

CASTAC

worrying over speaking and the pretentiousness of podcasts

REBECCA V/O
This was meant to be a podcast about making podcasts.

But in the end, this podcast is really just a conversation between two people who used to be close friends, a long time ago. It rambles and meanders. It doesn't always stick to a coherent point.

I wondered then whether it could also be academically useful. Relevant to conversations in anthropology? Or even interesting to anyone other than me?

Before I can answer that, I have to admit first that I've been conflicted about a lot of things lately. And this is really the gravity I think though, or to, which this conversation is being pulled.

At first, I wanted to present this conversation as almost unedited. I didn't even want to have to really explain what it was about. At first, I only chopped off the last hour. I wanted to keep my pedantic and performative voice out of it, and at first provided very little framing or context. But in that format, it seemed to fall even more out of its possible usefulness.

Because another force of gravity pulling down on this recording, is my relationship with Thuy. At first, I thought it was irrelevant to the conversation, certainly irrelevant to reflections on academic research practice, which I supposed this Platypus podcast format had to be dictated by.

But this is another kind of gravity that won't let go. And recording this podcast together, brought up between us difficult conversations we carried on with after,

through text. Some of it about anthropology, but most of it was, for me, probably left over from the way we, and the reasons why we, separated twenty years ago. And at the center of that, was a question over whether we saw the world in compatible ways and whether or not we could see and understand the other.

Thuy might explain this all very differently.

And another question at the center here which I go around, is what right do I have to speak, anyway, in this way. It's not an insecurity, for me, as much as she says it is. To me it is also a question of power. Because sometimes to speak means to cast others into silence. And I struggled with whether it is really fair to recast our conversation, to qualify it here, to attempt to make it useful, though my own self-involved introspection. And I haven't gotten to end with all that, or with her. Or maybe again, an end will get to me.

But after a little while, I started to think, or hope, that these weights could say something that might be recognizable to other people. Part of it was connected to something Thuy says late in our recording. That in academic disciplines, we tend not to value things like conversations or banter between friends, to figure them instead, not as knowledge, and not as science and not as worthwhile. And I counter there and other places throughout, you know, that "anthropology isn't like that". My data is literally conversations with other people. And at some point she accuses anthropology, or at least includes it as complicit, with the idea that we are searching for some kind of objective truth. Or that we imagine that we are not part of what unfolds in our data and work with other people.

But see, what she says comes out an articulating, even if oversimplifying, of a conflict I presented to her. Which for all our talking, I don't necessarily provide with much definition.

So instead, here, I decided in the end it was necessary to footnote, to make all my own little interjections and asides, my qualifications. To have the last word, in fact. To stitch.

THUY
I'm excited to be an interviewer because I'm usually an interviewer. I'm all like waiting for you to like, ask me questions...

REBECCA

I know, I just realized that I was like, wait, I didn't write down questions. I imagined we would just have this organic conversation that wouldn't need any preparation on my part.

THUY
Oh, good, you can say that too. That's what I say. But I'm letting you take the lead.

REBECCA
No, I have nothing prepared, except thoughts. I have thoughts, I guess, things to talk about...

And you, so you've never gone back and edited the, the birth podcast, huh?

THUY
No, I actually, come to think about it, I just, my friend who was the other person was just here and I didn't even talk to her about it. But I felt so bad because that was the only podcast where I interviewed people and I didn't do it. And I felt like they were gonna feel that there was something wrong with their contribution or something. And so I actually talked with people, them, back then about it and said, I, it's I don't know why it's hard. It's just hard. And I'm gonna shelve it for now. Yeah.

REBECCA
How did they react to that? I mean, I'm sure they were fine.

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
At the time, I didn't even really think about how implicated I was in this statement. But I had already told her that I was worried the direction my own recording took, might have been part of the reason she put off finishing her birthing episode. She reassured me that that wasn't the case, and I then was embarrassed my concern suddenly seemed so self-involved, but our car recording did start a kind of unanticipated movement, a thread which ties this moment to then.

