Letters of Introduction

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We would like to begin by expressing our heartfelt thanks: first and foremost to our contributors who responded with such enthusiasm, expertise and insight to our invitation to *write differently* and/or to *reflect on writing differently*. Some looked to explore the whys and wherefores, the possibilities and promises of textual innovation and what such alternative practices might mean for sociology and cognate disciplines. Others took the opportunity to compose texts which themselves in some way embodied unconventional literary forms, styles, and devices. We welcomed studies that critically engaged with fiction, poetry, graphic novels and other artistic/literary modes as textual models, as well as more 'experimental' papers that embodied not just new but perhaps marginal or neglected ways of writing the social, of performing critique differently. And, second, thanks are due to our reviewers who generously appreciated the guiding ethos and particular challenges of such a heterodox collection, and recognised that the final result was, as one of them kindly put it, 'wonderfully eclectic'. If we have indeed enabled a 'wonderfully eclectic' volume to come into being here, then we have accomplished all we set out to do.

'Wonderfully eclectic' certainly does not mean problem-free. Far from it. The quality of the papers set a high standard for us as editors as we embarked on writing this introduction. They, our contributors, have exceeded our expectations; we, as editors, must not let them down. So, how are we to do justice to a set of papers that vary so much in both form and content? Indeed, how do you introduce a diverse collection of texts under the theme of 'writing differently'? Should the introduction itself be in keeping with the spirit of what is to follow; that is to say, a serious exercise in playfulness (or vice-versa), an experiment in form or technique or style or voice or all or any of these in combination? Should it be, then, less an introduction as such (a 'leading into') and more a seduction (a 'leading astray'): rather than an invitation a ('letting in') should one compose a provocation (a 'prompt to speak': 'letting rip')? We will return to this.

We? Who is this 'we'?: as we have collaborated on this volume, as editors, as writers, we – Jane and Graeme – have come to reflect upon and appreciate genuinely the contrasts in our own writing styles and voices. That we ourselves write differently – is this a problem to be smoothed over for the sake of a consistent 'tone'; a critical dialectical potential to be unfolded; or, a promise to be kept open for some future occasion, some further collaboration? If nothing else, there is a conversation to be had as to this 'we', indeed one that may come to involve other interlocuters. We shall see that 'we' extended, multiplied.

And then, of course, there is the challenge of how best to 'order' the papers. All editors, inevitably, must confront this problem and deal with the numerous dilemmas involved: 'pulling together' a set of papers is never straightforward; every anthology could be otherwise, *organised differently*. But as editors of a collection expressly committed to questioning and challenging 'the "disciplining" power of academic disciplines', being expected to impose a structure, a sequence, a shape brings with it an intensified unease and anxiety. No two papers are alike: what connects them is principally their disparity. How, then, could we bring them together as a coherent whole without doing an injustice to their particularities and manifest differences? Are there occasions when, for good reason, one should resist the usual temptation to make connections, to stress commonalities, to highlight the shared this-and-that, to *synthesize*. Better to allow the parts simply to stand alone, equal to, not greater than, their sum? Or perhaps juxtaposition them precisely to heighten and exacerbate their incongruities, like some kind of surrealist montage? Or set them in a random sequence – alphabetical order, names pulled from a hat, the contingencies of chance – which might take on the deceptive appearance of an obscure, esoteric schemata. Or, most ingeniously, ostensibly to stage one ordering while creating another surreptitiously, secretly, behind it? (after all, the manifest and the latent have a long history in sociological thought). Reluctantly, we resisted all such ludic temptations. Or did we?

We are, of course, not the first to confront such conundrums: in what follows we will come on to consider what others have done, not so that we may follow the same path, but that we may at least choose and, if fruitful, choose differently.

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In writing an introduction, should we not pose the same challenge or offer the same choice to ourselves as we did to our contributors?: to write differently, or to write on writing differently, that is the question. Should we *introduce differently*? Do we make the writing of our introduction into some kind of 'live' experiment – a conversation, a debate, an argument? Should we look to the playfulness of bricolage?[1] Could we make a game of it?:[2] the visuality of concrete poetry with sociological prose trailing across the page, sculpted into this or that figure? Blank pages for the unthought, the gaps, and lost thinking? Text overlapping for confusion? Could we follow Paul Klee's dictum of artistic practice and take a line for a walk, a line of argument that is? Or should we make a statement of intent, an announcement, proclaim a manifesto even?[3] Let us imagine it for a moment:

I Writing differently is not a mere corrective, a simple unfettered freedom. There are always constraints: just ask a novelist, a poet, a playwright; each working with and against established and recognized forms. In the 'underlife' of writing, one fashions the improvised make-dos in the cracks and crevices, at the limits of, that which is being imposed, which imposes itself.[4]
II Writing differently as sociologists is not license for forgetting: beauty is – and has always been - in the eye of the *privileged* beholder.
III Writing is always already collaborative. 'We' are already extended, multiplied; always rewriting.
IV Academic writing is a set-up: a fiction, of sorts. There is inevitable sleight-of-hand; and a hiding of the retrospective logic.
V There is no end to writing. There are latest versions, but never a final one.

So far, so good. But we worried that a manifesto would be too prescriptive even if we developed our manifest. We do not wish to posit or proscribe what counts as writing differently. Is there such a thing as a modest manifesto, a messy manifesto? Perhaps a minimalist manifesto? Like this:

I Write something 'wonderfully eclectic'.

We decided against a manifesto; for us, manifestos are to the future what monuments are to the past. We prefer ghosts, spectres, hauntings, to monuments. We could only countenance a manifesto if it could invoke such manifestations-to-come.

We turned to others for guidance and inspiration. How do you introduce a collection of differently written texts? How do you do it *well*? How can you do it *differently*?

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Let us consider three exemplary collections: *Writing Otherwise. Experiments in Cultural Criticism* (Jackie Stacey and Janet Wolff, eds., 2013), *The Future of Scholarly Writing. Critical Interventions* (Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, eds., 2015), and *Writing Differently* (Sarah Gilmore et al., eds., 2019). In each of these you will find the editors pointing to a shared purpose and offering a clear statement of intent. So, for example, Stacey and Wolff begin by observing that all of the essays 'share a desire to write otherwise', and that the aim of their collection is 'to expand some of the traditional boundaries of academic practice' and thereby discover 'what else we might want to say about our subjects and about ourselves if we were to move beyond the expected forms through which our thinking and writing as academics have previously flourished.'

