. I had become increasingly aware that it was gaining a certain amount of notoriety. Some rumours were getting back to me. Had one of my examiners really been asked by someone if it was true that he was examining ‘that’ thesis? And, much more worriedly, was I really that person who had a) accused his supervisor of being racist and b) threatened to take his department to court?\(^1\) So, I had to get it out there so that at least people who’d actually read it could spread the rumours. There weren’t that many

\(^{1}\) Answers: a) No b) that's a longer story (a version of which appears in the thesis).
copies floating around. Maybe only as many as ten. I wonder where they are now. But
rumours about such things are the stuff of much informal academic chat. To many, this was a
juicy one. It's strange that, now, my final thesis is almost impossible to get to (unless you have
the right connections). It's in a kind of limbo. And, even if/when it gets on the library shelf,
how long do you think it would take for you to get a look at it, if you wanted to? And I’m now
spreading rumours about this PhD through this chapter. And I’m spreading rumours about my
chapter on the phone to, for instance, Chris Philo, James Sidaway, Peggy and Geoff Cook. I
wonder if they’ll mention this to anybody? Can it really be what they say it is? Surely not.

But what kinds of comments did I get back? I have to tell you sooner or later. How
might these compare to the kinds of comments you might make about this book chapter? I
wonder. Let’s try another form of polyvocality here. You’re going to get more people, less
detail and just one direct quotation. I’m going to illustrate a range of responses, some from
people you’ve already heard about/from, and some from new ones. You might be one of them.
Thanks again for your comments. Here we go. In response to an early submission of part of
the first draft, my remaining supervisor was concerned that there were some ‘factual
inaccuracies’ in my account. At the viva, one of my examiners thought that there was a great
deal in there about ‘moral geographies’ while the other picked out its ‘Christian ethics’ and
‘geographies of rumours’. We could have had an interesting discussion about these things.
None of these reactions came through in their written report, though. That’s a shame.
Anyway, another geographer told me that he couldn’t help reading much of the auto-
ethnographic part as an academic soap opera, especially as he thought that he knew who was
who. My older brother – he’s called Chris Cook, by the way – stopped reading the
autobiographical part because he felt it was like reading someone's private diary. I don’t think
my younger brother -- he’s called Andy -- read it at all. Or if he did say something about it, I
can’t remember what it was. But Mum and Dad did tell me that reading ‘their’ part had made
them think about their own lives and why they had brought up my brothers and I in the way
that they had. And they told me that it made them want to write their own stories. I certainly
wasn’t expecting that. I hadn’t even imagined that in my wildest dreams. And I’d had a few of
those. Many people schooled in the sped-up world of ESRC deadlines told me that the auto-
ethnographic accounts reminded them of the bad old days of doing their PhDs in other
institutions. That was far easier to imagine. I might even go so far as to say I would have
expected that. One postgraduate told me that the first ‘unfinished’ version was a 'post-modern
text' about the ‘impossibility of closure’ (i.e. it wasn’t finished and this was achingly obvious).
I’d taken the piss out of this in the thesis itself. For instance, I hadn’t finished one section
because I had to print it out straight away. The courier bike was coming really soon, and it was
essential that I get it in ‘on time’. This was the only way to do it. This courier bike was a vital
part of my timely submission. So I wrote about it in the thesis. Timely submission was the
most important thing. I’d been reminded of that more than once. Remember? But, as I wrote elsewhere, this was 'a submission, but not a knockout'. Are you a wrestling fan? Oh yes, and another postgraduate wrote to me saying that:

"this is a thesis about English Culture and Academic Culture. You could contextualise it with reference to literature on academia, and the problems the English have in dealing with conflict, complaints, the blurring of boundaries (English Boy goes to USA becomes English Man with new insights on Boundaries. Returns, seen as English Boy by English Parents/Professors in Standard Role Patterns in English Universities and Conflict Arises). In my biased perspective, it is also about the continued emotional repression of the English".

