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Book

Poetry and Organizing: Perspectives on the Uses and Value of Poetry in Organization Studies

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Poetry and Organizing

Poetry and Organizing

Perspectives on the Uses and Value of Poetry in
Organization Studies

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Contents

Foreword ix

PART I ABOUT POETRY AND ORGANIZING

1	Thinking and writing (with) the poetics of the social and the organized	2
	The world in a grain of sand	2
	Poetics and negative capability	8
	<i>Good Bye, Hayek!</i>	11
	Complexity and the poetic	14
	Work	19
2	Poetry as reflexive landscapes of inclusive potential	26
	Explorations across prepositional liminal spaces	26
	Poetry <i>in</i> organizing	27
	Poetry <i>for</i> organizing	32
	Poetry <i>on</i> organizing	37
3	Organizational poetry as an embodied feminist practice	44
	Becoming with feminist poetry	45
	Poetry as feminist diffraction?	49
	Can I go beyond?	51
	Poetry as relational sensemaking	51
	Let's just sit	55
	Writing difference, power, and vulnerability differently as/ through feminist poetics	55
	I am un/sure	58

PART II TERRITORIES OF POETRY AND EXPERIENCE

4	Workplace landscapes	64
	1. Staring at me	64
	2. Work was love	66
	3. Affective solidarity	67
	4. What it takes	68

5. After office hours	69
6. Dystopia	70
7. I dissent	71
8. Counting my blessings	72
9. In the drawer	74
10. Tired	76
11. Workplace poetry	77
12. Breaking the mould	78
13. Heart of feather	79
14. Time is my enemy	80
15. For you	82
16. The waiting game	84
17. Watch me	86
18. Who is we	87
19. I search for you	89
20. Every new ceiling	91
21. Rainbows in the distance	92
22. Sleepless nights	94
23. Leave	96
24. Rainy days	98
25. A life that's cheap and rich	100
26. It's a new dawn	102
27. Vertigo	103
28. Snowfall	105
29. Mentoring	107
30. A picture of my old self	108
31. Sensory words	110
32. Tracing back the steps	112
33. Fragility	114
34. Walking away	116
35. Wolves in sheep's clothes	118
36. What if	120
37. Nostalgia	121
38. Pockets full of you	122
39. A new year	123
40. Becoming change	125
41. Keynotes and laundry	126
42. Are we safe	127
43. These poems	128

5	Iotas	129
	1. Mind, atoms	129
	2. Packing up	130
	3. The map	131
	4. After the flood	132
	5. The old man	133
	6. The list of longing	134
	7. Breathless, again	135
	8. Elegies for the living	136
	9. Prospero's book	137
	10. Lockdown	138
	11. The new train is not blue	139
	12. Gloria	140
	13. Job's secret	141
	14. Heroes no more	142
	15. Just before	143
	16. Cesspool days	144
	17. A recipe to survive work alienation	145
	18. Impossible symmetry	146
	19. Message in a bottle	147
	20. Deserters	148
	21. Words	149
	22. CV	150
	23. Airport dreaming	151
	24. Medusa	152
	25. Professor A.Z.	153
	26. Mourning is the most radical thing we can do these days	154
	27. The last summer, and back again	155
	28. Medea	156
	29. One more letter	157
	30. Transparency	158
	31. Great again	159
	32. The Mr. Brainwash life philosophy	160
	33. Self-guided tours	161
	34. A ride through the material world	162
	35. Make no bones	163
	36. Like silence	164
	37. Lamentation	165
	38. What would saint Valentine say	166
	39. Figs from thistles	167
	40. Red	168
	41. Pay slip	169

42. Mephistopheles was downsized and his job was outsourced	170
43. Home	171
44. Splinters	172
45. Imagine	173
46. Redemption	174
47. I am November	175
48. Riddle of the Sphinx	176
6 Breaking words and silences	177
1. Writing poems in/for academia	177
2. A-void-ing	179
3. There is more	180
4. These moments	181
5. Can we just remain?	183
6. Shame in silence	184
7. I am afraid	185
8. Writing ↔ unshaming	186
9. Words again	187
10. Speaking writing shame	188
11. Shameless space	189
12. Putting words?	190
13. Tik tak	191
14. Mouthless Inter-faces	193
15. Writing the other in/for academia	195
16. Belonging(less)ness	196
17. Being un/sure	198
18. You are not alone	199
19. Connecting	200
20. (Un)gendering words	201
21. Moments fecund	203
22. Going beyond	204
23. Positive for Covid	205
<i>Afterword</i>	208
<i>Index</i>	213

Foreword

Warning: If you want “business as usual”, this book is not for you

(Jenny Helin, Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University)

From the very first page, I am drawn into this text. As I underline words and phrases to remember, and reread sentences that combine arguments in unexpected ways, I begin to see how the general understanding of “organization” is questioned. At the heart of this questioning is the bridging of two domains typically kept separate: organization and poetry. By intertwining these realms, the book invites us to reconsider what “good” management entails, raises new questions, and encourages us to write organizational life anew. In so doing, you will notice that this text is so much more than a traditional book on organization.

A call for intellectual activism

If we know in what direction the scales of society are tilted we must do what we can to add weight to the lighter scale

(Simone Weil, Gravity & Grace)

I read this book as an experiment in social activism. As such, it is a challenging companion where the boundaries between intellectual inquiry and activism dissolve. We are invited to consider how the act of infusing poetry into organizational contexts can serve as a form of destabilization, opening avenues for not only thinking differently but also acting in unconventional ways.

On the one hand, the focus on social change in this text joins forces with the growing community of scholars in organization studies who emphasize the need for changing the norms of academic writing. In the introduction to a book from this community, where people contributed chapters on why they experience the need to expand the repertoire of writing, Nancy Harding wrote that “[e]ach academic text ‘written differently’ is a micro-revolution. Micro-revolutions add up, overturning dysfunctional, perhaps rotten, sometimes corrupt, practices that inhibit knowledges and understanding” (in Pullen,

Helin, and Harding, 2020, p. 3). Just as Nancy acknowledges the relationships between change and writing, this book is a poetic invitation to something new through an embodied form of writing that:

urges us to recognize that we should ethically act up against tendencies of normalization that promote all sorts of discrimination and exclusion in academia and society more broadly. We should rather pave the way towards a new world bound through collective solidarity with and between different bodies to/in/through action. (p. 57)

At the same time, this book reaches beyond the current body of work focusing on writing by offering insights into poetry in organizing, poetry for organizing, and poetry on organizing, and thereby considering how this art form opens up new ways of engaging in activism. Thus, as we come to understand how poetry can make a difference in organizational contexts, this book does not seek to mirror the status quo; rather, it opens up possibilities for reimagining what organization can be during particular moments “when a new door opens in the everyday space” (p. 2). Through emphasizing vulnerability, beauty, and relational engagement as vital aspects of this change, the book delves into the affective, embodied dimensions of organizations that so often go unspoken.

Seeing the other

Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity
(Simone Weil, *Gravity & Grace*)

Is our relationship to the Other the basic building block in any form of change? In the preface to Martin Buber’s book *I and Thou*, we can read:

Someone exists in the World, unknown to you, then, suddenly, in a single encounter, before knowing him, you recognize him. A dialogue begins in the night, a dialogue, which, through a certain tone, completely involves the persons. “Michel, is that you?” And the voice answers, “Jeanne, is that you?” Neither one needs to answer. “Yes it is I”. ... Through the encounter, he has become. (Bachelard, 2018, p. 271)

I agree with the authors in this book that, amid the grand challenges we face – like war, species extinction, climate change, and the rise of non-democratic forces – the significance of small, everyday gestures of recognition and seeing of each other is where we need to start. Is this what Gherardi and Cozza (2022) call “slow seeing”?

This is of importance because “the presence of the Other and a shared sense of vulnerability challenge a simplistic managerial perspective”, thereby fostering the capacity for change (p. 10). This emphasis on the Other brings to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “surplus of seeing” and the understanding of ourselves as incomplete; only I can see you, the whole of you. Furthermore,

you can never see yourself *in* the world. Through me, and my responses to you, you can see yourself, more fully, if I am offering you my “surplus of seeing” (Bakhtin, in Morson and Emerson, 1990). This is a conception of “seeing” that transcends mere sight; it encompasses a fully embodied, multisensory experience of connection. However, for that to happen, we have to fully attend to each other and “[m]anagers cultivating this philosophy take care to nourish relationships, to stay open to the world and to others, while accepting that it is impossible to know or understand everything” (p. 9).

Management by waiting

The real way of writing is to write as we translate. When we translate a text written in some foreign language, we do not seek to add anything to it: on the contrary, we are scrupulously careful not to add anything to it. That is how we have to try to translate a text which is not written down.
(Simone Weil, *Gravity & Grace*)

Already in the first chapter, this book turns much of what we take for granted in organization studies on its head. Arguments are convincingly made for seeing how we, in organization and management studies, are unthinkingly filling up every gap in our hectic work schedules. Good managers are active in a particular way: by doing things, for and with others. There is a tendency to be afraid of inactivity. Time and space need to be productively filled; everything else would be a waste of resources. And a waste of potential.

Here, a counter-story is coming into play, inviting us to question the relentless drive for activity if we are to gain deeper insights and that we need time to make new connections. Drawing inspiration from diverse voices, from Keats’s concept of “negative capability” to Bachelard’s reflections on “poetic space”, the authors challenge the neoliberal imperative of relentless productivity. Instead, an organizational paradigm that values reflection, patience, and genuine connection is emerging. This is also called “weak management”.

I am currently in an administrative role at my university where I constantly feel that I am not doing enough. In this situation, to read a call for emptying the space, literally and metaphorically, is such a relief; I can breathe again. Just like the ink of poetic language is not filling up every inch on the paper, thereby leaving room for the reader’s own interpretations, this is a form of negative capability that “allows poetic imagination to work and to develop a mature intuition” (p. 9). These are management practices that offer a pause, and silence, not to be filled, but to be left untouched:

Holding a space of silence through poetry is not to silence or be silenced – but instead to hold a space of absence that is loud in its deficit and deprivation. It links to the notion of negative capability ... as a way of embracing the unknown, what

cannot be described and defined; a way to reject the need for over-explication, production, linearity, and homogenization. (p. 31)

In writing this Foreword, I have incorporated some of Simone Weil's words from her book *Gravity & Grace* (1997) because I kept thinking about her writing on "decreation". Just like weak management, this is a way of creating where the ego is de-centred. In the words of Simone Weil (1997, p. 80), we "participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves". In terms of academic writing, I am imagining that decreational writing can come in different forms, one of them being in the form of this book. This means a book that resists the great plot or the unifying thread. It rather consists of pages that slide into and out of each other in creative ways – many times in dialogue with each other, yet other times taking off in different directions. And as you read, your mind starts to make imaginative leaps too.

Should decreeted books come with a warning? A signal that reading them will lead you into a new sphere, one that may challenge your understanding and push you towards unfamiliar terrain. If so, this book certainly warrants such a warning.

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PART I

About poetry and organizing

1. Thinking and writing (with) the poetics of the social and the organized

Monika Kostera, Emmanouela Mandalaki and Ilaria Boncori

THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND

Swedish sociologist Johan Asplund (2002) believes in a personal encounter with art as a kind of intensive experience of presence, just like an encounter with another human being. Such an experience cannot be reduced to mere sensations of pleasure or curiosity. Most definitely not to consumption. That is why, Asplund argues, it makes a great difference whether we are dealing with the original or with a forgery, even a technically very skilful one. It is not only about the dexterity of representation or the talent of the artist. What matters most is something else: a moment when a new door opens in the everyday space. Then we face something from a different time and context: something that the artist experienced, something that guided her or his hand, caught the eye, passed through the thoughts. A work of art is not a thing but a witness of a process of creation: at the same time something physical and a mystery. In the words of William Blake, it is to see the world in a grain of sand. Asplund presents the example of the masterful forgery of a Vermeer painting by Han van Meegeren, who admitted to the fraud in defiance of the opinion of experts who maintained for some time that the work must be the original. However, when the forger made his confession, the painting lost its power over the audience. It was not entirely an economic or managerial devaluation. It was not just about price, and certainly not about technical or even aesthetic qualities. Experts insisted on a high evaluation of the material side of the artwork. In managerial terms, it should have been all that matters: performance, excellence, the product. The work did not cease to be outstanding. But it ceased to be a point of passage of presence, a doorway towards something bigger than our senses and our minds, bigger than markets.

Canadian-British scholar and deep ecology activist Patrick Curry (2019) suggests that mystery has been gradually trivialized by the rationalism of

the industrial society, until neoliberalism brought a complete invalidation of mystery – the great disenchantment. This concerns all walks of life, all ways of seeing, talking, and writing – even in discourse about art (Hine, 2016). Actually, maybe only children are nowadays capable of seeing the world as enchanted, which is not to say that one has to be four years old to understand art. In a way, the amazed child is present in all of us, although too often it remains huddled in a corner of consciousness or unconsciousness, supervised by neoliberal productivity-speak, supervised and managed into submission. Such everyday violence blocks and clutters the way to a dimension of the human condition: creativity, art, imagination; the artful dimension that is very important because, although it is a small seed, it allows us to acquire regeneration without harming the Other or vital relationships, to give without taking away anything essential. The inner child is the negation of capitalism (Kostera, 2022).

The inner child can be released, and not just in play or for leisure when it runs free; for no other reason than pleasure. But it can also be part of the process of educating management students to observe and to develop an ethnographic imagination (Kostera, Ludwicki, and Modzelewska, 2022). Ethnographic poetry helps to learn through experience, including aesthetic experience. Teaching it requires moderating and facilitating communication, the building of relationships with others, and dealing with emotions. The ethnographic mode of learning is a craft or an art: the learning process should be experience-based, and students have to immerse themselves in intense perception. It is also important to discuss these observations afterwards, reflect and reconsider the categories one is using in everyday life.

On one occasion, I asked my students to reflect on the experiences of beauty they had during ethnographic observation. They were asked to abandon all received figures of beauty and to aim at seeing and describing something truly unique and personal. It is important to learn to be introspective because neoliberalism is bombarding us with images of smooth surfaces, laughing people, alluring impulses. I collected close to a hundred answers, the vast majority of which were truly original, unrepeatable, personal. Some were so beautiful that I am sure they are the seeds from which the students may grow something splendid in their lives.

The students wrote, in the form of haiku and poetic prose, about the small and ephemeral, what can be seen truly in everything: in nature, people, relationships, or everyday moments. We have become indifferent to ephemeral things because we have stopped seeing the beauty in small things, gestures, people. This transience connects a sunset with the smile of a loved one and with a hill full of hoverflies – it is ordinary everyday life, but in its simplicity and transience it is beautiful.

The students wrote about rain. Rain evokes stillness and tranquillity; it makes drumming sounds on the windowsill; its shamanic rhythm makes us feel connected with the plants absorbing it, creating a balance in nature. Rain connects us to life going on outside our apartment buildings.

They wrote about what they could do with their hands. It is not about pride, authorship, or success, but about the beauty of the satisfaction of a job well done. A handmade object is not necessarily unusual. Perhaps it is even something mundane. But it was created by human effort and dedication. They wrote about hand-knitted sweaters, handmade candles and dumplings. Each dumpling is a little different, and that is beautiful.

They wrote about the Other. Not a celebrity, influencer, supermodel, or glamorous star, but a human being unaware of his or her own beauty, perhaps met by chance: an older man standing in front of them in the checkout queue, a tired woman sitting on the bus. The moment when they really saw a human being they described as sacred. Just as the working hands immortalized by Polish photographer Janina Mierzecka (1939) – a student spoke of them as “holy icons”: beautiful, unspoken, real. In their answers, references were sometimes made to photographs, paintings, and films: Mierzecka’s *Working Hand*, Mekas’s film *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2001), *Paterson* by Jim Jarmusch (2016).

In fact, beauty is what crosses over individual boundaries:

My handwriting is similar to my mother’s – after all, she’s taught me to write.
I still make guacamole the way a friend from school showed me, years ago.
I continue to listen to an album a friend recommended, and though we haven’t
spoken for years, I still think of her then.
Beauty is a stained glass window created in me by people who revealed a fraction
of themselves to me.

... I think that beauty consists of the fragments of others that, like pieces of glass
in a stained glass, make up who we are. (KM)

Beauty of this magnitude helps us to see that we are all part of something much, much bigger than ourselves individually. Love is very close to such beauty.

My students wrote about human gestures, the ordinary “good morning”, the common courtesy, the sympathetic nod. A sign that the other person really is there, somewhere, next to you. They wrote about the incredible beauty of a loved one’s freckles, which makes her unique and the only one in the world, even if she is ashamed of them and considers them a defect. A beauty where there would be no place for freckles would be pointless. Such beauty is cold and does not attract tenderness – rather, it repels, it numbs. They wrote about how beauty is in the everyday and the trivial: the family around the table,

having dinner together, putting together a Lego set with a little brother. The beautiful object is here, now, somewhere else than the finger on advertising billboards indicates.

They wrote about plants. Roses are mystical, like prayers – that is why Catholics have their rosaries. You can also contemplate roses, and that is a kind of prayer, too. Dandelions are especially beautiful flowers because they are simple, but they have a message: early spring has come. It is an unpretentious message, impermanent, ephemeral. But it is good to be able to say hello, and then goodbye, to a phase of the season, and dandelions mark these occasions. My students wrote about the blossoming lilacs and the bold forget-me-nots. They wrote about trees. In fact, they wrote a great deal about trees. Trees comfort us, trees can be trusted, trees are the very essence of life, they are a solace, they are an antidepressant. Finally, trees take us out for a walk – yes, just like that, one student claimed. Humans are like dogs living in a closed space, and the trees lead them along a green path to breathe. The students wrote about the animals they have seen, sometimes accompanied by humans: a focused neighbour with a dog; a deer running across the park; in the evenings, squirrels hiding behind cars. The animals made them realize, humbly and in amazement, that beauty is being able to be part of a living planet.

The city is beautiful too. The students wrote about how beautiful it is when it wakes up to life in the morning. It is beautiful to sit with a mug of tea or coffee by the window and watch, to celebrate the morning. It is beautiful how the early sunlight flows down the streets, how people rush to work, how someone rides a bike ... The awareness of being inside a great organism, both managed and chaotic, is beautiful. A student explained that sometimes you forget that the city is an organism, but, in the morning, when it wakes up, it is easy to see it clearly, face to face.

They wrote about the smell of asphalt after the rain, the wandering of clouds across the sky, the sudden sensation of colours biting into each other.

They wrote about old, worn-out trainers, and about a sweatshirt bought at a thrift store for close to nothing.

They wrote about conversations in the coffee queue, of the beauty of having to wait for something, even if it is just a bus ticket.

They all gave very different answers to my question. If any of them recurred more than others, it was about trees – and eyes, human and animal eyes. Eyes reflect the rays of the sun, and this is not at all a metaphor. They connect facts and feelings. Because there is both good and evil in them, often mixed up – because that's who we are, mixed up. Because looking into eyes is an intense contact, the eyes don't lie, and beauty is something that makes you feel that life is truth. Like Keats said (1819/2024):

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

My students wrote that they liked to write about beauty. They were able to see beauty. For them, as for me, experienced beauty does not have much to do with canons and fashions, with what is appropriate to think and say, with what is pretty, nice, or what others like. Bruno Schultz said that beauty was a disease:

it is the result of a mysterious infection, a dark forerunner of decomposition, which rises from the depth of perfection and is saluted by perfection with signs of the deepest bliss. (1937/1988, p. 219)

This is not a category of abstract aesthetics – it is our human embodiment finding a context. We need context to live, as embodied, spiritual creatures. Yet neoliberalism is all about decontextualization – like a ghost train in a ghostly timetable:

The 16:29 nightmare train
is delayed.
We apologize for the inconvenience.

In her book *Steal as Much as You Can*, about creativity and creation under neoliberal capitalism, journalist Nathalie Olah (2019) depicts the image of cultural exhaustion of meaning from the symbolic spaces of classes other than the middle classes. The middle classes have acceded without much resistance to the reduction of art to a category of financial and measurable values. Aesthetic impressions have been subordinated to demand and supply and thus, like other commodities, compete with each other for appreciation by the market. They become measurable for this purpose because they are assessed on simple scales, and thus similarities, not differences, define their meaning and purpose. “Higher culture” has become something destined for those who know its (so understood) value. Yet this has not always been the case. The arts have been the domain of the upper classes for centuries, but there have often been strong dissenting voices within it. In the preceding century, the lower classes gained access to culture, including the higher classes. Folk art and music were “discovered” by the cultural world and invited to participate in shaping the canons of beauty. Writers from poor families, such as Flora Thompson, who had not finished any school, began to be read and respected in salons and lecture theatres. Boys and girls from working-class families were playing rock and the world was in awe. John Berger (1972) talks about how everyone can experience art, not necessarily as mediated by salons of the elite, the academy, or the critics. In the punk era, “working class” became downright glamorous

and desirable; people from the more affluent classes also began to dress “working class”.

There was nothing strange about “unmarketable” art until neoliberalism brought on the news of the “end of history” and there was “no alternative”, imposing a market-related taste and value, as well as the law of “copyright”. Thus, it streamlined art production and eradicated art exchange and “wild” creativity more effectively than Hitler or Stalin ever managed to do. Stalin feared poets – so much so that he went out of his way to repress and harass them, as individuals, not as a group (Bobin, 2022). Neoliberalism allows for “perfect freedom”, it does not hunt down or repress the poetic. It just fails to see it, annihilates it by not seeing it. “Nice” is that which has market value. The market knows it all: “excellent” universities teach us capitalism, its aesthetics, myths, and attractions (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera, and Zueva, 2022).

Yet perhaps, what is most evident are surfaces, and, in the depths of human experience, there live ideas and encounters such as those described by my students. John Berger (1972) encourages us to look elsewhere, beyond such surfaces, to what is living and true. It is simply liberating, and may bring insights about what is “good” in ways that cannot be managed or measured by the market.

Poetic contextualization shapes the poetics of writing and organizing by bringing the human condition out of neoliberalism’s linearity and supposedly rational practice of maximization and optimization. Yet good life is not about maximizing productivity. The economist Robert Skidelsky and the philosopher Edward Skidelsky (2013) write about the good life in their book *How Much is Enough?* Their main concern is the good life: what makes it and how we can achieve it. Art and beauty are presented as an important part of it. In the not-so-distant days of John Berger’s prime-time TV talk about art, taste was considered a sensible and legitimate topic of popular discussion and education. Moreover, left-wing policies embraced taste formation in society and even preached the necessity of such education in the long term in order to enable people from different social classes to actively participate in culture. Social democratic governments of this era, such as the Swedish and British ones, invested heavily in art and aesthetics education programmes, in cultural centres, and in promoting cultural initiatives of different social classes and groups. Skidelsky and Skidelsky point out that this was an active programme of care by state institutions for the arts, not shying away from discussing who had taste and how one’s taste could be developed. Public institutions often gave voice to artists and critics who expressed preferences for different tastes and for what they considered the good in life. The good life is not confined to the tastes of elites and market valuation but is lived out: in conversations, educational courses, TV and radio programmes. Meanwhile, neoliberalism has gradually abandoned aesthetic education under the pretext of freedom and

liberty, or because it is an unnecessary cost, replacing dialogue with one-sided, relentless, and massive indoctrination of tastes – because that is what mass advertising and marketing is all about. The dictatorship of marketing.

A superficial dictatorship, perhaps. My students felt intensely that beauty makes the world meaningful. Experiencing beauty and talking about it was, to them, important and vibrant. They also commented on the aesthetics of ads: how fake and dead they were. The beauty of a freckled face is incomparable to the prettiness of a poster adjusted by artificial intelligence (AI). They emphasized how there needs to be a space for all of us to talk about beauty. There must be space to talk about old trainers, about the deer under the block, about dumplings. Whoever has not seen dumplings can never enter heaven.