The work of contextualisation is also central: on the one hand, there is the important recognition and caveat that experimenting with the protocols of academic writing is not new: academics have always written with creative flair. Creative writing, performance, and arts scholars have pioneered 'practice as research', which allows for distinctly experimental forms of critical writing and discourse more broadly. Anthropologists, ethnographers, and historians have established a range of narrative and stylistic innovations while philosophers and theorists have always stretched the limits of academic writing through aphorisms, theses, and fragmentary, momentary meditations.[5] Moreover, 'There is a long tradition of academics (especially in literary studies) producing fiction alongside their academic work, and teachers of creative writing, of course, also publish it, as well as doing their own critical scholarship' (Stacey and Wolff, 2013).

On the other, there is a special necessity, urgency or topicality for and about writing differently now. Whilst acknowledging the 'critical theories and practices' pioneered by 'feminist studies; ethnic, critical race, and minority studies; and cultural studies in general,' Bammer and Boetcher Joeres, for example, nevertheless make a claim for the acute timeliness of their collection as:

‘part of a debate about what is sometimes cast as a writing “crisis”—an uneasy awareness of the fact that established forms of scholarly presentation (the conventional monograph or peer-reviewed article) are no longer adequate to the needs of the contemporary academy, much less those of the world beyond it’.

The statement demands us to pause and prompts us to ask: what exactly are these crises and what exactly are the ‘needs of the contemporary academy’? Feminism, postcolonialism, anticolonialism, posthumanism, poststructuralism and (post)modernism are not the only currents prompting and questioning the production processes and practices of conventional scholarship. There are far less benign, far more coercive forces at work too. Does traditional academic writing – painstakingly researched and written books, journal articles carefully reviewed and revised – now find itself increasingly out-of-kilter with the demands for the immediacy, the ‘relevance’ and the 24/7 ‘accessibility’ of the twenty-first century sociologist as ‘public intellectual’, and the whole neoliberal marketized machinery of citation indexes, pay-to-publish and pay-per-read open access, Research Excellence Framework league tables, ‘stake-holders’, ‘measurable outputs’ and ‘impact’? ‘Writing differently’ could mean to write principally with these exigencies and imperatives in mind, for these readers, for these ends. For an increasingly de-professionalized, casualised academic workforce, to ‘write differently’ may be essential to secure further funding, another short-term contract, another job.

And there are important technological drivers at work here, too, of course. The proliferation of digital platforms and social media have opening up all manner of new sociographical possibilities: tweets, text messaging, blogs, vlogs, postings here, uploads there. The metaverse has spawned its own new verse form: so-and-so many characters only. Time-space compression demands text-space compression. And such new modes of writing allow for new writers. ‘Beyond’ the academy, there is no shortage of those who, suspicious or scornful of academic research and scholarship (or simply excluded from them), are only too keen to hold forth and ‘write differently’: the digital realm is host to all manner of opinions, comments, scribblings posted by online prosumers, influencers and others. Tbh there is much more that could be said here. Suffice to say: there are many crises of writing in the ‘post truth-world.’

Our three sets of exemplary editors remain composed and calm amidst such a plethora of crises. Yes, indeed, sociologists should not shy away from writing affectively, emotionally,

'powerfully' – but in so doing they should not shirk the duties of care and responsibilities for mustering of evidence, unfolding of reasoned argument, informed and critical debate, and the openness to reflection and revision. The efficacy and persuasiveness of sociological writing, different or not, should not depend primarily upon affect, emotion and power. And so their writing continues to be measured and mannered: their tone is consistently polite, formal, considered. There is cautious and conditional claim making: 'All the contributions in this volume could be read through the lens of more personal writing in some senses, but this is a deceptively unifying category obscures the innovative ways in which they also undercut what the idea of the personal so often promises'. But also, there are bolder, more confident conclusions, which sum up and stretch beyond the terms of preceding arguments. Gilmore et al. conclude:

> '[Writing differently] is writing that calls into question – it refuses – the continuation of the existing relationship between academic writing, being an academic and the *anaemic* outcomes of knowledge production within the academy' (emphasis added).

There are moments of rhetoric: questions are asked but they are not for the answering. There are inevitably a few undeveloped lines of enquiry, unsubstantiated claims, and some tantalizing loose ends. There is, of course, considerable allowance for this. Conventional scholarship provides some room for manoeuvre. It may be a uniform, but it is not a strait-jacket.

As for their writing itself: diction and syntax are appropriately academic with few liberties taken; and grammar and punctuation are properly observed, although with some tolerance now for the use of colloquialisms and contractions. Moreover, there are no infelicities, or lapses in politeness and polish. There is no rough language, no language working-out the thinking, no trace of the drafting. There is no repetition. There are some highly technical terms which are used with due diligence, for example, 'desire', 'other', and 'performative'. Paragraphs are generally long and develop a point. They are also clearly and logical connected, and thereby cohere to build and structure an overall argument. The writing is clean of process; it is a neat and persuasive product.

In other words, these introductions are, in their different ways, excellent examples – indeed, models – of how to write a scholarly academic editorial. There is a conscious decision to

resist experimenting with the protocols of what makes for a good introduction, and more generally, to interrogate what makes for good academic writing. The editors themselves write with genuine authority. They are reliable and are to be trusted. Ironically, the very caveats that are made about their arguments lend their claims greater weight and integrity. The more carefully and cautiously they are advanced, the more convincing and compelling they are. So, in fact, there is little doubt or equivocation, not much in the way of: This may or may not be case. There is no deciding it. There is confusing. This is a mess. No contradiction. No discussions left hanging. No fragments. Or non-sequiturs. No going around in circles, no tail wagging the dog, or horse before cart. No redundant comment. The writing is always pertinent, precise, and to the point.

And the point is: that traditional academic writing is something to be appreciated, valued, and treated with respect. We respect it. Writing differently should never give carte blanche to writing poorly, confusedly, for the celebration of style over substance, for the mere aestheticization rather a politicization of the text. To think of writing differently is an opportunity to think differently and to engage in the genuine interrogation and scrutiny of the practice of writing itself. It is to pay more attention to language and expression, not less.

So far, so good: we have not ‘led into’, but we have certainly ‘led around’, circled the work of others, cautiously, respectfully; spelling and spinning out the argument. And where did this lead us? To something a little different, to *Writing Differently* edited by Alison Pullen, Jenny Helin, and Nancy Harding. We liked how they mattered and talked to each other; how they invoke a ‘we’ but do not shelter behind it because the contrasting, competing voices themselves are foregrounded. Alison has her say; then Jenny, and in turn, Nancy, followed by each of the contributors. There is no ‘we’ who declares a shared purpose, or a ‘we’ that offers a statement of shared intent, that is not immediately called into question. The editors do not write with a single voice or totalizing authority. We liked this. Jane and Graeme, that is. We liked their eschewal of establishing a context or identifying precedents. Their writing is partial and provisional. There is ample opportunity for discord and dissensus. Fortunately for them and for the reader there is sufficient consensus for the experiment to work. The fiction or even fetish of a labour-free or frictionless emergence of a finished text is exposed and exploded. Jenny thanks Alison for bringing up the question of ‘collaboration’, and answers:

> ‘Isn’t reading the primary collaborator to writing? That is, what I immediately came to think about as I read ‘collaboration’. The importance of reading for writing. […] How reading is writing is reading.’ […]’

There is potential to pick up the complex issues raised by Jenny but the question of reading is left unanswered because Nancy is next in line, sitting at her desk in her new house, with her new hip, and settled into her new job, and her thinking is elsewhere.

