

Narrative writing as art based practice

Mona Livholts

Bio

Mona Livholts is Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Welfare Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. She is the founder of the international Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies (RAW) 2008-2017. Livholts work focuses on the uses and creative and transformative practices of narrative life writing genres in research and education, such as diaries and letters, memory work, poetry and photography. She has developed writing strategies such as ‘the thinking*writing* subject’, post/academic writing’, and ‘situated writing’. Research themes include: media narratives on rape, gender, space and communication, and publicly staged conversations with researchers. Her recent work focuses on glocalisation, social work and methodological re-shaping inspired by cultural geography, creative writing and the arts. Publications include: *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies* (Ed. Routledge 2012), *Discourse and Narrative Methods* (with Tamboukou Sage 2015), *Social Work in a Glocalised World* (with Bryant 2017). Livholts is currently completing the monograph: *The Professor’s Chair and Other Untimely Academic Novellas. Situated Writing as Theory and Method.*

Abstract

Writing is an act of translation and transformation, an embodied, material and spatial activity through which researchers’ design and shape knowledge. Thus, researchers are storytellers with signatures beyond the page and the computer space. Currently, narrative genres of writing research are emerging as a wide and heterogeneous field of work that often interacts with visual culture such as photography, paintings, theatre and film. What are the potential possibilities of narrative life writing genres to contribute to shape creative and performative art based practice for scholars across the arts, design and science? In this keynote I explore epistemological questions about the author as creator and storyteller in art based practice and suggest that the expanding heterogeneous field of narrative life writing genres, where the written word often interacts with visual culture, is useful as a catalyst for such practices. Inspired by auto/biography- and life writing, feminist theory and literary fiction, I promote the idea of artistic self-portraiture where the writer at work perform their writing selves in specific situated locations, power relations and inter/disciplinary contexts. I will draw on my specific work with the untimely academic novella, to explore the relationship between the body, material objects and textual shaping, the ethics and politics of poetics, self and another.

KEYWORDS: narrative, life writing, situated knowledge, diffraction, art based practice, untimely academic novella writing (UANW)

Introduction

“Dear Mona, I’m contacting you on behalf of the organizing committee of the sixth Art of Research Conference ...” It is summer in Sweden by the time I receive an email invitation from the organisers of the Art of Research Conference. I am still enjoying vacation after a sabbatical period, working on a book based on my untimely academic novellas.¹ As I begin to write the conference abstract I am reminded by how Gannon (2012, p. 8) talks about how difficult it can be to keep the promise one makes in an abstract although the tone may be confident. She argues for academic writers to develop “... an embodied and reflexive literacy of place that incorporates multiple modes of knowing, being and writing.” It is in such modes this paper is written, with the notion that writing is a scholarship in its own right, a creative act of designing textual shaping, underbuilt by philosophies and technologies that are put into practice by researchers across the humanities, social sciences and the arts. Ever since I read Richardson’s (1997) timely and timeless questions, they have stayed with me and gave me permission to explore my own pathway of writing (Livholts, 2016). Richardson (1997, p. 1) asked: “How do the specific circumstances in which we write affect what we write? How does what we write affect who we become?” Writing is carried out at the embodied spatial location of the writer in the moment, but shifts and changes through all the complexity of living life as it stretches to touch other people, places, relations, institutions, texts and contexts. “Why we write” is often not part of our scholarly conversations”, argues Coylar (2009, p. 421) and calls for increased awareness of writing as a method for learning and communication. I believe we need to talk about writing with the courage to say things we have learned not to talk about. As Nobel (2014) shows with acuity, hierarchies and dichotomies between spoken, visual, and textual languages, is a problem for art based practice. This paper is an invitation to consider the contribution from narrative writing as art based practice by making use of the untimely academic novella. First I briefly present the departures of narrative life writing, situated knowledge and diffraction as a prism for story-telling. Thereafter I present my untimely academic novella writing (UANW), as a form of biographical narrative, guided by the idea of research as creative practice, which make use of

¹ This research has received funding from the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences with the project The Untimely Academic Novella. Situated Writing as Theory and Method. (Swedish: Riksbankens jubileumsfond - Stiftelsen för humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning). This made a sabbatical period at Sussex University, UK, possible spring 2017. I am forever grateful for this time to read and write. I also wish to thank Camilla Groth for helpful guidance and support during the conference and the publishing of filmed key note and this paper.

narrative life writing genres, such as diaries and letters, memory work, poetic writing and photography. I conclude the paper with open questions and concerns, useful for readers who wish to make use of UANW as art based practice.

Situated knowledge and diffraction: the author as creator and narrator



Figure 1. A single hand writes, 2017. Photo: Marcus Kumpula.