The story I told in that recording is not particularly interesting. I didn't have complications or a trying birth, there were no particular struggles. What I had really, was an opinionated birth. I had strong feelings about what I wanted and why; to not give birth in a hospital (I did anyway), to not give birth lying down (I did, mostly). I feel now looking back, and I tried to explain to her then, that later I felt my strong opinions were out of touch with the reality of giving birth, which was going to be its own thing, both of me and out of me, not matter what I wanted. I talked mostly about my frustrations with the overly negative view of pregnancy

and having children that I feel can drown women in US society. And at some point in recounting this story to Thuy, I started to cry.

I think Thuy's own story is a lot more compelling. She had three home births and the last two she delivered all alone, with her husband out of sight but nearby, keeping the other kids busy. There, just in case. I didn't know about this until she told me in the car that day. And I was a little amazed by her. I wondered if I had ever really known her very well.

Thuy and I had been friends from university, but we stopped talking about the time she gave birth to her first child. And I guess, talking about giving birth, at a time I remember struggling with what it would mean to become a mother while still in graduate school, and of feeling isolated from other women who had similar experiences or even positive retellings, and after we were no longer friends, it bought up questions for me of what had happened in our relationship so long ago.

THUY
My one friend who just left, I think we've had issues where she's felt somehow, like, not important enough for something in my life or something like that, like it was a long time ago. And so like, I was worried about that, because I was like, it's not, it's not that, you know. So I don't know how she actually is taking it in, you know, like, I can imagine if I'm part of an interview, and it doesn't get used, I would feel some kind of weird way about it. Like, what did I say? Or didn't say? Or what happened? Or was it wrong, you know?

REBECCA
So have you had that issue with other people you've interviewed? Because I just I did the first podcast, it hasn't come out yet. But I realized that you know, you record an hour interview, and then I only take, like, not 30 seconds, but very short piece of something that someone says and then, you do worry. So I have so many thoughts about this I wanted to ask you about because on the one hand, like I'm worried that they'll be unhappy that they wasted their time talking to me for so long, considering I've only used like, a couple of minutes, or that I put things together in a way they didn't intend. And that also I've made the podcast about me, somehow, and not about them. Um, so yeah, like, how do you...

THUY
I mean, I think the only, the other thing that ties into this that I'm very aware of is that I have an agenda, like, [Yeah], I'm not, I want them to say something. I want to say something. So I'm gonna make them support what I want to say, [Yeah], and I'm

very aware of that. And I don't do it like crazy, like, I'm not using their AI voices to make them say things, but [That's the next step though], but through my narrative and through my editing, even if they say something contrary to what I want to say, I use that contrariness to accent what I want to say, rather than detract from it, you know what I'm saying? So, it's like, there's this sense of responsibility that they're under my control, that's like, so weird. But I, I don't pretend like I don't, inside myself or with them even, I don't pretend like I'm just, I don't have an agenda. I think people know, I tell them, I have an agenda.

REBECCA
Yeah. And so like, because you said before that, like you give them a lot of information about that. And so is that something that you do in the interview process? Or like leading up to it? Like, how do you, because this is really interesting to think about how an anthropologist does interviews too, because it's kind of similar, but we're supposed to be a little bit different, but I don't... there's that question of like, how much is anthropology, anthropological interviews, also kind of the same process where I have, of course, I already sort of have an agenda and I want to lead you in that direction. And I'm sort of hoping you say the things and, and support the things I want to talk about anyway. And of course, I'm going to edit what you say to kind of, you know, I don't want to use the word manipulation, but you know, there's that element there too. So how much like information, how do you approach that then like with them, do you? Is it something you do like at the start of the interview or...?

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
Here's where it's easy to get mixed up. I've been thinking a lot about what I say here. About how easy it is for me to lose that thread of knowing. Of the things I've learned. Sometimes I tell people I think all forms of communication are a kind of manipulation. Not about getting something from them, or out of someone, but more like a grappling for making sense and being understood, for reaching across a gap. And that takes turning words around hoping they'll fit.

