

SHERIDAN LINNELL AND DEBBIE HORFALL



## 10. DISTURBING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DISCOURSE

*Re: Writing Practices*

### “JUST” WRITING?

From a sociological and poststructural viewpoint, professional practice discourse is a productive set of relations that makes practice possible, including many progressive, supportive and creative ways of practising professionally. At the same time, even progressive iterations of the discourse tend to reflect and sustain already established power relationships and limit the possibilities of thinking / doing “otherwise” (Foucault, 2000). Writing marginalia into the professional practice discourse is a political act intended to unsettle this tendency towards establishing and reinforcing dominant power relations, so that something different that we are yet to even envisage may emerge. To enable established and sedimented truths to move, we may need to unsettle not only content but also form: in particular, the forms of re-presentation that reinforce and construct the domain of professional practice and its limits. *Doing* writing as an enquiry (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) into dominant and taken-for-granted assumptions and practices can disturb those discourses which further marginalise and pathologise those who are already most marginalised in society. In this chapter we write onto and into professional practice discourse through a collaborative dialogical process that we call *just writing*. We expand this phrase beyond its suggestion of spontaneous creative writing in order to link our writing practices with our passion for social justice – with writing *for* justice.

Professional practice does not exist outside of ourselves as the disembodied object of our academic discourse. We situate ourselves as higher education professionals for whom writing is part of our professional practice – central to our identities and values, although at times marginalised within the neoliberal university (Bansel, Davies, Gannon, & Linnell, 2008). In this chapter, we seek to open up our own professional discourses and academic writing practices, and also ourselves and our relations, through writing. Yet of course locating critical endeavour within scholarly writing and research can perpetuate yet another binary, by inadvertently alienating practitioners, leading to understandable accusations that academics “don’t live in the real world”, and reinforcing a division between “those who *do* and those who write”.

*Interruption: Robin: when one is writing, why isn’t one “at the barricades”?; when one is at the barricades, why isn’t one writing (Robin Morgan, 1992, p. 16)?*

*Jean-Paul: but Robin, “Writing is action” (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1966)<sup>i</sup>.*

J. Higgs and F. Trede (Eds.), *Professional Practice Discourse Marginalia*, 83-90.  
© 2016 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.

Writing is an action that can mediate the tendency of professional practice discourses to solidify the binary oppositions of self and other, normal and abnormal, abled and disabled, worthy and unworthy. These binaries not only prevail in conservative public discourse – they continue to haunt some of the professional areas that aim to be of help to those who are marginalised. We play with serious questions of what writing unravels and makes possible. We mix up and bring together seemingly incompatible genres of writing in order to interrupt assumptions, binaries and our professional selves. This is not to suggest that the chapters of textbooks or the web pages of professional organisations should be overtaken by experimental writing and mischievous disruptions of normative assumptions. Rather, we are suggesting that, alongside the useful conventions of professional and academic writing, we could keep a critical and creative space open through writing differently, even disturbingly.

**Our aim is to lovingly “disturb”,**  
interfere with  
interrupt  
alter the position or arrangement of  
upset the natural order and balance  
destroy the composure and tranquillity of  
throw into disorder  
put to inconvenience  
ALARM

Found at (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disturb>)

(Un)certain writing practices are generally pushed to the edges by professional practice discourse – particularly creative, situated, emergent and embodied (and funny or whimsical) writing. Here we follow where these practices might lead us. In this way it could be said that – although our methods are far from straight, indeed they attempt to bend the norms – that we are *just*-ifying the margins.

*Interruption: Marginalia: that’s a grandiose claim – who do you think you are?*  
(one possible answer ...  
... and another)



Figure 10.1. Debbie,  
*clowning around*



Figure 10.2. Sheridan,  
*“Crooked self-portrait, with dog”*

## WRITING BEYOND AN ETHICS OF JUSTICE

We have spoken of “just writing”, but is “justice” always the right word? Debbie (with others) has worked in the broad context of the community sector, focusing on how we look after each other and the planet with which we live. This work proposes that, in the professionalisation of worker-client relationships, a tension, even a contradiction, emerges between equity and relationality, or between an ethics of justice, in which professionals stand back and/or act in order to treat people equally, and an ethics of care, in which connection takes precedence and decisions are shaped by relationships and depth of feeling (Horsfall & Higgs, 2014). With/in this tension is a taken for granted and enacted hierarchy: doing wins over, perhaps erases, being. Debbie’s work of inhabiting the “relational turn” challenges this hierarchy and seeks instead respectful democracy in action/s.