[...] a single hand writes, but the self who inscribes, who is, is herself enmeshed with other lives which give hers the meaning it has. And it is not just 'the author' who takes on an ontologically shaky character in these autobiographies, for so do 'selves' in general." (Stanley 1995: 14)

Autobiography and life writing in narrative research, have shown the historical and contemporary role for the impact of writing lives (Stanley, 1995, 2013; Plummer, 2001; 2013; Jolly 2001, 2011; Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015). As Jolly (2001: ix) states in *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, life writing is an umbrella term that “encompasses the writing of one’s own or another’s life”, which includes written forms such as diaries and letters and forms outside of the written such as artifacts, visual arts, photography and film. This circumstance that “documents of life” takes different and multiple forms (Jolly & Stanley 2005; Lejune 2009; Tamboukou 2015) requires an openness to how these forms are shaped when they are put into practice by the writer, researcher, artist. Inspired by Haraway (1988) I work from the philosophies of situated knowledges, which promote that we are all embodied and situated as researchers. Haraway (1988, p. 583) talks about embodied vision and “specific ways of seeing”, which asserts that

there are no invisible positions from which privilege subjects can speak. Haraway (1988) emphasises the role of vision to challenge dichotomies in language and research. Thus, it is from situated locations with partial perspectives that writing emerges through acts of translation. As a narrative reflexive strategy Haraway (2000, p. 102) argues that the use of diffraction is useful. She writes:

I am interested in the way diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. In this sense “diffraction” is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual and political technology for making consequential meanings.

I wish to promote a narrative situated diffractive writing strategy across the humanities, social sciences and art based research (compare Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015; see also Ehrnberger, 2017). Diffracted writing is a creative strategy for the researcher to situate and re-situate themselves, to shift writing positions, to see and see again, and it is also an invitation to the reader to enter the story and engage in the creating of new knowledge. “I want to offer you my story for the creating of your story’,” *Jag vill erbjuda dig min berättelse i skapandet av din berättelse.*” [Swedish] writes Ehrnberger (2017, p. 17). Ehrnberger makes use of diffraction as a research method, to write multiple entangled stories through the design practice. As her designer work materializes through the text, she enters into writing and the reader is invited to enter too to create their own stories. I wish to emphasise how working with words is always an act of translation, a philosophical and visual process from which knowledge is shaped. Inspired by writing as a re-wording strategy and further by Spivaks (1993) a politics of translation, I translated “översatte” a section “del” of Haraways (1988) text in English to Swedish (Livholts 2017). I struggled “kämpade”, wrote “skrev” and re-wrote “skrev om”, and through shifting languages “språk” situated and re-situated my authoring “författarskap”.² Circumstances and conditions, the site of the writer means that we always write from somewhere: a street, a house, a bus or a train; we write through social relations and power structures of institutions and society locally, nationally and globally, and make sense of all this. The art based practice of working from different locations is theorised by Rendell (2010, p. 2) as site-writing, which raises questions in regard to the possibilities and limits of the writing: when does it no longer “count as criticism?” Important inspiration for the developing of my own work are feminist- and postcolonial scholars who writes memoir, diary and poetry to show the dynamics and

² Questions about the role of language, relations of power and their role for art based research is important to address. To illustrate this I shift language through inserting Swedish words in this English text. See also Dahl, 2012; Livholts, 2017.

intersections of class, gender and race (see also Jolly, 2011). Examples are Lorde's (1984) poetic writing, hooks' (1999) memoir writing and Williams' (1991) diary writing. In the next part of the paper I present the departure in literary fiction and the diverse and intersecting narrative life writing genres such as memories, diaries, letters, poetry and photography that I use as design elements to compose a trilogy of untimely academic novellas.

The Professor's chair and other untimely academic novellas



Figure 2. University furniture, 2005. Authors photograph.

Literary fiction: wallpaper and the theatre

Many years ago I read a sentence by Virginia Woolf (1929, p. 41) that remained in my thoughts ever since. She wrote: “What were the conditions in which women lived, I asked myself; for fiction imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble on the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners.” For me it visualised the relationship between writing fiction and material realities of the writer and the possibilities of using life writing to write about everyday life and academic life. Woolf (p. 4) also writes about the “liberties and licenses of a novelist, to tell you a story” and that writing fiction in a particular context can “contain more truth than fact.” Both these aspects are important and relevant for UANW. In narrative research there is recognition that fiction are useful to show the complexity of social life (Stanley 1995, 2013; Plummer 2001). As Plummer (2001) argued the creating of life stories as an activity created and recreated by situating and re-situating themselves in different worlds. He contends that:

One curious breed of life document, largely neglected by the social scientist, is the writing that takes on the form of a fictional novel but which is dealing with true events fully researched by the author. (Plummer 2001, p. 56)

Leavy (2013, p. 38) describes a number of goals for fiction as research practice. Fiction allows for the researcher to portray lived experience in complex ways and to promote self-reflexivity, compassion and engagement. Fiction also potentially disrupts stereotyping processes and promotes social justice. There are several elements of using fiction in UANW. One aspect is related to how this particular writing emerged from attempts of trying to write a novel. The first untimely academic novella – “The Professor’s Chair” - was published in Swedish in 2007 (Livholts, 2007) and later in English (Livholts, 2010a). However, the draft of the text had existed for several years by then in the form of a crime novel. It was in 2006, when I worked with a feminist writing group (Bränström Öhman & Livholts, 2007) that I coined my work as untimely academic novella and transformed my initial ambition write a crime novel into the writing of an academic text (see also Kelly & Livholts, 2014) . When I read “The Professor’s Chair” now, I think that there are traces of writing in a fictionalised style, which an extract below illustrates (Livholts, 2010a, p. 159):