The possibility that I approach ethnographic interviews within the weight of my own interests, because of course I do, too easily unbalances me, pushes me out of room, out from seeing how much else is always emerging in the moment. I want to amplify another's voice but I know it gets warped and bent as it moves through me, but so do all words. And looking for, or pretending to find, a pure capture hasn't been anyone's intention in anthropology for a really long time. So what am I getting stuck on, something about modulation? Something about how to do this well, or about how hard it can be to find the end of me I imagine is not an end.

THUY
Yes. And I mean, I want to add that I, I also, this is going to sound so crazy, I don't have issues with my agenda, I feel that part of my agenda is a very positive healing type thing, you know. And so because it's not like my agenda is to, like, manipulate something for something. I, I stand fully behind my agenda, I feel strongly that part of my agenda is to support the person I'm interviewing. And I also really encourage them to listen to my other shows, because in some sense, I'm saying the same thing all the time that you can hear my agenda when you hear my other shows. [Yeah.] So I encourage them to listen to the other shows to see what they're being a part of. And a lot of people I interview kind of already know me and my work.

REBECCA
Cause with the first podcast I had I shared, because these are researchers too, the other people that are talking, that I was talking to, and so they're sort of, they have a public life in a particular way that they maybe have to care for or that they might worry about. And also, it's just really common in anthropology to like, or becoming certainly more common to share sort of an article with someone you interviewed before you publish and just sort of confirm, like, this is how I'm using what you're saying, and do you agree...

I thought a lot about the interview that we did in the car and thinking like, what? Some things that I'm like, I don't, I hope she doesn't include that, you know, but also didn't want to contact you with this, like, long list of like...

THUY
Oh, you have a list, you should tell me. [I have a list.] I might without knowing it and I might include it.

REBECCA
No, because I feel conflicted about that. And I don't 100% feel that way. It's sort of like, oh, this was really embarrassing that I went there. This was like, you know, the latter part of the interview was very uncomfortable for me, you know, I said some things that later, I felt like, I don't know. I know, we came back to a couple of things, like, why do you keep talking about this? Or like, why was I feeling sad? Or, you know, we kind of talked about it. And then I sort of like, offered some reasons that I feel like, I don't know how genuine or long lasting those things are. And so that's the other thing, like you say things in the moment, but like, when you come back to them, are they true? Or does a person feel like six months later or a week later, yeah, I would have answered this in the same way, or would I offer the same excuses or something like that?

THUY
Right. Right. And do you mind that that snippet was taken at that time, and represented you at that time? Right, so it might have changed, but does it, do you mind then? There was a period of time that was snatched, you know?

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
I wrote a paper that was based on a collaboration with someone who I saw as my primary informant. The paper itself really turned into an analysis of our conversations, a meta-take on what I decided was our failed collaboration, although he told me more than once that for him, it had been useful. Although he didn't co-author with me, he carefully read and commented on every version of the paper I wrote. And during a last check before publication, he highlighted the word "humbly" in one his quotes, and attached a comment box, writing: "I wrote 'humbly' 1,000 times, or about striving for it, but did I have it during our conversation? I think not."

I realized then the way a conversation is a thing that moves and breathes, and goes on, like the people who are in it, and who speak it into the spaces and the others around them. But committing it to paper can make it brittle, and sometimes fall apart.

REBECCA
Yeah, yeah, then I could say like, well, it was genuine and true for me in that moment. But then also, that moment is always like me manipulating other things that are happening or like, like my relationship with you, like, because we know each other, so it wasn't like, for me, it felt different because we weren't strangers, we've had a long relationship or whatever. So like, somehow our relationship got integrated into the interview in a way that I think it didn't need to or something. Does that make sense? Like, or someone else had asked me about that experience that wasn't you I would have had a different answer, or the interview would have been a different... So like, the interview itself is an experience between two people rather than just me telling a story about something that happened in the past or something.