I like this ‘biased’ perspective, though. It made me think. Perhaps you noticed that these 'English' problems are here, too. This chapter is full of sarcasm, ambiguity, understatement, self-deprecation, double-meanings, triple meanings, euphemisms, hints, silliness, tongue-in-cheek comments, did you spot any others? I grew up with this, these language games. The more I think about them, I become convinced that they allow me to deal with conflict, complaints, the blurring of boundaries in quite sophisticated ways. These ways make sense to a lot of the people that I know. But there is that translation problem. Have you found reading this chapter to be a bit of a clash of cultures? Or is it more of a personality clash? Where might one end and the other begin? I’m assuming that there’s got to be some sort of clash somewhere. Maybe I'm just paranoid? Does my bum look big in this?

I think it’s fair to say, then, that much of what came back to ‘me’ was not about ‘me’. It was about ‘them’, 'it', general ideas and concerns, all kinds of things. But some people did seem to think that they knew ‘me’ better through reading my thesis (not my older brother, though). They’d got 'closer' to someone they hardly knew before. Perhaps. There are parts of the autobiographical parts that are very personal, very ‘confessional’ in a way. Emotions. Relationships. You know, that kind of thing. I still can’t believe that I wrote these out. But they’re safely consigned to the page now. I’ve got them out of my system. But why should I offload them on you, if you ever get to read them? Some were really embarrassing. But the point I needed to made through talking about them was more important than this. At the time, anyway. For instance, I’d described in some detail how I thought I’d become a ‘crap heterosexual’. You don’t do that every day. Can you imagine what I wrote about that? Or why? And, on a couple of occasions, it felt like I’d written the longest chat-up line in history. People told me that they thought I was ‘brave’, too. Desperate, more like. But every response was strange and unexpected -- to me at least -- and all of it was much appreciated. I was amazed and disturbed so many times. I really hadn’t expected anything like this. But I also loved it when people said little more than ‘Yeah. It’s OK’. Nobody told me that my thesis was utter crap, that they hated my guts after they’d read only the first two pages. Maybe they
weren’t ‘brave’ enough? Would you be, if your reaction to this chapter is like that? Let’s not fight, though. It’s only a book chapter. It’s not that important.

So what do you think is going on in the relationship between my writing and your reading? Are ‘we’/‘they’ getting on OK? But, please don’t think that you now know ‘me’ really well. You’ll never know ‘me’ like my Dad knows a Baxi Bermuda. PLEASE NOTE THAT I MAKE NO CLAIM THAT I WILL BE THE SAME BY THE TIME THIS BOOK IS PUBLISHED, ANYWAY. I WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE TO THE VIEW THAT PEOPLE ARE PROCESSES, NOT THINGS. I WILL HAVE CHANGED. I AM BOUND TO. THE BAXI BERMUDA IS MORE OF A ‘THING’ AND LESS OF A “PERSON” THAN ME. MAYBE YOU SHOULD FOLLOW ONE IN YOUR PHD RESEARCH. ONCE INSTALLED, THEY DON’T GO FAR. BUT YOUR MONEY WILL. THEY’RE VERY ECONOMICAL, SO DAD TELLS ME. HE ALSO SAID THAT, IF YOU HAVE IT SERVICED REGULARLY BY A REGISTERED HEATING ENGINEER, IT WILL GIVE YOU MANY TROUBLE-FREE YEARS OF HOT WATER, THE WARMTH OF A FLAME EFFECT FIRE AND THE CLEAN ENERGY OF GAS. AAAAAAAAAH. THAT’S MUCH MUCH MORE TROUBLE-FREE THAN A HUMAN BEING. ESPECIALLY ONE LIKE ME, PERHAPS. AND, IF IT GOES WRONG DUE TO A MANUFACTURING DEFECT, BAXI WILL REPLACE IT FREE OF CHARGE. YOU CAN’T DO THAT WITH A HUMAN BEING, ALTHOUGH MY SUPERVISORS NEVER DID TRY TO EXCHANGE ME FOR ONE OF MY BROTHERS. THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN INTERESTING. WOULD CHRIS HAVE WRITTEN A CHAPTER LIKE THIS? I’LL ASK HIM, BUT HE PROBABLY WON’T READ THIS ONE EITHER. HE COULD SURPRISE ME, I SUPPOSE. MOST PEOPLE DO. I’M NOT SPONSORED BY BAXI, BY THE WAY. DID I SAY THAT LOUD ENOUGH? THAT’S ANOTHER DISCLAIMER.