Deported to the room of silence, cut off from the continuous conversation at the table, she becomes aware of the movable image in the window glass of herself and her colleagues. But they were not the only ones sitting there! Beside them, in a circle, a group of women sat on the cold concrete floor with their legs crossed. Text stripes were attached over their eyes and mouths. She was terrified when she saw them and wondered if it was the past or the future which presented itself in this way. Or, even more upsetting, death! She thought she had seen, if not dead, but rejected, silenced, expelled women, and she asked herself if this would happen to her as well. Would she join the circle of ignored, ran down, invisible? If so, the next generation would be forced to pass through so many women’s bodies and lives during all the hundred years to finally become professors.

To further describe how UANW developed this tone, I would like to draw attention to how I selected two feminist literary fiction texts to create tone and style. These were the work by the theorist, critic and writer of fiction, Hélène Cixous’ (2004) essay “Enter the Theatre”, and the feminist author and theorist Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s (1892/1989) story “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Inspired by Cixous’ (2004) I make use of untimeliness for understanding social change and authoring. She writes among other things about the untimely letter that is sent too

soon or too late and refers to human relationships of understanding as occurring not at the same time. Cixous uses active listening to form characters of the past. Through this lag of understanding I elaborate with “the cynic” and the “tragic” as characters of agency in my novella. Characters are created through the self as a shaky character (compare Stanley, 1995), by writing in the third person, which was initially inspired by the memory work method (Livholts, 2015b), but developed further inspired by fiction. My reading of Gilman’s (1892/1989) story is that patriarchal control and physiological distress are created by sceneries where colour and spatiality are central. The woman in the text writes about her life and invites the reader to a “house of illness” (Livholts, 2015a). The emotions of the story teller shifts between reluctance to stay in the house to obsession with a yellow wallpaper in her room, tearing it down to liberate women who are caught creeping within the walls. In an attempt to elaborate with Perkins Gilman’s writing strategy I write about changing emotions, fears and fantasies that occurs through material spatiality of academic life and the sense of loss I feel in relation to the rural landscape where I grew up. Loss of orientation, tiredness, and whiteness represents this sensory space making. I describe “The Professor’s Chair” as “a narrative about the act of writing, a story about creeping and sitting and searching for a posture and a place” (Livholts, 2010a, p. 155). When writing snow angels (Livholts, 2010b, pp. 108-109) the overarching idea is to perform through human relations, dissolvability in the scenery of shifting weather frames, and to develop critical studies on whiteness.

I have chosen to work with the novella form as a fictionalised approach in between the short story and the novel. Since boundaries for genres are porous, it is not possible to provide a clear definition of what is a novella. Leavy (2013) describes the novella as located in between the short story and the full length novel, which can vary from a few pages to around thirty pages. I think that the novella is very well suited due to the format, the length, the openness to make use of narrative life writing by the way it promotes intensity, news and the unexpected.

Working with memories: creating mo(ve)ments

Hunting hare and she is guard in the darkness and silence of the night.

Burning grass; she breathes spring and moves as fast as the whimsical wind.

The rhythmic movements of the horse running and sound of clattering hoofs.

The smell of dust.

A fox screaming.

She is woken up by her own scream. Looks in despair for her hands. Cannot turn on the light without hands! Rolls out of bed and hit her knees hard towards the floor and then the

elbows; a shooting pain searches her head. She manages to reach the hallway where a soft light from the street leaks in, which makes it possible to examine her hands. They hang loosely along the body. She can hardly move them and suffers from a stinging pain. But she finds no visible marks and returns to her bed; shivering she lies awake, upset and shocked and asks herself – is it worth it? But in that very moment she realises that the question is wrongly put. She cannot waste any time. She has only twenty years left. Much less than a hundred years. But she can hardly write at the same time as seconds becomes months and turns into years and sickness is the only time offered to her.

One hour later she is sitting in bed holding a cup of hot tea in the same hands that she recently lost. Feeling the heat. (Livholts, 2010a, p. 160)