Sheridan similarly raises ongoing questions about how the professionalisation and standardisation of the emergent field of art therapy may inadvertently objectify (or “other”) and place distance between therapists and those marginalised people who consult them. Drawing on Foucault’s analysis of ethical subjectivity as a form of power (Foucault, 1992), she suggests that the training and professionalisation of arts therapists, while important and necessary, may shape them in ways that distance them from more diverse and passionate versions of themselves and from the relationships, values and commitments that brought them to train as therapists in the first instance (Linnell, 2014).

## WRITING LISTS

In the following examples Sheridan takes up the unpromising genre of the list in order to foreground or imagine subjectivities, practices and relationships that differ from or expand those suggested in normative documents. The intent is to make more visible, assumptions about professionalism, and what these assumptions exclude.

Advantages of arts therapy / arts psychotherapy	Therapy, like art, is as much invention as it is citation ...
<p>Arts therapy can help people to resolve conflicts, develop interpersonal skills, manage behaviour, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and achieve insight. Arts therapy can encourage clients to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– explore their imagination and creativity</li> <li>– develop healthy coping skills and focus</li> <li>– improve self-esteem and confidence</li> </ul>	<p>The following list ... give[s] a flavour of the sort of things that Ashley, Maree [two aboriginal foster siblings] and Sheridan found to be “therapeutic” during and around their art therapy meetings:</p> <p><i>hand-printing</i>  <i>making houses from cardboard boxes for sisters to live in together</i>  <i>writing stories about girls and geese</i>  <i>dot painting [with the girls’ Aboriginal foster mother, Galiindurra]</i>  <i>making cards and writing letters for Mums and Dads</i>  <i>making presents for baby sisters</i>  <i>painting as an expression of being sorry [the therapist saying sorry on Sorry Day].</i></p>

<b>Advantages of arts therapy / arts psychotherapy</b>	<b>Therapy, like art, is as much invention as it is citation ...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– identify and clarify issues and concerns</li> <li>– increase communication skills</li> <li>– share in a safe nurturing environment</li> <li>– improve motor skills and physical co-ordination</li> <li>– identify blocks to emotional expression and personal growth.</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://www.anzata.org">http://www.anzata.org</a></p>	<p><i>making up songs and singing them, for instance the one that goes “there was a little girl who loved to play in the garden, in the garden.”</i>  <i>working out who sat in the front of my car last time around</i>  <i>laughing at jokes, falling over in the grass</i>  <i>being the artist’s assistant</i>  <i>playing noughts and crosses and losing</i>  <i>cuppas and chats</i>  <i>looking for netball results in the local paper</i>  <i>throwing the frisbee for Moonam Chomper [the therapist’s dog pictured with Sheridan in Fig 10.2]</i>  <i>talking to Moonam and guessing what she would say to us if she spoke English or we spoke dog</i>  <i>surprising Mum with what we’ve made asking questions when that’s OK, but not too many writing and responding to [a] poem. (Linnell, 2009)</i></p>
<p><b>Professional requirements of registered arts therapists / arts psychotherapists</b></p> <p>ANZATA [the Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association] recognises training for arts therapists from approved courses offered by Universities and Colleges in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. These can be found on the “Professional Membership” page on the ANZATA website. This training comprises a minimum two-year Masters Degree with a component of 750 supervised clinical hours placement under qualified supervision.</p> <p>A professional member of ANZATA works under a code of ethics that addresses issues of safe practice for their clients which is mandatory in most employment situations.</p> <p>Graduates of these programs are eligible for professional registration with ANZATA, entitling them to use the recognised postnominal title A.ThR (registered arts therapist) after their name.</p>	<p><b>Art therapist in the spotlight</b></p> <p><i>Pet hates:</i> Colouring-in books. People who say “Oh yes I do a bit of art therapy too”.</p> <p><i>Current love interest:</i> Jung – he appreciates what I do. And I just adore the way he introduces me to his friends – “I’d like you to meet my better half”.</p> <p><i>Favourite weekend:</i> Time in the studio and Sunday brunch with friends at my local gallery café – freud eggs and francis bacon on sourdough toast.</p> <p><i>What are you enjoying?</i> Sculpture by the Sea.</p> <p><i>Who are you listening to?</i> Winnie Cott and the Re-Kleins playing covers of old favourites – “Mammy” and “It’s all over now, baby blue”.</p> <p><i>Who are you reading?</i> Bowlby. And Harry Potter.</p> <p><i>Who would you most like to sit next to on a plane?</i> Marion Milner and Frida Kahlo (I’ll take the middle seat).</p> <p><i>If there were one word left to you in the world, what would it be?</i> Transitional object.</p> <p><i>That’s two words.</i> Art, then. Or love. (Linnell, 2010)</p>

WRITING A(S) PLAY

While Sheridan is driven by concern that therapy often reproduces the forms and norms behind so many of the categories of distress that bring people to therapy in the first place, Debbie is driven by a desire to make sure that scholars do not just keep talking to themselves. She looks for alternative forms to scholarly exposition using creative genres in order to demystify theory and methodology and make the conceptual tools essential for research more widely accessible.