POETICS AND NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

But can we really see things if we have an urge to constantly produce? Can we afford to look beyond the dictatorial surface? I agree with Byung Chul Han (2023) that it is not possible to gain deeper insight if one is constantly overwhelmed with activity. Inactivity is necessary in order to see the connections, to wait for things to mature, to let in *life*. This happens when we enter into the contemplative mode. In order to see, something needs to be *taken away*, we have to cease to incessantly add more and more of the same (Han, 2010). Romantic poet John Keats reflects on a poetic capability which he calls the

Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. (Keats, 1818/2024, pp. 193–4)

A branch of religious reflection known as apophatic theology or *vita negativa* is a way of seeing God by negation, by naming that which the godhead is not. Negative capability likewise emphasizes that things beyond perception can only be grasped by not grasping, by refraining from defining and categorizing. Keats recommends practising it in everyday life as a way of being. He understands it as a radical doubt about the relationship between who we are and what we see, a way of abstaining from the urge to categorize and explain what we do not fully understand; a way of allowing mystery to take root in the psyche. This approach encompasses both modesty and bravery. To admit not knowing and to risk loss of sense is courageous because humans abhor unknowing and fear senselessness. It is modest because it does not place the ego at the centre of the universe. But this is actually not about celebrating ignorance: negative capability brings new insight where the ego is de-centred.

There is an ocean of truth all around us, proclaims Ursula Le Guin (1995) in *Four Ways to Forgiveness*. We cast out our nets, and they bring only a fragment, a particle, a flash of what is infinite, inexhaustible, and unknowable. Human knowledge is limited and essentially arbitrary. Infinity and complexity do not make reason irrelevant or unimportant. But sometimes it is as vital to bring in fresh insight, one that feels like truth – as with my students’ definitions of beauty, which were reflections of things both great and incomprehensible. Daring to question some of our assumptions, we gain the ability to take care of the grain of truth and beauty that may be able to teach us something new.

To Keats, negative capability does not mean scientific distance, as it does not have to mean to us in today’s turbulent world. A sense of mystery is not a disinterested pursuit for its own sake or for knowledge as such; it is a quest for something greater than we are: “with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration” (Keats 1818/2024). A poet is ready to give up “reaching after fact & reason” (Keats, 1818/2024) to strive for the intensity of presence that is art.

Negative capability is important for managers and organizers in our turbulent times. “Weak management” is an approach based on negative capability (Deslandes, 2020). Instead of omnipresent control, “weak” managers recognize their vulnerability and fallibility, and pay attention to weak signals. Poetics, by renouncing aspirations to omnipotence, may help human beings become more able to be genuinely responsible. Furthermore, it can help a new managerial approach to change: to live with ambiguity and paradox (French, 2001). Instead of rushing into action and fragmenting problems into manageable bits, negative capability allows poetic imagination to work and to develop a mature intuition. Managers cultivating this philosophy take care to nourish relationships, to stay open to the world and to others, while accepting that it is impossible to know or understand everything (Simpson, French, and Harvey, 2002). The “reflexive inaction” of a leader is an ability to wait, refrain from relentless productivity, and instead take in, listen, and observe. Instead of speed – not so much slowness as patience and temperance. It is equally important to cherish what we experience and to doubt it. “Weak” managers do not resort to any of the existing fast recipes for decision-making, be it liberal or conservative. Fast reactions are often violent and breed energies of conflict and war. Patience brings peace and imagination, which often is expressed and nurtured through art, be it “high” or “just” street art (Hunek, 2024). It helps to embrace an alternative embodied approach to organizing, including a *relational embodied ethics of the commons* (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020). Mutual vulnerability, corporeal connectedness, and communing are a foundation for an ethics beyond neoliberal linearity. It links to poetic experience through the recognition that rhetorical rationality cannot alone define normative organizing

practices: the presence of the Other and a shared sense of vulnerability challenge a simple managerialist view.

The much more common approach to management, which likes to present itself as “excellent” and thus not at all weak, abhors empty space: it has an irresistible compulsion to fill in all gaps with rhetoric. This urge is propelled by a strategy of order and productivity (Höpfl, 1995). Decisions are made in order to conceal and control ambiguity, to force the human being into a linear state of mind. Rhetorical management cuts out and prevents everything undefined and indefinite. That way, it reduces uncertainty, but, at the same time, it simplifies and spoils complexity. By offering an illusion of meaning, it averts genuine renewal. By closing off the door to silence, the rhetorical manager builds a space filled with imperatives. However, Heather Höpfl also envisages a vibrant alternative, similar to weak management, which she describes as

poetics [which allows that] the meaning is always ambivalent and resonates with the flux of experience. (Höpfl, 1995, p. 176)

The poetic impulse, which can be recognized as an imperative to feel and think beyond the rhetorical dimension, makes space for the work of imagination, which has the ability to dive beyond surfaces and show the way out of its dictatorship. We need more imagination, not just to enjoy the good life but to rebel in an organized way. Italian poet and philosopher Franco “Bifo” Berardi (2018) argues that imaginative impotence allows, under neoliberalism, the absolute rule of preconfigured forms acquiring a monopolistic status. These forms are derived from powerful social actors: they are technologically and financially driven and they seriously limit and harm human creativity. They dictate an imaginarium defined by the principle of “more of the same”: more growth, more pollution, more profits for the billionaires, more inequality ... This state of things invites thoughts of extinction, dissipation, collapse. However, this deleterious dynamic can be counteracted by poetry, its rhythms of breathing.

Poetry is the excess which breaks the limit and escapes measure. The ambiguity of poetical words, indeed, may be defined as semantic overinclusiveness. ... Excessiveness is the condition of revelation, of emancipation from established meaning and of the disclosure of an unseen horizon of signification: the possible. (Berardi, 2018, p. 20)

Space itself provides this condition, potentially in a powerful way (Bachelard, 1969a). The poetics of space consists of dreams and reverie, unravelling under the surface of the perceived reality. Physical space works like an outer shell, nesting inner, poetic space which can be reached through an active quest of the imagination. But even if we, human beings, do not endeavour to do it,

we still remain entangled in them: we are imaginative beings too, not just material ones.

Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides. (Bachelard, 1969a, pp. 217–18)

We need poets and poetry to tune up our imaginative capacities and actively participate in poetic space, which is important for the social, because it “gravitates about a value” (Bachelard, 1969a, p. 171). In this space, images and events appear not in a linear fashion but come up, following the law of attraction and association between the mind and symbols and images. What we touch by imaginative attention in this space “can be the seed of a world, the seed of a universe imagined out of a poet’s reverie” (Bachelard, 1969b, p. 1).

GOOD BYE, HAYEK!

Good Bye, Lenin! is the title of a 2003 film directed by Wolfgang Becker and set during the collapse of the GDR. The protagonist is Christiane Kerner, a committed East German communist who has an accident and falls into a coma in October 1989. When she wakes up in June 1990, the GDR no longer exists. Her son Alex tries to prepare her as sensitively as possible for the new reality, not wanting her to suffer a shock that could hinder her recovery. He stages a non-existent East German reality around her using old props, videotaped messages, and various tricks to repack new elements of everyday life in old East German wrappings and shells. All the time, however, the new reality spills out of these packages, causing amazement, anxiety, but also laughter. What is new is translated in various ways, often comically, in the language of the old – the new elements of the cityscape come from the fact that the GDR began to accept refugees from the West. Towards the end, a helicopter takes a statue of Lenin to the rubbish tip, but, sailing through the air, Vladimir Ilyich seems to be tenderly saying goodbye to the heroine. The film is warm and funny, as well as sad. By being all these things without contradiction, it triggers a poetic impulse.

There were many factors that contributed to the fall of the Eastern Bloc, some of them immediate and some working in the long term. Some management researchers suggest that in the longer, systemic run, the collapse was due to a sustained lack of balance (Koźmiński and Obłój, 1989). If so, the same may be happening right now, argues French philosopher Edgar Morin in his book *Changeons de Voie* (2020). Shocking recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, show how many things do not work, how the neoliberal system is out of balance. The connections between its elements turned out to be fragile,

and the optimization of everything has progressed so far that no allowance for a plan B is made. Neoliberalism seems to have filled in all the blanks. COVID-19 revealed the helplessness of social institutions, the incompetence of politics, the recklessness of big capital, which profits from the pandemic as it does from almost everything that happens, including disasters and ecocide. Dominant management regimes and the prevalent modes of governance fail to engage with the unexpected, which is part and parcel of human life (Boncori, 2020).

Reality looks like a driverless train rushing into the abyss: a mode of governance and management that has no time and is in no mood for reflection. There is clearly something missing – an alternative. When the Eastern Bloc collapsed, an alternative existed and could easily be named by anyone – it was the Western Bloc. Yet neoliberalism is founded on the maxim coined by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: “there is no alternative”, popularly known as TINA. Instead of looking for possible solutions (which do not exist if we lack an alternative), politicians and voters look back to an imaginary past. This is the background of the phenomenon which sociologist Zygmunt Bauman refers to as *retrotopia* (2017): a kind of utopia, but located in the past instead of the future. It has no other function than serving as a calming remedy, something like managed nostalgia. “It was better before” does not inspire social action, looking for new policies, or seeking to change the world for the better. It is a desperate attempt to comfort lonely human beings under neoliberalism, to call to forging ties where they once perhaps were, in a society where structures and institutions have ceased to function. *Retrotopian* thinking blinds us to what is going on on the politico-economic level, and how the proposed “solutions” are causing harm and presenting humans and the living ecosystem with real danger.

Among these solutions, there is, typically, a tendency to apply the same medicine over and over again. Difficulties are dealt with by means of austerity and the limiting of complexity. Indeed, states and institutions with power, such as the US or the International Monetary Fund, act directly or through the media and structures, as well as academic disciplines (economics and business), to exercise their power by framing and disempowering the margins, ideas that may turn out to be radical and actually constitute an alternative to the existing order (Bøås and McNeill, 2003). Yet such ideas continue to turn up, albeit in ever more violent and chaotic forms such as terrorism and vandalism.

In addition, institutions of power try to instil even more control to deal with what appears to be increasingly out of control, as it did in the collapsing Eastern Bloc (Obłój, 1986), only now they do so in more technologically advanced ways (Bloom, 2019). Today’s digital surveillance society turns citizens and employees into objects of content monitoring by civic authorities, by police, by employers. Surveillance cameras operate in more and more workplaces, and this is compounded by an increasingly elaborate system of

electronic monitoring, ubiquitous measurements of performance, parameters that determine promotion and mere survival on the job. Self-monitoring practices are becoming more and more widespread, measuring pulse, steps, amount of sleep, blood composition, and further private functions of the body and the mind. We are all constantly under close scrutiny. All of us – except for those in positions of power. The higher up in the social hierarchy, the more invisible the position holder becomes and the more uncontrollable his or her actions and decisions, including those with consequences for other people. At best, their actions are individualized and narrated from an individual or organizational level. This is reinforced by a society where the super-rich have turned into celebrities (Bloom and Rhodes, 2018). One can perhaps venture that they have taken the place of the political despots that once ruled the Eastern Bloc. They are presented as the ones with real agency, as well as icons to be emulated. However, in order to climb up the social hierarchy under neoliberalism, one needs a gigantic fortune at the entry point. But, if “there is no alternative”, salvation is expected from those who represent this omnipotent order.

The poetic impulse means always looking for alternatives to what is superficially regarded as obvious and omnipotent. One such exploration of alternatives is presented to the general public, like the parafuturological book *Four Futures: Life after Capitalism* by sociologist and columnist Peter Frase (2016). Frase is not an advocate of technological determinism but, rather, believes in different uses of technology. The neoliberal powerholders use the available technologies for their purposes; but, in a world out of balance, these strategies are not resilient. Depending on what the balance of social power looks like, the scenario will play out in one of the four ways delineated in the book. The first scenario is communism – not the Soviet-type state authoritarianism but a fully equal society that uses technology to bring about universal affluence: from each according to ability, to each according to need. No more exploitation and no more destruction of the environment. This is the utopian option: unlikely but worth fighting for. The second scenario is rentism: yes, abundance is produced, but only for a small elite. The rest struggle for increasingly limited employment opportunities in operating the technology through which the rich keep getting richer. The third option is socialism: a system where everyone has to cut back a little, there is no growth, but there is equality, justice, and concern for the environment. To save the climate, the state radically transforms the socio-economic structures. Everyone receives a basic universal income. The last option is exterminism. This is the dystopian option, a society from the world of horror movies, where a small wealthy elite introduces modern feudalism. Human lives count for less than the economy, openly and officially. Excess “human resources” are kept in refugee camps or simply exterminated.

”Stop imagining the Apocalypse. Start imagining a revolution”, says a meme passed around on Facebook during the first lockdowns of the COVID-19

pandemic. For a start, it could perhaps be at least the socialist scenario of Frase's four futures. My students who wrote about their experiences of beauty would perhaps enjoy watching a film entitled *Good Bye, Hayek*. To use Edgar Morin's motto: "change the track" (2020). But in order to even dream about this, we need to know how to imagine, and for this, we need a working capacity for imagination whereby the poetic impulse is able to surface. Negative capability can help us to train it up. Only then can we make good managerial use of the real complexity we currently live in.

COMPLEXITY AND THE POETIC

Complexity calls for maturity. On the other hand, a complexity perspective can help to develop a more mature structure or organize multifaceted social processes (Letiche, 2000). We need a vision of many-sided, versatile, colourful, Baroque managerial and organizational solutions. Linear management does not live up to the challenge because it creates binaries which are not only impossible to connect but also deepen existing polarizations. A complexity perspective would strive to link theses and antitheses via a synthesis, looking for possible synergies between different elements. Linear, rhetorical management produces black-and-white solutions that solve nothing because they do not interact with each other or with the more complex aspects of the world.

The solution is not to try combining what does not mix but to get beyond the duality (and the visible surface) by living poetically – "vivre poétiquement" (Morin, 2020, p. 261). Instead of focusing on the codes of opposites, it means bringing (back) in the notion of the good life as central to our world. Poetic living – a challenge for power-driven rhetorical simplifications – is not about efficiency or productivity but about the quality of experiences and things. In Bachelard's terms, it is the "androgynous instant" (1969a, p. 59) – creating a hybrid, uniting different energies in a poetic synthesis. It generates a new context, where time ceases to be linear and becomes vertical (Helin, 2023). This frees energy and enables seeing possibilities of a change from within, on the community's own terms.

In a living and complex world, opposites should be able to attract each other. Peacemakers are usually bridge-builders (Hunek, 2024). To see possibilities for the building of bridges, one has first to be able to consider the main barriers which are, as Bloom and Rhodes (2018) point out, systemic and due to a consolidation of power of extraordinary proportions. In this task, social science, including management studies, can be of help. Social science methodologist Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) points out that, when dealing with the social, one has to ask oneself basic questions: Where are we going? Who wins and who loses from going where we are going? Is this direction of development desirable? If not, what should we do about it? These questions all concern power; they help

to focus on it. Without taking into account the power factor that is often hidden deep within social structures, we fail to consider the fundamental question: For whom is the proposed solution beneficial? Any managerial policies that fail to address it lack perspective and, ultimately, social value. Critical thinking and reflexivity can be helpful in revealing that the most self-evident truths are not the complex truths we need to learn in order to find complex solutions. Such an approach may help to create a “reflexive inaction” in management (Deslandes, 2020).

“Weak”, poetic management is truly inclusive because it is neither linear nor founded on binary opposites and does not rely on categorizations. There is no thrust to exclude – division does not, for this mode of managing, provide a source of power. Poetic collective identity does not have to eradicate difference because it seeks synergies and syntheses, which may bring about a collective identity. Whereas rhetorical management is linear and endeavours to instil order, to persuade and to establish structure, poetic management is about coherence without control, content before form, dedication without suppression (Höpfl, 1994). Poetic management is not about hegemony but about responsibility and rhythm. The collective flows need to be adapted, orchestrated, and managed into a greater whole. Where rhetorical management is not in favour of real creativity because it brings disorder and empty spaces and is not “productive”, poetic management depends on creativity as the soul of healthy productivity.

Indeed, management can be seen as a kind of art; management is “a journey in aesthetic space” (Guillet de Monthoux, 1993, p. 4). Aesthetics exists in the space between scientific knowledge and the moral realm and offers a context of knowing beyond the rhetorical, and of understanding which is inaccessible to proponents of a narrowed efficiency or rhetorical vision. In this context, art is a beacon, an inspiration for managers and organizers who are not content with a world of indicators, short-term gains and the progressive fragmentation of everything, a world where, according to Oscar Wilde’s well-known maxim, everyone knows the price of everything, but no one knows the value of anything. Yet every human action has an aesthetic dimension, and if we do not cultivate beauty and truth, ugliness and fakeness automatically emerge. Without a conscious sense of beauty, managing has no living meaning. This sense needs to be reclaimed, even though the path leading there is neither simple nor can it even be clearly described and planned. However, it can and should be actively sought. Pierre Guillet de Monthoux (1998) proposes that managers visit museums and galleries and read books. They teach how to deal with the complexity of ideas, how not to be satisfied with simplifications and to appreciate that the world is infinitely diverse and complex. It is wiser to draw from this diversity than to limit it by force.

This approach has support even in traditional management ideas, such as Ross Ashby's principle of requisite variety (1956), according to which the management subsystem must be at least as complex as the system it manages. This means that good, healthy management must understand and take into account, and ideally also benefit from, the diversity of the organization for which it is responsible (Zawiślak, 1984).

Another example of management based on the principle of necessary diversity, which is able to act as a practical way of challenging rhetorical simplicity and thus make space for poetic complexity, is the collegial system (Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). The university, which is an extremely complex organizational form with conflict and dissent built into its normal functioning, has developed over hundreds of years based on seniority and the representation of various layers and levels of professions. In collegial management, it is assumed that the highest value is knowledge and science, and the pursuit of these must be subordinated to everything else, including profit and politics. It is a management system based on the economy of the commons, where a professional group makes the most important decisions, and the leader is elected as *primus inter pares* for a limited period of time. After the term of office has passed, she returns to her original professional position.

The awareness that an alternative exists has radical potential and threatens the existing system. The power of the poetic is conducive to such awareness. That is why rhetorical management so strongly insists on eradicating, filling in all the blanks (Höpfl, 1994). Poetic reality can be a real threat to linear management as well as a source of hope for its dissenters. What rhetorical management defines and stigmatizes as our weakness is, in fact, our strength. We are too complex for the rigid constructs that linear management is imposing on us: no living human is a *homo economicus* – it is a dead construct (Fleming, 2017), and this discredits neoliberal management and exposes its ineffectiveness, even in an era when it monopolizes everything. There exists an alternative – poetic awareness reveals it. Celebrating, exploring, and using complexity to coordinate organizations is an act of radical dissent and a revolutionary approach to management. That is why ideas of weak management and art-based management are much more than just models and theories. They are an invitation to build new, vibrant organizations, even in a world dominated by linear neoliberal polarities. When a critical mass of complexity gathers, we may yet all be able to discover the potential of vertical time and space.

Yet gathering a critical mass is not easy. Ideas and mindsets are not enough; not even the bravest uses of negative capability help to change the world if we work alone. Research from 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, shows that almost half of British university employees are desperately lonely in their professional work (Belkhi et al., 2019). Among PhD students, the number is even higher and amounts to 64 per cent. The feelings of isolation and

overwork have become norms, yet frequently without the energizing contact with other people. We work online or in anonymous pseudo-“open” offices, even in sectors of society where many people still believe that they are making a difference and providing a contribution to the common good. The commons call for communityship, which is increasingly hard to find. Instead, both higher education and many other workplaces are focused on a cult of “excellence”. Indeed, the commons and commoning link to a poetic quality of living and organizing through the mutuality and vulnerability that are its very moral fabric (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020).

Excellence, perfection is not part of the human condition. Many religions limit it only to divine beings and see human attempts to claim it as a wicked usurpation, a manifestation of pride (Kostera, 2020). As the biblical book of *Proverbs* says, pride comes before a fall. Pride is the root of all evil because it means self-deification. In Christianity, it is a cardinal sin because it causes loss of grace; it is the sin from which all others arise. There is a tendency in organizations that pride themselves on their excellence to generate a massive, dark phenomenon known as the organizational shadow (Bowles, 1991). When imperfections are driven out of conscious interpersonal communication, a shadow develops in secret, which sometimes explodes with enormous, destructive force in the eruption of sudden crises, violence, bullying. The paradox is that, the more management tries to control and steer the culture of the organization, the better the ground is created for the development of the shadow. Striving for perfection, not seeing the limitations of such behaviour, organizations lose the ability to see their mistakes. Managers project all negative signals onto others: competitors, customers, trade unions, employees. People working in such cultures often feel uncomfortable and depressed, and there is a tendency to develop serious problems such as depression, burnout, even waves of suicide. Management does not accept negative signals as feedback, which would allow the organization to learn from mistakes, but uses positive feedback – more of the same: more denial, more pressure, more perfection. Instead of learning, a vicious cycle occurs and makes the leadership and communication system more and more toxic and sinister. Finally, the organization becomes literally hell: people get physically ill, feel like they are suffocating, while the indicators of excellence increase, managers receive larger and larger bonuses for excellent management, apathy prevails and the feeling that nothing can be done, a paralysing lack of agency (Gabriel, 2012). The only way to solve this problem is to integrate weaknesses and negativity, and admit that humans are imperfect. Poetics shows the path towards such an integrative view. Only the light of consciousness can overcome the darkness of the shadow; only human fragility can save us from hell.

Rhetorical management cannot deal with it. It is unable to express weakness, failure, sadness, or mourning. Where these feelings are absent, there

arises a culture based on the breaking of an important archetypal taboo, which results in miasma (Gabriel, 2012). Organizational miasma is a metaphor for a deadly culture, with no known remedy. People try to deal with it as individuals; quite often, by posting and commenting on things that pose moral dilemmas for them on social media. But this is not a good context for catharsis; there is no compassion there, no restraint. It does not produce critical mass for communityship (Seymour, 2020).

In 1922, the North American sociologist William Ogburn wrote about cultural lag. It happens when humanity creates new solutions, new technologies, but does not know how to use them in a way that is beneficial for itself (and for the planet). Social change is important and necessary, but culture should be adapted respectfully to new conditions. Power and wealth are working according to their own interests and, as a result, we have connectedness that makes us isolated, social media that makes us antisocial. People working for the common good have no space for connecting, and this is yet another paradox that has become normalized. Neoliberalism attacks the paradox as it does every crack in its incessant rhetorical stream: by filling up the inconsistencies with yet more rhetorics (Höpfl, 1994). It aims at doing away with things that are not linear, such as silence, inspiration, doubt, unknowing. Acquiring excellence instead of experiencing beauty: a canon without transcendence, a riddle without mystery, an omnipotence without humility. Finally, belonging without presence.

The incredible vitality of the Extinction Rebellion movement and its ability to mobilize huge numbers of people, as well as the momentum of other political and social movements such as the recent Yellow Vests, were supported through social media but not limited to them (Hedges, 2015). Social media do not create bonds, but they very well may help to support bonds that develop in real space. Perhaps, if used judiciously, even in poetic space? Extinction Rebellion is created in a “slow” way, face to face, by people gathering in premises, meeting in houses, in contexts of nature and cities. However, writing on the internet, as any creative process, can be used as a poetic weapon, challenging and questioning linear orders, revealing labyrinthine complexities underneath seemingly straightforward hierarchies (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera, 2015). It too, is, in the end, physical. It, too, requires dedication, patience, and discipline. Good writing is a gift and a mystery, as many authors such as William Blake, Ursula Le Guin, Leonard Cohen, and Patti Smith all witness. It is not a programmable activity, embedded in place and time. It is about participation in something beyond the boundaries of the ego, in a space that has its own rhythms and its own laws. It is devotion (Smith, 2017).

Writing science, including social science, also has a poetic side, of course, in addition to the requirements of rigour and method. Swedish sociologist Stefan Svallfors (2020) proposes that, in order to write a scientific text, the author

has to enter dark spaces of the mind: uncertainty, anger, fear, fighting one's own limitations, even to the point of self-hatred. When writing something that does not exist yet, there are no easy paths or obvious creations. Sometimes one has to push oneself beyond rationality, trust one's own weakness, blindly struggle with concepts where one does not know for certain what they will turn out to be – or even if they will turn out at all. The scientist, like the poet, like the writer, although with less beautiful results, engages with dimensions beyond the linear. A scientific writer also benefits from learning to be obsessive enough, to achieve the right level of terror, to feel the right amount of panic in searching for the expression of the unexpressed. Often nothing comes out; sometimes – something; rarely – something needed to deepen the understanding of the world. All attempts, made sincerely, are necessary. This is a feature of vertical time and vertical writing (Helin, 2023); of writing and researching differently, in ways that open new doors of compassion and understanding (Boncori, 2022). It concerns what we write about, and how we write. We can try writing in ways that are less linear, less ordered. In itself, it may not change the world, but we invite readers to take a dive beyond the surface and into the blanks and twists of the text. As we have done with this chapter.