Working with memories is a design element in the untimely academic novella inspired by the memory work method developed by Haug et. al. (1987); in film and photography by Kuhn (1995; 2012); and forms of the method conceptualised as collective biography (e.g. Davies and Gannon, 2006; Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies 2011). An important aspect is that although the moment are in focus, doing memory work includes technologies of writing, talking, reading, listening and seeing, which create mo(ve)ments (Davies and Gannon: 2006, p. 7; Livholts, 2015b). The recommendation is to write in the third person to promote distance in seeing a situation. Haug (1987 et al) and her co-workers raised issues around the body, gendered relations of power, and knowledge production. Kuhn (1995) who worked with textual and visual material shows how photographs and film can be used as triggers for memory work, and how textual and visual methodology are intertwined and contextualised by family relations and nation. The example from collective biography used by Wyatt et al. (2011) is based on an email correspondence and the participants reading of Deleuze. This collective process has interesting relationship as a form of letter writing across space and time and the becoming of interlinked subjectivity. Memory work was a method I first used in my dissertation (Livholts 2001/2011) where memories from the main topics of the articles in the dissertation constituted themes to work with situations that I found important to situate and re-situate, think and re-think the production of knowledge. I conceptualised this as a *thinkingwriting* methodology, and created a literary design that made it possible to connect memories across time and situations in everyday life and academic life. In UANW memory scenes are fragments with no beginning or ending that disrupts narrative coherence (see Livholts 2015b for further guidelines). As the example in the beginning of this section shows, a memory from childhood and a dream from adult life is intertwined. Memories in UANW are often written in a poetic style. The idea of novella writing has been taken up in an ongoing research project in art and design, where Holmquist develops

“The production novella” (Holmquist, 2017; Holmquist, Magnusson & Livholts, 2017). By working with writing memories and photography from the design process, micro-processes from local production sites are re-visited to learn from the complexity of tensions between traditional and new design technologies. Moments of unexpected conversations, meetings, travels, and experimenting with material, is visualized and reflected on.

Emergent Epistolary and Diarist Forms: Sculpting Lives

“Dear Maj, I hope you endure my letters. At times I am afraid you will get too tired of listening to the endless problems academe has brought to our lives.” This is how the first letter in “The Professor’s Chair” begins, addressed to a friend, voicing troubled thoughts from academic life (Livholts 2010a, p. 156). Diaries and letters are historically blurred genres for autobiography and life writing, emerging through the diversity of forms of communication that we see in digitalized societies (Stanley, 2015). Indeed, our changing relationship to them raises a number of questions (Stanley, 2004, p. 201):

Why don't I (do I?) write letters? I do write 'a diary, of a kind'; and, while I used to worry about not keeping 'a proper diary', this has evolved into something I'm comfortable with, fieldwork notebooks that I write rigorously at important research junctures. However, perhaps emails serve the same purpose for me that letters used to? Or is it that my letters were never very important, being 'mainly business', or that I am, oh horror, locked into 'personal' writings rather than interpersonal ones?

As an untimely academic novella writer I am a (periodical) diary and letter writer who document and communicate events and situations from academic and personal life. I view these as interlinked fragments that emerge over time as “stories that respond to the world, rather than represent it” (Tamboukou 2015, p. 156). I understand the narrative power that this writing creates over time to extend both before and after the writing, exceeding from the text to living a life. The diary notes and letters in the untimely academic novellas take different forms, but as I showed in the previous section on literary fiction and untimeliness, they are written from the perspective of someone who is “untimely”, lending inspiration for tone and style and even characters and relations and notions of space from Cixous’ (2004) theatrical writing and Perkins Gilmans (1892/2012) literary fiction of a yellow wallpaper. Stanley (2004) has showed the rich contribution from letters to social research, and developed a theory and analysis of the epistolary form with three analytical aspects, which I suggest is useful in art based practice: 1) Letters are *dialogical* and as such a communicative act of correspondence, which means that how we understand dialogue theoretically and shape it when writing letters is central. 2) Letters are

perspectival, written in the moment, and connecting with other moments. Writers make use of voice and tone and personae to develop humor or strictness. 3) Letters are *emergent*, which means they do not fit into a specific form and content structure, but are developed through the ethics that letter writers make use of over time. In the UANW the relationship between the letter writer (me Mona) and the receiver (Maj) builds on an existing friendship and thus confirms that referential and “real world” connection (Jolly & Stanley 2005, s. 95). However, as part of the project of writing untimely academic novellas my letters are never sent. Nevertheless, they reflect ongoing conversations and reflections about academic life the perspective is that of the letter writer as a way of sculpting life. Jolly and Stanley (2005) discuss how letters are shaped by situational contexts that are social more than individual and it is possible to identify a particular epistolarium in the analysis of letters through the distinctive way in which one letter writers letters are different from other authors.

Lejune (2009, p. 173) has defined diary writing as open and formative as a document that “sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time”. I find the expression “sculpting life” as creatively expressing diary writing as a form of art based practice. Lejune (2009) admits to belong to those few loose page person writers and not the notebook writers, which for me was a relief to read because of my perception of how a real diary should be written. I used to keep loose pages in different places in my room when I was young, and my diary for the untimely academic novella has been written periodically, mostly on the computer and to some extent on loose papers both on paper and in the computer. I have lost one of the longest periods of diary writing when my computer crashed and I have deleted/destroyed longer periods of writing. I have felt that the diary has become, in part, my parallel life – “that my life is shaped by the existence of the novella” (Livholts, 2013, p. 181). Lejune (2009, pp. 194-196) suggests that diary writing has four functions: 1) The first is to express oneself, which allows to release emotions and thoughts, and to communicate. To make use of writing is an act of expression and separation that connects body (hands, fingers) with the pen, or the key board, into a form of meaning making through words. This may include the destroying of your diary to open for new writing. The well-known beginning, “Dear Diary” is an act of communication towards the paper, the machine and/or the self that may end if there is a communicating part in real life. 2) The second function is to *reflect*, which has an analytical and deliberative effect. The diary allows the writer to develop thoughts and reflections, make notes of the everyday and/or to write about crisis. The writer is also a reader of the diary, and through this creating a distancing to the self. 3) The third is to *freeze time*, and Lejune (2009, s. 195). writes that this function relates to “build a memory out of paper, to create archives out of lived experience, accumulate traces, prevent forgetting (...)” 4) The fourth function is to take *pleasure* in writing through “a flow of energy that courses

