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Want to talk about resonance.

Because I think there is something lost when we forget some of the ways we “come to know” and then teach others about the knowledge we’ve gained in research endeavors.

Our main interpretive act, our stock in trade is writing.

But this gets the least attention in our training.

It’s assumed that if we are literate, we’ve got that part covered.

In this talk I want to make the point that writing is both a mode of analysis (mostly unconscious) and a political act. Then, I want to provide some tips for loosening the grip of traditional scientific models for writing that treat writing as a transparent medium between the researcher the findings and the audience. Finally, I offer some everyday advice for practicing writing as a mixed media tool, involving the body, various messy tools to energize different perspectives or more visual modes of thinking, and reflection on the situated nature of the language choices, the structures of writing, and the researcher himself/herself.

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The more human inquiry becomes qualitative,
the more it needs to ask what is required of
writing and of language. What are the
possibilities of writing and what are its limits?

-- Max Van Manen

Max Van Manen. Phenomenologist, In this case, writing from the conclusion of the book *Writing in the Dark*.

Writing as...

1) writing as a way of knowing (process)

thinking from people like Kenneth Burke, Roland Barthes, Diana George,

Writing as analysis (interpretive tool, method)

Writing as political (the political function of writing (this may be a genre argument))

--Writing is an actively rhetorical act, setting up knowledge claims in a particular way, reifying or resisting ideologies of 'what counts' as knowledge in a scientific field.

--language is not a transparent medium for content or meaning. Nor is grammar, structure of sentence, structure of paragraph, structure of ideas. (Burke)

--so what does the form 'teach' the reader, in addition to the content? What is being emphasized in the modes of representation we're using, beyond the content? What terministic screens (Kenneth Burke) are present?

--we're good at understanding this concept when we analyze others' discourse, or when we look at films and think about these questions. But if time is short and research challenging, we remain blithe (or choose to dismiss/ignore) this concept when considering our own writing strategies.

Through our writing, we construct categories, reinforce certain orders, meanings, and hierarchies, and create a focal point for our readers. These are not neutral activities of transmission; language is not a neutral medium. We all know how spin in the media can the same news program can be considered distorted or accurate, depending on where the viewer/listener is coming from. We recognize that any story is not the only story, and that truth is partial. More, we are pretty adroit in realizing that no matter how much we learn, we'll never know it all. These sensibilities apply to writing as well. Once we recognize the political nature of writing, we can start to engage in reflexive activities to help interrogate our own writing practices, as these create knowledge that may, down the road, be read by others and interpreted as Truth.

The responsibility of scholarship is to strive to be ethical and analytically strong. Likewise, we have an ethical responsibility to question not just the data we analyze or the obvious methods we use to analyze these data, but the ways in writing intersects with but more importantly, plays a compositional role in both the process of analysis and the product of inquiry.

The interpretive turn, the linguistic turn, the meaning turn: All of these intellectual revolutions (movements) prompted scholars to refocus on the role of researcher in creating, not just reflecting culture. The theme of these movements was that, as Thomas Kuhn articulated so clearly, reality isn't out there to be discovered, measured, and transmitted to audiences through some transparent thing called language. Rather, the act of interpreting is the act of revising, editing, choosing, cutting, highlighting and hiding some of the stuff we witness in situ. As the contributors to the edited collection *Writing Culture* (1986) by George Marcus and James Clifford emphasized, when we do scholarship, we write culture.

So there is greater focus on the problematics of knowing. Many of us are familiar with, and even take for granted, the practice of thinking of "small t" truth or put scare quotes around grand theorizing.

But although the process of conducting research shifted, our writing is often seen as invisible, transparent, a conduit of meaning from the brain to the reader.

We don't often interrogate our own fieldnotes or our writing in progress as 'data'or, if we do, it's on our own time. It's not taught as practice in methods textbooks, for example.