WORK

Work is an important aspect of the human condition (Weil, 1942/2015). It gives us an identity that determines our place in the world, among and with other people. Work is part and parcel of human sociality and our social identity (Harding, 2013). People work to survive, but also to mark our presence in the life of our own and that of others – to become part of society and bring something into the common good. The work of a craftsman is hard and demanding. British sociologist Richard Sennett (2008) argues that “making is thinking” (p. 9) in the book *The Craftsman*. For him, craftsmanship is “an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake” (p. 9). There is an impulse in all of us that makes good craftsmanship something profoundly human, indeed “there is an intelligent craftsman in most of us” (p. 11). This is something much broader than employment or employability, which require qualifications. But craftsmen need to become qualified in order to work as grinders, violin makers, or, indeed, scientists. The work of an artist is also about craftsmanship, although arguably not only that – this is a reflection from my current ethnographic study concerning the work of artists. Work understood in this way has its own rhythm, its own internal coherence, which, when given full attention, helps to achieve mastery and feel unity with the activities performed. This brings deep, sensual, and spiritual pleasure at the same time. Zygmunt Bauman, in a private communication, told me that the closest he was to feeling happy was the satisfaction from the feeling of a job well done. Both

Sennett and Bauman were convinced that such work required many years of practice and constant commitment. There is no shortcut to satisfaction; in fact, such a shortcut would be the denial of its meaning. The long, difficult road is as much a part of it as the joy of the work, the effect, a well-deserved moment of rest. All these elements are part of a larger, organic whole.

The well-known Dreyfus learning model consists of five stages from beginner, through proficient, to master (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). The first three stages involve increasingly better mastery of principles and rules, increasingly better recognition of the situation, and selecting the appropriate rule or sets of rules for it. Increasing proficiency is achieved by analysing situations and making rational decisions by matching actions to the context. For example, a novice driver learns when to shift into a higher gear based on speed. He must constantly monitor it, and when the indicator shows a certain value, change gear. At the second, advanced level, the driver can tell by the sound whether it is time to change gear. The highest level of competence, that is, level three in the Dreyfus model, is characterized by high complexity. The driver knows that the road is sometimes slippery, knows when this may happen, knows that driving uphill is different from on a flat road. All these factors require collective rules and action plans. A learner can stay at this level for the rest of his life, modifying and developing more and more precise procedures and plans. However, there are two higher levels. There is a gap between levels three and four. To move to level four, one has to “lose” something: the analytical thinking has to give way to intuition. The master, or the person on the fifth level, loses the monitoring mode of consciousness. She becomes one with the work she is doing, and the involvement is so intense that the sensations come from the action rather than from the individual’s nervous or cognitive system. For example, it is said that Sarah Bernhard continued to play her role in *Tosca* after she had broken her leg. This is understandable because, although she most likely felt pain, it was not the focus of her attention during the performance. At the same time, the master is absolutely focused on what she is doing and her attention is woven into the context of the here and now, not point-wise as in ordinary experience.

Development of skill, as in the Dreyfus model, depends on stability. Yet the neoliberal workplace distinctly lacks stability. Actually, the new emerging social class, potentially threatening to the social order, is called the precariat – because of its precarious work conditions (Standing, 2011). These are vulnerable people without permanent employment, without social security, without the possibility of stability on temporary contracts; so-called “junk jobs”, seasonal workers, without any of the guarantees that employment used to offer. Unlike the traditional proletariat, however, this class has no very obvious avenues for self-organization – it is dispersed, often overloaded with

responsibilities, and without the space to seek contact with others in a similar situation and to organize itself.

Being a professor is, in the deepest sense, a dedication. It is worth remembering that the word professor comes from the Latin verb *profiteor*, meaning to confess, to declare, but also to perform (a profession) or teach. The word profession also comes from this verb, which refers to the religious profession, that is, vows, but also to professions such as a doctor or a scientist. In the sense in which I use the word here, it also refers to a craftsman, a sculptor, a seamstress, a skilled worker like my grandfather, a grinder. He had the precision, the accuracy and focus at work, which Sennett writes about only when he worked in a cooperative, for the commons, not in a large factory, where he earned much more but had no influence on his conditions and the way of doing work. State communism was based on the alienation of labour, just like capitalism. When a human being works hard for someone, be it an investor or the all-powerful state, work ceases to be a journey and dedication and begins to be enslavement. Some professions have specific ceremonies dedicated to them. For a monk, it is the moment of profession, that is, an act of committing to follow the monastic rule; for a doctor, it is the Hippocratic oath; and for a scientist, it is the doctoral oath. This moment, while important, does not define or explain what happens next; it is only a gate that then opens. On the other side, there is the work process itself and related values. They provide a compass that helps create what has authentic quality, guided by the so-called embodied motivation. Workers in organizations of the commons maintain moral balance and support community values and fulfil its needs. This cannot be replaced by management models or techniques. These values spring from the actual bodies of the commons (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020).

Indeed, neoliberal capitalism has led to the alienation of labour so powerful that even nineteenth-century rationalizers could not have dreamed of it. The workers and clerks, whose work a hundred years ago turned into a nightmare of repeated activities, often without any personal or social meaning, were joined by the once-sacred autonomous professions: medicine, law, and academia. Capitalism has turned the work of all people into a nightmare. A lot of the work under neoliberalism is organized and managed in such a way that it can truly be called “bullshit jobs” (Graeber, 2018). People hate their work, feel degraded by it, fall into despair, commit suicide, and die from exhaustion (Fleming, 2017). Organizations are mass murderers of an important part of a person’s self and life, which is created during good, meaningful work (Harding, 2013). By making everything superficially rational, they fill in all the empty spaces, killing poetry and the poetic impulse (Höpfl, 1994). Neoliberalism has turned quality into a facade that needs to be polished to shine with all the fashionable colours and slogans: excellence, productivity, innovation, all combined with youth and enthusiasm (Alvesson, 2013). One has

to “love” one’s job at all times, even if you work for Amazon in a job that feels completely devoid of meaning and where you perform tasks that have nothing to do with who you are and bring little to the common good.

Alienation has become almost all-encompassing. A worker under neoliberalism has to sell himself all the time, convincingly show how brilliant he is, better than all “competitors”. The cult of the facade is not only unrelated to work understood as devotion but also undermines all development of real craftsmanship. Everything that is hidden behind the facade is consigned to the past as irrelevant, even non-existent, *only in our mind*. A worker has to deaden her feelings with *positive thinking*, harass the mind with *self-confidence*, and manage the heart and the talent. And if it does not work, there is always yet another layer of individualization and fragmentation to be handed to the employee in the form of mindfulness programmes which in fact are a form of McMindfulness, a replacement for spirituality which prevents workers from seeking social and political transformation, in order to reinforce the neoliberal status quo (Purser, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, Richard Sennett did not find traces of craftsmanship in contemporary professions such as medicine. Organic work takes time and requires dedication and openness to what is unclear and ambiguous. Neoliberal rhetorical management has washed it all away with linearity: indicators, metrics, rankings. There is no room for practising the complex relationship between consciousnesses and embodied and experienced knowledge for devotion.

Taking poetic management seriously means to

acknowledge the poetic aspects of experience and to understand the contribution of poetics to learning is to confront embodied ambivalence, to encounter condensed affect and to become aware of unconscious rhythms and patterns. The recognition of the power of poetic experience has important implications. ... Lived experience practices the heart. (Höpfl, 1994, p. 471)

As Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s Little Prince said, it is only with the heart that we can see rightly. Let’s practise the heart, and join the poetic revolution!

The poetic experience resists subjection and appropriation. It finds expression in the subversion of rhetoric. In other words, rhetoric is subject to its own overturning. (Höpfl, 1994, p. 472)

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2. Poetry as reflexive landscapes of inclusive potential

**Ilaria Boncori, Monika Kostera and
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EXPLORATIONS ACROSS PREPOSITIONAL LIMINAL SPACES

We thought of entitling this book “The Poetry *of* Organizing”, which connects us to the process of poetic endeavours, the act of writing, the way of organizing people, bodies, ideas, emotions, and work. But this book is very much also a reflection of poetry *in* organizing – where is the beauty, the joy, the hope, the connection in organizing, and writing about it? Who is it orchestrated by, inhabited, or even just noticed? Where is it located, and how does it move across workplaces, personal and professional identities, relationships, and tasks? We also want to consider poetry *for* organizing – what is the potential and value of poetry in organizing at the individual, social, and political level? Finally, we explore poetry *on* organizing, which will also be illustrated through poems in the second part of this book – what can poetry tell us about the world of work? What are the affective, embodied, and cognitive experiences of the everyday life of organizations and people therein that poetry can help us surface, problematize, embrace, or challenge?

This book delves into an exploration of poetry as a space which can be inhabited in a more inclusive manner compared to traditional academic texts about organizations and processes of organizing. The structure of this second chapter is inspired by critical engagement with prepositions and the spaces they hold in our language and thinking. These often overlooked parts of our spoken language and texts (especially in contrast to nouns and verbs that seem to occupy the centre stage of sentences and meaning-making) are the repositories of unconscious and conscious negotiations, knowledge, and even power relations. Prepositions, as perhaps hinted by their name, also force us to acknowledge and make decisions on positionalities and relationships, which are two key issues in inclusivity.

Formally and grammatically, in the English language, prepositions are used before a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase to indicate direction, time, place, location, spatial relationships, possession, or to introduce an object. Prepositions therefore can help us navigate liminal spaces of in-betweenness, blurring the boundaries between power and agency, resistance and quiescence, holding, colonizing, or reappropriating territories of inquiry and sensemaking. Like poetry, prepositions blur spaces while also populating and defining them – they connect across/between/about, bridge spaces to/from, signal a direction for/against, and mark exclusions in/out. They help us problematize meaning and positionalities between people and others, shift perspectives for/against, question temporalities before/after/beyond. Interested in exploring and untangling the space they hold between concepts, actors, knowledge, and places, here, in particular, we explore the shape-shifting potential of prepositions and meaning in the liminal space between *poetry* and *organizing*, by wandering (and wondering) across the meanderings of these prepositional liminal spaces of in-betweenness. Prepositions, although often only afforded a signposting role in relation to something else, can instead be used as powerful keys to unlock meanings. The following sections of this chapter will engage with each of these prepositional spaces (poetry *in* organizing; poetry *for* organizing; and poetry *on* organizing) to consider whether, and how, poetry can become a reflexive landscape of inclusive potential in organizations and processes of organizing.

POETRY *IN* ORGANIZING

In organizations we often talk *at* people, or *for* people, and *about* them. As such, traditional ways of writing in management and organization studies have favoured defined, linear, “neat” ways of writing that dismiss the unruliness, vagueness, and affective embodied nature of being in organizations as people (Höpfl, 1995). This sanitizing of academic writing is having an impact on the nature, access, and dissemination of academic work. Mats Alvesson, Yannis Gabriel, and Roland Paulsen (2017) argue that research in the social sciences has not only become impoverished in quality but also in its meaning; studies have become of little value and impact to society, and publishing is used in this writing factory to increase one’s chances of promotion and probation within the academic machine/game, rather than to produce meaningful research. Maybe, then, it’s not just about what we study but also how we write about it. Within this field of inquiry, norms around writing academic texts have included the supreme reign of impersonal language, disembodied narrative, and “objective” statements. Indeed, as a student, I (IB) was taught to never use the first person pronoun “I” as the researcher/writer is not important, and what we need to focus on is an objective, emotionless, cautious representation of the

data. To do so, the ideal data set is constituted by large masses of numerical data points – the more the better, really – that should be analysed through software and algorithmic intelligence. Percentages, statistics, and other numerical outputs are sought to generalize findings, homogenize, infer, and assume, and computers then analyse these to generalize. Data need to be tested and replicable to be “proper” science and rigorous academic work. Even this book – a project that we as co-authors value and that brings us joy – doesn’t “count” in the colonizing imposition of academic metrics of quality and publication .

But what does count, and for whom? Qualitative work needs depth, imagination, layering. Can you test and replicate poetry? Can you test beauty, emotion, the body? Surely, these all have a place in the life of organizations. *Surely*, expecting people to pretend that their personal lives, bodies, and emotions have no bearing in the workplace is both pretentious and absurd. And yet, our research shows that this is still an expectation not only in writing about organizations and organizing, but in the everyday life of work itself, in the way line managers relate to “subalterns”, in the relationships established between people and institutions, in rewards and entitlements, and the majority of other institutional structures and processes.

Needless to say, after trying to conform to what I (IB) had read and learned about academic writing, I realized that the traditional way of reading, thinking of, and writing about organizations didn’t quite work for me. Rather than inferring causality, I wanted to talk to people and ask them why. I wasn’t really focused on testing hypotheses and building models. Instead, I was interested in the granularities of experience, the textures of everyday sensemaking, the differences within and among people. I wanted to focus on what is said and meant by individuals and organizations, how they feel about their environment, but also what is not said, and why. I strove to explore the nuances and gradients of sensemaking – scratching out the surface to uncover tensions, inaccuracies, power dynamics, and incongruencies; unmasking taken-for-granted notions; unpacking issues and “following ideas around”, to borrow Sara Ahmed’s language (Ahmed, 2019). As a critical management scholar, I am concerned with power dynamics for groups and individuals, and structures that challenge, resist, or maintain inequalities.

Poetry is difficult to define, although many have tried. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (2020) remembers being taught that

Poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes.

Poetry – like art – is also about being and becoming through poetry; it’s as much in the process and the writing as in the text. Poetry goes beyond the

merits of quantification, as exemplified in the beautiful poem by Salvatore Quasimodo memorized by all Italian children during their school years:

*Ognuno sta sul cuor della terra,
trafitto da un raggio di sole:
ed è subito sera.*

Each of us stands alone on the heart of the earth,
pierced by a ray of sun:
and it's suddenly evening.
(Our translation)

Poetry then seems particularly appropriate to subvert this disembodied and “objective” norm around scientific writing as it invites us to slow down, stop amassing data and statistics, and instead to listen, to listen vertically, and to write vertically (Helin, 2020). As such, poetry is also the song of an epistemological stance that is rooted in beauty, intensity, openness, and the embracing of others. Poetry can be seen as an autoethnographic method in the way it allows us to link the individual to the collective and the universal, through resonance and the sharing of experiences. Poetical knowing trusts the body and emotions, without subjugating them to logic and intellect. Writing poetry in academic texts in the field of management and organization studies is a political act as it challenges masculine notions of what organizing means, and what professionalism and quality look like within and outside academia. Traditional academic writing for publication, especially in the social sciences, tends to erase the multiple “I”s within the “we”, even in qualitative work – there are only so many quotes one is able to include within the small space allowed through the limited word count of an academic journal article. Poetry, on the other hand, illuminates the personal and individual while connecting it to the universal.

Poetry is related to *poiesis* – which invites re/writing and un/knowning making, remaking, or even revolution (Threadgold, 1997). As such, *poiesis* is located within creative territories of knowing and understanding that invite action – whether linked to materiality or the essence and speaking of being. This can be thought of as a way of organizing that is also linked to a generative epistemological stance premised on openness, ignorance, failure, vulnerability, and the un/knowning. This approach is often rare in masculine fields like management and organization studies, as poetics foster meaning-making and interpretation that espouse vagueness and ambivalence in contrast to the oversimplification and generalization of phenomena and people, which does not reflect the complexity of the “flux of experience” (Höpfl, 1995, p. 176).

This nature of poetry, to me (IB), is well captured by the Japanese expression *wabi-sabi* (侘寂, or わびさび). As explored by Beth Kempton (2018), this

concept is very complex and hard to define, although Western trends have tried to appropriate it and simplify it in relation to fashion, artwork, and lifestyle. Wabi-sabi is the combination of two separate words that are also used independently: wabi (subdue taste), refers to finding beauty in simplicity (but not in a simplistic approach) through in-depth spiritual engagement; and sabi (antique look, tranquility), which is linked to the passing of time, change, and immanence. Like poetry that is juxtaposed to neoliberal norms of academic writing and metrics, wabi-sabi marks a stark contrast in approach to the fast-paced modern lifestyle and “promises to whisper potent wisdom to those who slow down enough to investigate, and approach with open heart” (Kempton, 2018, p. 2). Although this form of quiet content may seem in contrast to passion and activism, it is not void of emotion. Like poetry, it requires careful and slow listening that is engaged with both sensorially and affectively, to reflect on not only *what* we see but also *how* we see, and ourselves. “Wabi-sabi is seeing the world not with the logical mind but through the feeling heart” (Kempton, 2018, p. 6), filled with authenticity and inspiration that favour sensitivity over strategy. As a reminder to the detached researcher, wabi-sabi is an intuitive response, an approach to life and beauty that is centred in experience, like art (Leavy, 2009), and by being in the world and feeling part of it.

This concept, like poetry, can be seen as a counter-response to the need for linearity and for the enclosure of reality into neat boxes that can be bordered, ordered, and classified into models and frameworks that give us the illusion of simple solutions to the nuanced complexities of life and organizing. Further, wabi-sabi “is an acceptance and appreciation of the impermanent, imperfect and incomplete nature of everything” (Kempton, 2018, p. 5) – an acknowledgement of individuality and difference. The feeling of wabi-sabi is personal and distinct for each of us as it is embedded in our own positionalities and experiences of the world, and yet it is a notion that is understood collectively – albeit seldom defined (Kempton, 2018). The wisdom of wabi-sabi is often in the unsaid and unspoken as powerful repositories of messages. It is also in the appreciation of beauty that is not just loud, joyful, and obvious; in the valuing of the passage of time, use, and decay. Wabi-sabi can illuminate moments of beauty and decay, an impression that leaves a print on the heart, or an aesthetic arrest. And so, wabi-sabi can be thought of as a form of organizing that – like poetry – is concerned with affective motion, sensory knowing, the connection with the past, and our being in the present.

A cardinal tenet of the wabi-sabi approach is the value of imperfection and vulnerability. This is illustrated in another concept coming from Japan called *kintsugi* (金継ぎ), which is an artistic intervention whereby the cracks of a broken object are highlighted – rather than hidden – by mixing lacquer with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Rather than trying to conceal a weakness or an imperfection, the crack is rendered stronger and more beautiful through

the golden joinery, valued and celebrated. Beauty is found in the cracks and in the new object that builds on its broken past. This echoes the valuing of vulnerability as an epistemic positioning (Kaasila-Pakanen et al., 2024), where vulnerability is seen as receptivity and openness to the ability to affect and be affected by others, which is so fundamental to poetry in its exchange and relationality between the individual and the collective.

Because of its very nature, which is rooted in being and experience, reality and materiality, but also in the affable affect and abstract aspects of human existence, poetry can draw from aesthetic and embodied ways of knowing to speak of the marginalized – or the unspeakable – through silences, metaphors, and rhythm (Owton, 2017). Silences can be imposed, as gagging orders and instruments of erasure, but also become spaces for reflection and percolation. As Audre Lorde suggests: “women are at war against the tyrannies of silence ... we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (1978, p. 44). Holding a space of silence through poetry is not to silence or be silenced – but instead to hold a space of absence that is loud in its deficit and deprivation. It links to the notion of *negative capability* discussed in the previous chapter – as a way of embracing the unknown, what cannot be described and defined; a way to reject the need for over-explication, production, linearity, and homogenization. It goes against the grain of mainstream management and organization studies needing to create models and frameworks to understand phenomena, fit everything into a category and everybody into a box with a clear label on it.

Processes of organizing focused on inclusion are often peppered with or ignited by ruptures, diffractions, dis-junctions. The term “verse” itself, in its Latin etymological origins, suggests a line of text but also the act of re/turning, going against, not following the straight road ahead. As poetry brings together narrative and aesthetic sensibilities, these fruitful encounters can be understood as a *stop* – “a moment of critical and aesthetic reflexivity that appropriates the aesthetics of the experience (the emotions, feelings, sensations) and uses them to transform action from that point” (Vettraino et al., 2019, p. 219). These moments can be surfaced through non-traditional academic writing as well as visual methods. As such, poetry and poesis afford affective and embodied reflexivity for both the writer and the reader or receiver of the poem. As described in the previous chapter, encounters with art can become moments when a new door opens in the everyday space – this is true for visual art and for narrative arts-based encounters, such as those with poetry. These moments can be arresting and rupturing through these “stops”, and unlock a new experience or perspective.

Although what we write is important, there is power and change-maker potential in how we write too. We are reminded of Helene Cixous’s words:

Writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. (Cixous, 1976, p. 879)

Inspired by Geertz (1973), Mats Alvesson (2023, p. 1) writes about “thick description” as

an alternative, going into empirical material, exploring this in depth and search for layers of meaning in order to gain insights and ideas, quite different from collecting large volumes of data in order to “go upwards” and aggregate the empirical material. Thick description calls for rich material studied in depth, an idea and intentional depth in interpretive work.

Poetry then, although not necessarily thick data in the sense intended by Alvesson, can be seen as “deep and expansive” material that delves inwards and takes space by contaminating the intellectual, emotional and embodied sources of knowing, bringing memory of the past and hope for the future. This is particularly the case for poetry that is unrestricted, uncodified, and unruly. It allows us to embark on a quest for meaningful writing that defies the trite academic re/productive context denounced by Alvesson, Gabriel, and Paulsen where the stress is on getting published rather than on what is getting published, whether relevant or interesting. The challenging of structures, style, and content then becomes an isomorphism to be challenged in search of meaning (Harley and Cornelissen, 2022). When academic success is premised on publication, keeping to the beaten track of academic publishing can be seen as the safest option. But for whom?

POETRY *FOR* ORGANIZING

Poetry, then, can be an important political project for organizing in a way that is more inclusive, open, and vulnerable. In the US, the social and political value and potential of poetry are well exemplified through the inclusion of poetry in the inaugural events of four US presidents (Biden, Obama, Clinton, and Kennedy). For example, when Amanda Gorman, America’s youngest-ever inaugural poet, read her heartfelt poem “The Hill We Climb” at Joe Biden’s presidential inauguration – her words reverberated through crowds and from screens worldwide. Her work became the number-one bestselling book in Black and African American Poetry on Amazon, showing that poetry is not a dead art form, and it is not just for the elites. These poems are momentous, addressing challenges of the time, bringing critique as well as hope:

- 1961: Robert Frost read “The Gift Outright” for John F. Kennedy’s inauguration
- 1993: Maya Angelou read “On the Pulse of Morning” for Bill Clinton’s first inauguration
- 1997: Miller Williams read “Of History and Hope” for Bill Clinton’s second inauguration
- 2009: Elizabeth Alexander read “Praise Song for the Day” for Barack Obama’s first inauguration
- 2013: Richard Blanco read “One Today” for Barack Obama’s second inauguration
- 2021: Amanda Gorman read “The Hill We Climb” for Joe Biden’s inauguration.

As a political project – whether in the sense of parties and government politics or in relation to the dynamics of power in everyday organizing – poetry can be seen as a way of researching and writing differently (Boncori, 2022) in organizations and processes of organizing that surface the individual in relation to the collective, and vice versa. Donna Haraway (2016, p. 58) highlights precisely the relationality of this practice when writing about *sympoiesis* as “a word for worlding-with, in company”. As such, poetry brings people together through the commonality and exceptionality of life experience across generations, fields of inquiry, and socio-cultural backgrounds. When understood as a type of autoethnographic endeavour (but also on its own as a method), poetry is firmly rooted in the notion of the researcher as the site of academic inquiry, and as such requires reflexive engagement with positionalities, including intersectional approaches to privilege. It occupies intricate positionalities of privilege and oppression.

Poetry – especially in its more political interventions – can be a tool for organizing. To borrow Sarah Faulkner’s words, “poetry can unmask hidden cultural assumptions, which is why it is valuable in activist projects” (2018, p. 19). It can be a way to organize for and against, a political and critical choice to address power inequity, potential violence, and marginalization caused by Western-Anglo-centric ways of understanding and writing about organizing, which fail to acknowledge the wide range of positionalities and diversity of identities in research. It should come as no surprise that poetic inquiry has been espoused and championed by feminists (see Faulkner, 2018), Black researchers and activists (see, e.g., Lorde, 1978/2019) as a methodology. For example, “street poetry” (Batta and Boncori, 2024) and “call and response” poetry (Davis and McTier, 2023) have been spaces of resistance and challenge against inequality and the status quo. Further, these have been powerful ways to honour and maintain ways of organizing that are cultural and historical, but often unrecognized as legitimate by the mainstream.