through the practice of writing” (Lejune 2009, s. 195). A question actualised through my own diary writing is how the diary shapes life over time and how *not writing* a diary does not mean that I stopped writing. I still experience that the not writing of a diary is a companion, a notebook for writing the self that offers a writing space from the body, a complex shaky character of a self that characterise my academic and personal life intimately entangled.

(Academic) poetic writing and photographic acts

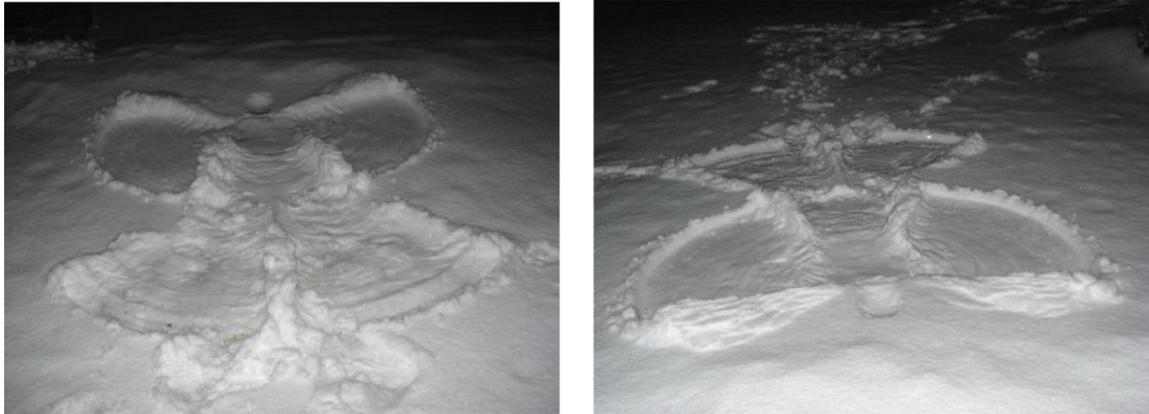


Figure 3a and 3b Evening snow angel, 2008. Authors photographs.

My first encounter with academic poetic scholarship was when I read Audre Lorde’s (1984) *Sister Outsider*. As a reader I was emotionally moved and engaged to act for social equality and change through the intersecting oppressions of power that sexism, racism, classism, homophobia created. I perceived Lorde’s poetry as a passionate writing from the body, and I didn’t think it was difficult to understand the multiplicity of intersecting power relations in society and theoretically. I make use of a variety of forms of poetic writing in UANW- writing, and re-reading the novellas now, the poetic language occurs strongly to me. Looking back on the shifting forms of textual and visual representation and the intention of creating a critical, creative and reflexive space, the poetic language that shapes the professor’s chair, the snow angel and writing water invites the reader to scenes where bodies, furniture, buildings, and landscape, and past, present and future are entangled. The desirable gaze, seeing the furniture, caressing the cloth, she with the name “woman” who make angels in the snow, leave an imprint that erodes with time, and the force of water, invisible ink, tears, love and sons. The poetics of writing angels in the snow is shaped in a diversity of weather conditions, in wet snow, soft snow, in different times and places. It brought memories and sensory perceptions of smell, sound and emotions (Livholts 2010b, p. 104)

She is lying on the frozen ground, embraced by soft, dry, powdery snow.

Face touches sky.

Arms and legs spread out.

The language of folding cloth marks a temporal figure.

Carefully rise to upstanding position,

Hold balance and step out of the imprint,

Watch the contours of a Snow Angel.

Snow beneath her jacket; a miniature stream of water is running down her neck. Changing form and silently disappearing.

Poetry creates what Leavy (2015, s. 97) calls “a third space”, “a third voice”, to mediate experiences that can’t be expressed through other forms of languages. I believe that this question of creating a third space through writing is important, and as Gordon (2015) shows in her study of creative life writing, it can contribute to dialogical spaces for personal freedom. I wish to emphasise the role of scene making, emotion and intention to mediate what it feels like across time and space dimensions, rural and urban landscape, in the way I use poetry. There is the poem itself, and then the use of poetic language in the narrative writing. There is a tension between the poetic writing and the narrative. As Berger (1984/2005, p. 21) writes poetically about poems, they recognise that “what has been experienced cannot disappear as if it had never been.” Poetic language can be used to create place beyond a specific notion of time. Time has a pervasive role in the untimely academic novellas. Time is a forceful actor that speaks the language of power; time invites the cynic and the tragic; friendship, love, waiting, tiredness, failing health and a letter that arrives when the recipient has moved (Livholts, 2013, p. 178):

Had it not been too late, I would have claimed I am writing water,

In the age of untimeliness.

