

# WRITING DIFFERENTLY

# DIALOGUES IN CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

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DIALOGUES IN CRITICAL MANAGEMENT  
STUDIES VOLUME 4

# WRITING DIFFERENTLY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCING

Alison Pullen, Jenny Helin and Nancy Harding

### Alison

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’. Authoring, being an author, masks who we are, and perhaps who we become in our writing. The importance of situating ourselves is vital.

Writing differently for me has become the only way I can write, breathe, be free from the academic constraints that categorise my writing as outputs with metric value. I was interested in ‘writing differently’ to write as a woman in her multiplicity. I am still interested in writing as a speaking woman, with all the complexity that being a woman writer entails. Writing against the mainstream. Writing against those that seem to silence and repress. Writing out of fear that if I stop, I may never write again.

This book has been a labour of love, rather than collecting and cataloguing contributions. A reminder to work with wonderful people who teach us so much if we listen. And, this requires slowness.

Remind me to talk about ‘collaboration’.

### Jenny

Collaboration, this is an important word in our work. Thank you Alison for reminding me as well. 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. The importance of reading for not stopping to write, as you mention Alison. How reading is writing is reading. How no reading is innocent, which is why how we read affects what we write. Last week I re-read Laurel Richardson's beautiful book *Fields of Play, Constructing an Academic Life* where she has put together her earlier pieces on writing and added some shorter commentaries to it. As I read her seminal piece 'Writing as Inquiry' (which she by the way has entitled 'Writing Matters' in the book), I was reminded of how that text started out of her frustration on what she has to read. In the opening line she wrote:

I have a confession to make. For thirty years, I have yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies. Countless numbers of texts have I abandoned half-read, half-scanned. I'll order a new book with great anticipation – the topic is one I'm interested in, the author is someone I want to read – only to find the text boring. (Richardson, 1997, p. 87)

Unfortunately, I think these words could have been written today as well. And sometimes when I see the reading lists of the courses we are teaching our students I am thinking, this list cannot have been put together for the aim of actually reading. What is on the list is boring, outdated texts with too many words for anyone to REALLY engage with during the time of a course. And that is what we are examining next generation scholars!

The texts in this book have been written for reading. They are opening-up for multiplicities of readings as they engage our full bodies. I look forward to offer students, texts from this collection, to be read with care and attention.

What did you think of when you wrote collaboration?

## Nancy

Each academic text 'written differently' is a micro-revolution. Micro-revolutions add up, overturning dysfunctional, perhaps rotten, sometimes corrupt, practices that inhibit knowledges and understanding. Writing differently revolutionaries want to influence the world. Some of us may have made successful careers out of surrendering to the binds of scientific writing, but successful careers are no more than dust in the wind.

I see writing differently as part of a wider academic revolution against the dominance of methodolatry and the increasing demands of its governors. We are now told that we should carry out 60–70 interviews if our work is to be deemed publishable. Why? No rationale is given for this ratcheting up of requirements, and Emperor Interview's lack of clothes is blithely ignored. Writing differently is a necessary contribution to the work in our sister movements in post-qualitative and post-human research methods: new ways of doing research require new ways for writing it up.

We do not wish to abandon academic rigour, by which I/we mean the reflection and interpretation that develops understanding of the world. Without academic rigour we become journalists, and trained journalists are far better reporters than are we. Rather, in the place of the stultifying format we must use if our stories are to be judged 'good social science', we will tell those stories in formats through

which they can be understood, valued, cherished and passed around from reader to reader.

If I were to have written that last paragraph differently, I would recount the 'Fringework' PDW at AoM 2019, when all three of us were together albeit that Jenny was a disembodied presence (via Skype). Many of those in the room are publishing in this volume and the special edition we co-edited. Its affective energies stay with me – the joyousness of academic play through listening, discussing, participating, passing around rocks, reading poetry, of hugged 'helloes' and 'how are you's' and inspirational offerings. I had come from a PDW that had aimed to think differently about interviews but had failed in that objective, and my emergency handbag book (pull out in case of nothing to do) was an edited book discussing posthuman research methods. Collaboration sometimes happens through a confluence of happenstances.