The use of poetry for organizing can be articulated in various ways – as a method it can be used to interpret data that are generated in other forms (e.g., interviews, focus groups, textual, or visual data), whereby the researchers draw on the data thematically and generate poems. For instance, critical poetic inquiry is “the process of using poetic devices to critically analyze a research inquiry to advance relevant forms of justice and produces research poetry as a product” (Davis, 2021, p. 3). In this case, poetry is both a process and a product of engagement. Poetry can also be used as data – poems written by participants or the researcher can be analysed and interpreted. Poetry can also exist beyond its value as data – as ignition, inspiration, exploration.

We are low but not alone
 stuck in the margins
 trapped in vicious schemes
 opaque structures
 invisible straight jackets
 trying silence us forever.
 Looking and pointing
 from a distance
 and never getting dirty.

and yet we rise.

we don't need you
 to give us a voice
 we have one of our own.
 silenced by the masters
 ridiculed by the complacent
 distorted by the powerful.

and yet we speak.

we see privilege un/conferred
 speaking for us
 talking over us
 lying about us.
 They shout
 in an effort to erase our stories
 maintain histories
 return us to othering

and yet we fight.

Although poetry can itself be regulated through rigid norms that exclude and act as gatekeeping technologies – for example, on the format, length, and structure of the writing – poetry can be loose of limitations and free in expression.

As such, it becomes a more democratic and inclusive way of narrating organizational experiences that blurs the researcher and the researched – a way to resist the “academicwritingmachine” (Henderson, Honan, and Loch, 2016) premised on disembodied, impersonal writing that is highly codified through “academese”. That is, resistance through the provision of “alternate voices to the dominant narratives communicated by interconnected institutions of power” (Cali Prince, 2021). The language used in spoken poetry is often more accessible and more colloquial than standard academic language, and at times even based on slang. There are examples of poetry in most languages and cultures – whether codified in rigid structures, considered part of the “classics” repertoire, modern versions, or poetry performed through the spoken word. Poetry is one of the most pervasive ways of communicating the lived experience, and yet, in academia, we often relegate it to the realm of literary tradition. By doing so, poetry becomes a type of writing at the margins, which is appropriate to convey sentimentality and “feminine” matters like love, but not “scientific enough” to communicate academic research.

The traditional Western-focused and Anglo-centred way of writing about organizations and organizing is a form of gatekeeping, a way to “colonize the experiences of marginalized people through the value placed on authority, linearity, and productivity” (van Eck, van Amsterdam, and van den Brink, 2021). These epistemological and practical impositions then render dissenting or different voices “othered”, cast in a position of marginalization and often isolation. Poetry can be considered both an affective and embodied method of inquiry (Thanem and Knights, 2019), but also as a powerful epistemological project that resists normative ways of thinking about academic writing in management and organization studies (Batta and Boncori, 2024). Read as an example of a “situated point of view”, to borrow language from Donna Haraway, poetry becomes a particular lens into experience, allowing access to a particular knowledge – as knowledge is always positional, situated in a specific socio-cultural-historic context and environment, and filtered through an individual and their group’s personal, bodily, and embodied experience.

The affective and relational potential of poetry – and its link to inclusion and activism – can be seen in many poetic forms, but perhaps most of all in street poetry and spoken word. Designed for performance rather than the page, these poetic forms have their roots in oral traditions and performance. Spoken word can include elements of rap, hip-hop, storytelling, theatre, and music. It is very rhythmic, drenched in emotion and affective engagement. Brian Massumi (2015, p. 3) links the notion of affect to hope and talks about it in a way that can be considered liminal, as a way to address the “margin of manoeuvrability” to consider “where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do”. He highlights how his use of the term “affect” differs from emotion (although the two are often used interchangeably in the literature), and instead focuses on the

capacity for affecting or being affected. This capacity is in itself a vehicle for inclusivity in organizing as,

when you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way that you might have a moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. (Massumi, 2015, p. 4)

Poetry becomes a door to affective experience that is multi-layered – descriptive, imaginary, embodied, realistic. It can be used to share and make sense of macro societal issues – war, genocide, poverty, racism – or the smallest and most ephemeral of details in everyday life. Poetry is about the extraordinary and the common, or perhaps it is about the extraordinary *in* the common and ordinary. Therefore, poetry belongs to everyone who has a voice and wants to share it, beyond academic status, educational achievements, and professional hierarchies – one need not be a certified poet to write and enjoy poetry.

When the topic of study is censored and the ways we approach or communicate it are gated and normalized, the shunning of poetry within studies of organizations and organizing is a form of epistemic injustice. It can even become a form of oppression, defined by Dotson (2014, p. 116) as “a persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinder one’s contributions to knowledge production”, which is both a by-product and a feeder into social and political oppression, perpetuating marginalization and exclusion. At the very least, the exclusion of some forms of expression under the pretence of “scientific writing” can be seen as a type of “intellectual arrogance” that “foster[s] the intellectual vices of timidity, servility ... and silence ... in other agents”, and “produces ignorance by silencing others (both preventing them from speaking and causing their assertions to misfire) and by fostering self-delusion in the arrogant themselves” (Tanesini, 2016, p. 71). Xavier Renteria-Uriarte (2023) links this to “hermeneutical injustice” as “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization” (Fricker, 2007, p. 158). Like social myths, as discussed by Renteria-Uriarte (2023), poetry can be a way to subvert political structures used by academic elites to exercise power and control over people, institutions, and technologies. Therefore, the very instrument used by those who aim to have inclusive, different, or alternative ways of writing and understanding organizations and organizing is hailed as improper, not “academic enough” or ridiculed, simply because it threatens the epistemic supremacy and power legitimacy of those in a position of privilege.

Relational engagement within this liminal space can be ignited through poetry, which can then also be seen as an opportunity to inhabit thresholds,

igniting change. In the editorial piece of a beautiful special issue of *Gender, Work & Organization*, Katie Beavan, Benedikte Borgström, Jenny Helin, and Carl Rhodes (2021) remind us that “to change writing and to write change, means re-evaluating the academic values that rest authority in conservative elitism, as well as realizing what nonelite knowledge are suppressed in that process”. Nuno Guimarães-Costa, Miguel Pina e Cunha, and João Vieira da Cunha (2009) recall how poetry and arts-based methods can be used as technologies of organizing and cultural artefacts – which, like the political protest songs which can be described as “poetry in motion”, and their diffusion, do not require formal publication and “can be performed in open or in clandestine settings since they enjoy a licence similar to poetry” and “help ordinary people to cope with their everyday challenges and make sense of the social world around them” (2009, pp. 89–90). For Javiera Garcia-Meneses, Giazú Enciso Domínguez, and Iván Chanez-Cortés (2023), the use of poetry is a way of affecting and being affected, being allowed “to expand the materiality of words by focusing on the sensory and bodily experience of passing through (not just reading and interpreting) the text” and to allow the reader to experience complexity, as in their case of Chilean child welfare workers’ subjectivity production.

POETRY *ON* ORGANIZING

Traditional research on organizations and organizing has sought to impose the sanitizing of the professional experience not only on what we research and how we write about it, but also by stripping it of the human side of the work. Somehow, although women and the feminine have been part of the world of work and organizing for decades, and actually for millennia in their true meanings, we have been led to believe that bringing “personal life”, our bodies and emotions, to the workplace is inappropriate and even unprofessional. And so, discussing organizations and the corporate world has often become synonymous with “leaning in” to morph ourselves into the white, male, cis-gender, able-bodied ideal worker that is still dominant in the world of business; or assimilation into the norms and boundaries set by the privileged majority, even though corporate missions and vision statements brand themselves as inclusive workplaces. Against this backdrop, poetry can be a powerful way to investigate the “backstage” (Goffman, 1959) of organizations and organizing, beyond the branding and the shiny social media posts.

More has been written about poetry on organizations than poetry on organizing, and it has been used to challenge dominant and patriarchal discourses in management and organizational studies (e.g., Oresick, 1991; Coles and Oresick, 1995; Leggo, 2008; Darmer and Grisoni, 2011). It is important to consider alternative ways of writing about organizations and organizing to

avoid the top-tier publishing trap of homogenization and homologation, subjecting ourselves to playing it safe in this publishing game as “[t]he expectation for submitting to the top tier first breeds intellectual risk aversion and, ultimately, homogenization, blunting a radical edge” (Ashcraft, 2017, p. 4). This allows marginalized authors, experiences, voices, and texts to come to life and reclaim their space. In the edited book *Poetry and Work* (Walton et al, 2019), Jo Lindsay interrogates the relationship between work and poetry, inviting us to consider the blurred lines between the personal and professional spheres, and how drawing from poetry and other types of experimental writing can provide models for the workplace that are more free and less alienated/alienating. The authors show how social, political, and technological upheavals have a strong impact on the nature of work and how work appears or hides within poetry; and they ask if poetry is work or play, or something else completely. The book asks whether poetry and avant-garde and experimental writing can provide models for work that is less alienated and with more freedom. In the book *What Poetry Brings to Business*, Clare Morgan explores the deep but unexpected connections between business and poetry, showing how the creative energy, the emotional power, and the communicative complexity of poetry relate directly to the practical need for innovation and problem-solving that confronts business managers. Morgan explores the ways in which poetry unpacks complexity and flexibility of thinking, together with the ability to empathize with and better understand the thoughts and feelings of others. This, she argues, helps facilitate the entrepreneurial culture of an organization and develop imaginative solutions, and gives a better understanding of chaotic environments (see, e.g., Darmer and Grisoni, 2011).

In the context of social work, Furman and colleagues discuss how the use of poetry in their field is an established therapeutic tool to help people commit to lasting personal and systemic change, as well as to help them make sense of their circumstances by linking their inner worlds to the outer experience. This is achieved through valuing and legitimizing the individual experience and people’s subjectivities as “there is no one single truth, there is that which is constructed based upon a lifetime of experiences, values and meanings” (Furman et al., 2012, p. 7). Through various linguistic mechanisms – whether recognized as such or otherwise – like metaphors and allegorical imagination, poetry can discursively organize experiences in a way that the individual is linked to the universal human experience, with its joy and struggle. In their conclusion, the authors highlight something important – that

there is no magic formula for a poem, especially not one written for personal use. The poem does not need to be “good”, in the sense that literary criticism is not the essential goal of social work in any arena of the field. Rather, the essential goal is to illuminate some truth from the client’s perspective. This truth is universal, in

the sense that there are more than likely others experiencing the same feelings, but more so personal, subjective truth, the truth of experiences. (Furman et al., 2012, p. 13)

Although this flexibility and the allowance of imperfection or lack of anointed “poetry status” is somewhat allowed for respondents and those who are researched, somehow the pressure of being “good enough”, of what can be called poetry and who can define themselves as poets, seems to remain strong for researchers. Such engagement with a form of subjective, affective, and embodied writing that is in stark contrast to mainstream disembodied and impersonal ways of researching and writing about organizations and organizing still seems to be deemed somewhat “experimental”, even though writers have been engaged with poetry for millennia, across cultures and literatures. Perhaps this contrast also comes from a perspective of lack. As Furman suggests, creative endeavours such as poetry and arts-based methods, or the construction of one’s individual life space, are deeply personal acts, which demand more witnessing than expertise, thus perhaps de-centring the traditional authority of the researcher (Furman, 2004, 2005).

Poetry is often born out of a need to speak up – whether publicly or intimately. As such, the process of writing itself, and the sharing of it within a scholarly context – albeit scary in its exposure and vulnerability (Boncori, 2023) – is not just important in its value as output or textual artefact, but as a means of holding one’s truth, claiming authority, and re/claiming space within academic conversations (Richardson, 2000). It can be cathartic, igniting emotion, action, or relief. It can provide conscious awareness, feelings of empowerment, and reflexivity (Faiz, 2024). Noortje van Amsterdam captures this when she explains, “these texts wrote themselves, simply because they need to be in the world” (2024, p. 2) in relation to the touching collection of poems she wrote on living the aftermath of the experience of sexual violence. Poetry sheds light on affective embodied experiences that are inextricably integral to people’s experiences in the workplace, which are often cut out through the “sanitizing” of academic writing and as a marker of high scientific quality in this field (van Eck, van Amsterdam, and van den Brink, 2021). While poetry has been signposted as a way of “elevating the self beyond the milieu and malaise of the ordinary”, there is nothing wrong with poetry which focuses on the ordinary, the small, the personal, the insignificant, the dirty everyday life experiences that are traditionally cut out of management textbooks. Poetry should be for everyone, not just the poet (Davis and McIntosh, 2005, p. 85). Thus, poetry becomes a form of self-organizing that rejects manipulation and academic gatekeeping, and embraces the inclusion of embodied, affective, and vulnerable experiences, silences and emptiness, boundary-spinning and boundary-less sensemaking and knowledge production.

Like wabi-sabi, some words and expressions in a language may be so filled with socio-cultural knowledge and experience as to be almost untranslatable. Indeed, as famously noted by Heidegger and in an Italian popular saying, to translate is often to betray. This can also be the case with the embodied and affective experiences that people hold in organizations, which is why it is so important to include personal narratives and arts-based expression in research and testimonies of organizing. We, the authors, have all written poetry in more than one language, perhaps inhabiting those spaces and territories of meaning with different approaches, varied backgrounds, and narrative tapestries. Andrew Aramitage (2014) discusses how poetry has been used in organization studies as a way to help people tell their stories in the workplace – for example, in terms of reflexive practice to aid sensemaking around particular situations or positionalities (e.g., organizational management practices, leadership, performance management) and situated workplace realities. In a recent article, Rafia Faiz (2024) uses personal storytelling and poetic inquiry as a Pakistani Muslim woman academic in Canada to explore the role of mentorship in inclusivity and belonging among marginalized migrants. This evocative text brings to the fore the lived everyday experience of being and working in a context that is acknowledged as sexist and racist, thus sharing stories and perspectives that are normally left in the shadows of this professional context. To borrow her words:

Encouraging colleagues to express their lived experiences of resistance and resilience not only enriches research and scholarly discussions, but also aligns research, pedagogy and careers with lived realities. Although this approach may challenge conventional boundaries, clash with mainstream ideologies and meet with some skepticism, it does pave the way for a more inclusive, reflective and authentic set of practices; thereby contributing to a broader shift towards acknowledging and embracing diverse methodologies and perspectives. (Faiz, 2024, p. 7)

And so, how we write is important, as it opens up the ranks of academic activism (Beavan et al., 2021) that challenges epistemic oppression and silencing.

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3. Organizational poetry as an embodied feminist practice

**Emmanouela Mandalaki, Ilaria Boncori and
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Can poetry make sense
as academic knowledge?
Can we know each other
outside of the constructions
of conventionally
written or spoken
masculine language?
How does feminist language
translate onto the page?

.....
*The air is cold outside but I am boiling; my cheeks are blushing of agony in front
of the blank page,*

*once more.
I open the window to cool down my body, moving closer to the
screen, trying to relate to yours, looking for some connection and resonance; for
some space of and for*

*agreement, disagreement, creative (dis)comfort, provocation, support,
openness, joy, belongingness, connection, I guess. Some sort of 'safe',
inclusive space where otherness and difference can be expressed, heard,
validated for what they are without much justification.*

Is this a big ask?

*I know there is a senseless interface between us often,
but it feels as if our affective bodies are able to shake the stillness of our screens,
even for a moment, such that we can actually permeate and reach each other.*

Do you feel so too?

*As I am writing this text, I struggle to separate ideas from and into concepts and
from there to a structured*

'academic text' to fit the title of the chapter.

*It seems an impossible, almost ridiculous endeavor to speak 'of/about'
poetry and want to control its untamed flow, instead of just letting it flow;
to say in words more than words can ever say.*

*Asking myself how we might move beyond the primacy of masculine language in
organization studies*

*to create a feminist language that speaks (about) the body and its affects, I am
 urged to let poetry speak (of
 and from) itself. But still the power of academic words defeats me.
 I am urged though, because I realize that I don't have many answers, let alone
 'correct' ones and
 I feel the weight of this writing endeavor pushing me
 down, unsure about what I am supposed to write or say and what my legitimacy
 is in doing so.
 This undertaking seems so much bigger than my ability to conceive of and
 express.
 If anything, I would thus like to clarify that this writing does not intend to offer
 absolute truths
 about
 poetry as a feminist project or 'the good way' of connecting to the affective body
 and the senses.
 Recognizing the work of feminist thinkers, poets and authors who have offered
 inspiration for feminist researchers in organization studies to speak up against
 the logocentric and masculine forms of epistemic oppression subjecting differ-
 ent other bodies to forms of epistemic silence that chokes (Lorde, 2017, see also
 Dorion, 2021), the purpose is to rather explore the potentials of poetry, as a
 feminist language, to raise difficult questions even where answers do not straight-
 forwardly exist
 (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2022).*

BECOMING WITH FEMINIST POETRY

We – the writers and editors of this book – as non-native English speakers often feel suppressed by the “linguistic colonization” of English, including the rigid academese formats, which more often than not do not do justice to the very experiences researched and written in the academic text, including those of the sensing bodies that write. Faced with this and other conundrums shaping academic writing conventions, we here discuss poetry as a creative way to problematize the very heteronormative, masculine, and colonizing structures that promote hierarchical, power-laden cultures of exclusion and marginalization in neoliberal academia (Dar et al., 2020; Boncori, 2022). We rather wish to expel words that sweat, attentive as they are to the rhythm of affective, sentient bodies. Audre Lorde (1985) writes that through/with poetry, we can give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless – about to be birthed, but already felt. Odysseas Elytes,¹ in his fight against the oppressive regimes of his time, expressed how poetry creates this feeling of floating in suspension, the sensation of becoming “winds for the kites and kites for the winds, even when the sky collapses” (2004). Speaking of the potential of poetry to transmit women’s unruly embodiment, Cixous conceives of poetry as a practice of flying and travelling (Cixous, 1976); as a way of being attentive

to the senses of the skin that writes and uncensoring the body – namely, bodies not abiding by the masculine, heteronormative, ableist norms that we are socialized by in society and academia – to permeate the boundaries set by the dominant power structures of social and epistemic organization (Cixous, 1993; Höpfl, 2003).

Thinking, feeling, and becoming with the potentials of poetry to contribute to the feminist project for social and epistemic transformation/s, we cannot omit mentioning the works of Sappho, the archaic female poet and symbol of female homosexuality, who was perceived as lustful for her sexual orientation and faced exile. Sappho used a form of Lesbian poetry, going against heteronormativity and expressing desire between women. This retrospective journey to the work of feminist writers' poetry also brought us to the writings of Ericka Huggins, from her days in prison. Huggins's poems render heard "the sounds that come from the soul ... reach out and touch", "the tears in [the] laughter", the "oppression and the wish for its removal", "the natural power of people to resist/to smile/to laugh/to sing/shout/love/give" (Huggins, in Davis, 2016, pp. 114–15), shouting out for freedom.

Becoming with these inspirations, this writing, as a collective body of texts, seeks to pay tribute to black, brown, indigenous, but also white feminist writers and poets, who go beyond "whiteness" (understood as an institution, not a biological trait – see Ahmed, 2017), to speak of women's and *different others'* oppression. We are thinking, among others, of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Helene Cixous, Virginia Woolf, Marta Tikkanen, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alejandra Pizarnik, Joy Harjo, Lisa Bellel, Rupí Kaur, Noor Unnahar, Sylvia Plath. All these feminist thinkers found in poetry a medium to express embodied sensations of oppression and revolutionary hopes for resistance, to reclaim womanhood, otherness, difference, female, lesbian, and/or queer embodiment, as well as the fight for justice before the dominant colonizing and patriarchal, sexist orders of their respective times.

As Audre Lorde (1985) beautifully puts it, poetry offers access to the hidden feeling places of possibility within ourselves, "coin[ing] the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom". Following in the footsteps of these intellectual feminist "giants", the poetic exploration endeavoured in this collective body of texts thus humbly wishes to develop a feminist language, both as a form of *writing differently* from/through affective bodies (e.g., Gilmore et al., 2019; Pullen, Helin, and Harding, 2020); Boncori, 2022) and as a way of *writing different things* long silenced under the normative orders of epistemic organization (Clavijo, 2023; Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024; van Amsterdam, 2015, 2024). In doing so, we wish to nurture a space for feeling and reflection, but also of relationality, to conceive of poetry as a feminist language with the capacity to resist the dominant orders that confine writers', researchers', research

participants', and everyone's (involved in research) sensing bodies in masculine academia.

Feminist thinkers remind us of how poetry offers a feminist language to transmit the affects that linger on affective bodies, and to connect affectively with the Other, through the spaces that we share and those that we do not. By nurturing relationality, collaboration, care, shared responsibility, and *responsiveness* (i.e., the ability to respond and render each other capable to respond, see Barad, 2014), poetic language can nurture responsiveness and healing (Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024). This challenges the status quo of rational academic knowledge reproduction (Lorde, 1985), experienced rather as a potent tool for rethinking the language of and for organizations and organizing. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf (1929) writes that poetry allows us to expel the edges of the world – anguish and laughter – to “celebrate a feeling one used to have, so that one responds easily, familiarly, without troubling to check the feeling or compare it with any other” (pp. 17–19, cited in Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023; see also Helin, Kivinen, and Pullen, 2021).

Pondering Emily Dickinson's poetic practices and drawing inspiration from Woolf's words in their poetic text, *Until the dust settles*, Jenny Helin, Nina Kivinen, and Alison Pullen (2021) suggest that writing poetry is not a straightforward practice but might rather be seen as “the most difficult genre of all writing” requiring patience and slowness (p. 90). In their own poetic words, writing poetry involves

using the multiplicity of meanings of words, conveying layer upon layer of meanings. Like an abundant box of treasures, always more to be discovered if you dig a bit deeper. A poem draws you into a miniature world created by a few words and sentences, creating an affective atmosphere where we as readers can dwell and linger. A world in-between. Is the writing of poetry a practice of patience? Of thinking about words, meanings, rhythms? Saying words out loud to hear them in the room, see them bounce off the walls. Or perhaps the words are silently murmured so no one can hear them. (Helin, Kivinen, and Pullen, 2021, p. 90)

These words resonate! Interweaving poetry in academic texts allows us to hearken to the affective screams uttered by research bodies, to feel pain and laugh, and to practise our capacity to respond in and through thinking, feeling, relating, and knowing with and through one another (Irigaray, 1985; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). Engaging with poetic explorations and embodied usages of academic language can enable affective textual and relational spaces for rethinking intersectional “bodies' varying relations to patriarchal structures of domination and violence” (Plath, 2015; Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024, p. 13). By inscribing lived experience in language, poetry provides an embodied and affective ground functioning as an emancipatory way for denouncing violence and, rather, fighting for freedom (Moraga and

Anzaldúa, 2022; Lorde, 2017). In this way, poetry and embodied and poetic inscriptions of academic language can inspire non-linear academic writing, bridging the private with the social, the professional, the public, and the political; the internal with the external (Lerner, 2016). In doing so, they pave a relational, inclusive ground for validating one's experience, which is fundamental for social recognition; transmitting the reality of intersectional lives and allowing different bodies to unleash their potential to relate creatively as humans (Faulkner and Ruby, 2015; Lerner, 2016) and with the non-human, more-than-human world (Huopainen, 2022). Emerging from a corporeal demand often experienced as an itching (Thanem and Knights, 2019), poetic writing prompts the writer to do justice to embodied experience and to experiment with language styles and formats, written from the heart. In this order, research questions and writing styles are not just cognitively chosen as "interesting, cool" sites, questions, or statements to study and claim. They rather often choose us more than we them, offering us (organizational researchers and writers) a language to transmit the complexity and multiplicity of the inter- and intracorporeal affective entanglements and becomings within our fields.