The letter is sent too soon, too late.

The recipient has moved.

Written in the layers of ice, cracks, breaking the line,

Had it not been too late,

I would have claimed that I am writing water.

Through all uncountable years of metaphoric captivity I was always writing water;

but it was just now when you were leaving with the train and the lake threw rain on our faces,

that I was astonished to know this.

In UANW-writing, textual and visual auto/biography is employed as a narrating strategy, and there is an intimate relationship between poetry-and-photo-wording. Initially the use of photographs as “triggers” to write lent inspiration from the memory work method (Kuhn, 1995, p. 2012), but I continue to develop this writing as a situated theory and practice for ways of seeing (Haraway, 1988; Berger, 1982). Looking at my work I increasingly regard it as a form of self-portrait with a strong performative and life-shaping role. The title “The Professor’s Chair” came early to my mind during the writing of the first novella followed by “The Snow Angel” and “Writing Water”. It was the metaphoric and performative power of these words as interpretations and sensory perceptions of objects, landscapes and (inter)disciplinary practices in academia that created movements in the writing. Drawing on my untimely academic novellas as examples I wish to theorise the making of word-pictures.

As Stanley (1995, p. 25) writes:

[...] photographic and other literal or memetic visual images are not the only sources of ‘pictures’. Others can be built up in words themselves [...]. These word-pictures can be and often are much more powerfully present in the mind’s eye than the literal images provided by photographs and film.

Berger (1972) and Berger and Mohr (1987) have created a theory and method, a practice for photography, which I have been inspired by to further develop analytical reflections: ‘What did I see?’ write Berger and Mohr (1982/2016) and explain how a photographer wants to know how the photographs are read and interpreted, perhaps even rejected by the spectator. Also that the photographer wishes to tell the story of the photograph and that a photo itself are never sufficient. Berger and Mohr (1982/2016, pp. 40-41) also argues that to become a photographer, taking self-portraits is important to understand “the embarrassment, the worry, even the panic that people may experience when being photographed.” It is an unexpected experience to learn that as the years pass, I perceive an increasing vulnerability to talk and write about UANW. I experience embarrassment, worry, and even panic. Perhaps it is the power of narrative life writing, the diffractions that are possible to write as moments, the elaborating with textual shaping, the letting go of conventions, and taking risks, representations of the shaky diffracted self. And the continuous force of writing, even when I am not writing.

* * *



Figure 4. University building, 2005 and Figure 2. University furniture, 2005. Authors photographs.

The crouching fearful character, who had its home within the white walls of the corridors, was ready to announce its existence as a thinking*writing* subject.

Untimely?

Yes, indeed.

But necessary.

She leaned against the doorway. The warm palm of her hand rested against the smooth cool surface of wooden material.

It was a good spot for watching.

The red colour of the textile, which caressed along the outlines of the contours of the furniture was attractive to the gaze.

Expensive cover; long high back; comfortable; easy to tilt.

Expensive cover.

Long high back.

Comfortable.

Easy to tilt.

* * *

In the soft greenish light of the lamp he watches a woman. What he sees is the appearance of an unlikely character; a thin body with long arms moves quickly and a bit twitchy; a humanised shadow. He is caught by the decisiveness he is witnessing through her movements. But all of a sudden they become slow. She reaches out to the book shelf and her fingers touch each and every one of the books in a row before she finally picks one and sits down in a red chair in front of the desk. Now the only visible sign of her presence is part of her blond hair sticking up above the chair. Without noticing he had slowed his movements down, passing the house and the window on the ground floor. He can see how she uses the chair as a vehicle for moving between the desk and the book shelf again.

Each time she firmly put down her feet and make a push, the wheels of the chair make a low sighing sound against the soft plastic floor. She leans comfortably against the high soft back.

Expensive cover; long high back; comfortable; easy to tilt.

Expensive cover.

Long high back.

Comfortable.

Easy to tilt.

Professor's Chair

The art of writing within and across mutable genres: open questions and concerns

In this paper I have outlined a conceptual framework for narrative writing as art based practice with a departure in the theory and practice of situated knowledge, diffraction and narrative life writing genres. I have made use of the example of untimely academic novella writing (UANW). Thus, my intention is not to present a model to be used in a specific way. On the contrary, I hope that my example awakens ideas, thoughts, inspiration, critique, and discussion and perhaps give rise to new forms of textual shaping. The becoming of an untimely academic novella writer has actualised a number of disjunctions in a similar way that Jolly (2011) describes in her analysis of critical and creative life writing as an exciting field of mutable genres where tensions arise. It is within and across mutable genres that narrative writing as art based practice emerges, but as I have argued, writing needs to be carefully considered and handled with care, because we are doing embodied, situated, emotional, and creative and often demanding work. In other words, writing needs the attention, engagement, dedication, passion, integrity, and as much hard work as the art work itself to become part of it rather than separate from it. The hand, and all the organs in the body, with all their sensory perceptions that give shape to the art work, is also the embodied site for textual shaping, which potentially creates new ways of seeing, hearing, and

feeling. I hope that the open questions and concerns below can be useful to inspire your own untimely academic novella writing for those who would like to work in this direction. I also hope that this text together with the growing strand of inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship on writing within and across the arts, contributes to permission to create critical, creative, and reflexive spaces for writing. Take the risk, dare to be untimely.