Neither the writing, nor the thinking, is ‘joined up’: it is marked by the social, so if a position is being advanced by all three, it is done so in jumps and starts, hops and skips, zigzags.

> ‘Oh, I need to sit here longer but ideas are flowing. How can we JUST read? Without extraction. How can we just let text sit on the pages to be read, rather than feeling compelled to ‘do something’ with it? […] It seems to be the nature of mainstream work, that reading is employed to arrive somewhere else. I want to just read the texts of Jenny and Nancy above without responding to them instrumentally. But. And. To add.

There is a desire here. An important desire to respond to another’s writing without wanting to make a point, of taking ownership. To be with the text, and not have it work for us in the service of an argument. To read a text without writing it, without authorizing it. To do justice to the text as the register of difference, as a register of the fact that ‘who people are matters’.

> ‘**Jenny**
> ‘I appreciate Nancy that you remind us about the importance of words and that ‘collaboration’ isn’t exactly the word that best captures what we are experiencing here. If that is the case, what alternatives can we think of? If I had to pick one word only as a signifier for the work during the process of bringing this book to life, that word would be ‘invitation’. Through this work, I have been generously invited to different life worlds where every story has found its own way to be told. […] What is your word?
>
> ‘**Alison**

> ‘My word at this time is co-operation […] Maybe an ideal word may be collaborative participation but editing often involves much more explicit negotiation. […] A new word appears gratitude for those who value the book format as a suitable outlet for their writing. Of course, books are where you have much more scholarly freedom and I always feel emancipated from institutional research metrics when working outside of journals. […] Yet my parting word is surprise. I have been surprised by all the texts, the risks taken in producing texts that make us read and think differently about where we speak from and the implications of this acknowledgement. It is still raining and will do all day.’

We are a little loath to part company with Alison, Jenny, and Nancy. The register of difference, if not personal, is rendered in an intimate language. It is inclusive and welcoming. We wanted to join in, share in the conversation.

Graeme

‘My word is interruption. But please do not misunderstand: this is not intended as a discourtesy, an intrusion into and curtailing of the words of another, born of impatience and an inability to listen, but rather as a productive intercession as in Walter Benjamin’s reading of Brechtian ‘epic theatre’.[6] Here interruption – the radical cessation of the conventional flow of time and events on stage, the sudden suspension of action, characters frozen in expressive gestures perhaps as a newcomer to the scene enters from the wings – is a device to create situations and stimulate moments of recognition, opportunities for the spectators to appreciate and reflect critically upon the underlying social, economic and political tensions and structures that have led up to and are fleetingly manifest in this instant, this tableau, this dramatic still-life. In this pedagogy of the pause, interruption is not an act of unwelcome closure but one of unexpected disclosure. Interruption occasions ‘dialectics at a standstill.’[7] A breathing space, a moment to think and rethink.

Jane

‘My word is riff; collaboration is a playing-off of each other’s thinking and writing. There is always influence: something heard and registered, something that matters, but the point is not to repeat each other exactly, to accept every word, but to interpret and read; to quote each

other differently. A line of argument will be broken, and words lost. But another started, and new words found. It is how we work. There is deviation. A respectful disregard for ...

Graeme

I am going to interrupt again. For here we have the work of writing itself: riffing and interruption: words feeding off words, multiplying, one generating another, words as the precursors and producers of yet more words; and all the while being arrested, broken up, subject to stops and starts, rendered in staccato style. Riffing and interruption, or words and punctuation – that is, after all, what writing is.

Jane

What *academic writing* is, yes? A *production*, a leading into being of thought, analysis, and argument. And that is what we seek here: a bringing into being of something 'wonderfully eclectic'. We hope.

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Productions involve staging. How have we staged our contributions? Again, we are neither the first nor only editors to contend with such problems.[8] Alison, Jenny and Nancy ask the question and argue the point from the outset:

'How do we come to organise a book on writing differently? By theme? It seems that when we organise and carve a volume which crosses so many epistemological, methodological and genre blending variations, we can only conduct editorial violence on sectioning, organising and narrating the contributions of others. We offer a collection presented alphabetically according to first name, a suggestion by Jenny so that: 'who people are matter'.'

Sympathetic to this approach, we deliberated over the ordering and arrangement of the papers: thematic? interweaving? juxtaposing? continuity? contrast? contradiction? – and discussed at length how these might shape the reading of them. The challenge of writing differently anticipates that of reading differently. But collections are often read differently anyway, indeed rarely worked through sequentially; more often they are selectively

scrutinized, dipped into and out of, mined here and there, for what is deemed of interest, essential for a particular purpose. The remainder is left for, well, perhaps another day.

So, why not keep it simple? We decided we should just divide the collection in half: in the first part, writings, meta-texts, that articulate and explore the idea of writing differently itself, the theories and themes, the modes and methods, the potentialities and perils of such practices. And in the second part, we present writings which themselves seek to exemplify such ideas through, for example, fragmentation, textual collage, the multiplication of voices, the mixing of media, poetic expression.

This is most assuredly not to privilege or promote or position one set of papers over and above the other. Good academic writing, the kind demonstrated by every author in Part 1, must not to be underestimated or undervalued. It is to be recognised and appreciated as a skill, a craft, a way with words that is honed, attentive, precise, unpretentious. There is pleasure to be found in the cool clarity of plain prose, in the modesty of understatement and circumspection, in the lucidity of arguments scrupulously made, in writing that is well-wrought. Academic writing is quietly but insistently efficacious. No grandstanding; just understanding. And as for our 'innovators' in Part 2, then let us endorse the view of Carol Smart (borrowing from Avery Gordon) and acclaim them as accomplished storytellers: sociologists, she contends, have a particular duty, 'an extraordinary mandate […] to conjure up social life."'; and for that reason, it is both necessary and possible for us to think about the form and structure of the 'stories' we tell. If anyone is to experiment, then, it is to be sociologists (apologies here to our contributors and readers who are not sociologists).