STOP SHOUTING, WILL YOU? What’s your point here . . . ?

Remember I was writing earlier about doing research in/of distanciated systems and how multi-locale methods had to be considered when doing this? Well, that’s not the only way of thinking about this. Studies of distanciation can be really well done through single-locale research, too. One’s about connections and what connects, and the other’s about locations and what comes together there. Or that’s a really simple way of thinking about how they’re different but similar at the same time. How can you draw a line between where the location starts and the connection stops? Why would you want to do that, anyway? I’d been greatly influenced in my PhD research by Doreen Massey’s location-based arguments about how any attempt to find the ‘essential’, ‘inner’ identity of a place inevitably led you ‘outside’ and elsewhere to/through other locations, via all sorts of connections (see her 1995 compilation). And what if the people, metaphors, conflicts and/or things that you're following change as they
move, or fracture and go off in different directions, still changing as they go, bouncing against locales, getting tangled up in them, passing straight through, invisible like Arnie in that ‘Predator’ film? I’m sure that most things do. I think I do, a lot of the time. But the point that she’s trying to make is that, describing a single place in this kind of way can provide a means to understand a much wider world. When she described Kilburn High Road in her 1991 paper, she wasn’t only talking about Kilburn High Road. Doesn’t she talk about half the world and a considerable amount of British imperial history? It’s something like that. I’ve left the article at work. I’m at home at the moment. It’s so much easier to write here. Massey has called this way of thinking about places ‘progressive’ or ‘extroverted’. But my supervisor gave me a paper by John Fiske (1987), in which he’d argued in almost the exact same way, except that he was talking about autobiography and his site was the ‘self’, his ‘self’. He didn’t reference Massey at all, although she had said something like ‘if people can have multiple identities, why can’t places?’ Something like that. But I saw the reverse connection. Fiske didn’t just seem to be ‘all over the place’. ‘He’ was a ‘place’, in the same sense that Massey talked about ‘Kilburn’ as a place. So the 'self' (or maybe it's the 'body') could be thought of as a place, but a 'place' that moved and connected places/people/things/etc. itself. Like a ship. So, while Massey was talking about an ‘extroverted sense of place’, was Fiske talking about an ‘extroverted sense of self’? I could certainly identify with this. It did work for me. Reasonably well.

I’m a bit wary of this, though. Things never translate from one realm to another that easily. It’s a bit too neat. But I do like the idea of constructing a self in my writing which isn’t just about ‘me’, and which can work against the divisive politics of the ‘me’/’you’ or, more broadly, ‘us’/’them’ binaries in the way that Massey’s place politics are supposed to do. I’m hoping that, as you’re reading this chapter, you’re thinking more about 'you' and people you know, places you’ve been, things you’ve heard, etc. than about ‘me’. If you think that, in places, 'Ian' has gone 'too far' in this chapter, I'd like you to at least be considering that the boundaries that I might have breached could be subject to some self-conscious critique. Please don’t look for my ‘essential’, ‘inner’ identity, to work out who I ‘really’ am. That would make me really uncomfortable. Please don’t psychoanalyse me, even if you’re a qualified psychoanalyst. I’m not your client/patient. Anyway, you must have something more interesting to do. Go down to the arcade and have a game of pinball. I don't think that my autobiographical writing is me-me-me-me-me-me. It's it-me-them-you-here-me-that-you-there-her-us-then-so-... Or, at least, I really hope it turns out that way.

But you’re still the standard white male writing autobiography . . .