THUY
Exactly, which is why I like to do interviews the way I do, because our relationship is part of the show for me. Like I'm not interviewing you as an expert. I don't like to interview experts. [Yeah] I like to interview the living realities of issues that live in relationships and inside people, and necessarily related to relationships. And you

can't get more authentic than to be part of that and to be witnessed to what is actually happening in the moment because you're a part of it, you know? I don't, personally, I don't like interviews that pretend like those things are not a fact. [Yeah.]

My agenda isn't topic driven. My agenda is relationship driven, and present time driven. And I think that's why it's so fun for me because it's, it feels alive. It doesn't feel like if I had a topic, like I want to talk about birthing, and I want to, I mean, I don't care, like so many people give birth. I don't care, cause it's like I, the people that I love, or I get to reflect on my experience, or I get to understand the person who's talking more, because they're related to me, like birthing as a thing just happens all the time. What do I care? I only care because it affects me, right? And the people I love. And that's my agenda is to give permission to that I, I, it just feels more honest to me, actually. Yeah.

REBECCA
Yeah, but then you must encounter like surprises in that process as well too like, if you start out you think like, this is what I want to say or do. And maybe we're not, maybe using that word agenda is not the best word, but I can't really think of another replacement for it. But it's like, I mean, you start with this idea. And then if it's so much happening in the moment, then do you go a lot of places that are really surprising for you?

THUY
Bro, you were there? [Yeah.] I mean, you experienced it. And it's the surprise, the surprise is beautiful. The surprise is like the gift of what, that's why I love what I do. It's like, it's like, real time getting to discover together, the topic is an excuse to connect, and to speak deeply and explore things that maybe separately, we haven't or we haven't given ourselves to explore separately. But then giving ourselves permission to explore together because we have this little thing that we want to do. And it's just an excuse, and then we get to capture it. Like, I don't know, that's what's fun for me, you know, and every episode that I, there is not an episode that hasn't been surprising to me.

REBECCA
And that's why I'm so curious to see, I would never tell you like, please take this embarrassing thing I said out or something like that, or please don't include how much crying I actually did during our recording. I didn't wanna say that because I'm sort of curious, you know, because it's your podcast, I, I want you to have the, the like freedom to represent that however you want to. And I'm also kind of curious to see like, what it becomes.

THUY
Yeah, I don't know, and I'm excited about podcasting in a way because, you know, I think writers or whatever, do the same thing. This is just another form of, like listening to something is different than watching something. Like to think about the impact of, somebody said, like, as podcasters you actually like, you'll go into the bathroom with people, they have you on when they're taking a shower, like people don't do that when they watch stuff. So it's actually very, very intimate. And I'm like, wow, it's like even thinking about that, those dimensions that we have access to and how a person listens. Most people don't listen, like when you watch a movie, you're watching your full, most people listen with half an ear, like, how do you, like it's a, it's a lot of different things to consider. What you're trying to get through to a person like, a normal person is cleaning their house with one ear to it. How do you, how do you feel heard? How do you, how, I want them to hear me though, and that's the reality of it. What do I do? You know, so it's not going to be five minutes of crying, how many minutes of crying can a person who's doing like that take, you know.

REBECCA
But you should make, you know, the podcast where Rebecca just cries for ten minutes.

I think my problem is, so I, you know, I have my little interludes and I have the things that I say and like, because I like writing, because I like reading the things that I write, there's something very satisfying, like if I write a poem, for example, there's something very satisfying for me to come back and read it again. It's like, I don't know what is like listening to a song or something, but I feel like I am expressing emotion in the reading of something that I've written. That gets at something. So I feel like my problem is if I listened to the finished product, I would be like, oh, yeah, that's so great, like things that I said or whatever. And I wouldn't catch the problematic parts of like, my, my, you know what I mean, my voiceover or something? So how does, are you able to be like, oh, gosh, I was so boring here. Or I need to fix this part for me or is it more about the interviews?