## Alison

It is raining today, and I should be doing laundry and finishing a paper for a colleague who has become an academic project manager (you know the ones that manages the research of others). You see, I am late, again and as soon as I am managed, I can't write. Is my body saying that I shouldn't write? I want to write. I wrote to a dear academic feminist friend last night that as soon as I 'get rid of the project managers from my life, I can enjoy writing again'. I have no idea when to start writing until I see my fingers moving in front of me. It is different with writing with, or, for colleagues, the writing starts with thinking, working the writing through others text, developing text and argument in synergy but this is research. I like writing when it feels like writing, rather than working on a text. My friend said after every break from writing we should start writing 'something enjoyable', so here I am doing this instead of the chores that need doing before the school run and the orthodontist and the traditional academic paper I desperately need to finish. You see there is a problem with it, it is full of distinct voices that stem from vastly different paradigmatic research. Writing differently needs to be enjoyable even when it pains, or why else would we do it? And, to work with people who you can write *to*, is a gift, a pleasure, and we could continue this project until we think it is 'ready' or 'right' but actually what stands between publishing the book and where we are now is the completion of this introduction. When will we know when to stop writing? Usually, we conclude, offer an ending. Something finite, closure but that would contact an epistemic violence to the authors who have all opened themselves up to us as editors and the readers at large. The responsibility is to keep these texts alive, open for them to be read and re-read many times in many different places. Place is important to writing to.

I sat at my dining table. I have just had a wonderful chat with a colleague who decided to retire early. I asked him if he has started to write again now that he has been retired so many months. He said, to my surprise, that he was writing a lot more and on new issues such as metaphysics because he now has the space to

work deeply with issues. He also said that he enjoyed writing again now that he was out of the corporate university. Of course, I was delighted for him, and a little bit envious. But this writing to who you know feels like I am writing a letter to you to explain where I am and what I have been doing. In the mundanities of life, I find inspiration to write, like many of the chapters in this book which have arisen from authors going about their daily lives. I know I am on borrowed time today and that I need to be slow, to think slowly and to read slowly as Jenny always reminds me. Read slowly. Connection to each word is important. These words connect. Touch. Develop relationships.

When I read Jenny's text, I laughed as I had just picked up Laurel Richardson's text to place it back on the bookshelf but I sat down again squeezing my thighs between my brown labradoodle Ted and black and white Schnoodle Rupert who are really enjoying a dog's life on this rainy Sydney day. I sit and open the page, [Richardson \(1997\)](#) writes:

I invite you to experiment with form – to write lives differently in shape and style and format in order to build new 'knowledge', an understanding that embraces ritual and that moves beyond the battlefields of attack and counterattack. Such understanding shows. It does not 'resist'. (p. 80)

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? Is this urgency to do a product of the nature of academic work in business and management? 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.

Collaborations evolve over time as trust develops and it is clear throughout the book that considerable trust has been placed with us. A responsibility that we have a duty to care for the texts and the authors. The ways in which we have related and developed relationships with our authors has been important, and I know that I have not always got this right as I rush to complete feedback reviews. In the future I will only collaborate with close friends, this will work against the machine of writing.

Having listened to Jenny at a recent workshop, I would like to ask: how do we embody slow philosophy? How can we teach our students to read with care?

Ah, Nancy the AoM PDW on Fringework so beautifully chaired by Kat Riach was an absolute delight. We were a gathering of new and old friends, some very old friends. I sat looking at the ways in which people listened carefully to each other, moving closer together to be together, talking intimately and being challenged by the presentations that we heard. Anu Valtonen working on the affective materiality of rocks, Noortje van Amsterdam and Dide van Eck poetry from their projects on fat bodies and Jenny Helin's reflections on reading. The importance of working differently methodological must take qualitative research forward in new ways, and in, itself becomes ... What did you call it Nancy? Was your question: are we seeing a new future for qualitative research? Or was it have we seen the end of qualitative research as we know it? But qualitative inquiry has long nurtured traditions and ways of working that have long been practiced

in our field. What is changing now? Is this a call for writing different as an activist project? It is important to me that 'writing differently' becomes a space for recording our activist projects like we read in Ozan's chapter which captures his volunteering in New Zealand. That we use different ways of representing our projects as witnessed with plays, poetry, photography and autoethnography. I like to think of all our interventions as micro-revolutions, and ask who benefits from these interventions? Us? Our students? What is the potential of the struggles we have had in the pages of journals in terms of being read in terms of academic or scientific rigour versus the embodied, affective ways of knowing that are housed in this book? Who will be affected by this book? Are we comfortable speaking with our own crowd? Is it time to get uncomfortable?