Indeed, for Smart it would be 'positively irresponsible of the discipline to continue to ignore or shun the potential' of writing differently. We agree wholeheartedly. But to observe such an imperative, we need to do more than think about 'the quality, style, energy and fluency' of our writing. The eloquent use of 'metaphor' and 'imagery' might provide insight and illumination but something more and more radical is needed if sociologists are to address the larger challenges at stake here: how writing may allow or disallow difference to register – there is no doubting that tradition academic writing has promoted and privileged the anthropocentric voice and discourse of the patriarchal and colonial subject; and, how writing may encourage or discourage collaboration, dialogue, and knowledge production across time and space, by others and between human and non-human agents. To 'conjure up social life' is

to call animals and the environment as well as humans to give testimony; and while we agree with C. Wright Mills when he writes that 'the job of all social science worth the name [is] to make society become as alive and as understandable and as dramatic as the best fiction makes the individual seem', to write without all those other networked and non-networked actors would be to endorse, to slightly misquote Smart, an 'impoverished' sociology, one unable to do justice to the sheer complexity of the social and the many, often ephemeral and precarious, ways of knowing it.

In 'wonderfully eclectic' ways our contributors have conjured up the social world differently. They intimate, they anticipate, and they reflect upon the practice of a different sociography; they attempt (essay) through invention and reflection an adventurous sociography. We hope they will inspire others to write, read and think differently about the sociological imagination.

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Part 1: Intimations, anticipations and reflections

In our first paper, Rita Felski addresses some of the key questions of this collection: why write differently? how? And to what end? Her answer to the first question is short: to reach wider readerships. In keeping, then, with a range of critics, Felski accepts the need for accessible scholarship but as a literary critic she is sensitive to the fact that 'most discussions of public sociology pay scant attention to genre, form, or style', with the notable exception of Andrew Abbott, and his argument for a lyrical sociology. At issue, for Felski, then, is a sociological writing that 'captivates and illuminates' and 'does not see reason and politics as opposed to aesthetics and affect.' In other words, she argues for a distinctly literary sociology, one which addresses C. Wright Mills' (1959) 'call for creative forms of sociological writing that can enchant as well as analyze'.

Quickly the question becomes how. What quality of writing is required? Which literary devices and techniques should sociologists draw on? Key to Felski's response is her analysis of Didier Eribon's *Returning to Reims,* and Hartmut Rosa's *Resonance,* both of which have proved popular among the reading public, despite the latter being an eight-hundred-page doorstopper. Felski identifies a number of formal features which are crucial to

their success, including, must notably, scale-shifting, which Felski defines as the ability to move 'between frames of differing magnitude: zeroing in on a specific phenomenon and then zooming out to an analytical claim; oscillating between the explanatory and the descriptive, the macro and micro, the general thesis and the poignant or unexpected detail'. Admittedly, she argues, 'there's nothing especially unusual--or intrinsically literary--about moving across scales. Sociological essays often begin with a broad claim, narrow down to a specific data-set or case study, and back out, finally, to assess its larger significance'. But Eribon and Rosa are particularly 'attuned to the details of persons and things': an eye, in other words for poetic detail; and they have a feel for literary pace, the nature of which will ensure that readers keep turning the page.

In answer to her final, if implied question, Felski accepts that academics are critical, and to that end, the challenge of public scholarship is not just one of 'accessibility', of finding ways to 'leaven' theory, but negotiating discord and dissensus, of finding a language that allows for 'disagreement on [an] equal footing'. What is needed is what she calls 'horizontal critique'. A form of critical engagement that is on a level, so to speak, with ordinary life, not one that breaks with it.

The question of public engagement is key also to Nicole Vittelone, who is interested in taking up Bruno Latour's challenge of description from the bottom up, which he issued in his (2018) book *Down to Earth*. Indeed, while mindful of longstanding decades over the methodological issues associated with descriptive practice – of 'writing-up' empirical research, Vittelone is clear that a renewed, revitalised practice of description will help social science scholars 'deal with the metamorphosis of the world and take into account multiplying viewpoints'. Indeed, put bluntly, we need to write differently if we are to address global environmental problems.

While Felski, as a literary critic, is inspired by sociological writers; as a sociologist, Vittelone takes her initial inspiration from literary critics, most notably Heather Love (2010), who 'highlights the methodological gain of privileging descriptive methods of attentiveness, acts of noticing and being surprised to the blunt method of critique'. Once again, the potential of writing differently is pitched against the power of critique, the strike of reason, and the on-high, objective rule of theory.

Taking her lead, then, from Isabelle Stengers' criticism of 'theoretical voyeurism' and her commitment to 'ontological tact' when describing human and non-human interactions, Vittelone goes on to argue for the importance of 'hesitation'. Here the practice of writing differently is figured as a way to pause, as a means to hold open the space and time prior to

assessment, decision, judgement; a small, almost delicate gesture of holding back, which allows for attachment, attentiveness and attunement, for wonder and curiosity, for noticing; and with such practice the possibility that the previously marginalized and unnoticed including objects can emerge from 'the thick of things'. The challenge is for us, as witnesses, to be 'forced to think by the situation'; and not interpret it in advance. To slow down our thinking.

The importance of Vittelone's paper is twofold, however. It is itself a richly thick description of the critical debates, and of her involvement also in London's #OneLess refill water fountain pilot project initiated in 2018 to reduce plastic water consumption. As such it is exemplifies the value of careful, detailed description; or what might be called close writing. At stake, then, is not only knowledge production and the possibility of inter-disciplinarily dialogue, but how we might read academic work differently; bear witness to another's thinking. To dwell within the terms of an argument and pay note to 'the yet to come'.

In keeping with the language of witnessing but signalling a break with pure text, Nayanika Mookherjee reflects on the power of graphic ethnography and how it 'allows us to map the objects and feelings of fear through the silence of images'. Sociography and writing differently is refigured through the visual, which holds the potential to express that which cannot be 'brought out by words and texts alone'. That said, Mookherjee is not looking to endorse but rather challenge the idea that fear – and the trauma of sexual violence more broadly – is unrepresentable, and, so, she insists that we must 'go beyond the search for the 'unsayable and unseeable'. As such, her argument serves as an important caution: writing differently is not simply, or, indeed, necessarily about the allusive and ineffable.

Indeed, as she points out about what is distinctive about the rape of 200,000 women during the 1971 Bangladesh war compared to other instances of wartime rape is that it was not kept quiet, silenced or otherwise censored from public discourse. Instead, there was widespread recognition of the violence endured, which was evidenced by the fact that the Bangladeshi named 'the women raped as *birangonas* (meaning 'brave women'). Thereafter, in independent Bangladesh the figure of the raped woman would be present in photographs, advertisements, testimonials and various literary and visual representations.'