THUY
I think it's tricky, because I think that there is, you do want to create something that you love, like, you should have a smile and a happy reaction to what you've done. So I, I think that's tricky. But I do think that it's a, it's a process to understand when you're going on and on and on and nobody cares. You know like, I've had intros where, because writing is very different than podcasts like I, I use, I'm much more simple and succinct in podcasts. I like words, but I don't, when I speak it and hear it, it, it's something hard on the brain to process when you're hearing something,

versus when you're reading it. And I don't know if it's experience, but over time I catch it, like, I don't have to say it like that, like, people just wanna... there's, you wanna create imagery in podcasts, I think part of what's enjoyable about listen to podcasts is like, the person creates a movie in their head. And words that I think can create that imagery more easily or something like that, it's a very different type of writing. It's very interesting to me, but it's not the same writing I would do for writing writing. And I've had to learn that mostly because sometimes I'll write write and then I'll read it like it's an intro and it just sounds awkward, sounds like too wordy and something, you know.

REBECCA
Yeah. Yeah, I think I, I like, I'll write it, and then I read it. And then I'm constantly changing it, and I read it over and over again. And as I change it to, to like, make it more readable. But I do think that my style is still more like hard to listen to possibly.

[bell]

REBECCA V/O

It's a word that you stitched to
paper
saying
this one is a beginning
this one brings
the ground up under it

to fill a mouth we call home

but
it's more
like satellites of ink, to me
little
impressions
on skin

dark wonders in the sky above us

THUY
It depends on also who your audience is, that's a huge factor, like you are talking to other

anthropologists, anthropo- I don't know, academics? [Oh, yeah.] Um, so it's like what, I guess that comes back to agenda. For me, I'm really trying to make myself accessible to normal people. I'm not, I really am almost intentionally not trying to speak to the professionals in my field. [Right.] So I would, I use different language, you know. So I think that that's a huge factor in how you structure what you write, and say.

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
Its less a question of curation and more about the direction of intended speech then. Who is the story made for? In anthropology, sometimes we aren't really talking back to the people in our own stories; even when we want to be. That's when I start to lose my way.

REBECCA
Yeah, I, that's maybe my problem, too, is I haven't really thought that much about my audience or cared, actually. And I haven't actually put out the first podcast I made because it had some problems, I have to still fix it. And I haven't done that yet. And that's kind of interesting, because for me, it went on the shelf for two months, in a different way to like the birthing recordings did for you, but yeah, so I put it away and then like, but I think I mentioned before that I just do it because I feel driven to do it. And I haven't really thought about and almost have really mixed ambivalent emotions about people listening to it. I kind of don't want people to listen to it. But I also do, [It's such...] yeah, I feel very conflicted about it. And I think I told someone that it feels both, like more like simultaneously more vulnerable, but also more pretentious somehow. And I don't know why it feels pretentious to me, but maybe it's or why does it feel different from writing an article? Where I mean, articles, writing articles, is very similar kind of thing, we've sort of pretend in like academia that articles, it's not that its objective somehow, but you know, we, as if so I'm imagining my voiceover is just like writing a paper, you know, it's like the, still my ideas, I'm saying those things. But in a, in a paper, I kind of pretend like it's not, it's not as located in me as it is, of course, it really is, but it's like a pretense to imagine that somehow, like this paper is sort of removed from myself in a way that when I speak those words, obviously, it's, it's really coming from me. And so for me, the podcast shows you like this is what, yeah I'm having trouble articulating exactly what I'm, what I'm trying to say, but like a podcast is just as true as an article. It's the same, but there's less pretense that, that it's somehow removed from me or something. Does that make sense? [That's hiding?] Yeah, exactly. Right.

THUY
Yeah. But you said that you felt the podcast is more pretentious?

REBECCA
Yeah, because they, because I'm not comfortable also with, like, I'm driven to say like, this is what I think and this is how I feel about things and I need to say them, but saying them in my voice and going on about what I think about these things, feels somehow more like, look at me or look at my idea or like, or even taking a podcast and editing it together and then putting my voice over as like the stitching together-ness of everything feels more, yeah, pretentious for some reason, but why? I don't know why I feel that way.

THUY
I want you to think about it, cause it's interesting to me, because that's what's happening. Why is it pretentious? If there's a person that needs to do those things and put up thoughts and stitch things together and give an opinion? Like, do you think that your, the way you think or how you think about things have no validity? Or, like, what, I don't...