Ping, I look at my email and the itinerary for Thursday's Research Strategy day has arrived, starting at 8.30 a.m. (clearly someone else is taking the kids to school in other houses) and I thought I signed up for a much needed research day where we talk amongst colleagues about the research we are doing. Perhaps, I should write instead of being informed about the ways my research needs to align with the university strategy?

By the way, when did we start collaborating? The history of our collaboration is worth documenting.

## Nancy

Collaboration – I wish there were a better word for the joys and rhythms of working with such people as my co-editors. 'Collaboration' is another word that belongs to the style of writing against which we are rebelling. It is an instrumental term, devoid of the rhythms and emotions of working together to produce something new. Alison and Jenny have carried me through much of the period of editing this work, as I went through one of those horrendous periods when life collapses and all that can be done is to struggle on, trusting that it will come to an end at some point. These are the things we do not write about; we hide them behind the mask of the professional, and locate them outside the structure of Introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis, discussion and conclusion. Is it sufficient to say that I am sitting at my desk in my new house, with my new hip, and settled into my new job? It is not my place to mention that all three co-editors, and the editor-in-chief, have had to battle through life circumstances to bring this edited text to completion.

But these events break through into our thinking, writing and research, something to which some of the texts in this edited collection attest. The move to reflexivity in research scratches superficially at this, although it requires there to be an I to be reflexively reflected upon when the theoretical perspective many of us work with denies there is such an 'I'.

I am on holiday as I write this. I am spending 3–4 hours each day of this holiday working on a conference paper. This is not unusual, of course, and perhaps is the norm in academia, but this is joyous writing. I am experimenting with a paper that will be written differently, and whose 'methodology' is a hodge-podge

of influences from what is emerging as a mis-labelled ‘post-qualitative’ move. I am trying to understand the Brexit vote and how the divide that has riven the UK’s Conservative Party has been exported to the kingdom as a whole. I have not read Lauren Richardson’s text and inviting though it sounds know I will struggle to find the time to read it. But over a hot bank holiday weekend (those words ‘hot’ and ‘bank holiday’ are rarely seen together in the UK) I’ve been sitting in the garden reading Gwyn Alf Williams’ history of ‘the Welsh’. This is part of the conference paper I’m working on. It is a history that shows how much has been written out of the history of work and of organisations and a history that Alison and I, both from the Welsh valleys, share, and I wonder what the history of Jenny’s community might add. It is a history of a hidden colonisation, and in that it replicates a history of the colonisation of academic thought by movements that restricted it to ‘the rational’. I’ve also been re-reading *The Mabinogion*, the ancient Welsh tales. These have no beginning, middle or end; they are not logical as we understand logic today; characters that are major in one story reappear in a minor role in others. The stories fade rather than end. Isn’t this more like ‘life’ than our neat contemporary stories/academic accounts that provide neat resolutions?

Which brings me back to Alison’s point about writing differently as an activist project. One response is: let’s not freeze it into a singular stance, but let it remain organic and free-flowing. Let it be like the shape-shifters that litter the ancient Welsh stories, and that Jenny perhaps will identify in the stories of her homeland. This does not deny the political power that could come with writing (and researching) differently. Indeed, through new ways of understanding (or a resurrection of very old forms of understanding?) we may better represent the complexities of the lands in which we live and the places in which we work. I am thinking of the Brexit vote and how it came as such a shock to so many in the UK. That shock arises from a failure of understanding, and some of that failure at least must be laid at the doors of research traditions that disguise rather than explain. The knowledge that is needed at this very difficult juncture in time needs to be expressed in ways that cannot be compressed into aims, lit review, methodology, analysis, discussion and conclusion. So, for me writing differently is an activist project, but one with unclear aims and trajectories. Perhaps that is as it should be – it will take us on a journey of exploration out, we hope, of the thickets of scientific writing that tell stories few people will read, that mislead us in the understanding they develop of work and world and that narrow the ways in which we can think, write, dream, discuss and, yes, collaborate.