With such poetic impulse, the present embodied poetic exploration into feminist writing seeks to invite readers to alternative, fecund, sensuous forms of knowing and becoming (Fotaki, Metcalfe, and Harding, 2014; Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2022); in experiences of affective resonance from which we – academic thinkers, researchers, writers, and readers – might also cultivate our collective ability to know, feel, and learn differently from and through one another. Experimenting with poetic forms of writing and knowing differently through feminist inspirations enables us, we suggest, to "do more than think about [our] own life ... to critique how social structures scaffold [our] experiences of relating" (Faulkner, 2017, p. 150). It renders us capable to explore and practise academic writing as a form of resistance (Ahonen et al., 2020), whereby we can politicize connections with different intersectional bodies (Mandalaki and Daou, 2020, p. 13) to invigorate debate over academic and social structures that oppress different, other bodies under the need for academic (masculine, supposedly neutral) "justification".

Elytes reminds us that it is in the unequal fight and the loneliness that poets are born. We echo his inspiration in the current epistemic, academic context where feminist critical knowledge is becoming increasingly marginalized by autocratic heteronormative ideologies (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2022; Jack, 2024). Poetry practised with feminist inspirations advocates for justice and an equitable world, providing a vocabulary and a grammar which, we suggest, have the capacity to overturn power structures and free the body from "all psychological, spiritual, political, economic boundaries" (Huggins, in Davis, 2016, p. 112) on which epistemic and other conventions of academic socialization have been built. We suggest that understanding poetry as a feminist

project attentive to the affective body and the senses opens space for dialogue between and through each other's bodies, matters, thoughts, and senses. This might also enable dialogue with the dominant order, which we seek to resist (Young, 2010) (provided that this Other is open, willing, and available to listen, since active dialogue requires at least two interlocutors willing to engage in constructive debate) to explore the (im)possibilities of/for doing and writing organizations differently.

In/through poetic dialogues,
 we might problematize the masculine norms of epistemic organization
 traditionally marginalizing women,
 intersectional and *other* writers from the page
 (Hopfl, 2003; Pullen, 2018; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023)
 We might rather inhabit
 our work
 inhale/exhale (Wickstrom, 2023),
 together
 like a
 slow-motion, fine-grained,
 full-bodied endeavour (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 617)
 writing through our pores
 as Brewis and Williams (2019)
 offer,
 and through our naked skin
 resonating with Mandalaki and Pérezts (2022)
 negotiating tensions
 with-in/out/side/between
 Opening up to
 the conversations, the collaboration,
 the potentialities
 the sense-abilities
 and response-abilities
 and processes of *making with*
 (Barad, 2014; Haraway, 2016)
 that lie
 ahead

Shall we try?

POETRY AS FEMINIST DIFFRACTION?

In this book, we engage in a collective poetic experimentation and exchange to expose how we experience and embody, in our women academic writers' bodies, the possibilities and impossibilities of capturing sensorial moments of living, researching, and writing under the normative conventions of academic language patterns and formats. As writers and editors of this book, we seek to actively resist the cleansed, purported "gender-neutral", Western logos, which

qualifies as perfect knowledge in organization studies, problematizing how this forestalls attending to otherness and the sensorial, embodied, and affective elements nurturing academic researching and writing (e.g., Fotaki, Metcalfe, and Harding., 2014; Pullen, 2018; Boncori, 2022; Pullen, Helin, and Harding, 2020). We rather opt for using words creatively, experimenting with our sense-abilities and response-abilities (Barad, 2007), seeking to navigate an embodied space where we can relate as/with/through others, feel, and sense life and language to reinvent the latter's potential to undo the very normative orders reproduced by its academic use (Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). Poetry, explored as a feminist methodology and language, offers an epistemic shelter that gives us back our silenced voices, functioning as an affective and emancipatory pedestal that allows us to speak from within situated embodied truths. It offers the means to manifest and perform in the academic text the way we embody and reflect upon our academic public and private lives to access relational and affective forms of knowledge-making as they emerge at the intersections of our researchers' thinking minds and sensing bodies, in relation to the bodies involved in the fields that we study (Faulkner, 2018).

With its non-linear presentation, the way this book is written, across texts and poetry, might be seen as a diffractive practice in reading and writing (Barad, 2007, 2014) – an endeavour into collating our embodied experiences through (feminist) texts of scholars that inspire us and poems that we wrote before and during the writing of this book. Building on the work of Haraway (2000), Barad (in van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2012) proposes diffraction as a feminist alternative to academic critique. However, unlike critique, diffraction does not involve “a practice of negativity that ... is about subtraction, distancing and othering” but rather one of “respectful, detailed, ethical engagements” that are “suggestive, creative and visionary” (pp. 49–50). As part of such diffractive experimentation, we here cut apart our writings and those of others who inspire us in all directions, reading “through and around one another rather than against each other”, which allows us to understand words as mutually constitutive forces in the making of this text (Murriss and Bozalek, 2019, p. 11). Putting fragments of the recounted lived experiences together as it feels right builds a sort of dialogical poetic collage (Lafaire et al., 2022; see also Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2024 for a discussion on academic writing as *colligere*), whereby we author our feminist selves in their multiplicities and in relation to other colleagues/writers/thinkers in ways that go beyond the expected academic linearity of presenting “logical” textual flows and structures (Elbow, 1998; Meldgaard Kjær and van Amsterdam, 2020). Such diffractive, non-linear engagement in/through poetry surfaces knowing as a feminist project: a “direct material entanglement” (Barad, in Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2012, p. 52), whereby *different others'* bodies, objects, subjects, matters, texts, affects, and human, non-human, and more-than-human companions, bound

with theories, epistemologies, methodologies, practices, our cups of coffee or tea, co-produce ever-emerging surprising processes through their intra-actions with one another. Poetry thus offers access to a flat relational ontology of becoming (Cozza and Gherardi, 2023). Such ontological engagement with the world does not see objects, subjects, bodies, theories, methods, and epistemologies as pre-existing, comparable, “more or less than”, but rather as co-created through processes of constant inter/intra-becoming (Barad, 2007), leading to a conception of knowledge creation as a feminist endeavour with ethico-political bearing.

Adopting such a poetic orientation in our academic journeys raises the epistemic awareness that knowing cannot happen in isolation, nor from a distance (Barad, in Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2012), recognizing that “much is not knowable cognitively and can never be articulated” (Murriss and Bozalek, 2019, p. 3) through (conventional) masculine and dominant academic verbalization. Poetic encounters confront us rather with the limitations of articulating and knowing the *Other* that we study, opening access to what is not yet known as well as to the impossibility of ever knowing embodied differences and otherness fully in/through the knowledge that we create (Gilson, 2011; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). Poetic language might then be seen both as a creative constraint and an enabler of expression and knowledge development, problematizing the disproportionate emphasis placed upon logocentricism (Derrida, 1976) and cleansed organizational discourse, and making space for sensing the levitating meanings that emerge from words’ creative encounters (Kostera, 2007).

CAN I GO BEYOND?

Beyond language

Can I go?
What is after?
What is before
or in-between?

Do I think too much?
Do I sense too little?
Can I go beyond?

POETRY AS RELATIONAL SENSEMAKING

Body leaks outpour this text to complete what “resists being put into words” – the unwritten, the unspoken, the unseen (Meldgaard Kjær and van Amsterdam, 2020, p. 300), dressing this collective body of texts with touch, colour, and odour, uncovering the very unavoidable “nakedness” that informs academic research and writing (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020). Poetry goes beyond

filtered articulation to unveil the invisible, “not yet known” but so very present affective situated realities (Manning, 2016), offering access to new, surprising, provocative, and unsettling ways of knowing and being known, not only in what can be read in the lines, but also in what can be heard or sensed between the lines. Such interplay across words and silences, presences and absences that poetry offers access to reveals much of the richness of intercorporeal field experiences that are more often than not rendered invisible under normative researching and writing conventions. When engaging with poetic explorations of language, synesthetic-making processes emerge as an unavoidable element informing academic interpretations (Gherardi, 2019; Thanem and Knights, 2019; Pérezts, 2022), enlivening the academic page with images, senses, and affects. Writing poems in organization research promises to convert our texts into this sort of porous, skinned, palimpsestic canvas of embodied experiences (Brewis and Williams, 2019; Mandalaki, 2021), releasing embodied knowledge and rewriting it as it emerges from the senses.

With its elusive sentient qualities, poetry, as well as poetic research and language explorations, enable us thus, as women-other-identifying researchers and writers of organizations, to generate a relational space to negotiate the tensions that we experience in our academic work and the writing of this book. The poetry we expose surfaces the gendered aspects of academia, the self-doubts associated with claiming the legitimacy of our embodied, different, non-masculine, non-native-English, female academic voices, and what it means to sense and write together in an increasingly virtual world in post-pandemic times. Poetry pushes us to listen and sense each other in silence, discomfort, reading, distance and closeness, shame, anger, and vulnerability, in the leaks and sweats dripping from our sentient women writers’ bodies (Cixous, 1976; Beavan, 2019). We experience value in them and their ethico-political potential to equip us with creativity (Ahmed, 2017), courage, and love (Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018), which we can employ to co-create embodied, hopefully socially resonant accounts that go beyond the representation of “absolute truths”, to surface individual contextualized and situated embodied experiences – often perceived as self-indulgence in academia – unapologetically (Pullen, 2018).

Engaging this poetry as a feminist practice and process of/for writing organizations, in this book, we affectively “un/dress” each other’s texts and those of the authors that have inspired our writing, rereading and rewriting/s, “break[ing pieces] apart in different directions” (Barad, 2014, p. 168), remaking this collective body of texts all over through active material engagement. While, as we have discussed, we cannot claim to *know* each other through this poetic making, poetry pushes us to make space for listening and accepting the differences of each of us and the Other involved in our texts, which, in

neoliberal normative academia, offers a provocative epistemological shift in how we engage with the knowledge we create.

We invite you, dear reader, to engage with this book as the amalgamation of bodies – that is, not as a traditional book structured around clearly separated chapters, each discussing a different aspect of poetry’s potential for organization studies, but as a collective body of texts built around an ensemble of sounds, words, reflections, senses, and silences that intermingle into an organic flow of being and becoming. Walking the talk of such an approach, we have decided to experiment with a creative presentation of the book, not just involving separate chapters as initially intended, but rather two parts, with the second one dedicated solely to poetry. Namely, while we started thinking and feeling (about) our respective parts and then started to write these down, we experienced a conundrum in relation to how to separate interlinked questions and interrogations in different chapters to fit conventional writing standards. This brought us to consult among ourselves and revise our idea and initial agreement in consultation with the publisher as well. After such consultation, we decided to present this book in two parts, recognizing the impossibility of cutting the flow in/of discussing inter- and intra-related elements of poetry and poetic writing, seeking to de-centre and challenge our epistemic habitus from/through this writing and rather leaving space for poetry to speak of itself. This poetic undertaking might be seen as a form of “sympoiesis” (Haraway, 2016, p. 58) – a process of “making with” each other and with poetry, signalling that the collective text of this book is not made by us alone. It is rather made in relation *with* everything and everyone around us: the feminist thinkers and authors that inspire our account, the publisher we work with, as well as the theories, epistemologies, and ontologies – in our approach onto-epistemologies – that lead us to experience poetic writing and writing (about) poetry as processes of relational reflexivity (Doucet, 2008; see also Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). Such a relational reflexive process does not submit to pre-established conceptual silos and methodological categories. It rather remains open to surprise, playfulness, and experimentation which open up new interpretations and inspirations in this collective making.

While such a process often exposes us “naked” to each other’s “gaze” and to you, unavoidably dear reader – a state traditionally associated with sexualization, vulnerability, shame, and discomfort in masculine academia (Cover, 2003) – the feminist force that sustains this poetic making allows us to experience “nakedness as a relation of erotic inter-corporeality” infused with affect, joy, and liberation (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020, p. 2). Such eroticism, which is not reduced to sexualization and objectification of the (female/other) body but rather surfaces the pleasure and playfulness dressing intercorporeal makings, brings us closer to the uncomfortable experience of encountering otherness, and pushes us to creatively engage with each other’s embodied

“truths” relationally. It equips us with the epistemic courage to unshame our shame (Beavan, 2019) and unsilence our bodies (Cixous, 1976, Irigaray, 1985, Vachhani, 2019, van Amsterdam, 2020; Clavijo and Perray-Redslob, 2021; Clavijo, 2023) to develop knowledge inspired by affective bodies’ sentient impulses.

Putting our experiences of feeling and living in/through each other and poetic verses, we seek to enable a feminist language that allows reassembling and reclaiming intersectional, feminine bodies in academic research and writing (Ahmed, 2017). This acknowledges the differences, otherness, vulnerabilities, affects, as well as the messiness, non-linearity, fragility, and mundaneness that different others carry (Helin, 2020). It lets poetry speak from and of itself, opening up the potentiality of affective encounters in how we relate and socialize in academia and the research field and beyond – and from there, with the very body of the academic texts that we write (Jensen and Mahmud, 2024; Mandalaki, 2023).

Engaging with a feminine poetics to flesh out linguistic and sexual differences (Vachhani, 2019) inspiring our theorizing – authors, thinkers, field study participants, and so on – enables us to unveil what we are touched by (Ahmed, 2017; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023), to expose what our “relationships feel like and sound like and smell like more than how they function as some kind of analytic variable to be deconstructed” (Faulkner, 2017, p. 2). Such poetic undertaking engages with situated experiences, emotions, and feelings (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981), urging us to taste the “flavour of life” and make sense of how the conceptual mind and the inexpressible presence of things more often than thought of become one (Hirshfield, 1997, p. 32). We might then experience academic language and the affective body as one; complementary as opposed to competing forces, from which new relational meanings can emerge.

Experiencing how sensing, poetic bodies (the writer’s but also everyone’s body involved in the research) can mediate our forms of *knowing* leads us to question existing understandings of sentient bodies as “the already there things” (Mack, 2012, p. 287). We rather recognize affective bodies as tangible, visible, and audible (Essen and Winterstorm Varlander, 2013), entangled with the broader contextual realities and materialities, also understood as *matter-realities*. We become attentive to the emotional, affective, sensuous, aesthetic, and material happenings of the field (Strati, 2007; Gherardi, 2017), performing knowing through poetic discourse that unsettles through its irreverent power to claim difference and multiplicity (Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). As an embodied form of academic writing, poetry opens up relational spaces for *relating with the Other differently*, countering patriarchal academic domination. Through disruptive, non-linear, vertical, textual connections (Helin, 2020) that feel right, poetic language, thus, surfaces creative ways of becoming

attentive “to [the Other’s] differences and matters of care in all their detail” (Barad, 2007) to recognize the limitations and (im)possibilities of claiming knowledge of/for the Others’ bodies. This problematizes masculine ideas of domination and authorship itself, that is, the glory of claiming “who said/wrote what”, rather enabling us to experience the possibility of becoming new through one another in/through writing/feeling/doing/cutting words and silences, feelings, theories, and inspirations together-apart (Barad, 2007).

LET’S JUST SIT

Can we maybe not
write/talk, but just sit
here in our own spaces
with each other in mind
thinking and feeling flow freely
more freely than articulated speech
(Noortje van Amsterdam)

WRITING DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND VULNERABILITY DIFFERENTLY AS/THROUGH FEMINIST POETICS

If writing is our “home” in academia (Mandalaki, 2020), we experience poetry as the onto-epistemological tool, which we can use to reconstruct its bases to transcend the limited frames of academic rigour and reinvent them through embodied sensorial experience. Derrida prompts us to become writers and poets, “very thinking-poets” (referring to Helene Cixous) to explore the potentials of poetic language to make space for women, the oppressed and marginalized others, and the fairies to survive (Cixous, 1976). Cixous suggests that “only poetically ... can we approach these places of fire”, to speak about what makes us tremble, to acknowledge what renders us vulnerable and weak (Cixous, 1993, p. 53), to enlighten our women’s ancient, darkest, and deepest places of power and find restorative force for lasting change in these (Lorde, 1985). Only poetically can we go up, by going down, Cixous argues, to engage in affective journeys of downward ascent, whereby we can explore the “lowest and deepest” “truths” of the intersectional self and other through/with one another (Cixous, 1993, p. 5). As Helin (2020) writes, this is not a linear or horizontal journey. Becoming and writing with poetic inspirations can be conceptualized as vertical writing (Heilin, 2020), disrupting chrononormative demands in academia that often exclude marginalized people and experiences (Meldgaard Kjær and van Amsterdam, 2020). Such feminine poetics contribute to the feminist project by embracing “plurality against unity; multitudes of meaning against single, fixed meanings; diffuseness against instrumentality;

openness against closure” in how we engage with academic writing and knowledge creation (Kuhn, 1981, p. 38, cited in Vachhani, 2019).

By engaging with this feminist poetic experiment between and through our fleshy selves and the others that have inspired this book – a collective body of texts – we thus wish to make space for voicing affective experiences of othering in their various diversities. We engage with critical, deconstructive relationality, seeking to make potent connections that oppose dominant tendencies, colonizing academic research and writing practices. We call for understanding differences not “as less than” (Murriss and Bozalek, 2019, p. 5) marked by divisions, comparisons, dualities, or separations, but as multiplicities relationally entangled across/within bodies (Barad, 2014; Cozza and Gherardi, 2023). Poetry in this endeavour offers a feminist methodological tool against epistemic oppression and heteronormative domination; that constructs epistemically disadvantaged identities by marginalizing different other bodies from collective dialogue and understanding (Dotson, 2014). Experienced as the springboard where otherness and difference can be inscribed, poetic language can, rather, act as a form of epistemic insurgency against the practices of epistemicide upheld by colonial heteronormative domination (Santos, 2018; Ribeiro, 2020). It nurtures the conditions for relating and responding to the situated needs of the Other and learning from those voices that we have been accustomed to dismiss (Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). Such epistemological orientation, we suggest, is grounded in the awareness of the agentic capacities that subjects, objects, human, non-human, and more-than-human bodies and matters carry (what Barad would call *agentic realism*). This carries an ethico-political bearing, leading us to conceive poetry and our broader engagements with the poetic qualities of academic life as an ethico-politico-onto-epistemological endeavour promising long-desired social and epistemic transformation (Barad, 2014; Bozalek, 2020; see also Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023).

In the form of the feminist experiment explored here, poetry not only allows us to speak about what we *think* but also about what we *feel*, placing emphasis on the *how* – not just the content of *what* we study but also *how* we do so. It generates an affective, intellectual space for reconnecting with our embodied senses and affects through the Other, raising questions of how identity, power, vulnerability, and inclusion are contextually bound with social and material forces (Pullen, 2018; van Amsterdam, 2020, 2024); Mandalaki, 2021). With all its transformative quality, writing poetry for organizations emerges as an unfinished project, opening ends that disrupt linearity, certainty, or completeness, seeking rather to challenge taken-for-granted gendered and colonial structures that shape our research, writing, and socialization practices in academia and society. Poetry for organizations fosters instead a vulnerable ethics and an ethics of vulnerability (Vachhani, 2019), recognizing vulnerability as a

social condition that connects bodies across intersectional differences (Butler, 2015). Such feminist poetics draws an ethics that taps into our potential to feel power flows between bodies by sensing how we relate to difference in and through our own othered bodies (Ashcraft, 2018). This supports the epistemic effort to find our own embodied voices, as academic writers, and our hope to make space for other voices to be heard and validated for what/how they are in this endeavour (see Erricka Huggins, in Davis, 2016; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019).

Inscribing poetry and poetic forms of language in academic texts can thus be understood as a feminist ethico-political act that resists the objective representation dominating organization research; instead, surfacing the possibility “to restore freedom to all the realities involved before any one of them could succeed in unifying the others” (Latour, 1996, p. viii, cited in Abdallah, 2017; Spivak, 1987; Rhodes and Westwood, 2007). As writers of organizations, we might then counter binaries and traditionally sustained dichotomies – such as body/mind, self/other, nature/culture, male/female – that reproduce hierarchies and systems of oppression, instead to create spaces of knowing and unknowing, learning and unlearning, but also spaces for feeling differently within/among/through vulnerable bodies.

As an embodied form of writing differently (Pullen, Helin, and Harding, 2020; Boncori, 2022), poetry not only awakens our moral sensibilities and responsibilities but also actively participates in the feminist project (Cixous, 1976) by nurturing our sense-abilities and response-abilities (Barad, 2014) towards one another. It urges us to recognize that we should ethically act up against tendencies of normalization that promote all sorts of discrimination and exclusion in academia and society more broadly. We should rather pave the way towards a new world bound through collective solidarity with and between different bodies to/in/through action (Denzin, 1997). We hope that, with such a focus, this book as a collective body of texts amplifies the poetic voices of feminist colleagues in the burgeoning stream of writing differently (e.g., van Amsterdam, 2015, 2020, 2024; Pullen, 2018; Beavan, 2019; Gilmore et al., 2019; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Mandalaki and Daou, 2020; Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020; Pullen, Helin, and Harding, 2020; Boncori, 2022; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023; Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024), calling for the need to further unleash the embodied, affective, vulnerable, poetic, and sensorial aspects of doing and writing organizational research and writing (Kostera, 2007, Gherardi, 2017, Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018; Vachhani, 2019; Helin, 2020; Mandalaki, 2021, 2023). We are confident that living and reliving sensorial, affective experiences in/through poetic writing can fuel brighter futures for academia and society as a whole, as well as more unsettling forms of writing, un/learning, and relating with and through different vulnerable bodies in academia and beyond.

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PART II

Territories of poetry and experience

4. Workplace landscapes

Ilaria Boncori

1. STARING AT ME

Staring at me
From the blatant abyss
Of privilege, wealth and position
I see my wilful denial
Staring at me
Through your eyes.

I wanted to believe
In this place
I wanted to hold
The flame of justice
Up high
I wanted to show
Proudly
That things can be different
Here.

We can make a difference
We can affect change
We can shed a light

Was it mere delusion.

I sit
In my bed
Staring at your words
Politely corporate
Cowardly unjust.

I sit and stare
Void of hope.

The abyss of disillusionment
Echoing in me
Staring at me
Through your eyes.

2. WORK WAS LOVE

Work was love
 Passion
 Inspiration
 Motivation.

Eager
 To please.
 Keen
 To do my best.
 Moved
 By opportunities unseen.
 Motivated
 By affective collaborations.

Work was love
 And then it wasn't.
 Work was passion
 But it faded away.
 Work was inspiration
 Dried into neoliberalism.
 Work was motivation
 And then became pointless.

Hurt
 By sheer inequality.
 Aged
 By careless care.
 Frustrated
 By deaf ears.
 Exhausted
 By unreasonable expectations.

Work was love
 But it turned selfish.
 Work was passion
 But done in secret.
 Work was inspiration
 That now belongs somewhere else.
 Work was motivation
 That now shifts to interest.

Lost
 In a crowd

3. AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY

The unexpected joy
Of workplace affect.
The surprising candor
Of honest conversations.

Kind words
 Genuine care
 Honest support.

Generous offers
 With no payback.

Empathic words
 With no subtext.

Impromptu exchanges
 With no ulterior motive.

I feel
 seen
I sense
 an embrace
I crave
 more humanity.

The truthful concern
 Of friendly eyes
The warm resonance
 Of shared scriptographies.

Together
 Kindness
 Professionalism.

4. WHAT IT TAKES

What does it take
To break the spirit
Of a committed lover.
What does it take
To break the spell
Of a many decades' affair.
What does it take
To silence a nascent voice.
What does it take
To suspend a wilful desire.
What does it take
To nurture unprecedented resentment.
What does it take
To negate a dream of pride.
What does it take
To crumble structures of hope.
What does it take
To caress an ego unborn.
What does it take
To poison a pure heart.
What does it take
To pierce an ethereal future.

5. AFTER OFFICE HOURS

Exhaling
At the end of a consuming day
My smile collapsing on the screen.
The camera is shut
The curtain unrolled.

Unravelling
Exhausted
Proud
Anxious.

Torn
At the kitchen table
I meet your voice.
My heart
curls up in the chair
the child is fed
my hands worn out.

Dismantled
Eroded
Wishful
Alone.

Undone
in the bedroom
spiritual unrest
torments the night.
Incessant narratives
disrupt the air
frayed sleep
unsettle the sunrise.

Frustrated
Preoccupied
Loving
Alienated

6. DYSTOPIA

I hear you saying
 You are worried for me.
You whisper tenderly
 It's just a job.
I see the conviction
 Of your stern remarks
But you don't know
 You can't know.
I was you
 Once upon a time
A long while ago.

The pressure of perfection
The work of our class
The misogyny of my superiors
The belittling of my plans.

I hold your worries
In my hands.
I kiss your fears
With my eyes.
I breathe your stress
Through my heart.
But you don't know.

