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Book review of *Writing Differently* by Pullen, A., Helin, J., & Harding, N. (Eds.). Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2020.

Is it possible to write academic texts differently, and break out of the traditional scheme of scientific writing? And is it possible to apply this alternative writing to academic research reporting on organisational phenomena, and to Critical Management Studies?

Writing Differently is a series of experiments in different ways of researching and then writing about the research, where every chapter is a demonstration in itself, that de facto answers these questions. The authors research organisation, workplace, workers' experience, intersectionalities in

a globalised world, and social structures by allowing themselves the freedom to use different genres to write their academic report, as a way of conveying a prototypical, genre-bending scientific writing.

Fieldwork and academic writing in *Writing Differently* are conducted through the use of ethnography, auto-ethnography, and duo-ethnography, but also fiction, anecdotes, film scripts, plays, poetry, interviews, notes on sensory or physical states, annotations and performance. Most of these genres are usually rejected as non-standard in an academic paper, unfit for scientific writing or data evaluation. At the same time, beyond the medium or writing style, there is the constant research on how to bridge the gap between new management theory and business schools, and between critical theory and the traditionally structured academia.

Chapter 1 is meant to be an introduction, but it is already research: in a chain of messages the editors interrogate themselves and each other on new methods of enquiry, and that is exactly the main investigation fleshed out in this book, although the *Writing Differently* project started years before this publication. In Chapter 2, Özkazanç-Pan uses the very un-academic method of fiction to illustrate how work and globalisation create an intersectional clash of gendered structures, diversities, socioeconomic conditions: when a workplace has no national borders it becomes a flow of different cultures and technologies (Appadurai, 1990), mostly coming to the realisation that Organisation Research has not tended to the problems of migrant workers, and that in a society that is no longer homogeneous, Organisation Studies are not going to be either. In particular, so far we have seen diversity in structured organisations as meaning simply switching out the gender or the ethnicity of a leader, while maintaining the systems as they are. The result is a double-edged sword: diverse professionals can find it hard to change the system from the inside, yet they will achieve no change at all if they defect from it.

In Chapter 3 Clarke, Corlett and Gilmore bring us into the origins of *Writing Differently* with an experimental work, posing that the researcher-researched encounter should be part of scientific writing. Touching encounters and the way they affect the researcher, interviews, the researcher themselves and their interiorisation of the moment, of being there, even

the research preparation, like reading and thinking, should accompany the gathered data. Parallelisms between writing as an academic and creating art, such as references to 'performing the research' (Burge, p. 36) are found throughout the contribution, which is presented in the form of a script, a play in two acts, a poem, and an interview, all the genres interlocking. In Chapter 4, Bjursell aims to demonstrate, instead, that just as technology can enhance human work, human expert skills can enhance technology, and that their understanding of the machine makes them almost part of it, in the act of working, in the performance of the job. To do so, she writes her Chapter around a personal short story, rejected twice because storytelling is a non-standard, scientific text, defending narrative as a medium for academic writing. Her story is also a personal memory, so it can be auto-ethnography. A story is art, and represents knowledge, but is it science? Bjursell answers with reference to Dewey (1934/2005), inviting us to focus on the experience of art, the experience created by the artistic product, posing that if science is the journey of discovery, then 'story' is the 'art of science' (Bjursell, p. 61).

Chapter 5 sees Brewis and Taylor Silverwood introduce spontaneous annotations to texts as a genre unto itself, characterised by reflexivity, like a portrait of the approach and thoughts of the reader, as a dialogue between reader and text, and as a personal response by the reader to the organisation of the structured publication or working text. Chapter 6 is a heartfelt feminist manifesto by Beavan addressed to the Organisation Studies Academia, mostly inspired by Cixous (1976; 1993) and proposing to restart from trying to break the rigid formula of scientific writing or the status quo.

The linear, clean, abstract organisation of textbooks used to teach Business Studies moved Grafström and Jonsson to experiment with fiction in education. Other contributors have suggested and given an example of fiction meeting theory in this work, but perhaps in Chapter 7 we find the method that has been the most demonstrably applicable in Business and Organisation Studies. The two Associate Professors mean 'writing differently' as writing differently for a textbook and engage professional novelist Oline Stig to write a novel, A Story About Organising, depicting managers' relatable dilemmas and experiences. The novel has been written for their textbook but can also be

read as a standalone work and is both a starting point to write the rest of the textbook and for potential new observations by the readers. Thus, the usually monolithic textbook become a genre-bending work and fiction can become a case study. The writing style crossover is defined as allowing the authors to have a personal voice, to connect more or elicit something more from the reader ('creating resonance', p. 121) and with an open end, replacing further debate to the final conclusions. In Chapter 8 Academics Johansson and Jones superimpose researcher and researched, applying ethnography to themselves, using memory work and comparison of their past as a method, and working on the meaning of their past. The memory work brings forth questions about their present, and even more questions on the class.