## Jenny

Nancy and Alison, I would like to thank you for your generosity in sharing what you truly believe to be important for how we can make a difference through our writing. I received your text yesterday and as I read these pages with great pleasure, my mind started to spin off in all kinds of joyful directions. Eventually, I decided to take a pause over the night before continuing because you offered

me so much to continue to think *with*. And I was thinking, isn't this the point of what we are doing in many ways – to offer potential readers things to continue thinking with? What also struck me is that the way to offer such readings is to write about things that matters to us, in ways that supports what we want to say. This is of course nothing new and rather self-evident, but I can feel the difference when people are writing out of what they have to write because it means something to them; this urge for having to find a way to tell exactly this story in this way. Isn't that when we can become relevant and perform activist writing? It is my conviction that many times when we have writers block it is because we are not writing about things that matter, or we have to squeeze ourselves and our writing into pre-configured formats that kills everything before we even have started.

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

Thank you for your text this morning. We have flash flooding today after a glorious but hot day yesterday which I only knew because my fieldwork was in a park and I almost never sit in the sun. Rain lashing on the windows as I type, and the news of a suspended parliament in the UK has crippled any ability to think about work, writing work. Then I open your text, find some British tea in the kitchen cupboard and sit down to read. Thank you so much for being so open with your thoughts and posing questions to be reflected on. But I am preoccupied with: What is your word? Well, my word is, well wait ... I think invitation is a wonderful signifier for being given entry into our authors' lives; there is something very special about the opportunities to relate and connect with others virtually via their texts. Of course, I know some of the authors for some time and have very warm, generous feelings for them and their work and I am cast swiftly towards those I have known, or partially known through their writings, mutual friendships, etc. But I am mindful of the utopian desire to be exchanging, connecting, relating to all our authors and the violence that this desire of mine can inflict. For some of our authors, they are very honest about sharing aspects of themselves with known readers, but have I cared about the writings of those people who have shared their writings with me whom I have never met? I am guilty of over-sharing aspects of my life experiences and I am now thinking as I write of the perpetual struggle of being open, generous and working 'differently' and the constant risk of imminent violence approaching. I am also mindful of the violence I have the potential to do to others. How can we suspend judgement in reading others' life texts? Am I suspicious of those who use genre and form to mask themselves?

And then there are times that despite the openness and generosity of the relations we create through working together, there are always moments of violence where we don't care enough for the person writing. And, am I using writing differently instrumentally to avoid academic assessment and standards? And what inequalities are created through the process of writing differently?

My word at this time is co-operation: how can we cooperate across the spaces that divide us and how do our writing relationships mediate personal and professional lives? Maybe an ideal word may be collaborative participation but editing often involves much more explicit negotiation. I hope we have not demanded editorial changes that move beyond the author's intentions. Furthermore, this collection has been a space where we have been able to work differently because we are working with 'writing differently'. But there are also risks with working differently especially for a book which in some contexts won't be regarded as much of a scholarly output as journal outputs. 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.

Your last reflections which offered an important pause, a slowing down, shifted our temporality of replying, conversing, having something to say. Often, I have nothing to say, until I stop and there is nothing, except perhaps silence and loneliness, and then fingers start typing in a pre-reflective way:

Stopping. Rupturing time. Slowing. Listening.

Being with. Reading with. Feeling with. Thinking with.

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.

Now I don't want to stop writing and offer a question that each chapter prompts for me to remember in my own work:

Banu – how is colonial knowledge produced through texts, and how can we learn from non-Western genres?

Caroline, Sandra and Charlotte – what are the different ways we can provide readerly direction?

Cecilia – how can we read without knowing?

Deborah and Sarah – how can new knowledge be created across disciplines by bringing artists into new spaces?

Katie – how can transgressive resistance be represented in the text?

Maria and Anna – how can we unlearn, unknow through writing?

Marjanna and Sally – how do texts cry and evoke emotions in others?

Marta – how can we keep challenging ourselves to read different realities in our fieldwork?

Mycellium – how does the political power of the collective permeate through genre blurring?

Noortje – what feminist care ethics are possible if we listen, trust and connect?

Ozan – what activism is possible throughout our academic work?

Suvi – how can we slow down?