The process of writing as a form of sensemaking or an essential practice of inquiry is discussed by ethnographers interviewed by Jean Jackson in her contribution to John Van Mannen's book *Representation in Ethnography*. In composition studies, Diana George has a great article on writing as inquiry. Dan Chandler has written about the phenomenology of handwriting. Bud Goodall writes about the new ethnography in a book by the same title.

These authors help inspire us to bring more passion and reflexivity in to the process of writing, so we can find our interpretive voice. The skill of interpretation lies not just in mindwork, but in writing practice.

Of course, there is a distinctly political function to writing, as well. The linear, logical, tidy scientific report conveys a particular meaning about how knowledge ought to be produced by absencing the scholar from the process of interpretation. What is left when the subjective author is removed is the authorial, authoritative voice of the science itself; ideally separated from the interference of

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"Writing should be exceedingly clear and concise. The purpose is to inform an audience of other scientists about an important issue and to document the particular approach used to investigate that issue." (University writing Center)

"writing is not just externalizing internal knowledge, rather it is the very act of making contact with the things of the world and making sense of it." (Max Van Manen)

These two quotes represent well the ends of the spectrum.

Scientific writing is...

- ...practical task
- ...transparent medium
- ...after the fact
- ...discipline specific

We are very well trained, by this stage (in academic institutions), in traditional ways of thinking about what the purpose of writing is.

Yet the texts we write often accomplish what Stanley Deetz calls 'discursive closure,' where alternative explanations are suppressed by the tight, controlled, and no-room-for-discussion way the situation is framed.

Which is contrary to the strength of qualitative inquiry, or as Van Manen says: "openness, in the sense of interpretive availability, is a sustaining motive of all qualitative inquiry." (max van manen...in either Writing in the Dark or Researching Lived Experience).

We are trying to balance the need to build credibility as authors/scholars and do good research. There are ways to balance creativity and constraint.

▪ Digital composition is...



- ...linear
- ...clean, untracked
- ...different from handwriting
- ...textually biased

Some of our challenges with writing are perhaps exacerbated by the fact that we now write in digital form, as opposed to analog

COMPARE this to other disciplines like art, photography, music, and architecture.

Dan Chandler has collected some great info about the phenomenology of handwriting, which helps us think about digital writing by contrast. While the authors he quotes are not the only side of the story, it's worth reading what they have to say, if only to recognize where we are not (if we spend most of our time composing on the computer)

Wendell Barry: "In using computers writers are flirting with a radical separation of mind and body, the elimination of the work of the body from the work of the mind. The text on the computer screen, and the computer printout too, has a sterile, untouched, factorymade look... The body does not do work like that. The body *characterizes* everything it touches. What it makes it traces over with the marks of its pulses and breathings, its excitements, hesitations, flaws and mistakes... And to those of us who love and honour the life of the body in this world, these marks are precious things, necessities of life." (from Chandler's website)

So I want to give some 11 TIPS I WOULD GIVE TO MYSELF ABOUT HOW TO LOOSEN THE GRIP

first set: how to insert more the idea of writing as a method of analysis into the project

Second set: reminder: don't forget that writing is political

Third set: how to loosen the disciplined training or to find new ways of writing, generally

1. Look for juxtaposition



Juxtaposition, write otherwise.

2. Repeat in variation



Repeat in variations, keeping each iteration as visible analysis. Adele Clark writes about situational mapping, which is a useful way of trying to identify all the human and non human actants affecting a situation. Variation on a theme would be to recenter the map and redraw, using something that was originally tangential. This shift of center can help identify what is operating unconsciously in the mainstream and what might be marginalized as a consequence.