Figure 5. Water, 2012. Authors photograph.

- How can you seek inspiration from theory, literature and art that allows you to ‘set the stage’ for creating your own UANW? Think about and choose a scholarly text, a literary text, a film, a play or theatre, or a combination that you think would be fruitful for the creation of a design for a story and that contributes to inspiring you to work with a particular tone.
- What ‘sites’ do you think are available for you to write from as a critic? How do you understand power in the perspective of ‘site-writing’?
- What objects and items do you identify as useful in the creation of a story that addresses important aspects of your research? In what ways is the object you think about/choose interwoven with other objects?
- Which of the writing methodologies would be fruitful for addressing questions of self and other, privilege and subjugated knowledge in your research? Can some of the representational

forms, or a combination of them, in UANW be used for promoting multi-vocal expressions?
(...)

- Look at the possibilities of using photography as part of UANW. What are your perceptions of the empowering and disempowering aspects of photography? Think about how you can combine photography with a particular form of writing. (Livholts 2010c, pp. 189-190)

References

- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin books.
- Berger, J. & Mohr, J. (1982/2016). *Another Way of Telling*. New York: Vintage books.
- Cixous, H. (2004). Enter the Theatre. In Prenowitz, E. (Ed). *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Coylar, J. (2009). Becoming Writing, Becoming Writers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(2), pp. 421-426.
- Dahl, U. (2012). The Road to Writing: An Ethno (Bio) Graphic Memoir. In Livholts, M. (Ed.) *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 148-165.
- Davies, B and Gannon, S (2006). (Eds.) *Doing Collective Biography. Investigating the Production of Subjectivity*. New York: Open University Press.
- Ehrnberger, K. (2017). *Tillblivelseser. En trasslig berättelse om design som normkritisk praktik*. Doktorsavhandling i maskinkonstruktion, inriktning produkt- och servicedesign, Kungliga tekniska högskolan, Stockholm.
- Gannon, S. (2012). From the curve of the snake and the scene of the crocodile: Musings on learning and loosing space, place and body, *Reconceptualising Educational Research Methodology*, 3(2), pp. 7-15.
- Gilman C. P. (1892/1989). *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Writings*. New York: Bentam books.
- Gordon, Sindi Fiona (2015). *Krik? Krak! Exploring the potential of creative life writing for opening dialogic space and increasing personal freedom*. Doctoral thesis (PhD), University of Sussex.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges. The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), pp. 575-599.
- Haraway, D. (2000). *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve*. New York: Routledge.
- Haug, F. et al. (1987). *Female Sexualization. A Collective Work of Memory*. Verso. Haug, F. (2008) Memory-work as a Method of Social Science Research: A Detailed Rendering of Memory-Work Method. In Hyle, A. E. et al. (2008). *Dissecting the Mundane. International Perspectives on Memory-Work*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Holmquist, A. L. (2017). *Folkform production novellas*. Exhibition catalogue. KTH, School of Industrial Engineering and Management (ITM). KTH, School of Architecture and the Built Environment (ABE). Folkform, Konstfack. (unrefereed publication)
- Holmquist, A. L., Magnusson, M & Livholts, M (2017). *The shaping of dissonance in craft---based innovation --- exploring the combinations of novelty and tradition*. Design Management Academy Conference, Research Perspectives on Creative Intersections, Conference proceedings, Hong Kong, Paper no 150.
- hooks, b. (1999). *Remembered Rapture. The writer at work*. London: The Women's Press.
- Jolly, M. (2001). *Encyclopedia of Life Writing. Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn publishers.
- Jolly, M. (2011). Life Writing as Critical Creative Practice. *Literature Compass*, 8(12), pp. 878-889.
- Jolly, M. & Stanley, L. (2005) Letters as / not a genre. *Life Writing*, 1(2), pp. 1-18.
- Jones, Kip (2006) A Biographic Researcher in Pursuit of an Aesthetic: The use of arts-based (re)presentations in 'performative' dissemination of life stories. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, II(I), pp. 66-85.
- Kelly, John Farrell & Livholts, Mona (2014). 'Light on Water: Conversations on Emergent Writing Methodologies.' *Writers in Conversation*. 1(2) August.
http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/bitstream/2328/27829/1/Livholts_Kelly.pdf
- Kuhn, A. (1995). *Family Secrets. Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London and New York:

Verso Classics.