Reflecting on her experience of co-producing a graphic novel with the Dhaka-based Bangladeshi visual artist Najmunnahar Keya, Mookherjee renders explicit both the ethics and politics of both graphic ethnography and public scholarship: *Birangona* is an attempt to do justice to the 'experiences of sexual violence which are inherently felt as incoherent, non-linear and fragmented'; experiences that are remembered, but not easily, not least because they are

held by objects; and at same time provide a 'set of [survivor-led] guidelines for professionals seeking to record testimonies of sexual violence'. Indeed, during the process of making the graphic novel, which included the enrolment also of students, government officials, policy makers, NGO representatives, feminists and human rights activist, and journalists, it became clear that both form and content - graphic novel and an intergenerational storyboard - 'made it relevant for children of twelve years and above.' *Birangona* would have a readership that Mookherjee's scholarly *The Spectral Wound* would not have.

In auto-ethnographic mode also, Jenny Edkins reflects on her attempts 'to write the tears of the world into poems, poems that speak of injustice, oppression and tragedy', and their value as a method of critical engagement. Indeed, according to Edkins, and in what is a clear rejection of the linear demands of narrative, whether fictional or scholarly, poetry may be better suited to expressing 'the political moment—the moment when worlds are destabilized and the taken for granted no longer holds. When we are obliged to face the ungroundedness and fragility of being'.

Pursuing her argument in a deceptively short and 'lightly' written paper, Edkins raises two key challenges: how do we speak and advocate for others; and how do we express what we do not know for certain. Poetry, as a means of inquiry, is her answer because, on the one hand, it allows us to address social and political questions 'obliquely': in an allusive language, a language that avoids attacking a problem directly: square on; and, as a result, it 'can reveal what may be hidden' and 'allow for [the] unsaid to emerge'.

While, on the other hand, poetry affords us a voice that is 'not our own in any case', a reality that the traditional academic denies (for the most part). Writing differently is thus figured by Edkins as a refusal of the possessive discourse of academic discourse and expertise: of authorship, of *our* research subjects. The tone of her writing is noteworthy in that respect. Indeed, pressing her argument, which is informed by a post-structuralist understanding of language and identity (see also Edkins, 2013), she concludes: 'We do not possess 'voice'; we are its instrument. It passes through us. Language speaks us. Like a poem we may write, it is not 'ours' to control.'

In sum, and across all the registers of her paper, Edkins experiments with a range of voices and points-of-view, and while she finds fault with most of them, they are witness to her 'refusal of individuality', and as such Edkins highlights a key aspect of any successful attempt at writing differently: a dispersal of expertise; a dispossessed voice.

Does fiction have a role to play in sociological writing? That is the question that is picked up by Greg Smith, who brings us back to a sociologist and a sociology we are familiar

with (in both form and content): Erving Goffman, who Smith reminds us, was a 'distinctive and sometimes even a graceful writer in a discipline renowned for the absence of such qualities' but who, more importantly, was inspired by novelists and novels, most notably William Sansom (1912-1976), a popular British mid-twentieth century novelist, travel and short story writer. At stake, though, is not whether sociologists are in competition with novelists as Wolf Lepenies (1988) maintains (cited in Felski): indeed, as Smith speculates there is reason to believe that Goffman 'may have sensed a kinship between Sansom's writing and his own sociological work'; or, whether, as in Goffman's case, the use of fictional and other literary sources will help a sociologists achieve 'crossover' status as a writer, but why use fiction as data to illustrate and inform an argument when as Smith makes clear sociology 'prides itself upon explaining the "real world" and its analyses are based in "facts", not the fictions invented by creative writers.'

The answer to the question lies in the fact that Goffman framed his work as an 'exploratory sociology': in 'which possibilities were explored rather than actualities demonstrated'. The use of fiction as an alternative or supplement to fact is a way of guarding against absolute certainty and easy generalisations. Indeed, as Jon K Shaw and Theo Reeves-Evison argue: 'fiction turns toward the unknown without seeking to legislate or capitalize on its relation to the knowable; indeed, fiction precisely encourages the impact of the unknown as unknown on the known and its persistence therein. This is the ability to remain open'.

And yet as Smith notes, in a suggestive prompt, for Goffman 'an adequate categorization of the everyday must fold in elements of make-believe (daydreaming, joking, theatrical gestures), not divide them off as separate finite provinces of meaning'. Put more strongly: '"life may not be an imitation of art, but ordinary conduct, in a sense, is an imitation of the proprieties, a gesture at the exemplary forms, and the primal realization of these ideals belongs more to make-believe than to reality".

So, we can ask, if make-believe is part of how the social world works, of what makes it a meaningful reality, is there an opening for sociologists to make-believe also? Indeed, part of the inspiration for this collection is Mariam Motamedi Fraser's 'Once Upon a Problem' in which she argues for the methodological importance of make-believe; she writes: 'It is often helpful for sociologists […] to proceed, at different points in a research project, *as if* something were true.' The value Goffman places on fiction is a pragmatic accepting of that the conditional possibility.

The question becomes, then, whether sociologists might not adopt make-believe as a method for exploring the world, and not just an occasional aid to our thinking about it.

Fiction and make-believe are not the same. But fiction does require a suspension of belief for it to be read as if it were true: that is the magic by which both forms works. Is it not time for sociologist to harness that power? To get a feel for writing fiction(s)?

The answer to that question, according to Ash Watson in the final paper of Part 1, is a resounding yes (a yes, it is worth adding that is in keeping with a broader yes to arts-based methodologies for the social sciences). As a leading advocate and practitioner of sociological fiction, Watson focuses our attention on 'fiction written as sociology' and offers us a close reading of the techniques used by sociologists writing-up their research in fictional prose to show how they work as an alternative to, if not substitute for, academic 'explanation, exposition, and argument'. At issue, in other words, is how sociologists craft 'sociological insight in/through fiction'.

Key to Watson's answer are the ways in which sociologists writing fiction (as sociology) render the familiar strange, which she holds in counterpoint to the ways in which novelists render the strange familiar. Indeed, in a telling example of how fiction might be used as data to inform and illustrate an argument, Watson begins her paper with a long quote from Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and returns to it and the question of García Márquez's techniques to consistently argue that sociologists achieve the opposite affect: García Márquez 'naturalises magical events, [while academics writing sociological fiction] authors achieve the inverse and each make something that is familiar and everyday feel unusual and strange.'

To that end, then, Watson reminds us of what is important about academic writing and sociological writing: it is critical writing; and no matter how experimental, it has to do the work of critique. A sociologist writing fiction is not a novelist: the writing is supported by years of research. Evidence is to hand, in the telling.

That said, and given, as Smith also notes, that Goffman was favourably compared to Franz Kafka, it is possible to conclude here by asking whether sociologists might also draw inspiration from the non-realist literary tradition. Some sociologists have been inspired by the modernist and experimental tradition of the early twentieth century (most notably surrealism), but few have looked to postmodernist writers, including not only magical realists such as García Márquez and Angela Carter, but those novelists who are known for their meta-fictional devices including Italo Calvino and Jeanette Winterson.