The unbreakable glass ceiling
The magnitude of systems
The endlessness of expectations
For the promise
Of a better life
In this dystopian organising

7. I DISSENT

Eyes wide open
Always open
Whilst I want to sleep
Unsee the hypocrisy
Fog up the hurt
Forget the yearning.

I dissent
I repent
I never forget.

Never forgive
The scars on my mind
Never delete
The paths on my skin.

Resist –
alone, together, in waves.
Scream –
in silence, in anger, with hope.

Let us flow
In a luminous embrace
Collapsing on the page
Thumbling over
Hand in hand
Stumbling on
But moving forward.

My limbs are sore
My mind is stifled
My words are cracked.

I can hear the echo
Charging in the dark
Absorbing the distance
Reflecting the light.
Warmth, compassion, values.

A melody of voices
From the margins
A beautiful cacophony
Of a strident choir.
Growing stronger,
Getting louder –
I dissent.

8. COUNTING MY BLESSINGS

Regardless the darkness of present times,
 The love, oh the love, of so many people.
 My little family's trio of smiles;
 Her little voice calling me *mamy*.
 My parents, still alive, meeting her.
 My home, the first one, all mine;
 My sense of pride – I did it my way.
 My purring companion – we rescued each other.
 I miss him
 At the end of a long day.

A profession that fulfils me
 A job that is more than work
 An identity that is slowing growing
 In confidence
 In strength.
 Intellectual breadcrumbs left behind – I was here.

Our health, our strong temples
 The news of a miraculous recovery
 From afar.
 The ability to keep going
 When the weather gets dark.
 The knowledge always there –
 This could be all over
 Very soon.

The inner smile
 Staring back from my mirror.
 I lived, I loved, I did my best
 To fill other hands
 With happiness.

The gifts of joy
 I have received
 The words of admiration
 I have struggled to accept.

The many desires
 But no real needs
 The browning ambition
 In plain sight of the top
 My voice – still loud, questioning.
 The camaraderie of kindred academics
 And human spirits

And hope.
Hope for more days
Like the past ones
And even more
For the ones to come.

9. IN THE DRAWER

On my bedside table
I nest two piles of books
Reminding me
Of impending duties
Fast approaching deadlines.
I watch them as my children
With love
And longing
For more time together
Away from emails and meetings
Committees and boards.

Next to them
A pile of anxiety and guilt
I dust it off every morning
Promising myself to put it away
Before the night falls.

In the drawer
Precious little mementos
Stashed away in haste
My little treasures
Reminiscing of kindness and love.

I turn to those
To be reminded of who I am
And what is really important.
But somehow the drawer
Always gets littered
With broken objects
Important notes
Spare parts
That I will never use again.
Extra buttons and pins
To clip things together
The remnants of my life.

In the closet
A recent revolution
Injects colour, fun, liveliness
Representing a new professional self
That I want to embody
Standing close side by side
With outgrown black cloaks.

I'm always used to hiding
And fading in the background.
But I am trying to gain control
Over this new life well lived
Of this stretched out work
Across oceans
Before it's too late.

I put away my tasks
And self-imposed high expectations;
Delete fake smiles
And empty ambitions.
I feed feminist buds
And prune masking lies.

I will sound my punch
I will share my thoughts
I will write my fight.

10. **TIRED**

tired. so tired.
 even the word exhaustion breathes tiredness into my soul.
 I work from a virtual background,
 meeting people nowhere and in many places.
 bedrooms, kitchens, staged corners with backdrops – books, art, cats, light
 fixtures.
 they tell stories of private worlds,
 sentient panoramas,
 hidden privilege,
 shared passions.
 unrequited magnifying glasses
 necessary virtual etiquette
 gasps of humanity.
 the human world halts outside my windows
 sirens rushing by
 lone dog walkers
 early runners
 in the desolate absence of workers.
 we are not considered essential,
 and yet we work, we care, we tire.
 we balance, we bend, we tire.
 we meet, we write, we tire.
 we achieve, we overperform, we tire.
 we work, we juggle, we tire.
 faster, stronger, we tire.
 and then the traffic voices come back.
 I am still in my room
 looking outside at the morning light
 illuminating the crevices of this disjointed humanity
 bruised civilisations
 thriving ecosystems.
 I remember smiles
 I remember touches
 envelopes of warmth
 connections of affect
 filaments of burning ideas.
 the world slows down again, although we never did, in this infectious carousel.

11. WORKPLACE POETRY

workplace poetry
an oxymoron to some.
embodiment of the emboldened soul
suspended liminality
emotive inbetweenness.
seeking a voice
wandering in between the lines
resisting across deafening noise
screaming through silences.
a motion inward outward upwards
a dance of
words
on the page
inscriptions
of affect
of praxis
of hope.
a voice cracking through bureaucracy
a light illuminating
the smokey mirrors of policy
the empty redundancy of process.
workplace poetry
reappropriating language
away from reporting
performing
leading.
a shifting neckline
of sentient intellect
between sensory knowing
and reasoning senses.
collapsed ideas
on the page
fragmented feelings
on fingertips.

12. BREAKING THE MOULD

the texture
of your words
scratching the back of my throat
stretching the walls of my professionalism
encroaching on my private life.
the emptiness
of propaganda
the imponderability
of corporate aims
the bodilessness
of everyday practice.
it is what it is.
or it isn't
and we can change
we can improve
we can make it
meaningful
supportive
ethical
caring.
we can reimagine
who we want to be
together
what we want to engage with
together.
we can break the mould
of trite talks
unachievable aims
disembodied interactions.
together we can create
a place
a space
a way of being.

13. HEART OF FEATHER

As I looked around
Through the boxed up faces
Framed by urgency
And organizational needs,
I wonder.

Would you be able
To stand proud
In front of the forty-two judges.
Will your heart be enough
In the face of truth and justice.
Will your true self
Speak of verity
Or will you be dismembered
By the wrath of a just crocodile.

Will your voice be harmonized
By those you supported
Helped
Promoted
Lifted
Developed,
Or will it be silenced
By the screaming of those you oppressed
ignored
scarred
belittled
overturned.

What is the legacy
You leave behind
With the living.
What is the honour
You take away to the dead.
What memories will speak of you
What successes in others
Will be partly yours.

Ask yourself
If you die today
Will you carry a heart of feather?

14. TIME IS MY ENEMY

Time
Is my enemy,
My lover,
My mother.
Academics without time
For reading
Or writing.

My narratives juxtaposed
Will never compare
To masterpieces
Expanding through time
Read over time
Regardless of the times.

Unspoken narratives
Trapped in liminal moments
Bodily knowing
Remaining silent
Captured and detained
In ligaments of time poverty.

My body aches and yearns
My body longs and stretches
My body knows and responds.

Head churning
Temples echoing
Eyes unresting
Through endless nights
That make wasteful days.

Work
Eat
Walk
Sleep.
Repeat.

There is no time
For growing
And knowing more.
No time for sharing
Or caring
Anymore.
No time for creating
And loving
On your own.

Priorities
Strategies
Performance
Planning.
Endlessly.

Can we magnify our thoughts
Through eternity
Forever inscribed
Into liquid modernity.

Honing our craft
Through fragmented paths
Of stolen minutes
In between zooming carousels.

Instead of sleep
In spite of oppression
Despite of inclusion.

Chanting our needs
To deafening emptiness
Hoping our skills
Our drive
Our ambitions
Our care
Will never be turned into dust
In the hollow hourglass
of time.

15. FOR YOU

Less than a week
Pegged onto our dreams
Heavy under years of sacrifice
Hard work, craft, sleepless nights.
It all comes to this door
The sound of my anxiety
Reverberating in the pain
Echoing through my head
Resonating in my stomach.

I take your little hand
For a stolen kiss
You call me the name you give me
One, two, a million sweet times.
I look at your precious eyes
Black ponds of cheeky spirit
Gentle souls out in the open
Caring caresses for drained minds.

I hope we will have many years
Together
Memories, laughs, favourite dishes.
Little rituals
To trust and treasure
Following us through the test of time
Scattered in our memory
Feeding our affect.

You are too young to know
And to understand
Who I am, what I do, how I live.
My dreams and passions
To share and justify
Percolating our lives
Trelling over the future
Fencing away unwanted possibilities.

I love you so desperately
So desperately grateful
To know that you are mine
To raise and to help
Whilst belonging only to yourself.

I can see enchanting glimpses
Of the future you
Will you see the old me
In the words I leave behind?
Will you be proud of the woman I am
Of the text unravelling across my pages
Laid bare for strangers to see
For foreigners to inhabit.
Will you recognise me
In between the dotted lines
Across the academic titles
Perched on pompous semicolons
Leaning on a podium?
Will my words speak to you beyond motherhood
Beyond our joint flesh
Beyond the myriad of tiny moments
We have shared together?

I write you in every line
I hold you in every comma
I embrace you in every parenthesis
Of breath of thought, of the senses.
You are my work
And my work is for you.
You are my deepest affective resonance
And the most cruel mirror
I didn't know I would love to find.
You have freed my scream
And liberated my charm
Emboldened my spirit
And built resilience around me.

I hope that one day
You will learn to read me
And know that I was here
And it was all for you.

16. THE WAITING GAME

I was never made
For the waiting game.
Born defiantly
Ahead of time
Always wanting to chart
My own path
At my own pace.

In my references
An unexpected note
Making professor
Achieving
Working
Loving.

In my own rhythm
A little upstep
A little sincopato
A little allegro
A little staccato.

Dancing around multiple floors
Connecting webs of thought and embodiment
Project
People
Emotions.

The idle waiting
Breaks my steps
Forces me to trip
In my thoughts
In my stride
In my weak confidence
One, nobody, a hundred thousand:
The mirror of my resilience is shattered
And I cannot find myself.

We make ourselves
in the moments
Of action
And we are unmade and torn apart
In the moments
Of waiting.
The suppression of agency
The lack of control
The torture of unknowing

Leave me unhinged
Shoulders contorting
Eye twitching
Stomach incensed
Through the dismantling grip
Of a dantesque limbo
Of no guilt or shame.

17. WATCH ME

watch me defy the square root of improbable
raise above the impossible
without losing my self.
claw my way out of my obstacles
with kindness and sympathy
though layers of glass ceiling
intersectional smoking mirrors
labyrinths of patriarchy
minotaurs of jealousy.

watch me become
who I am supposed to be
without losing myself
holding my hand out to alterity
difference
posterity.

watch me soar without a Pygmalion
but through the shadows of anonymity
under a cloak of invisibility
supported by the understanding
of women just like me.
watch me smell the air above the clouds
bask in the sunshine of clean consciousness
and bottle up some of that warmth for you and me.

18. WHO IS WE

Tensions peering
Through fabricless screens
Black boxes alive.

Emotions perspiring
Through pixelated frustrations
Contempt
Anger
Exhaustion.

Empty stories resounding
In the magnified ether
Void
Performative
Scripted.

Who controls the narrative
Where has the discourse gone
Who makes decisions
What are we dissenting on.

Resistance to boundaryless lives
Distribution of real and symbolic power.
Shaking of intellectual identities
Ignition of an ivory and broken tower.

Survival is at stake
Wellbeing is threatened
Personal pride is annihilated
'We are all in this together'.

But who is this 'we'
Which raft, boat or mega-yacht are we sailing
Are we all on the same one
Or are you just abseiling us.
Is there a solution
Is there another way.
Who is willing to step forward
Who can ever take the blame.
Who is mad enough to grab the helm
Of this sinking ship in the slippery rain
Through the storm towards the apocalypse
Over the black waters of pain.

No map to follow
nor coordinates to enter
Or blueprint to borrow.
No decision left to stall
Nor anchor to throw
or shelter to seek
And horizon to know.

For the 'we' in this keel
Is exclusive at best
Who can reimagine the future
Beyond their safe nest.
A life new for us, we,
It's a passionate please
Beyond the sinking land
Across this raging sea.

19. I SEARCH FOR YOU

I search for you
In my dreams
In my lunar subconscious
In my professional ambitions
In my personal wonderings.

Only now older
Perhaps a little wiser
I begin to understand
What you knew
What you tried to teach me
In our short time together.

I want more of you
I wasn't ready then
I wasn't listening with my mind
I wasn't knowing through my body.

Too inexperienced to understand
Too lost to find what was already there
Too caught up in life
To see what was so rare.

I feel you now around me
Guiding me and steadying my hand
Modulating my trembling voice
Quickening my pace and my mend.

I know there are others
Who feel your presence too:
Your intellectual embrace
Your quick wit
Your experimental sense
And your unapologetic words.

I see your knowing smile
Through the words I type today,
In the academic I have become
And the impact I hope to make.

I hear your astute caution
Against convenient arguments;
I imagine you peering above your glasses
Framing a lifetime of feeling and knowing.

You left me gifts of people,
Books, pathways and growth.
Your work and your direction
Demanding always more
I inherited a universe
Of glistening learning
Annotated pages
Connecting and non-conforming.

Will you be with me for long
Will you hold my hand until the end.
Will you spark your magic
As a fairy godmother
Of academic endeavours
And important life lessons.

Sometimes I wonder
What you saw in me that day.
Am I doing you proud
Or am I going too astray.

Am I carrying your torch with kindness
Fierce poise
And cunning resolve?

I want you back
I am not done
With the talk and the advice
for the academic mother I have become.
With your belief in me
I need you here
To guide me through this journey
I have only just begun.

20. EVERY NEW CEILING

every new ceiling
is ground that I'm sawing
plunging up through the cloudline
floating deep in the sand.

stomping my prints on the ground,
echoes in ether
filigrained thoughts
connecting distant bodies.

the silences of arid souls
won't choke up
my undying hope
buried deep in belief
rooted in hyphenated identities.

heart beating an original song
catching on fire
through the confidence in my self.

when I can find the words
you remind me of my melody
you shine a light on my instrument
blow away the dust
with the kiss of confidence
inscribed through gifted steel.

and I come back to me
through you
brushing off the ghosts
armoured against the ivory spikes.

I breathe through my reading
I bleed through my writing
I live through the touch of your hearts
and the memory of hands together.
titles falling off my lips
allow me to sit more comfortably
within myself.

shallow badges
sheltering hardship and struggle
polishing ambition and achievement
paving access routes
and future unknowns.

21. RAINBOWS IN THE DISTANCE

rainbows in the distance
delayed rest and gratification
wired fences around my private life
overflowing banks
floods of responsibility.

this is not my job
this is your responsibility
this was your call
this is your remit.

your inability to lead
your lack of organization skills
your vacuum of leadership
your carelessness towards others
cannot be my emergency of today.

the sleeplessness of my nights
the invasion of my home
the frown on my beloved
the disappointment in their eyes.

I must rebuild the fort
dig a deeper trenching
fill a wider moat
whisper enchantment on my gates.

create the distance
you no longer see
the separation
you no longer feel
the rupture
you do not foresee.

I consider the hard consequences
of my actions
of my inaction
of my instinct to please
of my anger to resist.

I lie with plots
unravelling on my skin
with storylines
carved on my eyelids
with intentions
wrapped around my fingers.

I feel the need to reject
reprimand
remember
revolt against

this impingement on my life
an invisible bending of my body
a suffocating string around my well-being
a trigger for future deployments.

and rainbows far in the distance.

22. SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Through sleepless nights
 Too hot in my feet
 Too cold in my bones
 Too crowded in my thoughts
 I think of these verses
 And my poetic predisposition.

Is there a place for poetry
 In today's organising.
 Poetry, so unapologetically
 Disjointed
 Erratic
 Unruly
 Messy
 Emotional
 Feminine
 Embodied
 Raw
 Mediated
 Instinctual
 Relational.

Verses that refute books
 Reject constraints
 Resist norms
 Rebuff explanations.

Organising as poetry
 An orchestra of minds
 A melody of affects
 Unplanned cacophonies
 Unimaginable harmonies
 Beautiful un/structured chaos.

Poetry
 In the beauty of the connections surrounding us
 In the chorus that we make
 Through others
 for others
 despite others.

Organisational poetry
 In the kindness of a colleague's smile
 In an unexpected present of loquacity and time.
 It's in the eyes of a tired caring manager
 In the smell of a good book.
 It's in the lines of shared good news
 In unexpected encounters over food.

It's in finding another type of family
Of people you care about
Their cats, children and partners.
It's in the messages of compassion
Solidarity and esteem.
It's in the crevices of experience
that organisations
won't allow to be seen.

23. LEAVE

unfurrowed brows
feet finally up
and maybe this year
I won't suffer
my seasonal illness as much.

but a bigger darker illness
is looming
is mutating
is killing.

pretending it's just us
in the world
alone
distancing ourselves
from everyone else.

adrenaline lowers
winter crafting kicks in
and this year more than ever
we need a clean break
from relentless work
innumerable meetings
A revolving scene.

on the scale of experience
we had some important wins
and some sad losses.
some ambitions were fulfilled
and honours felt
an important threshold was crossed.

I breathe again.
many thanks were received
and even more sent to others.
I'm told
I make a difference
in my organization
for my colleagues
through my work.

And probably I should not care
but I do
it means something
it means a lot.

but the new year now
for the first time
brings not hope
but fear
anxiety
and loss.

distance from our closest ones
far away
in their bodies
close by
in their affect
And words.

the privilege and plague of familiar proximity
separation and remoteness across oceans and lands
Choice and consequences for us to understand.

24. RAINY DAYS

rainy days
like a chant
murmuring in the background.

I rest my bones.
liquid polka dots
transforming in feeble rivers.

tracing paths
against the cold glass
meeting the warmth of my home
taking me far away.

my goddess is silent
nothing to say
nowhere to fight
just the pain of my bones
and the burning of my eyelids.

exhaustion is
a taken for granted
occupational hazard,
an ancillary term
undressed accompaniment
to this privilege world.

I ask Her for words
thoughts
and inspiration
to trace my letters
carve my space
occupy my position.

activating
the weapon in my mind
requires charging
through silence and warmth
rest and affection
reading and listening.

you can borrow my skin
you can touch my heart
curling toes
stretching wide across
the coolness of the sheets.

the rain stops
conquering me like an army
the echoes of my words
disappear
dead
in my bones.

25. A LIFE THAT'S CHEAP AND RICH

when you write your name
against a blue sky
and then it can't be found
amidst the clouds up high.

transported back
to my first steps
ingenious leaps
into a mysterious land.

hieroglyphs and consecrated grounds
counting strokes
in foreign characters
one, two, a hundred times around.

if we dare
we'll live eye-opening adventures
that feel like other lives
in a parallel universe.

eyes we loved
lessons we learned
teaching you give
teaching you absorb
in the beauty of a white magnolia
turning pink.

chasing a life extraordinaire
with drums of passion
and expanses of dreams
across the borders
across our souls.

if you build your home
without a raised threshold
the evil spirits
will seep through
under the doors
through the cracking windows
inoculating your very senses.

so step away
and start afresh
in a new quest
for a life
that's cheap and rich
built upon Babel's pillars
the cultures that touched you
and the dreams you share.

26. IT'S A NEW DAWN

It's a new dawn
It's a new world
It's a new beginning.

But how do I start today
And try again
Whilst carrying all of yesterday
In my bones.

All the planning
The strategies
The tracking
Are but a flicker
In God's sense of humour.

How foolish of us
To think we can drive our future
And trace our own path.

There is no perfect time
There is no other time;
It is this time
It is now or never.

How do I forget
The nascent stars
Who never got to shine.

How do I prevent them for
Overshadowing
Or turning us blind.

I must embrace this new leaf of life
Though death has tainted its light
without fear
Anxiety or resistance
And the stabbing pain of a knife.

I have reached my goal
I have fulfilled my dreams
I can give myself to another
But always remember
Who has never been.

27. VERTIGO

vertigo
in horizontal waves
that push me off balance
whilst standing
make my head spiral inward.

for the first time
in my whole life
I am not able
to write.

I don't recognise myself
without being inscribed
across the life line
of my shattered sensemaking.

a new beginning
unlived and untested
believing I could breathe inwards
a fresh whirlwind of new life
mysteriously mystical
in its unborn potential.

I wasn't good enough
unloved and untrusted
I thought I could reach out
a leap into the dawn
rolling relationing
in my unfulfilled desire.

I don't want to know
I don't want to hear
the thump of my failure
echoing
deafening
chanting
between us.

will I find the carvings
on another path?
will my good fortune
and my kindred spirits
lead me
to a distant distilled dream?

I am left bereft
tingling hollow
curled up
in hidden rooms
of hope and futurocity.

28. SNOWFALL

thick snowflakes
descend in a silent dance
pirouetting through the wind.

it's cold outside
and thousands of people
have lost their jobs
their livelihoods
their lives.

government sponsored food rations
for children
are unjustifiably small
inexplicably uncontested
by millions of people
Overlooked.

academic cuts
all around us.
a siege
against the ivory tower
excuses
to torpedo
critical scholars
challengers
Fighters.

nobody is safe
no tenure
no professorship
no gilded title
will render us immune
to the systemic grip
of economic interest.

conveniently argued purge
of brilliant minds.
who's next
who's in the line of fire
identified from the roof tops
chased behind disembodied procedures
nailed against financial rationale.

a silent coup
forced against a backdrop of
deserted picket lines
virtual indignation
and collegiate solidarity.
annihilated across bush fires
extensive floods
and silent snowflakes.

29. MENTORING

I hear your pain
The tiredness
Trapped between your eyelids
In the cracks of your smile.
You are nervous
Not knowing who I am
In this first meeting
And what I stand for.

I feel your story
Resonating in my own memories
Still in fresh paint
Forever spoilt
By late touch.
I see the hope
Hear the silent prayer.

I will help you
Doing all I can
To wipe off the snow
From your chosen path
Wishing I could abracadabra away
The pettiness surrounding you
The otherness and jealousy
boxing up your ambitions;
the patriarchy clipping your wings
dressing your female body
stepping on your breath.

I can sense the immense potential
For your happiness
The superfragilistic potion
In the reassurance sought
Across futuristic landscapes
Of equity, freedom and respect.

I bleed for the support
You are being robbed of
The hoops you are made to jump
The obstacles to circumnavigate
And no wind.

I will help you
More than I know how to now
More than I have time for.

30. A PICTURE OF MY OLD SELF

You read
Of my old self
From my old self
The crystallised experience
Of millions of minutes ago
Moments in another life
Another pain.

And yet
That is all you know of me
Not my story now
The echoes of my pain
The reverberations of my joys
Metaphorised and morphed.

Reading of my old self
I want to hold my hand
Kiss it cupped in mine
Like a mother
Allowing her child
To make her mistakes
Resisting the temptation
To love and shelter
From harm.

The fickle memories
Fading away
Or stridently hatched
In the texture of my self.

How could I write
About my old self
That dear ignorant old self
Today.
How do I feel the gap
Between then and now,
Stepping stones on my academic river
Of life and work.

How do you fill the gaps
Joining the dots
To make up a picture that recognises me.

Who did you see
In my old self
Reading between the lines
Of emotion and professionalism.

was it a ghost of your past
unforgettable discomfort
or a mirage of the future
unapologetically dreamy.

My portrait in words
Work and life experience
Congealed in a moment
Mummified in time and feeling
For all to read.

31. SENSORY WORDS

Words fail to translate
 My world
 Revealing it
 Giving it dimension
 A smell
 A touch
 An echo of a feeling.

Colours in vowels
 Breadth in punctuation
 My body in my handwriting
 My sense through my words.

Synesthesia
 To combat
 Otherness.

Writing that screams
 Academic embodiment
 Writing that touches
 Impersonal language
 Writing that moves
 Blind reviews
 Writing that kicks in
 Rules of detachment.

Jumping off the page
 Trickling down my legs
 Sweating on my lips
 Perspiring under my breasts.
 Distilling cognition
 Channelling the sensorial
 Quintessentially human
 Academic
 Woman.

Fondling the pages
 Of my experience
 Forming the portfolio
 Of my expertise.
 Messy
 Misinterpreted
 Misjudged
 Misguided.

Grappling with thought
And with abstract flesh.
Instruments of the mind
Reasonings of the heart
Entanglements of the academic soul.

32. TRACING BACK THE STEPS

Tracing back the steps
the prints and impressions
of my long walk
on cement
on tarmac
on sand.

I see my old struggle
the ghosts of past gone
seeping through those walls
thin
cold
mouldy
transpiring
Alive.