- Kuhn, A. (2010). Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory in and with Visual Media, *Memory Studies*, 3(4), pp. 298–313.
- Lejeune, P. (2009). 'Composing a Diary' in Popkin, J. and Rak, J. (eds) *Philip Lejeune: On Diary*. Translated by k. Durnin. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 168-174.
- Leavy, P. (2013). *Fiction as Research Practice*. Left Coast Press: Walnut Creek CA.
- Leavy, P. (2015). *Method Meets Art. Art-Based Research Practice*. New York and London: The Guilford Press. (Second edition)
- Lorde, A. (1987). *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Marshall : The Crossing Press Feminist Series.
- Livholts, M. (2001/2011). 'Women', *Welfare, Textual Politics and Critique. An Invitation to a Thinking Writing Methodology in the Study of Welfare*. Dissertation, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Livholts, M. (2007). Professorsstolen. In Bränström Öhman, A. & Livholts, M. (Eds). *Genus och det akademiska skrivandets former*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Livholts, M. (2010a). The Professor's Chair. An Untimely Academic Novella. *Life Writing* Vol. 7, No. 2: August: 155-168. Commentaries on the Professor's Chair: Erla Hulda Haldorsdottir, Matti Hyvärinen, Kali Israel, Stevi Jackson, Barbara A. Mitzal, Andrea Salter, Liz Stanley, Maria Tamboukou.
- Livholts, M. (2010b). The Snow Angel and other Imprints. An Untimely Academic Novella. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 3(1), pp. 103-124.
- Livholts, M. (2012). (Ed.) *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Livholts, M. (2013). Writing Water. An Untimely Academic Novella. In Stanley L. (Ed.), *Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical Methods for a 21st Century of Critical Humanism*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, pp. 177-192.
- Livholts, M (2015a). A Politics of Location in Discourse and Narrative Studies. In Livholts, M. & Tamboukou, M. *Discourse and Narrative Methods. Theoretical Departures, Analytical Strategies and Situated Writing*. London: Sage, pp. 137-148.
- Livholts, M. (2015b). Working with Memories and Images. In Livholts, M & Tamboukou, M *Discourse and Narrative Methods. Theoretical Departures, Analytical Strategies and Situated Writing*. London: Sage, pp. 162-176.
- Livholts, M. (2015c). 'Untimely Academic Novella Writing'. In Livholts, M & Tamboukou, M *Discourse and Narrative Methods. Theoretical Departures, Analytical Strategies and Situated Writing*. London: Sage, pp. 177-191.
- Livholts, M. (2016). Permission for untimely writing, In White, Julie, Permission. *The International Interdisciplinary Impact of Laurel Richardson's Work*, Sense Publishers: Rotterdam, pp. 144-146.
- Livholts, M. (2017). What we learn how to see': A Politics of Location and Situated Knowledge in Glocal Social Work. In Livholts, M. and L. Bryant (Eds.) *Social Work in a Glocalised World*. London: Routledge, pp.89-105.
- Livholts, M. & Tamboukou, M. (2015). *Discourse and Narrative Methods. Theoretical Departures, Analytical Strategies and Situated Writing*. London: Sage.
- Nobel, A. (2014). *Dimmer på upplysningen – text, form och formgivning*. Akademisk avhandling, 2014:1: KTH, Arkitekturskolan och konstfack: Stockholm.
- Plummer, K. (2001). *Documents of Life 2. An Invitation to a Critical Humanism*. London: Sage. (Second edition).
- Plummer, K (2013). A manifesto for social stories. In Stanley L. (Ed). *Documents of Life Revisited. Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 209-219.
- Rendell, J. (2010). *Site-Writing. The Architecture of Art Criticism*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

- Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). The Politics of Translation. In Spivak, G. C. (Ed). *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, pp. 179-200.
- Stanley, L. (1995). *The Auto/biographical/I: Theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Stanley, L. (2004). The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences. *Auto/Biography*, 12 (3), pp. 201-235.
- Stanley, L. (2013). Introduction. Documents of Life and Critical Humanism in Narrative and Biographical Frame. In Stanley L. (Ed). *Documents of Life Revisited. Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 3-16.
- Stanley, L. (2015). The Death of the Letter, Epistolary Intent, Letterness, and the Many Ends of Letter Writing, *Cultural Sociology*, 9(2), pp. 240-255.
- Tamboukou, M. (2015). Working with Diaries and Letters. In In Livholts, M & Tamboukou, M. *Discourse and Narrative Methods. Theoretical Departures, Analytical Strategies and Situated Writing*. London: Sage, pp.149-161.
- Widerberg, K. (1995). *Kunskapens Kön: Minnen, reflektioner och teori*. Stockholm, Sweden: Norstedts Förlag.
- Willard-Traub, Margaret K. (2007). Scholarly Autobiography: An alternative intellectual practice, *Feminist Studies*, 33(1), pp. 188-206.
- Williams, Patricia (1991). *The Alchemy of Race and Rights. The Diary of a Law Professor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wyatt J, Gale K, Gannon S, Davies B, (2010). Deleuzian Thought and Collaborative Writing: A Play in Four Acts, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16 (9), 730-741.
- Wyatt, J., Gale, K., Gannon, S., Davies B. (2011). *Deleuze & Collaborative Writing. An Immanent Plane of Composition*. New York: Peter Lang.