3 . Defamiliarize the Object



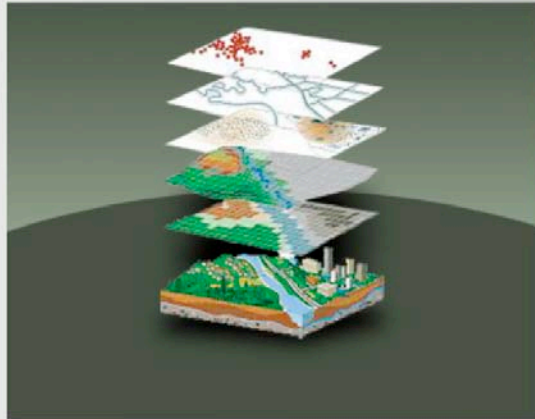
Another way to reflexively interrogate the ‘stuff’ you’re looking at is to defamiliarize through some form of deconstruction. This is a great example.

4. Defamiliarize the Self



Reflexive self analysis, use your notes and drafts as data to make yourself 'foreign' or 'other'

5 . Create Layered Accounts



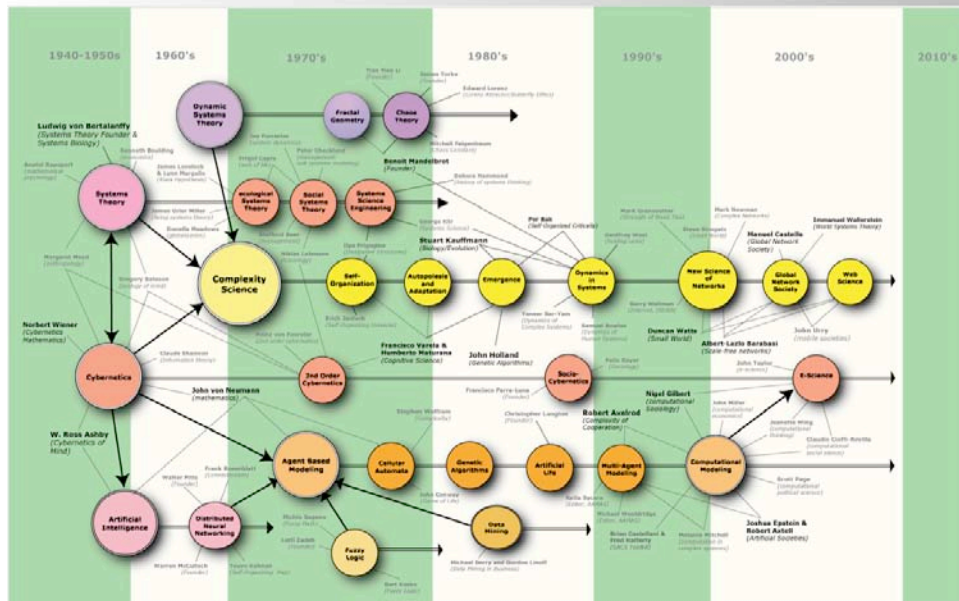
Use layered account or fragmented narrative method to compose and then position/juxtapose different POV

Find and mix representational forms that resonate with the situation or people.

Be as expansive and creative as possible. Tidy it up later.

Carol Rambo Ronai writes keenly in this genre...

6. Interrogate the politics



Advice: practicing reflexivity and understanding the political function of your writing

Texts have power, we know that. Genres are political, in that they function rhetorically to persuade us to believe one way about the world or another. Study of college students reading across disciplines. Students said of the writing: "Sociology allowed me in, as if my point of view might be important. Philosophy seemed to be about being right by proving others wrong. Biology seemed to be about describing minute details in elaborate visualized detail, so we could better understand what we maybe can't see." Each discipline has a norm for inquiry and representation in writing.

But interestingly, if you trace your own intellectual history, it can be a way to identify some patterns that influence your own writing style. Or to see gaps. Or to see connections where you didn't otherwise. This type of visual mapping can really help you see where you're coming from.

Interrogate the politics of your form.

Undiscipline the writing form by reading and legitimizing other disciplinary forms.



The next four tips focus on ways of freeing one's mode of writing.