*Three people (the chorus) stand left of stage. Angie and Debbie centre stage. A computer with PowerPoint slides to the right of the stage.*

Debbie: We're going to talk about qualitative research and social change.  
 Chorus: (shout) Boring!  
 Debbie: Say people when they first come into the room.  
 Chorus: Yawn!  
 Angie: Since when was being curious, wanting to find out – boring?  
 Chorus: Why is academic stuff so dry and dense? Do you just want to talk to yourselves? How democratic is that?  
 Debbie: Yeah you can end up sending people to sleep. Or you are ignored.  
 Chorus: (All go to sleep)  
 Angie: Maybe that's the idea? What better way to make sure research is ignored! What better way to make sure social change does not happen? What better way to make sure the status quo stays intact!  
 Debbie: Well, I don't want to be bored. I don't want people I am doing research with to be bored. And I definitely don't want things to stay the same.  
 Chorus: (Wake up)  
 Debbie: Doing research using creative methodologies can speak with and to more people. Doing and then writing up  
 Chorus: or singing up, or drawing up, or performing up  
 Angie: research can be creative and fun. It can have integrity and rigour. And it can be about serious issues.  
 Chorus: You mean equitable AND accessible? Heads AND hearts speaking?  
 Debbie: Feminist, postmodern and postcolonial critiques of traditional research practices enabled researchers to see that their positions affected what and how they researched.  
 Person 1: Why did the chicken cross the road?  
 Person 2: It was an historical inevitability (Karl Marx).  
 Person 3: Chickens, over great periods of time, have been naturally selected in such a way that they are genetically disposed to cross the road (Charles Darwin).  
 Person 1: Only male chickens get to cross the road. The female chickens are at home sitting on the nest (Germaine Greer).  
 Person 2: Whether the chicken crosses the road or the road moves beneath the chicken depends on your frame of reference (Albert Einstein).

- Angie: So the critiquers began asking these epistemological questions: Whose and what knowledge counts? Says who and in whose inter-ests? And, who are researchers producing knowledge for?
- Person 1: (aside): “Do scholars think that people aren’t speaking just because they haven’t heard them yet?” (Armitage, 2007, pp. 33-34).
- Debbie: So we had the narrative turn ... biographies, autoethnographies, stories, local knowledge, testimonials, life histories, confessionals.
- Angie: And we had the postmodern turn.

Horsfall & Titchen (2009).

*Interruption: “Turn”, indeed! Does having a “postmodern turn” make these wandering minstrels “fit” to comment on something as serious as professional practice discourse? Or are they having an anachronistic fit of hysterics?*

#### THE “AMATEUR” – WRITING AS AN ETHICS OF LOVE

*Interruption: These women are AMATEURS????? (A warning siren goes off.) Ladies, gentlemen and those of other genders and classes, as though things were not topsy-turvy enough in this chapter already, these hysterical women have just invited the provocative figure of the amateur to stumble into and leave grubby footprints all over the well-tended field of professional practice! Are the professional bodies sleeping through this outrage? Where are the editors of this book? Didn’t they know that their dubious theme of professional practice marginalia was inviting trouble? Are there no scholarly standards anymore?*

We have found ourselves, so far, turning to writing to mediate the connections and tensions within professional practice, between an ethics of justice and one of care (Horsfall & Higgs, 2014) and to make apparently inaccessible knowledges more widely available. In the final section of our paper we continue to disrupt professional practice discourse through emergent writing that plays with the possibilities of an ethics of amateurism, or love (hooks, 1994).

“Amateur” has come to mean the opposite of professional. Yet the origin of amateur is the Latin noun “amator” or “lover”, from “amare” meaning “to love” (Wiki). Amateur etymologists that we are, Google-eyed searchers, we note the descent of the amateur against the rise of the professional. We seek to reclaim the amateur as s/he who practises from and for love. Writing the figure of the *amateur* (lover) into and over professional discourse, we place that discourse under erasure (Derrida, 1978). Rather than simply inverting the discourse of professionalism, we attempt to cross professionalism (a commitment or vow; that which we profess) with amateurism (the practice of enthusiasm; that which we love) in order to animate and transform the choreographies of expertise.

*Interruption: Do these clowns really think that “just writing” can do more than invert the hierarchy – just(ly) enabling them to imagine alternatives and offer possibilities beyond the dualism of the centre and the margins? Are they so amateurish that they are even challenging the guiding trope of this book?*

Perhaps. Yet might we move closer towards the practices we “profess” by *not* bundling up and discarding our clumsy spontaneous enthusiasms, not pretending, by accepting that we are always doing both (knowing and not knowing; professional and amateur) even while pretending/ performing not to. Our not knowings, even our hesitations may open up an otherwise constrained way of practising. Our fears keep us tightly wrapped. Ignoring or succumbing to them is equally constrictive.