The futures
I could have never hoped to have
are here
in my team
in the care
in her little voice
insinuating itself throughout my day.

crystalline
tempering
fresh
like a river
like a baptising splash
on my forehead.

Touching the ruins
of past dreams
across crumbling blocks
faded plans
ancient bricks
sprouting with green hope.

I wish I had sight
sibylline instinct
quieting wisdom.

Artwork on my wood counter
says more than I can believe
from our heart of hearts
I am your strength
your universe
a guiding star
the sun
and the moon.

an interlacing of flowers
bringing subsistence
and beauty
cutting through the centre
spiralling to the very roots
anchoring us
in colours
and love.

How far we have come
individuals
together
hand in hand
through tribulations
and silence
hatred
and pain.

The rest
is just a metric
on a virtual table
where we are not invited to sit.
a ranking on the wall
where our worth has no place.
a meeting recorded in minutes
where dialogues have no bodies.
too much to let go of
too little to live for
not enough to prioritise.

33. **FRAGILITY**

fragility
all around
in waves.

external tsunami
affecting
people
communities
families.

words dissected
weaponised against us
stomping on roses.

the inebriating smell
of pink hyacinth
stupefying my reasoning.

lilies powdered markings
immanent yet indelible traces
on my book
on my fingers
on my mind.

writing up my fragility
reading undercurrent
riding the margins
of sharp instruments
of crumbling pillars
of power and control.

choices made
holding on
to ethical reigns
to honest directions
to genuine connections.

Dissected exposure
marginalising
to silence expertise
to discourage investigations
to avoid criticism.

smoking mirrors
cracking shrieks
of systemic structures
of institutional capability
of inhuman failures.

34. WALKING AWAY

distancing myself
walking away
from your poison
utilitarian exploitations
of my gender
of my affect
of my work.

Our names together
never again
your web of opportunism
your hissing smiles
your obnoxious male ego.

The rumbling titles
in your own voice
rampant nepotism
academic privilege
lurid disappearances.

Still mansplaining
wolf in sheep's clothes
master of smoking mirrors.

enchancing eloquence
suffocating ripples
unravelling in the sun
until women choke
under your spell and power.

you think you know me
but opening my eyes
I saw the hard truth.

the painful realisation
I'm just a useful pawn
a chained monkey
a trained ally
an international connection
a starry-eyed dreamer.

how many people
did you take advantage of.
How many people
are still unwilling or unknowing puppets
hanging from your strings attached.

I will not let you perpetuate
this carousel masquerade:
colleague and Pygmalion
sensible sniper
trite author
thief of intellect
and young hopes.

35. WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHES

there it was
 hidden under friendly comrade robes
 the professorial ego
 imparting wisdom
 self praise
 and contempt.

dispensing judgement
 masked as advice;
 imparting sentences
 under the cloak of opportunity;
 parading
 the self-proclaimed
 intellectual right
 to recognise good scholarship
 to find others guilty by association
 to condemn research they do not understand.

belittling others
 whilst paraphrasing
 trite narratives of confidence
 assertive egotism
 and cognitive superiority.

dismay and sadness
 at yet another example
 of white male supremacy
 drowning and asphyxiating hope.

academic gerrymandering
 collegial disingenuity
 snubbing privilege
 dangerous fake allyship
 leave me anxious
 guarded
 unsure of the path to pursue.

instinct and female sensemaking
 calling loudly
 to run away
 to smile and take a bow.

needs and bleak alternatives
anchoring us deeply
into unknown prospects
across political ties
towards systemic inequality.
the everlasting tale
of risk and reward
safety and doubt
gambling with futures
painting over aspirations.

36. WHAT IF

what if

...

if you could see
all the turns in the life you had
all the minutes in the work you did?

would you still only see
what you didn't achieve
how you were not quite enough
always never good enough.

if you could feel
all the pain you had
all the hope you held
all the dreams you shared
would you still hide inside yourself
forevermore doubting your self?

if you make it to the final round
and you live to see others' joy
and you hear them thanking your name
would you trust your heart
to make it to another day?

if you could live a white man's life
would you fake it till you make it
use your privilege for theirs
always giving more than you can take?

and if you die tomorrow, through joy or sorrow,
what would you want your last words to say
where would the sound of your voice echo
who would you stay with?
if you could see who's left behind
could you carry on without her
could you say goodbye
walking into a lightless tomorrow
could you still hold her hand
without her smile?

if you are not here tomorrow
will your work still speak to her eyes
ageless ink
striving for a better tomorrow?

37. NOSTALGIA

the beauty
sweeping across the green hills
infiltrating pores, water, our soil.

the warmth
reflecting sunshine in people's lives
smiles, wrinkles, darkened skin.

the poetry
permeating work communities
of ancient knowledge, skills, passion.

the calling
moving populations beyond profit
holding on to love, history, quality.

the solitude
of distanced migrated selves
oscillating, wavering, everywhere and nowhere at home.

38. **POCKETS FULL OF YOU**

pockets full of you
letters with meaningless inscriptions
anticipated dates and moments.

womb empty of beats
my shoes full of steps
hands stained with tears.

my story interspersed with theirs
rasping voice echoing
their lives
their losses
their hopes.

drops of memory
strings of breadcrumbs
tales of love.

my nonsensical determination
my puzzling expectations
my other heartbeat.

echoing
their stories
their dreams
their records.

39. A NEW YEAR

a new year
without the flourishing bounce
of great expectations.

my brain staggers and trips
little fuel seeping through
to connect synapses
and shortcut my heart.

another loss
a restless vacation
the comfort of murmuring sea.

mourning cliffs
standing still
as graveyard monuments.

slapped by warm winds
driving towards the rainbow
channelling foreign affect
and forgotten mementos.

my mind roams and loses itself
wondering the wonder of life
bruised by needles.

hours of waiting
in uncomfortable side rooms
hiding anxiety behind a mask.

hopeless cries echoing in the distance
through doors ajar
and hearts broken.

nothing else matters
work is far away
void of excitement and satisfaction.

my body falters
slows down my step and holds my breath
deriding action plans and calendar invites
ignoring requests and rejecting opportunities.

I come first
whether I like it or not.
I have no power
regardless of my will.
I must listen
or pay the price again.

40. BECOMING CHANGE

Becoming the change I want
channelling the future I need
taking charge of my hopes
thinking of the sounds of my body.

Unapologetically tearing up
shredded filaments of strengths
hollow pockets of taste

– is this what we are living for?

Start hearing the call of life
stop sidestepping out of joy
repeat the mantra of your needs
stomp into a new era.

Exhale, like a lime note on a creamy dish
smile, like a fresh breeze through an open window
rest, like a child caught in a sorrowless dream
wait, like the night before an anticipated wedding
to become the change I have been waiting to find.

41. KEYNOTES AND LAUNDRY

Busy days
The start of a new year
Colleagues filtered through electronic displays
Exhausted, carrying on
Virtual backgrounds glitching
Strength and resilience faltering.

Planning new meetings
Meeting people in person
Resistance to socialisation
Masked anxiety, keeping the distance
Smiles warming up
Embracing hope and planning for the worst.

Keynote presentations
Parents' evenings
Research delays nagging in the peripheries
Primary homework, planning for change
Manuscripts submitted
Uniforms ironed and learning recorded.

Groceries shopping clicked and collected
Teaching delivery performed through microphones and video cameras
Young learners' progress communicated through online platforms
Fluid boundaries, invading and excluding
Disorientation and safety
Fluctuating between the past and the future.

42. ARE WE SAFE

are we safe

anxiety rasping in my throat
head spinning with tragic thoughts
horror igniting movies of violations
deafening pulsations spreading virulently

are we safe
are we really safe

thefts of our future
tainting of our dreams
vilification of our work
waste of our talents

are we safe
are we really safe

can I force myself to sleep
sleepwalking through my days
singing lullabies of merit
telling tales of privilege and love

are we safe
are we really safe

how can we feign peace
through telluric shakes
lava streams
poisonous forests
hungry children

are we safe
are we really safe

how can we breathe
when the world is choking
rampaging racism
murderous sexism
blatant injustice

are we safe
are we really safe

43. THESE POEMS

these poems
letters like notes
on a work-life score.

invading the personal
opening up possibilities
vulnerabilities
fragilities.

questioning the status quo
revealing hidden perspectives
muted struggles
silent joys.

marking up the filigrane
of professional herstories
workplace histories
indexed aspirations.

hoping to cast reverberations
on others
on papers
on policies.

is it worth the sound
of silence
and the leap
of activism.

5. Iotas

Monika Kostera

1. MIND, ATOMS

Motes of dust set in motion
by sunlight, streaming
into a room, more than two thousand
years ago. Leucippus
saw and was moved
across spaces and dreams.
Warm silence –
the Earth's iotas –
wrapped up
in a shell
of a story

(Sheffield, 2019)

2. **PACKING UP**

Loose ends of the world
flutter, do not meet.
Peopled by mystics:
the passersby. Fishes and men.
On a day like this,
one almost can
think of lifting
the ocean from the aquarium.

(Barnard Castle, 2019)

3. THE MAP

I supped with the kings of Nomansland.
I used to be a
Rover. Long ago, when
Midas was just
A man. Then he died,
Dried up.
His golden body sprouted an
Abundance of wastelands
We now live in.
Even back then,
He was convulsing
With sandstorms.
When the last drop
Of morning dew transmuted
The sun dried up. We had to go back
To autumn,
The truth. And so
We may yet find what was left behind.
The map of the worlds.
I dreamed, then, that my true name
Will be revealed.
Tell me, you who are
Always new, every
Low tide.

(Warszawa, 2019)

4. AFTER THE FLOOD

Walking in the footsteps of the flooding,
on my right the river
still digesting, round bellied. Banks adorned
with garlands of weeds,
small uprooted trees,
a dismembered bench,
a multitude of white plastic flags.
This is what it must have felt like for those following
Moses across the Red Sea, long ago:
pulse racing,
even though the voice
has been stilled.
Or are we
still crossing

(Sheffield, 2019)

5. THE OLD MAN

He never was a friend of
the old man. They met
a few times, drank some wine,
that is all. But he never
invited him to his home.
So when they asked him,
he walked in, confident
and said: yes, the old man corrupted
the local youth.
He does not know what happened next,
he left the city to travel and study.
When he came back he was made
magistrate. He did well.

(Paris, 2020)

6. THE LIST OF LONGING

When they let us out
I will walk straight ahead
And then I will scrape the skin on my heels,
so I will sit down, and then,
I will get up and go farther,
because, in time, all will heal,
and then I will go smell the trees,
because something will be flowering,
perhaps the lime trees, perhaps elderflowers,
and then I will board a train crossing the fields
perhaps I will meet the same storks
perhaps I will see a deer,
because nature does not abhor a train.
And then I will eat ice cream on Starowińska
even if there is a queue, all the way to Kazimierz,
and then I will sit in De Revolutionibus
with a book and a coffee
and then I will talk with students
they are so great this year
from the same stuff as dreams
and then I will touch my hand
to a stone bench hot from the sun,
and then I will breathe in the afternoon,
and then I will catch,
and then.

(Warsaw, 2020; translated with permission from
Polish by Jerzy Kociatkiewicz)

7. **BREATHLESS, AGAIN**

Flowers everywhere.
The spring began
with a checkmate.
Max von Sydow died.
A saint set out rambling –
she who died horribly
for companionship's sake.
The year came undone.
No shoes, no regrets, elders leaving.
We drown in our heartblood
yet forgot
how to breathe.
This is not a mantra.
This is the broken way back
to the gardens.

(Warszawa, 2020)

8. ELEGIES FOR THE LIVING

We did not fare so badly after all,
Not as poorly as
The things around us:
Cities, trees, hints, trivialities
We loved so much,
The kindness of strange places.
The blessed hormones
And the songs, the songs,
All the elegies for the living.
We did not fare as badly as so many things
That mattered, the giant shoulders,
We still keep handsome, where we stand.
We can do no other.

(Warszawa, 2020)

9. PROSPERO'S BOOK

I never aimed this high, never aspired
to anything more than a room full of books.
It was you who drove me,
with your relentless competitive urge,
out and towards greater heights
than I would ever had dreamed of.
I was fleeing from you.
So if I forgave you so readily,
it was not out of pity, not even
by virtue of my generous mind,
nor out of gratitude:
for that you have forced me
out, into glory.
Why would I? you wished me dead, not glorious.
No, it wasn't because of all that.
I pardoned you since this story is ending.
Now the ship's waiting, sails are set.
I am not taking this diary with me

(Paris, 2020)

10. LOCKDOWN

The slow descent down the hill, feet moving
step by step, dust to dust. But the slope
(look at your hands)
shifted here. A sudden discontinuity
of asphalt. Something
did not wait
for feet and gravity.
Does it mean you dream of flying or does Earth
dream of sudden stillness.
So improbable.
Like immortality,
and death.

(Viry-Châtillon, 2020)

11. THE NEW TRAIN IS NOT BLUE

Not everything that glitters is rain
but most often it is, and especially
in the morning
on the way to the train.
Somehow the day yet
may catch up with itself
The relentless multiple worlds
we inhabit
may fall into step
Vault after vault
Or it may end as it started:
full of promises no one believes.

(Le Mans, 2020)

12. GLORIA

And they shall be seen to fall
one after one
like droplets of rain
from a stark stillborn cloud.
For what goes up
must go down.
Sic transit.
What remains are
the swift earthly things:
the chthonic creatures
that breathe at our heels,
the worms, dust-eaters,
the healers of industrial plains,
of soil strewn with salt by the winners,
of light absorbed
out of season

(Viry-Châtillon, 2021)

13. **JOB'S SECRET**

Job knew things
Too many
to become wise

The world, if seen just once
without the
sheath of kindness
remains leaky

(Viry-Châtillon/Juvisy, 2021/2023)

14. HEROES NO MORE

There was a time I believed
in the strong and steady
the good sheriff, the selfless
hero

Then I hoped for the
Zen master to come down
from the mountain, reluctant
but calm

Now I only trust the ones
with a low pain threshold,
with a pulse prone to racing,
with stomachs too weak
to play by the rules
with breath too short
to break them.

I came to rely on the
escape artists, more likely
to lose the shirt
or a limb than keep
a stiff upper lip. If there is
any hope left
it lies not in the brain,
in the heart, the face,
but in the stomach.
Turning.
Revolting.

(Savigny-le-Temple, 2021)

15. JUST BEFORE

just before the wave comes
things lie flat on the ground,
and flutter. Some bored,
many restless;
one by one by one,
they do not make up
a whole.

(Warszawa, 2021)

16. CESSPOOL DAYS

So maybe you feel rather sorry
that you have banished the poets
and all the ones you insisted
to call immature.
Now they are gone
from your land.
Maybe the blood you drew was
meant to be
wine.
It is not.
Maybe it was justice you called upon.
But there was no one else left,
just the Kindly Ones.
And what you miss now
is something – anything
but this.

(Warszawa, 2021)

17. A RECIPE TO SURVIVE WORK ALIENATION

Always wear something Swedish.
Don't let things cross the threshold.
Alienation spills over.
Coming home from work,
leave polluted things:
bags, trousers, jacket,
and wash your face under clear running water.
Forget the names they keep shooting at us.
Their guns are relentless,
so be scatterbrained.
Inhale the sunshine.
Walk barefoot on grass.
Plot to overthrow innovative excellence.
Breathe. Write a poem.
Hug an honest man.
And if you run
think of dandelions.
Do not forget
heartfelt sorrow;
we are all
brothers and sisters
in the sadness of heart.
Kings never get it.

(Oslo, 2017 / Viry-Châtillon, 2021)

18. IMPOSSIBLE SYMMETRY

Maybe we all become someone's
somnambulist twin.
A troubling double:
the one who did not divorce –
– move house –
– say no –
– change jobs
Who fails to throw out the keys
to the old flat in dreams,
Who keeps on taking exams,
missing trains
one step ahead
and one leap behind.
What the right hand writes
the left has already erased.

(Dax, 2022)

19. MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Too fast, too intense, too
frantic.
Even for the old weathered
fisherman.
Too much too fast.
A fucking Molotov
of attention
There,
I've had my three minutes
I should have used them
to do a nice shapely haiku
or just to bloody
breathe

(Victoria Gasteiz, 2022)

20. DESERTERS

An indoor comet
caught by the tail.
I see in the window
vis-à-vis, bleeding
a fluttering pulse, captive
distress signals.
It is dark outside. Dark
inside the shining city.
Something like an embrace
of mild, celestial body,
fluttering.
The night is croaking
it is not here we rest.

(Warszawa, 2023)

21. WORDS

Just like light, words
never go out
but once spoken
they go on, and on
until the beginning.
Between the streets, the trees, the stars, into
the darkness of Cosmos,
the black holes.
A Greek chorus
endless

(Edale, 2019 / Juvisy, 2023)

22. CV

30 years and counting
I have been the captain of each sinking ship
I have eaten with friends who left me
with enemies who hated me
to the moon and back,
and with some who tried
to eat me instead.
My compass is broken or it
abounds in legends and songs;
I have always suspected there is more to it
than meets the eye, dear Polyphemus.
My name is Outis.

(Le Havre, 2024)

23. AIRPORT DREAMING

Awake in an airport
shards float in and out
of the line of vision
Godot never promised
he would come
Hundreds of wheeled suitcases
crashing in
The incessant vomit of attractions
Postcards from anywhere
Swallow anything
then fall down on your knees
in the faithless chapel
These are your own
fingers of ice
like Brutus and Cassius
your repellent reflections
in procession of mirrors
Crowd belching forth
Nothing matters
all is long lost
The cleaner will sing for you
a sad lullaby, leaning
against his big chummy machine
You must look up to the tables
blinking, glittering
waves
of times and places
If you miss the one
then it
all
gets real

(Sheffield, 2014)

24. MEDUSA

one day
the temple
dimmed:
the wise one she's been pursuing all those years
does neither care nor listen; will not
notice her gone
such loneliness,
self-possessed and foolish,
the fig leaf from before the Big Bang
absence to absence,
make a perfect shield
a minute's silence for nothing –
that is all.

(Sheffield, 2016)

25. PROFESSOR A.Z.

(1937–2015)

He said: until disproved
we are immortal;

one day, someone
will end up not dying.

He said: I don't go to funerals,
but I promise

I shall go to my own.

He said he was a staunch believer
in changing his mind.

(Sheffield, 2016)

26. MOURNING IS THE MOST RADICAL THING WE
CAN DO THESE DAYS

Daedalus lost his head, not his
wings. Master craftsman – I found
the headless body lying
in a street
of Warsaw. It's spring

and the city
is filled with fragrance,
the sublime
lilac smell of weddings and funerals.

Someone has to bury all those dreams.

The roles we were playing with zeal,
the work, well intentioned, the
dependable guts, the ways
we were good against
the dark background, the hope and the hopefulness
against hope. The ghosts
imprisoned beneath the victor's tale.

I must
– we need to –
Embrace

his tight, splintered body
fallen, in the kindness of dust.¹

(Warszawa, 2016)

28. MEDEA

Mother of untouched teddies,
smooth identical dolls, and of plushie

rabbits, hanging by the ear at checkout.
Of ready-made cards, wishing on

birthdays to best dads
in the world. Of mugs

lined up, wearing
red red hearts

on their sleeves. Mother
whom no one shall mock,

not like the rest.
Holy mother, pray for us,

pray for all that has been cut
off

and thrown away.

(Palermo, 2016)

29. ONE MORE LETTER

The first dove that came was taken
down by gun fire. The second
died from the pesticides

on the olive branch she held in her beak.
The third is here now: a city pigeon,
mangy and limping, with sparse blue-gray

feathers, his eyes red and orange,
like Hephaistos'
kiln.

God has not
forsaken us.

(Plakias, 2016)

30. TRANSPARENCY

I am too old, too young,
too woman, too androgyne,
too straight, too gay, too
excessive,
too wise, too clueless, we are
too slow, too love,
too soft, too sore. Too
lacking,
too failing
to follow standards
to
irrelevance.

(Sheffield, 2016)

31. GREAT AGAIN

Gray linoleum land
covered with thick,
sticky film. Buildings,
boarded up alongside
the tents of the homeless,
black tears on brick walls,
a feast
of stark camera necks, “surfaces
may be slippery”.
Train filled with
smell welling up
from the toilet.
This is not austerity,
this is overflow.
It’s what trickles down.

(Leeds/Sheffield, 2016)

32. THE MR. BRAINWASH LIFE PHILOSOPHY

In a time and place
I aim my camera
at what makes it possible to breathe.
Not art. Not meditation.
Just one-breath jailbreak.

(Leeds, 2016)

33. SELF-GUIDED TOURS

Self-guided tours in unloved spaces,
exhaling chill of the timeless order.
Makeithappen. Exciting. Excel. End
of history blowing cold in the air.
Synthetic plants in plastic pots,
in the corner
a plasma TV, hectic, by itself.
Folders scattered like petals.
Welcome,
we are delighted that you
have chosen us.

(Stockton, 2016)

34. A RIDE THROUGH THE MATERIAL WORLD

Pick up your mat and walk. See:
everything is poetry. Clouds,
people talking about the Black Death
on the train. More clouds. The rumble of rails,
conductor drawing face with rolling eyes
on ticket. He smiles up his cheek. All is swift but
inconclusive. All is a matter
of heart.

(Stockton, 2016)

35. MAKE NO BONES

On the day my mobile phone
connected directly to the Galaxy,
and started receiving
messages, though it was out of range,
a thick veil covered the city
and I met a sad man, asking
directions. He introduced himself as
astronomer, looking for his class.
We were dozens of kilometres
from campus. Spring was still
a possibility, distant but bold. The world
spat out venom under its
breath. I wish I had
told him the truth: per aspera
ad astra, but right then
stars descended on us
like a murder of
haphazard crows.

(Stockton, 2016)

36. **LIKE SILENCE**

Like silence before storm,
like darkness before dawn,
like business before pleasure,
like function before form,
like coffee before road,
like age before beauty,
like think before talk,
like cart before horse,
like cry before hurt,
like pride before fall,
like pearls before swine,
like dust before die,
so comes
poetry before revolution.

(Höfn/Reykjavik, 2016)

37. LAMENTATION

King Lear is dead
but miracles are still
likely to come.
The long march has halted,
the heart has fallen out
of the mouth of the city
and lies, like a small bloody animal,
at the crack of the curb.

Miracles are still possible.
Rain is falling on the homeless'
tent city. Should we weep now,
or have we missed the cue
long ago?

The King's crown of weeds
has been tossed in the air
like a bride's flower wreath.
He opens his eyes,
no dreams
want to come.

The tide rises, the tide falls like breath.
Miracles
are still likely.

(Sheffield, 2017)

38. WHAT WOULD SAINT VALENTINE SAY

In Pink Mushroom lane
people kiss like crazy, cats
sit on roofs, as it should be.
Poets run with it.
The train is announced and it takes you to
the island of Utopia.
All other destinations
have been cancelled due to
signal failure.
You may be pleased to learn,
that the catering was trapped
at Reading, we apologize.
You know they don't mean it,
but you dance dance dance,
more incarnate than ever.
After all, the Earth has been
transubstantiated.
Yes, the whole planet.
And we.
In
Pink Mushroom lane.

(Sheffield, 2017)

39. FIGS FROM THISTLES

There is a tree that grows
under the river.
My right arm is torn
and the blackbird sings loud,
louder than the roar
of the trains.
Carriage after carriage
cutting obliquely through
the glistening cold.
The landscape does not
give birth, not anymore,
not for a long time.
My right arm is torn
and there is a flood wave
coming through
security.
Nothing is delivered,
nothing forlorn.

(Durham, 2017)

40. **RED**

Blood in the sky,
blood on the pulse,
music and clouds
today:
all red.

Winds whisper
to the beads of dust,
reciting sorrowful mysteries.
They are all
the holy family, millions of them,
the saints of Syria,
their feet
carry
the weight of the Earth.

Seas and shifting sands,
dark matter flowing
in the veins of the world,
flushing out dreams,
all blood,
all red.

(Durham, 2017)

41. **PAY SLIP**

Pay as you go
Pay as you sit
Pay as you shit
Pay as you dream
Pay as you are
Pay as you stumble
Pay as you rise up
Pay attention,
Pay them back
Like they paid you.