REBECCA
Yeah, it's a good question that we can sort of, that's why I wish we had were also recorded, we started talking about these things when we're in the car that day, too. And one of the things that we got on to most was that similar question of like, what right do I have to say certain things, and you gave me some very supportive thoughts about that, like, you know, that it takes a lot to feel like I have a right to say something or that like, that it's worthwhile to share these thoughts with other people. But I, for some reason I do, I have a lot of conflict with that, even though I don't have any problem to sit down and write an article. And yet, it's the same process for a podcast, but I feel sort of conflicted about it in a different way.

THUY
Is it just because it's your voice and that writing something there is more hiding, cause, you know, it's, it's like, is that it?

REBECCA
Yeah, I guess so. But yeah, but that's why I'm stuck thinking on it. Because I'm thinking these are essentially the same thing. It's the same process. You know, I'm drawing what I have to say, from my educational background already anyway, you know. I might even cite some literature on a podcast or you know, but I maybe just, do, just sort of taught to me maybe it's just like, even my educational training, we're taught to sort of like, again, with the pretense like to take the self out of it in a particular way. But it's just a rhetorical process where of course, the self is there always constantly, I'm the one who's writing the paper in the first place, right? But like, I can't hide in a podcast anymore. And then not only can I not hide, but in that

what I'm driven to, like, really get into like, what I think about something, and then it just feels too, too obsessive, too self-obsessive or too self-involved, I guess. And so I, I don't, I start thinking, like, who's really gonna care about, about this? Or who's gonna to want to hear what I think in a very, because I'm, you know, it's a personal, it's personal. I'm like talking in circles now, but yeah I'm trying to think it out.

THUY
It's interesting, because I have almost an opposite feeling about it. Like I think, I think it's, I don't even know what the word pretentious means. I, pretend is somewhere in there. But I think it's pretentious to pretend like you're not the author, that there's some sort of objective truth to what is being presented. So I have the opposite thing and I actually think that I agree it's it's a very, can be a very scary, vulnerable process to say what you think or feel. And I think that, that inhabiting that gives other people permission to inhabit their own experience, actually. I think we feel like we can't inhabit our small understandings in our small truths. We don't have the right to. And it's because there's some part of us, that's always, that has been conditioned to question ourselves, because there are only certain people that are allowed to speak up. And they certainly don't look like me. You know, and I also, part of my agenda is to uplift the voices of what reality is, which includes so many different voices and to hear from so many different people and their, their experience, their real experience, you know. But I think that you're in a field where that conditioning is very heavy and very strong. So I think you're feeling something about that, you know.

REBECCA
But it's interesting, because in anthropology, like, we have a lot of conversations about that particular thing. And there's modes for, I think, you know, natural scientists don't think anthropology is a science in particular, that's part of it, because we highlight the subjective nature of a lot of things, in particular, we put emphasis on, you know, the bias a writer might have or like putting the making, making sort of really transparent that this is me, and I'm here, and I have this perspective, like, it's really common nowadays, for people to talk about positionality, what's my positionality and this kind of thing. You know, it's um, it's like an important concept that I feel like once people brand it with a word like that, it becomes very annoying, because it's not, everybody talks about it, but nobody thinks about it anymore. Oh, yeah, I'm thinking about my positionality. But it's not genuine anymore, if that makes sense, you know. And so that's really, for a long time been a part of the conversation, like it's important to be aware of, and talk about and insert my perspective, as a, as a researcher, and so, so I guess I'm sort of surprised that I feel the way that I do when it comes to the podcasts because I'm not coming from biology or something where there is like, no, no sense of author identity, whereas in anthropology it's like fore-fronted in quite a different way.

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
This difficultly for me isn't solved by quoting the "crisis in representation", as if once we dealt with this on paper, it was all tied up. As if it wouldn't always require turning things around and setting them down again, a bit better. And then only needing to pick them up again and return to those same questions. Because another kind of gravity is always taking those complexities and pulling them into cliches, some bounded efforts, repetitions, over neat attention to the stickinesses of our work. As if in acknowledging, it is a finished conversation.