*Invulnerable?* Making sure nothing untoward can sneak or seep in. Instead we would embrace the courage to be vulnerable, messy and unsure AND clear, well trained, practised. To be both critical *and* accepting; taking a stance *and* being fluid. Doing what must be done *and* being still. Just being.

“Often then, the longing is not for collective transformation but rather for an end to what we feel is hurting us. That is why we desperately need an ethic of love to intervene in our self-centred longing for change” (hooks, 1994, p. 244).

Amateurs can loiter on the margins of professional practices, redefining the margins by stretching the discourse. Embracing our own amateurism enables dialogue with the “other” (client, consumer, patient, student, community). Amateurism – with all its nuances of the passionate and dedicated enthusiast, the devotee, the aficionado, the dabbler and dilettante, even the incompetent, bumbling novice – unsettles and troubles relations of power, disrupting the expert-novice dualism through multitudinous practices and dialects of the in-between.

Inviting those who have been marginalised and pathologised by professional practice discourses to bring forward their own amateur passions, pursuits, talents and capacities brings into focus subjectivities and possibilities that might otherwise go unnoticed. This turn creates the possibility for dialogue between “authentic” or perhaps we might say more *fully authored* selves. Such engagement from and with the margins might give rise to unexpected connections that not only reshape the central discourse but even decentre the notion of core and periphery. Perhaps we might become enamoured with that which lies between, the liminal, the not-yet-possible. We might move beyond the individual and the social, radically decentring our-selves to find our inspirations.

*At dawn and dusk, in the marginalia of the rarely contained nine-to-five day, we look up from our screens and watch and listen for the yellow-tailed black cockatoo: punk rocker of the bush – a screecher – a black-feathered punk Goth with dyed blonde streaks, who loves the gloom and predicts the storm. Banshee of the bush<sup>ii</sup> she brazenly challenges the dominant discourses with her call.*



Figure 10.3. Yellow-tailed black cockatoo in flight

#### NOTES

<sup>i</sup> “The ‘engaged’ writer knows that words are action” (Sartre, 1966, p. 42)

<sup>ii</sup> Siouxsie and the Banshees were an English female punk rock group of the 1970s and ‘80s: “the band rapidly evolved to create a form of post-punk discord full of daring rhythmic and sonic experimentation inspirational in the ‘gothic punk’ genre” – Wiki

REFERENCES

- Armitage, L. (2007). *Trace: Shaping family history stories and theoretical families* (Unpublished bachelor's [Hons.] thesis). University of Western Sydney, Penrith, Australia.
- Bansel, P., Davies, B., Gannon, S., & Linnell, S. (2008). Technologies of audit at work on the writing subject. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(6), 673-683.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2000). Truth and power. In J. Faubion (Ed.), *Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume 3, Michel Foucault: Power* (pp. 111-133). London: Penguin Books. (Original interview conducted 1976).
- Foucault, M. (1992). *The history of sexuality, Volume 2: The use of pleasure*. London: Penguin Books.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Outlaw culture: Resisting representations*. New York: Routledge.
- Horsfall, D., & Higgs, J. (2014). People caring: Negotiating the space between an ethic of caring and keeping your distance. In J. Higgs, A. Croker, D. Tasker, J. Hummell & N. Patton (Eds.), *Health practice relationships* (pp. 85-92). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.
- Horsfall, D., & Titchen, A. (2009). Disrupting edges - opening spaces: Pursuing democracy and human flourishing through creative methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(2), 147-160.
- Linnell, S. (2009). Becoming "otherwise": A story of a collaborative and narrative approach to art therapy with Indigenous kids "in care", with a commentary by Galiindurra. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art Therapy*, 4(1), 15-26.
- Linnell, S. (2010). *Art psychotherapy and narrative therapy: An account of practitioner research*. UAE: Bentham Science Publications.
- Linnell, S. (2014). Shaking, and making, the ground upon which art therapy stands. *Art Therapy OnLine*, 5(1), 1-17.
- Morgan, R. (1992). *The word of a woman*. London: Virago.
- Richardson, L., & St Pierre (2005). Writing as a method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959-978). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sartre, J-P. (1966). *What is literature?* New York: Methuen. (Original work published 1948)

*Sheridan Linnell PhD  
School of Social Sciences and Psychology  
Western Sydney University, Australia*

*Debbie Horsfall PhD  
Professor, School of Social Sciences and Psychology  
Western Sydney University, Australia  
Adjunct Professor  
The Education For Practice Institute  
Charles Sturt University, Australia*

*Disturbed?*

*Disrupted?*

*Delighted!*