Obviously in academic writing, one's analytical methods are dictated, to an extent, by the traditions and conventions associated with the methodology. Generally speaking however, in the social sciences and humanities, a researcher will be working with texts. Transcripts of interviews, one's own fieldnotes, published texts are the most obvious form of this type of analysis. In addition to analyzing texts, or objects that function as texts, scholars filter, sort, and code data, a process that even if not conducted via text means, results in texts. Writing is an essential part of analysis, not just a transmission device for ideas. (Barthes, Haraway, etc).

Working in a range of media can help free one's thinking and help develop skills that may remain otherwise untapped in the analytical process. Laying my ideas out in this way is a way of seeing it differently. Activating different cognitive functions so that I can again identify what my routines and habits are.

8 . Move Around



Doesn't work for everyone. But is a useful way of sorting ideas. Or coding.

Like sitting on the floor to write a description of the room, moving to a different position can help free (or change) perspective and can literally change the form and content of the writing.

9. Embrace Messiness



It's worth considering the value of displaying the messiness of research, which is both essential and uncomfortable.

More uncomfortable for "planners" versus "discoverers." Daniel Chandler writes about this in his phenomenology of Handwriting. Where he offers two types of writers. Those who think first, then write neat and tidy and those who must discover through writing. Since we're fairly well versed in the more tidy forms of writing, it's worth attempting to identify if this is a true tendency or just a habit.

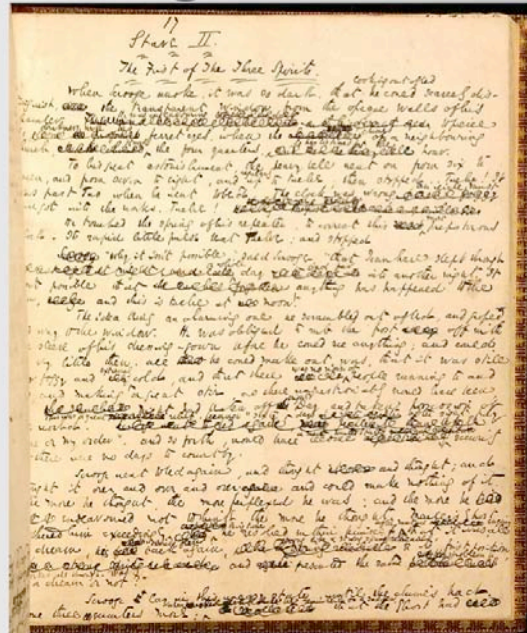
From Chandler:

"Planners might sympathize with the 18th century poet Matthew Prior, when he wrote of another:

Let him be kept from paper, pen and ink;
So may he cease to write, and learn to think.

This is in complete contrast to the advice of a Discoverer: 'Don't think and then write it down. Think on paper' (Harry Kemelman, in Winokur, 1988)."