THUY
This reminds me of our birth interview, actually. [Why?] I think there was something that I remember about the interview with birthing, that I think your assertion that it, it didn't, like the idea of birthing being a central part of womanhood or something like it, it wasn't how you positioned it in your life, like it, like whatever, you know. And I think that the way that you're talking about being a woman feels like a similar flavor somehow, you know, whatever. Which I think is interesting because I mean, I think you're very aware of racial things, but like being a woman it feels even closer to that to me, like more, like how you, how the world responds to a person and how a person responds, you know?

But you don't, you don't think that that's part of the sense of vulnerability or self-consciousness you have like thinking about what others are thinking about you, you know?

REBECCA
How that if I was a man, like, I wouldn't worry in quite the same way about, I might have more confidence to speak?

THUY
I mean, I definitely know that I feel like I was conditioned towards a certain way as a woman and I, I learned to move through the world in a certain way. Yeah, it's harder for me to speak up. It's...

I think there might be something that, like, why stepping into your voice and a podcast feels vulnerable and hard is because it's like, I think there's an aspect where it's been comfortable for you to be anonymous. Like, it's comfortable for you to not have a gender, not have a color, and not have an agenda, not something where it

feels safe, that you can just whatever. And so like stepping into identity, like all the things feels like, weird, because I think it's outside of your comfortzone like, yeah, it feels something like that, right? [Yeah, maybe.] But you are a person that has been conditioned that in all the ways that everybody else has but lives in a society that is like, of course. So like reflecting on yourself as if you are an anthropological subject, and like reflecting on yourself from the inside out. I think maybe you like it's, you're just used to doing the other thing, you know?

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
I can see what it means to be so in the neck, in the deep, that you're complicit in a different way. Maybe more tangled. And what I say here reverberates in places for me personally more than I can anticipate. It's not just what I can't see, but what I am also unwilling to say; about our relationship, about what it meant to me that if fell apart so long ago. It gets in the way. And speaking about the structure, underneath? If an anthropological vision is to speak outwards from one to a scale of multiplicity, from the now to the then, from the me to the us, then Thuy's pull draws away.

But all that distance between, is really manufactured anyway, I know, an oscillating thing. And I think that's what really I'm inside, struggling outwards with.

REBECCA
Yeah, maybe my last research field side, I think I ran into our like into a lot of problems because I was a woman. [Oh] Yeah. And I, sorry, I lost my voice suddenly. But it's like, I knew it was an issue. I knew it was a problem. But I didn't, I didn't want to, I didn't want to have to make it part of the conversation. It was like, I felt like it had to be part of the conversation. I felt like I was a researcher and I was in a situation and that I was a woman didn't matter and I didn't want it to maybe matter, to be something I had to like, reflect a lot about. My research is not from a feminist perspective, necessarily. And and yet my, my, so much of like anthropological research is just about human relationships. Like, it's just about forming connections with people. In order to collect data, or in order to do research, I have to make friends with people. I have to connect to them. I have to listen to them. I have to be with them and spend time with them. And we don't, I feel like I didn't really learn how to actually do that and carefully or consciously sometimes, you know, it's like something we're just like get thrown into, and you sort of have to learn. And I don't think I understood, like how much those interpersonal relationships would actually, just, it's not like it shaped the outcomes of what I got totally, but just how much it would make it, kind of difficult to do things, you know, and then I didn't want to be a woman, but I was a woman. And, you know, I wanted to pretend like, it

didn't matter, but it actually became almost not, it became a lot more central than I wanted it to be.

THUY
Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I think that that for me is, is the thing that you have a capacity to separate things into compartments and yeah, which is interesting. Mostly because so much of the work you do is almost like not doing that, so it's so interesting. You know that you, because you can see it outside but like when the mirror turns towards you, that's when it's like, oh, my, you're actually a woman.