Yes, the question does remain: what if an autobiographical writer - like me and, perhaps, John Fiske - does not speak from the margins but, more or less, from the centre? As I said earlier,
there are already too many people like me in geography. What can I do if that makes me feel uncomfortable, over-privileged? It does, you know. And there are plenty of people who can remind people like me of exactly this fact. There are plenty of critiques made from these margins of those writing at the centre if you look hard enough. Let’s include a few of these ‘voices’. That seems fair, don’t you think? Valerie Walkerdine has accused many middle-class academics of being “so busy talking about working-class fantasies, without ever analysing their own ... while the fact that it takes two classes to tango appears to have escaped the notice of those who constantly ask us to tell it like it is” (1995, p.329-330). Mike Oliver has pointed out how non-disabled academics are often quite happy to do research on disability without thinking through (their own embodiments of) the ‘normality’ of ‘able bodiedness’ without which ‘dis-ability’ makes no sense (1995). bell hooks has stated that "It would just be so interesting for all those white folks who are giving blacks their take on blackness to let them know what's going on with whiteness" (1989, p.162). And Richard Dyer has summed this up nicely:

“Looking, with such passion and single-mindedness, at non-dominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the sense of oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human" (1988, p.44).

You and I could hopefully agree that the class system is not only reproduced and transformed in the lives of working class people; that sexism is not only reproduced and transformed in the lives of women; that disablism is not only reproduced and transformed in the lives of disabled people; and that racism is not only reproduced and transformed in the lives of black people. We could then probably agree that it's necessary to conduct work which focuses on how these power relations are reproduced and transformed through the day to day lives of so-called 'normal' people at the centre of all this (ultimately, your white, middle-class, non-disabled, heterosexual, males). Let’s open that/us/ourselves up for inspection and analysis. Oh yes. But what if some of us already have? What if some other guys think we’ve gone too far? They may not always be guys, of course. Can it be true that the ‘man’ at the centre is not necessarily condemned always to reproduce these kinds of politics if 'he' uses his position, in a reflexive sense, to change things from the ‘inside’. Could he destabilise the right kinds of things, using the unique access and authority that he might have at his disposal? Could he do this in a small way, for instance, by teaching a particular kind of undergraduate course? Could he forge connections with less privileged academics working towards similar goals? You’d need a lot of people to do that, though, and they'd probably need the security of a permanent job (like mine) to take the risk. The odd one here and there wouldn’t do much, would they? What’s the point in trying? Where do you start? Would people take you seriously, especially if you
weren’t doing that in a straightforward way? I found a great paper about Carmen Miranda, that could give you some inspiration there (see Roberts 1993). You’d be surprised where I get my ideas and inspirations from. They don’t fit together at all well, except in this expanded field that I keep going on about. Do you think that writing in this way makes any difference, though, even if it’s only to you? And might it be a positive difference? Or am I just mucking about? Fixated on getting that PhD. That bit of paper. Those letters. Really. That’s how it all ‘started’ after all, didn’t it?

So, any concluding thoughts...?

Yeah. Try this. In a book published last year, I was interested to find James Clifford speculating about how an autobiographical PhD thesis might go down in anthropology. Here, he said “It would not, I think, be widely recognised as fully or characteristically anthropological in the way that work in an externalised field still is. One could hardly count on being awarded a PhD, or finding a job in an anthropology department, for autobiographical research” (1997 p.88). This makes me think whether what I’ve done could be recognised (one day?) as fully or characteristically geographical. I feel like a bit of a test case, unless you’ve got there before me. If you have, why haven’t I heard about it? I could have done with some inspiration, some help. Whatever happens, though, I’m happy that I did it. I’m not happy that I had to do it. I hope I don’t feel that I have to do it again. This may be the last I ever write about this bloody PhD. I don’t want to get a reputation as that bitter Geographer who never got over, or wrote about, his actual PhD research. The fruit-thing one. That’s the next big writing project. Honest. I am sick of making this kind of argument, although I still take the issues involved very seriously. I am hoping that, once published here, that’ll be it. But suppose I get some really interesting feedback? Even more things that I couldn’t have expected, or perhaps even imagined? We’ll see, I suppose. This chapter was initially a tricky one to write. But I’ve really got into its trickiness in the weeks I’ve been working on it. And it’s not hard to read, is it? I have only ever used autobiography to write myself out of a tight corner before, to write out a huge amount of anger, to ‘write back’. That anger was boiled down to the pages stuck between the hard covers of my final (I hope) PhD thesis. Do not rub with a soft cloth. It might get out. Writing the thesis was definitely cathartic, but I’m not sure what this chapter has done. I knew who and what I was arguing against then. I’m not so sure now. I’m writing autobiographically, but I’m nowhere near so angry. This is new territory for me. Soon, I may become a fully-fledged ‘Dr.’, part of the ’establishment’ which I wrote against. It’s a strange time to write this. But I’m really enjoying it now. Do you think I’m being self-indulgent?