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Part 2: Essays, inventions and adventures

In team sports, Lindsey Freeman reminds us, when the opposition are in possession of the ball, one can choose between two main strategies: one can mark player for player, or move to a zone defence.

In the former, one pays attention to the body, enters into a complex and combative dance, a game of move and countermove, physical call-and-response in which tussling bodies may become as intertwined as lovers. It is a mimetic practice. One's task is to mirror one's adversary, to shadow and pursue relentlessly so as to become the spoiling companion, the ruinous doppelganger, the evil twin of the other. One's goal is to prevent, thwart, obstruct, impede and impair, to stymie whatever they seek to do.

In the latter, it is not so much the bodies of opponents which one must scrutinize and supervise as the spaces they seek to occupy, move through, control. These spaces – close to home, to the goal, the net, the target, points and positions from which they can pass and shoot `– must be colonized and closed off, rendered impenetrable and impassable. The direct physical dual of the one-on-one encounter is subordinated to the logics of architectural formation and organisation and distribution of the team.

The three rather different first-person accounts which open Part 2 all partake of marking, be it of the body or of the zone, or of both, indeed of the body by the zone, of the zone by the body,

In *Dark Waters* Allen Shelton is certainly a marked man. But his marker is not there to negate his literary enterprises but rather to replay them, indeed to outplay them. Shelton is not confronted by an opponent of his writings, but, worse, side-lined by an amateur exponent of them. John Shaplin has, Shelton discovers to his understandable disquiet, taken it upon himself to re-write in his blog-posts one of Shelton's books, *Where the North Sea Touches Alabam*a, the second part of Shelton's unofficial 'soft arcades' trilogy following the extraordinary, genre-defying *Dreamworlds of Alabama*.

Interleaving social and cultural theory with psychoanalysis, autoethnography, family genealogy, biography and local history, these books are both explorations and evocations of bodies and places scarred by traumas and catastrophes. In *Dreamworlds*, Shelton's biographical reflections are archaeological excavations of the legacies of genocide, slavery, war and forced migration, a digging down into the past and the landscape which in turn digs

back into him, piercing and lacerating the skin, leaving its indelible traces; in *Where the North Sea*, Shelton mourns the suicide of his friend Patrik Keim, an artist who devoted himself to the creation of visceral installations and compositions of bodily fluids, animal parts, broken glass and razor wire. Astonishingly, the discovery of a large old wooden coffin half-immersed in a nearby swamp, leads Shelton to imagine a watery resurrection of his friend. It is this text that Shaplin has taken upon himself to edit, fillet, condense and rework under the new title *Dark Waters*. In so doing, he writes Shelton out of the picture, though Shelton is not complaining: he prefers Shaplin's literary economy to his own.

Perhaps Shelton's reflections here on his correspondence with Shaplin will themselves soon feature on the latter's blogs. Perhaps they are already there, only improved. Perhaps in time, the time-lag between Shelton's original writings and Shaplin's reconfigurations will close such that Shelton will find himself overtaken, superseded, superfluous. Shaplin will come to write more concisely what Shelton has only imagined. And then their roles will be reversed and, in a Baudrillardian precession of simulacra, Shelton may have his textual 'revenge' as Shaplin's alter-author, lengthening, expanding, filling out, writing himself back in.

The marked body, the female body as marked by male clinicians and their textbooks, her own body as marked by pain – these are at the heart of Karen Engle's exquisitely composed 'Foot Notes'. Despite the swimming and the cycling and exercises and the therapies, hers becomes a body that no longer so fleet of foot; rather, it becomes a body that carries its pain, indeed is painful in the very act of carriage, of walking, itself. In a moment of acute recognition one summer's evening, Engle notes, 'I came to sense that something had taken over my body and replaced it with this aching, despairing flesh. I had only been seeing my body in pieces; I had missed the moment that I became a chronic condition'. Three chronologies, three chronic conditions, are interwoven here : that of the author's body and its affliction by pain – firstly by planter fasciitis and then by fibromyalgia with its multiple, migratory 'tender points'; that of the changing medical tracings and interpretations of these symptoms; and thirdly, that of the conflation of women's pain with mental disturbances and neurological disorders, the *hyster* as the source of all women's ailments, and the close coincidence of these multiple 'tender points' with Charcot's 'hysterical zones'.

Engle sets these histories and narratives – personal/affectual, bio-political, psychosomatic/patriarchal – in a complex dance, one which opens up two key sets of disjunctures. Firstly, Engle foregrounds how such contrasting diagnostic regimes bring with

them very different interpellations, subjectivities, identifications and identities, fates: ‘Had I been born 20 years earlier,’ Engle muses, ‘I may have been diagnosed as having fibrositis, or as being just another hysterical woman in need of valium; 100 years earlier – malingerer or drug abuser; 150 years earlier – hysteric or neurasthenic; early modern period – witch’. ‘

Secondly, this three-way dance might perhaps resemble the figures in Regnault’s painting of the *The Three Graces* from 1793, a representation which came curiously to provide a template for the mapping of symptoms in medical illustrations. Given her acuity for visual phenomena demonstrated in *Seeing Ghosts* (2009) and her attentiveness to affect and the body exemplified by her co-edited collection, the playfully entitled *Feelings of Structure* (2018), it is little wonder that Engle is struck by the excess of incongruities in the reworking and recoding of images here:

‘Charm, beauty and creativity are made to occupy a black and white world entirely abstracted from their joyful existence. Those opaque blots start to look like bullet holes on a shooting target, and I search for any indication that their bodies have been impacted, but these tender points seem not to have affected them: there is no grimacing, no subtle lean from one foot to the other, no cradling of a bad shoulder. Even the figure on the right, who gazes out so mysteriously in the Regnault, seems utterly impervious to these holey impressions. These three beauties are now eternally youthful and eternally in pain, but you’d never know it from looking at them’.

In these interchangeably joyful/painful female bodies, it is the lived embodied sensuous affectual experience itself that is ‘entirely abstract,’ marked and marked out, erased.