Ethnography is also favoured in Chapter 9, in the interesting work by Połeć. The Chapter offers an overview of a years-long study on the informal organisation of street artists, intended both as self-organisation and government's regulation. The author also wonders whether the researcher has a social role in this context or is she just an observer and collector of data. The answer is given by the observed subjects themselves, through relevant impressions on the differences between the work of an ethnographer and the work of a journalist, and their implied consequences, thus making the case for the functionality of ethnography in Critical Management Studies. A reflection on journalistic versus scientific writing could have been expanded to benefit CMS students' understanding of potential mass media content influence on decision-making. In Chapter 10, instead, the Danish collective Mycelium describe their own internal organisation and, consequently, their writing organisation and intent, where activism translates into collaborative writing, although other methods of communications are integrated in order to convey their social messages, including performances: a physical presence beyond observation and writing.

In Chapter 11 Noortje van Amsterdam is another contributor who chooses to create her whole contribution in the form of a poem. However, her effort truly makes the poem a medium expressing everything a standard academic essay could. It poses a question (why do women stay silent after a sexual assault?), investigates interior and exterior observations, and successfully

deconstructs a misconception ('rare exotic bird' / 'common birds', p. 191). In Chapter 12 Alakavuklar goes back to ethnography and fieldwork, volunteering in a food bank that he would rather call a free food store, and, along with observation of the people who need the store, interrogates himself on the academically oxymoronic 'participant observation' and on a potential, concrete social role of the observer. Finally, in Chapter 13, Satama proposes other examples of ethnography and auto-ethnography, even trying to transform the investigator into a conductor of sensory research, a catalyst for aesthetic moments felt within immersive observation of organisational phenomena. In two studies (on her motherhood and canine companionship) she takes fieldnotes on herself and in a study on professional dancers she takes notes on herself and her sensory involvement in order to study the ballet company's workplace, thus also integrating the experience of research to the data themselves and hoping to become a 'living body of thought' (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 228) in the process.

The experimental writing in this book is always consequential to fieldwork, therefore it does not dwell on theory alone: the alternative writing itself is at the same time its greatest strength and the reason it positions itself within the larger scholarly discourse on Critical Management Studies, and on academic writing in general. Interdisciplinary methods of research, expressing results, and, in the case of two contributors, teaching, make it so that, in a way, the key value of this book lies in the existence of the book itself.

Similar ideas and topics chase each other from chapter to chapter: living the workplace, being part of it, what kind of change do different workers bring to it and what does the Organisation Study researcher bring to it (if s/he brings anything to it)? But while some contributors have an experimental approach to fieldwork, most of them experiment on alternatives to the scientific article format. This can be justified in the context of CMS, given that Academia itself is a workplace and an organisation. This opens the flood of criticism of scientific writing: it is 'methodolatry' (Harding, p. 2), 'tyranny of academic expectations' (Burge, p. 42), it has 'idiosyncrasies, routines and rituals' (Burge, p. 47), is an 'intellectual bottleneck' (Bjursell, p. 61), it 'reproduces some of the hierarchies of the status quo' (Brewis & Taylor Silverwood, p. 88), it has a 'rigid

formula' and is a 'straitjacket' (Beavan, p. 100, 106), and it is 'perform publishing (aka playing the game)' (Alaklavuklar, p. 194). Some authors, however, dare to mention rejection of their works, because of a lack of traditional structure, and Bjursell reminds us that ethnography, "and especially auto-ethnography, is nevertheless questioned by parts of the scientific community" (Bjursell, p. 59). This act of rebellion against gatekeeping in academia-produced texts might sometimes forget that alternative, very personal, and genre-crossing academic work could result in being less accessible to the reader. Furthermore, even though the irony on commenting on formality in this kind of text does not escape me, a few authors keep posing questions well into the second half of their contribution, where the reader might expect to find answers or propositions to these questions stated earlier.

However, if different creative genres used in academic writing happen to be called unscientific, according to the personal experiences of the authors, Grafström and Jonsson correctly remind the reader that "organisations and individuals are far from rational and the way we organise cannot be described as a linear activity" (p. 116). There has been a call for "moving beyond one-dimensional technocratic consciousness" and more "socially-informed, humanistic practices" and more awareness on the relationship 'between science and reality' (Tinker et al, 1984, p. 45) at least since the 1980s. And yet, only in much recent investigative works have the so-called unscientific factors, such as "mutual trust, shared values, [local] history" (Micinski, 2022, p. 31) begun to be considered not only part of the enquiry, but as determining factors in organisations, even at an international organisational level. Therefore, the representation of organisation might allow a 'far-from-rational' investigative work like this, which breaks new ground and brings a new reading of evidence and data.

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