REBECCA
Maybe, maybe it's like to speak, it's just easier to speak from that position, like what I imagine is a non-gendered perspective, but which is very masculine. You know, if that makes sense, to have the confidence to say certain things like, I wanna to speak from a perspective where I want to pretend like gender's not, not relevant or something like doesn't matter, don't, I'm a woman in this situation, or...

THUY
And it actually does remind me of our conversation about birthing, because I think that there was this essence where you felt like birthing should be a certain way. It should be a certain way, and it was hard for you to accept certain things about the experience of it, you know?

REBECCA
Well, yeah, but not that I thought it should be that way for other people too necessarily, but there was like, the things that I wanted were very important to me.

THUY
Yeah, for you, just like you should, just like you should be non-gendered but you're a woman.

[bell]

REBECCA V/O
I've turned her words around again, but here is where things don't fit. I haven't really ever written anything anonymously, or put forward prostrations of truth; really the opposite. And wanting to ignore being a woman in certain situations, or really not center it, even when others are demanding it, is maybe the way I get through them. To not get knit up in things that would want to pull me under. To not have my experience limited by the box that gets offered.

For me pregnancy was not a central experience, it wasn't even the center of me. What came after mattered a lot more. But that doesn't mean I've displaced being a woman, it just means that it means something different to me.

But maybe that's the part about our subjectivity anyway, its always pulling others into its orbit and wanting to reorient things according to its own logic, and getting stuck where the paths collide. Because we are circulating in captivating fields of others.

REBECCA
But just that question of inequality, or that question of like, what kind of relationship am I for being with these people and, and the conflict that I had from my original research was, I wanted to be friends with the person. Like, I became very intimate with the person who, who was in the field site, and in my field site that I was essentially sort of studying. And I wanted to be friends with that person, I thought that we were friends. And we had a mismatch come because he didn't think we were friends. Or he described to me that we're like, we're not friends, you know what I'm like, but you're my friend, right? Like, so maybe just that conflict of like, power inequality also, that comes from a difference in gender and how that's impacting the relationships that I can form with them.

THUY
Hmm, interesting. That feels more like, yeah, I mean, maybe gender is definitely a part of it, but also just your role as a researcher. Yeah.

REBECCA
Yeah, And I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to form those relationships properly or carefully, because we're not friends. You know, maybe there's a real truth to that, like, maybe it matters that, that I don't see them as friends, but that like I wanted to be friends. But maybe we need like a kind of, respect a distance, like I couldn't, I shouldn't just say anything, I'm thinking to, to these people, right? Like I might with a friend.

THUY
I mean, it's so interesting to me, because it it does go into this area of compartmentalization that I don't feel very comfortable in, you know. But like, it's like these ways that you have to be as a so and so when when you crossed a boundary and as an interviewer, which I think that one of the things I do in my podcasts is like, I enjoy interviewing familiar people who are my friends or family.

Because who says that there's no useful information there. I mean, there's so much that we've conditioned ourselves towards like, valuing as some sort of knowledge that's worth listening to, like silly, not banter from friends. But what when do we you know, so it's like, for me, it, all that is interesting. And I'm almost consciously trying to break down these to me very artificial creations that we have to, so that we can what? Ah, control an agenda pretty much in a supposedly objective way. So it's like these subjective rules we're creating? And I don't know, it just seems silly. It's like, we're creating this weird game that we all believe, but its like, we're playing by it, and then we're confusing ourselves.

REBECCA
Right? Yeah, cause it doesn't stick in the boundaries like it's supposed to.

REBECCA V/O
That means defining, bounding, setting things down.
In one of her last messages, Thuy wrote to me, "I wonder if you can consider that there's a way of being and orienting that doesn't always compartmentalize things" but I think that's what I try to see in the world. The edges of things, the ones that are set out for us. And then the ways things are always expanding and escaping those lines anyway. Going across and over.

Thuy and I haven't really been able come to the same place, or use any particular words to get there. But our conversations made me think of the first film I ever made. I called it Parts of Speech, and it was about what it meant to be a woman in words and language that somehow didn't fit. I wonder how much I got that from her.