And this brings us to Freeman and her marks, markings, and zones. Here, reflecting in and on Covid-times, she is very much ‘in the zone’ herself. Initially sketching a zonal epistemology and methodology, a manifesto in miniature even – a commitment ‘to track a space and to pick up on the things happening there’ coupled with a sensitivity ‘to see, feel and think this place’ – she embarks on a series of ‘sociological prose poems’ inspired by one particular forbidden and forbidding zone: the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (CEZ), a site whose continuing catastrophic potential has been much in the news following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Having grown up in Oak Ridge Tennessee, home to the uranium processing and enrichment facilities that supplied the Manhattan Project, a nuclear childhood retold and re-examined with brilliant wit and insight in her *The Atom Bomb in Me* (2029), Freeman is clearly drawn to, gravitates towards, the radioactive. In the Ukraine during the summer of 2018, her zonal

thinking and zonal imagination are sparked by zonal walking, or rather 'stalking', as she accessed this ruinous environment of the contaminated towns and abandoned villages composing the CEZ, camera in hand. There are different kinds of stalking and stalker. Shelton is textually stalked as well as marked by Shaplin. Engle is relentlessly and mercilessly stalked by her pain. In Freeman's piece, the stalker is, by contrast, not one who follows in the shadows, but rather one who enters into and becomes the guide to the shadows, as in the sci-fi novel *Roadside Picnic* (1972) and Andrei Tarkovski's 1979 film. With such a stalker as her Ariadne, Freeman's 'thinking zonally' not only allows / requires her to attend to 'the registers of feeling, mood,, and atmosphere that exist inside spaces' but also demands an eye for scenes and images, such as the one of an 82-year-old returnee, Maria Harlam, a humble portrait of a seated woman which, nevertheless, has a profound resonance for Freeman: 'the experience makes me want for a new category of looking that explains how some photographs put me in a meditative, contemplative zone'.

In their shared concerned with and foregrounding of bodies, affects, spaces, and moments of transformation/remediation, it is tempting to think of these three texts as some kind of triptych, as a trio of figures like *The Three Graces* – figures depicted not practising a marking drill (neither player-for-player nor zonal) but gathered in a conspiratorial team huddle, whispering tactics. But as we will see, the connections with the subsequent pieces in Part 2 are also strong, if a little more oblique (and it is the oblique ones we should perhaps value most here). A turn of the kaleidoscope and a shift occurs, a slightly different pattern appears: the author as walker, as stalker, as stalked cedes precedence to the writer as dispersed, diffuse, and distributed; multiple bodies become multiple voices; corporeal and contaminated zones to construction sites and urban zoning; places to the placements and positionings of textual fragments. We shift to polyphony and cacophony, collage and mosaic, architectures.

In his urgent and timely attempt 'to write antifacism', to compose 'an experiment in non-fascist writing', Günter Gassner places Walter Benjamin's 1923 provocative and enigmatic essay 'On Violence' at the centre of his contribution 'Spiral Movement'. There are many more Benjaminian motifs in play, however, shaping and structuring this piece: the very notions of a productive textual circling and of interruption are the organizing principles here. Author of a provocative critique of the changing London skyline, one insisting on heterogeneity and contradiction in metropolitan design (*Ruined Skylines*, 2019), Gassner once again combines his philosophical insight and acuity with his professional architectural training as he explores, through 'vignettes of urban situatedness,' the spaces and practices of

anti-fascist struggle and, most significantly, overt and latent forms of violence – physical, governmental, institutional, symbolic, revolutionary. How might a 'politicization of violence' respond to the fascist 'aestheticization of violence' (Hanssen 2000)? How might writing itself be implicated in this? Striking here then is Gassner's scrupulous attentiveness to textual composition – his 'eclectic approach' combines the idea of spiral thinking (involving 'circular as well as forward-directed movement') and the practice of repeated interruption though the innovative inclusion of social media threads, posts and tweets to break and break-up the flow. Punctuation and plurality of voices are themselves modes of political-poetic practice, rejecting totality and eschewing continuity, fostering diversity over unity, privileging the conversation over the monologue and monotonal. To write differently, to write decisively, the author may need to strike 'left-handedly', as Benjamin once put it, to become a southpaw scribe with a ready supply of punchlines.[9]

The city, violence, gendered and racialized bodies, textual disjunctures and multiple voices all come together – or perhaps better, *confront each other* – in 'Body as Border' co-authored by Julian Brigstocke, Lidiane Malanquini, Maira Froes, Cristina Cabral, and Gabriela Baptista. Focusing on the Bairro Maré, a district comprising some sixteen *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, they present a 'feminist phenomenology that analyses women *favela* residents' embodied experiences of urban mobility' through the triangulation and interleaving of contrasting methods and textual styles: an ethnographic approach based on qualitative semi-structured interviews exploring 'everday, corporeal micro-scale practices'; an 'experimental biosocial analysis of the physiology of affect in the *favela*' using electrodermal sensors to monitor, measure, record and generate quantitative data; and, a sociological exercise in creative 'stream of attention writing', based on everyday observation.

Importantly, this is not just a case of utilising mixed methods: there is a conscious refusal of synthesis here. There is no *and* but rather an emphatic and repeated *or*. Yes, there is a common ambition: a 'thinking with the skin' to render an 'urban skinscape' of affective rhythms and atmospheres. But these three analytical frames are set out, and operate, in parallel, paradigmatically rather than syntagmatically. It is through these contrasting ways of seeing and thinking, ways of working and writing, that the daily lives of three women, Patrícia, Letícia and Aline – are explored and unfolded. In this example of 'biosocial and neuro-urbanism', there is an attention to the skin itself 'speaking,' 'communicating', the skin writing, telling its own story.

Collaboration and the proliferation of voices – this is taken a step further in the piece ‘Cool Premonitions’. The premise is a simple one: a final year undergraduate class becomes a reading group and takes as its text Jean Baudrillard’s sometimes insightful, sometimes crass but always provocative study *America* (1988). What might a Baudrillardian take on America today, the twenty-first century America of Donald Trump not the 1980s ‘astral’ America of Ronald Reagan, look like? An America 2.0. Not the America of the road-trip, of desert landscapes and driving the interstate, but of the screen, of mediascapes and browsing the internet. There was no class visit to America. You can stay at home to travel in hyperreality. The guidance was minimal. Choose any feature of the USA today and write a fragment in a Baudrillardian spirit, whatever that may be for you: playful, sardonic, ecstatic, obscene, excessive, myopic, absurd, perverse. Be mindful that his real scorn was for his homeland and his compatriots: France and the ‘dubbed’ version of American ‘eccentric’ modernity. Is this then, an exercise in imitation, parody, pastiche, homage? All of these probably though it would be hard to tell which fragment is which. Does it matter? Everyone who wants to participate writes at least one fragment; some choose to write several. All are included. The contributions are put together like tesserae in a mosaic, though there is no particular pattern, certainly no craftily hidden figure. These may be puzzle pieces but there is no picture (and hence no puzzle). Individual pieces are not individually accredited. Contributors are listed alphabetically listed. It is a collection as collective endeavour.

Writing in such fragments is, of course, not new. Nor are multiple authors (ironically, this is characteristic of the natural sciences, though there are undoubtedly vicious squabbles over the rank order of authors: lead / first, second – like the results of some academic athletics event). Even writing and publishing as a class is not novel. But these particular voices are new. And presenting them here, showcasing them, is a writing differently. They are now all published writers.