So, how do you identify yourself, then..?

If you want to categorise me still -- did you ever? -- how about calling me ‘tall’. I’m about 6
foot 5 actually. I don’t mind being described as 'that tall geographer'. I have only met one geographer who’s taller than me. Hello Matt. How’s it going? What are you doing reading this kind of nonsense? Haven’t you got anything better to do? Pinball, anyone? Hold on. There’s another call. I’ve got ‘call waiting’ you know. Oh. Alright Rachel? How did they like your chapter?² Have they read it yet? I think they’re listening in to our conversation. I’ve told them so much. I wish they’d just go. I’ll have to see them to the door, though. But we haven’t got anything to hide, have we? Really? Jesus. Fancy that. Congratulations. Wow. How do you know it’s a girl, though? Aaah. Yeah, but what if she writes about you when she's older? Oooh. That'd serve you right. Ha ha. It's a good job turkeys can't write. Really? I didn't know that. OK, so when’s our next writing group meeting at the Fish Bar? Oh shit. Let’s change the subject. And why haven’t we written anything yet? Except our chapters, yeah. It was supposed to be a collaborative thing, wasn’t it? Me neither. Ha ha ha. Funny, that. I forget who’s supervising who, sometimes. They only want to know the rules so that they can break them. Don’t you just hate it when you don’t know who’s in charge? Shocking, yeah. See you soon. Gotta go. I’m right at the end of writing something. It’s late, and I’ve written far too much. I’m picking a friend of mine up from Aber station in about an hour. I told her I’d get this finished by the time she arrived. Yeah, but I’ll get the next thing done in plenty of time, won’t I? The right length. Yeah yeah. No probs. Actually, it’s a proper journal article, ‘economic geography’, sort of. Oh dear. Yeah, not quite. And, you got your chapter in to Pamela early, didn’t you say? How did you manage that? Oh, yeah. I remember. I’d keep that quiet if I were you. You’ll be kidnapped for tests in a soil lab, somewhere. ‘Rachel’s essential writing oils’. That’s what they’ll try to extract. Geography is a sinister business, you know. Do you have a favourite soil? Hello. HELLO. Oh no. Not again. Matt? Hello. HELLO Bloody phone’s gone wrong now. Never works properly. Even if you’re just imagining it.

**Is there anything that you haven’t told us..?**

Oh yes. Just one thing. I’ve a confession to make. I was officially awarded my PhD two weeks before I wrote this sentence. That was when I was only about half way through writing the whole thing. Sorry to keep you in suspense, there. I could have mentioned this earlier, but that would have ruined the flow. Hope you don’t mind. Uh, if you do want to get hold of it, it’s Cook (1997) I think, despite the fact that it was finally approved in April 1998. So, this autobiographical chapter has turned into a tale of ‘triumph over adversity’ after all. There’s a happy ending. You must be joking. Ha ha ha. But thank God it’s over eh? Bye. Enjoy the

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² I’m referring to Rachel's chapter in the *Autobiography in Geography* book. Her surname is Saltmarsh and she's a postgraduate student in the Geography Department at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (amongst other things).
rest of the book. Phew. They’ve gone. I can relax now. I thought they’d never leave.

**What are your references, then . . .?**


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