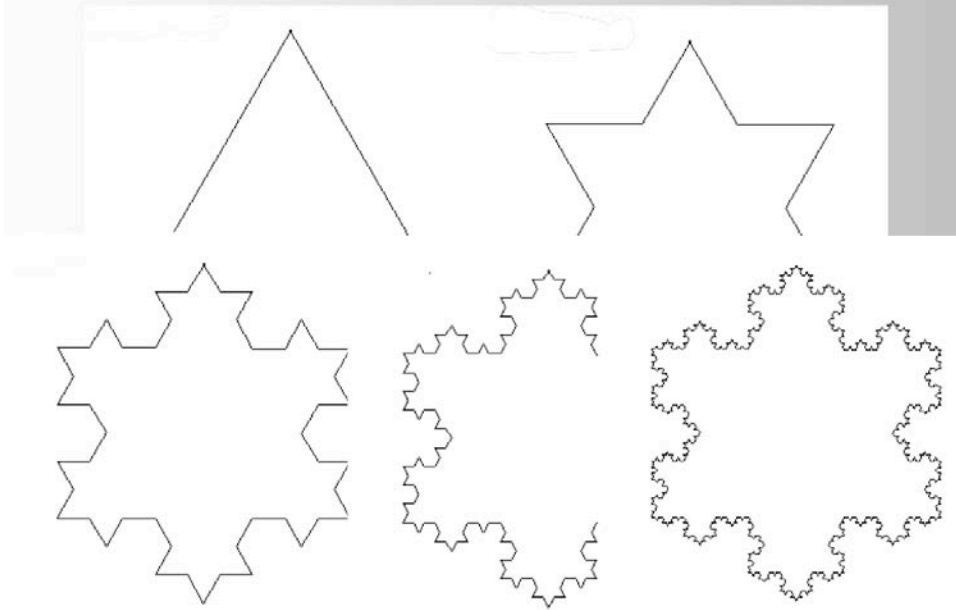
10. Try Handwriting



There was some research done into what parts of the [brain](#) were triggered when writing at a computer versus what parts were triggered when writing with a pencil and paper. The experiments showed that writing by hand triggered activity in significantly different portions of the brain than when writing at a computer. (See [Mozarts Brain and the Fighter Pilot](#) book.)

This image is from Charles Dickens' draft work.

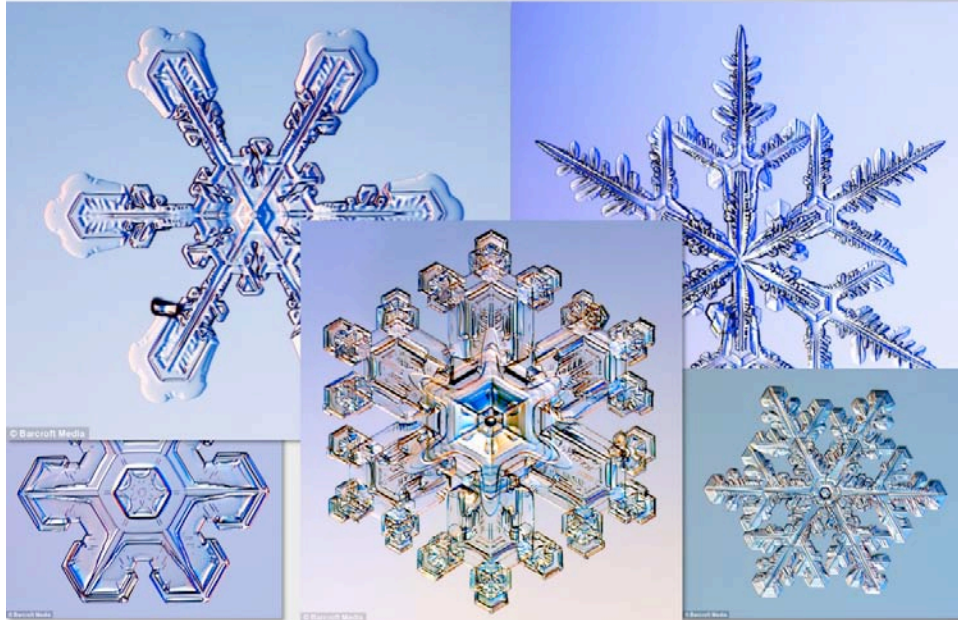
11. Build Snowflakes



Animations altered.

Another strategy to loosen linear thinking is to write with the snowflake method. Symmetry emerges organically over time as you write at each point on the snowflake. Rather than writing from front to back, this allows writing to occur anywhere and anytime. It enables one to think about the process as a snowflake building, rather than a paper getting written from introduction to conclusion.

11. Build Snowflakes



Animations altered.

These images of real snowflakes show extreme systematicity, rigor and symmetry that emerges in a seemingly organic way. It's a matter of trust to use this as an analogy for how one's writing will yield a polished product at the end. But it's also a way of imagining that complexity need not be linearity. And that rigor comes in many different forms, not just the scientific style report.