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And finally. We were delighted that Lauren Berlant and Katie Stewart accepted our invitation to contribute to the collection. They were working on a new project called ‘First Responders’, and the piece they offered us would showcase how their writing had developed since *The Hundreds*. The abstract they sent promised a paper that would be perfect.

And it is. ‘Some Stories, More Scenes’ meets all of the ambitions we have for *Sociography.* To begin, it shows us the potential of a new way of writing the social – or, as Berlant and Stewart prefer: ‘scenes of life that are ideas of life’, or the ‘new ordinary’ - which is both trans- and post-disciplinary, and publicly accessible: it is dreamy and loose; you can drift with their writing, attuned to its impact.

Whether as one commentator suggests their writing signals a ‘new turn in the social sciences’ is an open question but without doubt it serves as new way of doing ‘theory’, of writing ‘at the level of thought’: it is thinking which is speculative, testing, feeling. But not one that is concerned with pinning ‘the tail on ontology or on epistemology’, or of adopting a ‘diagnostic tone’. Thinking is not a game, nor blind to purpose, but something that allows for ‘surprise’ and ‘attitude voiceovers’. But still ‘perspective is precise’. It is academic writing.

That said, Berlant is clear that they are ‘not offering a new gimmick for a better theory’; a totalising explanation: the emphasis is always on the incidental, the moments, but not with ‘fetishizing representations of flux or indeterminacy’. There is a politics to their writing: it is not as Stewart argues occasion only for ‘virtuosic description’, although it can read for pleasure.

They ‘write to be in the reverb of word and world’; as might we.

‘Some Stories, Some Scenes’ is clearly also a form of writing that does justice to the critical curiosity that animates critical thinking. Berlant could not be clearer: the point of their project to is to make ‘concepts from what curiosity hooks’. The writing is animated, resonant, exciting. Entertaining, even. Witness to the moment. They resist closure; and they refrain from conclusions. ‘We test out propositions against repetitions, frictions, voicings, affects, events, or different and similar inclinations.’ Neither of them wants the final word. ‘Allusive, evocative, digressive, provocative, experimental, open-ended, and unexpected’, it goes without saying; or, as they put it, their writing is ‘direct not literal’.

Which is to say also that their writing is ‘non-realist’. They not interested in providing a window onto the world but offer a writing, as one commentator puts it, that is ‘on the sly’. Attunement not representation.

And while distinctly ‘anecdotal, aphoristic, and fragmentary’, ‘Some Stories, More Scenes’ is not beyond storytelling even though they question its logic: ‘The ethnographers say: we are all storytellers. I am a terrible storyteller. There are so many meanwhiles and to-be-fairs. There is so much backstory! Who is she? What does *that* mean?’

But there is a narrative, albeit a ‘fractal, fractious’ one. 'Some Stories, More Scenes’ will not stretch ‘the social and political into a resource for living’.

Berlant and Stewart also pursue an ‘argument’ which depending on your point of view either ‘falls-short’ of ideologically imposed norms of evidence and logic; or is in ‘excess’ of what is normally permitted. Either way it is playful: Sociography becomes ‘Sociomythography’ becomes ‘Sociopathography’ becomes ‘Sociodreamography’. Becomes a question for us all: ‘How do you become trained in a way of seeing without attaching to it? Is sociology to be part myth, part illness; partly unconscious?

There is the ‘we’ of their writing. If you know something about Lauren or Katie, in particular, and, for sure, it is possible to discern their thinking at work, their phrasing, their experiences, their voice, their register. But that is not the point of their experiment. They ‘are separate people trying to stay in sync’.

And then.

Here are Katie’s final words on the question of collaborating with Lauren:

‘We wrote our tiny pieces each day in a google doc and collaborated as intense readers for each other through long phone calls. Internalizing Lauren as a voice in my head and eventually a companion on my shoulder, was a gift that changed my writing. We came to know each other in words. We made a game of editing and editing again which for us was a lot of subtracting the long-winded to make room for surprising cuts, elaborative descriptions and sharp abstractions. Our thinking got sharper. We looked at each other in amazement at what we were seeing and what we were saying as if it came from an elsewhere.

‘We read our pieces aloud, feeling out what made what kind of sense, riffing on sentences, intuitions, associations, laughing hard, picking up on something, announcing that something else didn’t work – too many words, too much declaration, too cryptic, why that color blue? There was a hard edge between fun and judgement and over time, not without trouble, we came to trust each other. We got braver together. We made a little world of thinking through a writing trained on catching what we could of whatever seemed to be happening or might happen in one scene after another.

‘We developed a fierce, sheer generosity as the discipline of a compositional critique. We stopped diagnosing each other. Every new piece was inaugural. I learned from Lauren that to be intellectual or political is to produce new forms for optimism by

being in sync with someone attuning to something forming up in some rickety damaged world. She had a sentient mind.'

We dedicate this collection to Lauren Berlant.

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[1] See 'Doing Academic Writing Differently: A Feminist Bricolage, Rachel Handforth and Carol A. Taylor for an example.

[2] For discussions of surrealism and sociology see Derek Sayer (2015) 'The chance meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a statistical table—some thoughts on surrealism and sociology', and Sayer (2017) *Making Trouble: Surrealism and the Human Sciences*; and Victoria Foster (2019)'The Return of the Surreal: Towards a Poetic and Playful Sociology'.

[3] See Les Back and Nirmar Puwar's (2012) 'A Manifesto for Live Methods'; and John Holmwood's (ed.) *A Manifesto for the Public University* and Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99%* as examples of academics writing differently.

[4] This idea of an 'underlife' is, of course, a reference to/play on Erving Goffman's (1961) *Asylums*.

[5] See, for example, Stephen Benson and Clare Connors' (eds) *Creative Criticism: An Anthology and a Guide*, John Schad and Oliver Tearle's (eds) *Crrritic! Sighs, Cries, Lies, Insults, Outbursts, 'Hoaxes, Disasters, Letters of Resignation, and Various Other Noises Off in these the First and Last Days of Literary Criticism, Not to Mention the University*, Anand Pandian and Stuart J. McLean's (eds) *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, and the works of Michael Taussig and Stephen Muecke.

[6] See Benjamin, 2003: 304-5.

[7] See Benjamin, 1999: 475.

[8] Jackie Stacey and Janet Wolff divide and group their contributors into three sections – Affects, Displacements, and Poetics. But they acknowledge that 'The three remaining essays [grouped together in the final section] are in fact very different from one another, and yet each speaks, we think, to a more general concern with 'poetics.' Stacey and Wolff know they might have misrepresented the papers, but they let that 'violence' slip without further comment.

[9] See Benjamin, 1996: 447.