(Sheffield, 2017)

42. MEPHISTOPHELES WAS DOWNSIZED AND HIS JOB WAS OUTSOURCED

Be a success,
unconditionally,
be best!

Your choice!

This is the new
categorical imperative.
Everybody must be an artist.
Everybody must be
a world-class famous professor.
Only minus the suffering –
that's a complete no-no.

This is the new
non-elitist
talent management experience.

Afterwards you may
fill in a customer
satisfaction
survey.

Welcome to
project life as a loveless marriage.

(Barumini, 2017)

43. HOME

Sand coloured sky
hovered
over flat land.
I walked straight ahead.
And then
Earth attracted me
and I fell,
my body thrust
against hers,
5.97 sextillion tons
right into my arms.²

(Warszawa, 2017)

44. **SPLINTERS**

How could we believe
that what began
with a fratricide
was the golden future
as promised by the billion prophets
of hard work and thrift

How could we think we weren't the keepers
of hills of Sarajevo,
of Athens and Kos,
of the drowned man Jesus

Whatever comes through did not come unannounced
The Muses deserted us
only the Kindly Ones are still
with us

(Vergina, 2018)

45. IMAGINE

Imagine there's no internet,
it's easy if you try.
No online forms or forums,
around us only air.
Imagine all the people
touching things with their hands.
You may say I'm a dreamer
but dream is still offline.
One day it will eat us,
swallow us
bones and all.

(Berlin, 2018)

46. REDEMPTION

And if we ever were to be forgiven,
please let it be before the winter arrives,
while we have not yet settled
for the obviously clear
and when betrayal is still betrayal,
even when it is all clean and crisp.
If redemption comes,
let it be in autumn,
in the pouring rain,
in the mud.

(Berlin, 2018)

47. I AM NOVEMBER

I am November
I am the man without fate
The one small step
Into the darkness
The driver of the dreamtrain that has been delayed
I come from a hole in the present
Along the cord from the body of Eve
I am the smallest part, too small to add up
The bone, perfectly empty inside
I speak through marginal poets
Into the heart underneath the lava, no bypass, no detour
I am the word too slight to have earned a sound
Too small to be shrugged off
I am a passenger of dust
I am November³

(Sheffield, 2018)

48. RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

The Sphinx said: what is this?
 What speaks with one voice,
 of love and friendship in the morning,
 says "dearest friend"
 in the afternoon,
 accepts gracefully your gifts,
 and, in the evening, says: "please don't
 take it personally",
 and stabs you in the back?
 I said: But is this even the same creature?
 She said: I don't know. Do you?
 I said: So, how do you tell one from the other?
 She said: I cannot. Can you?
 I said: Let me through, will you? You don't have to
 jump off the cliff, can you
 just let me pass.
 She said: Yes, but do you really
 want to?

NOTES

1. Poems 23–26 were published as part of the collection *Oneiropoia* (Monika Kostera, 2016 (Liverpool: Erbacce Press)).
2. Poems 27–43 were published as part of the collection *Going to Delos* (Monika Kostera, 2018 (Liverpool: Erbacce Press)).
3. Poems 43–47 were published as part of the collection *I Am Not Magritte* (Monika Kostera, 2020 (London: Wordcatcher)).

6. Breaking words and silences

Emmanouela Mandalaki

1. WRITING POEMS IN/FOR ACADEMIA

I spend my day
writing (academic) poetry
So much to express

“Academic?”
my colleagues ask
when I tell them
what I am working on

And I have this feeling
that I was not
productive enough

Does this qualify as “working hours”?
Do these poems meet the masculine neoliberal “metrics”?

The academic texts that I read
are not like this
My text will look “strange”
to the Editors
This is the feedback
that I receive
in the research seminars

But this is all I have
to hold my fingers
typing a little longer
to keep my senses alive
in my writing
to put my flesh and my skin in the text
I remember Helene Cixous.

To take the personal in a dance with the social
I remember Rambo Ronai (1998),
to levitate in the liminal spaces between dreams,
fears, hopes and realities
I remember Audre Lorde (1985)

To unleash “the sea you can hear in me...
... the voice of nothing”
I remember Sylvia Plath (2015, p. 17).

Books, words, computers, papers and pencils
Emotions, feelings, thoughts and imagination
all I have in academia
These are my tools
to create meanings

2. A-VOID-ING

Against faced with a blank page
 That feels so much bigger
 and spacious
Than the words I could ever expel
 To claim I know
 in loss of words
blocked and anxious
 Do I have to write?
 What would silent
embodied writing look like?
 Would it 'count'
 As writing?

3. THERE IS MORE

There is more, she said
than what you can ever see
And it is already there
All newness resides in the invisibility of the every day
already
No need to look for it outside
Just take it slowly and focus
You don't even need to "look"
Just sense, smell, touch
to feel the palimpsestic texture of
Embodied experience
 - *Is there?*
And she makes me think of all what becomes invisible
 Lost in oblivion and fastness
 of neoliberal academic metrics and standards
All the potential that gets wasted
before it is even recognized

4. THESE MOMENTS

These moments
when I see you using your hands
to bring out from your guts this very feeling
and draw it in the air
I wish I could capture a picture
of your senses' levitating passage
Maybe I do
I feel that I know how you feel

These moments
Language and academese more specifically
are not enough
to bridge the gap between the lived and the uttered
to make sense and to be made sense of
the embodied being and becoming of this very moment
will always be there
even if we don't find the words for it
Is this knowledge too little?
Are our bodies too little?
words too few to capture the experience
words that we maybe never learnt
words that we might not know

These moments
we need to go back to childhood
to think in a native language
to find the words that might do justice to this body
and then look them up in the dictionary
to write them in English

Our bodies just googled
translated
inf(l)ected
their senses deflected
converted to letters of a language that is not 'theirs'

But these gestures are just so talkative
We read each other on the screen
hearing the skin
screaming
pre-words
aloud

still,
desperately trying to find the language
to de-code their mystery
to dis-entangle their meanings

to cleanse our senses
to make sense
non-sense
What a paradox!
Can we?

So engrained in us
these patterns
Word nerds
indeed

5. CAN WE JUST REMAIN?

hooks (2001) said if already:
we strive
to 'master' language
to control the world around us
to control our bodies

Can't we just remain in what we felt?
Or we will always look to
find-speak-write
the non/pre/anti/post-words for it?

Language that enables us
Language that constraints us

6. SHAME IN SILENCE

You feel your cheeks
 “Conveying a message of shame”,
 you say

#Me too.
 The skin of my cheeks
 vulnerable,
 weak,
 soft,
 blushes from shame
 when I use my body
 to speak
 to expel
 to write
 to present in front of an audience
 then
 silence
 loud
 talkative
 expressive
 uttering senses
 that cover my voice
 your voice

In my head
 buzz and noise
 I add words
 to connect the dots

7. I AM AFRAID

I am afraid
of the void created
in the absence of words
I never learnt to face it
I feel ashamed in silence
gazed upon
When silence becomes too deep
too big
I hesitate to surrender

I need words
to make sense of it and of my shame

I need words
to feel safe in silence

I need words
to not reveal
my “nakedness”

words that silence my body again
I remember Irigaray (1985)
I am a woman in academia
This is what I learnt
I remember Vachhani (2019)
Pullen (2018)
Fotaki and Harding (2017)
Now I “understand”

Rational, masculine words defeat me
but I struggle to escape
hooks reminds me
that “only what we cannot imagine
cannot come into being” (2001, p. 14)
I imagine we can escape
Shall we?

8. WRITING ↔ UNSHAMING

Beavan (2019) writes poetry
and prompts us
to unshame
our shame
Can we?
How?

These words
touch me,
open me up
Yes, touch opens me up!
(Ahmed, 2004)

9. WORDS AGAIN

You asked before if these poems
do not re-inscribe
the dominance of logocentricism

Words between us
again,
I know

But these words
are not about explicit knowledge
or rigorous articulation

these words sense, care
e/affect,

as Brewis and Williams (2019) beautifully put it
they pay attention to y-our bodies
allowing some kind of *sense - abling*
to feel through what we think
you?

10. SPEAKING WRITING SHAME

I never spoke about my shame in my academic texts
I never felt comfortable or “allowed”

But I can release this here
in this process with you
through *you*
between us
to come deeper into me
by exploring the depths y-our depths
to unsilence my body
to express vulnerability
to speak the truth that people cannot “deal with ...
the certainty that even my strength may break”
these words of Märta Tikkanen (1984, p. 39) touch my heart
Don’t you feel the same?

11. SHAMELESS SPACE

Cixous (1993) reminds me
The force of
this shameless space of the unconscious
where
“we will not be afraid
of understanding the incomprehensible” (p. 38)
where we can hear our skin
speak true (Cixous, 1976)
without shame

What does it say?
Can we make it heard?
Through/with/in/out a digital interface?

12. PUTTING WORDS?

Listening to your poem
I remember Berger's famous note that
'Seeing comes before words' (1972)
What about touch, hearing, smelling?
Indeed.
Yet, No
we don't often show our hands
when we talk online
do we?
How can we know what we think
before we sense what we
[our bodies] say?

13. TIK TAK

Tik, tak¹
tik, tak
One
Two
three
Up and down
Left and right

Fingers typing in rhythm
struggling to find words
that make a rhyme

All over again
Movement
Habit
Repetition
Fatigue
Punition

every second a little different
a little more
I cannot afford

Senses expressed
Others suppressed
Automatic performances
Physics in space and time
The pedagogies that we learn
as Bell and King (2010) aptly termed

Limbs
Legs
Knees
Feet
Hands
Arms
Fingers
Shoulders
and eyes

worn out
unveiled
surfaces inscribed with pain
eyebrows moving in every exhale
brains sustained

a moment collapses
in the curves of some wrinkles
and yet
all I say seems too little

And yet
I cannot escape

And yet
I still strive to dress the senses of these organs
with words
But words are too little
to perform the potential that they uphold

Tik, tak,
Tik, tak
All I can say

Can we just sense each other and not talk for a while?
Can you just ask me to pause for a while?

14. MOUTHLESS INTER-FACES

Sometimes
I avoid words
and reply with emoticons



These convey my senses
Nowadays
Humanizing the screen?

Behind the screen
I feel safer
unexposed
silenced again
I could feel this or that
but it doesn't matter
No-body really cares
and I don't need to show it
I can hide

How convenient
An INTER-face
becomes bigger
than my face
than your face
the between dominates the inter/within
it comes first
in language
and in the way I experience life

I too
starve for connection
touch
taste
hearing
odours
and I send emoticons
My body forgets how to move
how to connect
how to sense or feel
how to express
but I can send emoticons
These can feel on my behalf
Technology 'saves' me again
It augments me
It shrinks me
It permeates me

My face blurs behind
The INTER-face
I switch off my camera
Then I write these lines,
my only way to reach you
It returns me to the same feeling
I tried to express before
Poetry sustains me again
Yes.
Are you listening?

15. WRITING THE OTHER IN/FOR ACADEMIA

Senses and bodies
movements and rhythm
taking turns

holding hands
dancing Rueda in a circle

then
from rhythm to reflection
to make up stories
that touch perfection
then
from stories to words
from bodies to words
and
from words to texts
and
from texts to corrected texts
to proof-read texts
that CAN be
submitted

and then
from submissions to reviews
from reviews to revisions
from revisions to more revisions
to more proof-readings
to re-submissions

Our fields dried up
their bodies taxidermed
their dance-steps stilled
in a sense-proof writing
no external factor can permeate
like my water-proof academic jacket
it is not my size
but I have to fit
too big or too small
my body never really there
my senses no longer there

16. BELONGING(LESS)NESS

Always there
 this need
 to share
 to belong

And so, I conform
 when I speak
 when I write
 when I perform
 my body
 my senses
 in academia

My scripts
 dance floors
 sites
 where bodies
 crave to connect
 with each other
 where identities seek to be expressed
 but often remain underexpressed
 made
 remade
 stigmatized
 marked
 transformed
 explored
 underexplored

Academic texts often become arenas
 where some bodies can be heard
 but others not
 (Mandalaki, 2023)
 Is this how I should write
 In/for/of academia?

Words are my medium
 to express
 but I am prompted to hide
 in academia
 I crave for words that enhance
 not debunk

I need to touch
But this touch becomes 'too much'
Hancock et al. (2015)
I long to relate
to converse
even like this
even in this way
Can I?
Do I reach you?

17. BEING UN/SURE

I am unsure
 if I use *words correctly*
 I am not even sure
 if I use *the correct words*
 when I send professional emails
 to my colleagues
 to my co-authors
 or the Editors

People might not understand
 People might misunderstand
 And I don't want this
 This is not what I meant
 I wish I could look into their eyes
 touch their hands
 or dance to their melodies
 to make other meanings possible
 These meanings
 that language makes impossible
 These meanings that language reduces
 pollutes
 excludes
 makes elusive

so much life in these
 life maybe wasted
 maybe never tasted

18. YOU ARE NOT ALONE

We are not alone
I can hear
melodies
I can see (gendered) bodies moving
in the lines that you write
your verses invite me to dance
I remember Cixous
again.
She says
that we can only
“write intense,
dense poetry
with the kind of dance
that dances us around the world” (Cixous, 1993, p. 65)

YES

Let's take
our senses
each other
the other
and our words
to a poetic dance
to connect
our different bodies
hearts
and minds
in ways that
might
disrupt gender binaries
linear conceptions of normality
or other power dynamics
in society and academia
Let's use our poetry
as a way of
“going beyond ... [of] breaking
through the known and the human, and advancing
in the direction of the terrifying,
of our own end ...
there where the other begins.” (Cixous, 1993, p. 71)

19. CONNECTING

We connect through reading and writing
 each other
 (Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024)

We are following in the footsteps
 of those who have started
 to pave this way for us

Thinking of Sarah Ahmed
 of bell hooks
 of Helene Cixous
 Heather Höpfl
 Alison Pullen
 Nancy Harding
 Jenny Helin
 Marianna Fotaki
 Helena Liu
 Saoirse O'Shea
 Rima Hussein
 Carl Rhodes
 Ajnesh Prasad
 Janne Tienari
 Torkild Thanem

and I am not even doing justice
 to all of them

This is where we belong
 This is where and how
 we make a difference

If we can research and write with feminist inspirations
 (Fotaki and Pullen, 2023)
 apart-together (Barad 2014)
 we will become anew:
 something more than just
 you, me and our typing fingers
 We will become
 in collective solidarity
 across our differences

20. (UN)GENDERING WORDS

Words taking gender roles
 inviting each other to a dance
 male words that lead
 female words that feel
 This is what we learn in academia
 (Bell and King, 2010)

We choose the 'normal', 'safe', 'masculine' words
 to write
 These can think
 These can reflect
 These can conceptualize
 and
 Theorize
 These can lead our arguments
 and our bodies
 on the dance floor
 and in the text

words politically correct
 genderless
 supposedly
 gender neutral
 unable to express the identity of the bodies
 that they were chosen to 'represent'
 (I remember Spivak, 1987)

'The' MAN
 'the' woMAN
 MAN in woMAN
 MAN penetrates woMAN
 (Phillips et al., 2014)
 'Subject verb object'
 (MacKinnon, 1983, p. 124)

No woMAN is like a MAN
 in academia
 (Fotaki, 2013)
 The *Other* in their inarticulable multiplicity
 Words do not do justice to them
 Will they submit to the politics of subordination?
 I am tempted to lend them my tango shoes

Because I know
in tango
we can be
all in one body
women, others, queers and feminists
Davis (2015) knows it too

In tango
we can write-speak-dance
naked (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020)
like poets
through movement
Cixous (1976) finds us here again

21. MOMENTS FECUND

There are some moments
fecund
like living bodies
we cannot explain why
but they just feel right

to touch
to smell
to taste
to sense
life

and language
and then
to write
to live
to feel
to sense
to make sense
to express
to create
to relate
For
and
with
through
each other.

For
and
with
through
the Other

his/her/their-stories un/end and begin all over ...
every time a little different
to diffract
to rupture
to unsettle
to reimagine
and rework
our embodied onto-epistemologies
relationally (Barad, 2014)
to enliven
the way we sense
researching
and writing
organizations

22. GOING BEYOND

A thread connects my eyes
 with my ears
 with my nose
 with my tongue
 and my fingers
 I feel it
 but I cannot verbalize it
 It has no name
 no language does justice to it

and yet, I write about it
 am I already over it
 as Nietzsche (1911) would say?
 Inhabited by logos
 Logic
 Order
 Structure
 A need to make sense
 that cleanses my senses
 when I write for academia
 And is it not language that I hear when I hear?
 Can I go beyond?

To hear the rustling of your mouth
 before it utters words
 the moving of your body
 when it experiences discomfort
 or the swallowing of your throat
 when words are stuck
 never uttered

23. POSITIVE FOR COVID

Tested positive for covid
 But still so hard to put this damn automatic reply "ON"
 "you need to rest, Emmanouela"
 "please don't burn your candle at both ends"
 "Shut it down and rest"
 - *I know*
 And am so grateful for the care
 Of my feminist friends and colleagues
 with whom
 we can make a difference
 in the everyday
 I feel so
 But how can I say this and be heard?
 To the Editors, The directors
 The running deadlines
 To myself?
 To discipline this hyperfunctioning nervous system
 That is so comfortably immersed in the hyperproductivity neoliberal making
 That it hates and resists so deeply
 Afraid of existing differently
 Unsure how
 But for work
 Writing that sustains the body
 Writing that constrains the body
 Lacking imagination to create new worlds
 Or just because it trusts that alternative words are possible?
 How if not through these verses?
 The merits and limitations of isolation
 When one longs for connection
 And I keep checking and replying to emails
 My only way to connect
 Hoping I didn't transmit my virus to those vulnerable ones that
 I hope I would be able to care for
 Irony in work and life
 living in/for work? or
 working in/for life?
 Still typing
 Breathing slowness in silence

NOTE

1. Part of this poem has been inspired by the performance "Physical Time" by the artist Ely Daou. https://vimeo.com/336590951?fbclid=IwAR0MHLFD_ilo_eXBQtPSiCCkX91LkP1iqXISK0Vbhc6Grx25_x1vTJ49AtGo.

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Afterword

Noortje van Amsterdam

I am sitting in my office with the soft early summer sun warming me and have just reached the end of this book. The need to pause forces its way into my body. It feels like I have fallen off the pages filled with poetry and hit the ground. Squinting into the sun, I ponder what to do now. I know I should write something meaningful as I was asked to provide an epilogue to this book on poetry in organizations, but I am still a little shaken. While my first instinct is

to analyze,
to dissect,
to summarize

I need to pause

Because what is this book if not an invitation to pace ourselves? To slow down in order not to *understand* but to *sense*. It makes me wonder: how has this writing moved you? In what ways does it invite you to travel? What direction do you feel pulled or pushed to? I can't answer these questions in any sense-able manner. All I can do is feel with the poetry in the second part of the book and the thoughts that frame their possibility in the first part.

I want to offer a response – my response – by cutting the text, by splicing it, by putting it to the page again but in a different order. I want to see the text muddled up. I want to resist authorship, emulating meaningful and playful plagiarism, but I also worry about the violation this might entail. Can I just take some of the words presented in the book, some of the words from my colleagues, my friends, and play with them? It feels like the only way to do justice to the intent and content of this wonderful book. What follows are words that you have read already. They come from the authors and are reordered into verse to highlight how the text has moved me to think and be poetically as an organization studies scholar. The verses are interspersed with some of my own reflections. It is my first gut response and only one of many possibilities. Here it goes:

world that is filled with many types of violence, such as sexism, ableism, and racism that also permeate academia. I let Monika's words resonate with those of Hayes and Kaba (2023), who wrote the brilliant book on activism, *Let This Radicalize You*, in which imagination is similarly positioned as crucial for change.

We need more
Imagination
Not just to enjoy
The good life but
To rebel
In an organized way

Poetic impulse means
Always looking
For alternatives
To what is superficially regarded
As obvious and omnipotent

In order to do so, we need silence and weakness, as people, as students, as teachers, and as managers. We need to wait, unlearn and be fragile:

Only human fragility
will save us
from hell

I am moved to think we desperately need saving. From the erasures and violences present in our academic lives. From the racism and xenophobia that fuels war and genocide. From the impending climate disaster. Will poetry help? Or are we beyond saving? What is the role of hope? How do we practise this fragility without falling apart completely? Maybe we need to fall apart in order to build up something new. Maybe this "we" is not inclusive enough. What does the earth need? Who and what is included in the we? Who and what is silenced? As the authors of this book posit, we both need silence and get rid of it. Poetry speaks the language of silence and offers a liminal space to do both.

Silences can be
imposed,
gagging orders
instruments of
erasure

but also spaces
for reflection
and percolation

Chapters 2 and 3 build on the notion of beauty and our multiplicitous, sensuous selves. The focus on the affective body makes me turn inward. What do I feel, as I am typing these words, filling the blank page with ... something. The sun shining through the window of my office warming my left arm. I am thirsty, I want to drink the rain. And so I read more, read on, read again. I feel broken and healed by Ilaria's words:

Beauty is found
in the cracks
in the new object
that builds
on its broken past

How I long for beauty. How I feel this longing in colleagues too, and in students. This book identifies this longing, our collective need to create space within academic teaching and research to have different conversations, conversations that matter, and how the academy in spite of its white patriarchal roots still offers possibilities for organizing this if we seek out the collective, if we dare to be poetically:

Poetry is often born
out of a need
to speak up
a means of holding
one's truth
claiming authority, and
re/claiming space within
academic conversations

In Chapter 3, Emmanouela expands on the idea that these conversations are collectively established and should include the embodied capabilities of people, affective flows that circulate in particular contexts, and the fact that we are all complex individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. A poetic way of being in academia allows us to do this:

we author our feminist selves
in their multiplicities
and in relation
to other colleagues/writers/thinkers
in ways that go beyond
the expected
academic linearity
"logical"
textual flows and structures

These structures are important, because they make particular forms of writing (im)possible. This book gives a glimpse of what happens when we venture outside the conventional structures of academic writing. It is tempting to explain, to analyse, to dissect what all this means. Can we try, instead, to sense the potential of what this book has to offer?

Poetry
 what can be heard
 or sensed
 between the lines.
 An interplay
 across
 words and
 silences
 presences and
 absences

Let's end with the absences. Maybe I have written too much. Maybe I have tried to fill too many silences, instead of letting the cracks of this broken text shine. This book demands so much of us while also giving. It demands a reckoning with the structures that harm so many and that we are part of as teachers, managers, students. It demands that we do better. And it gives space: to undo, to pause, to feel and think, to listen, to dance in the rain. So I will stop writing now:

let poetry speak
 from and of
 itself

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Index

- “absolute truths” 52
- academic(s)/academia 75, 89, 105
 - embodiment 110
 - endeavours 90
 - entanglements of academic soul 111
 - gerrymandering 118
 - mother 90
 - privilege 116
 - stepping stones 108
 - without time 80
 - writing poems in/for 177–8
 - writing the other in/for 195
- academic writing 27
 - conventions 45
 - machine 35
 - non-linear 48, 50
 - relating with the Other differently 54–5
 - traditional writing for publication 28, 29
- aesthetic(s) 7, 15
 - arrest 30
 - experience 3, 31
 - impressions 6
 - neoliberalism impact in education 7–8
 - reflexivity 31
 - space 15
 - see also* beauty
- affect 35, 82, 116
 - nakedness and 53
 - and openness 31
 - workplace 67
- affective bodies 52, 54
 - feminist language 47
 - writing differently from/through 46, 48
- “affective solidarity” poem (Boncori) 67
- “after office hours” poem (Boncori) 69
- “after the flood” poem (Kostera) 132
- Ahmed, Sarah 28, 200
- “airport dreaming” poem (Kostera) 151
- alienation of labour 21, 22
- Alvesson, Mats 27, 32
- “androgynous instant” 14
- Angelou, Maya 46
- Anzaldúa, Gloria 45, 46
- apophatic theology 8
- Aramitage, Andrew 40
- “are we safe” poem (Boncori) 127
- art 2, 3, 15
 - Berger’s TV talk about 7
 - folk 6
 - “unmarketable” 7
- artificial intelligence (AI) 8
- Ashby, Ross 16
- As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (film) 4
- Asplund, Johan 2
- autonomous professions 21
- “a-void-ing” poem (Mandalaki) 179
- Bachelard, Gaston 14
- Barad, Karen 50, 56
- Bauman, Zygmunt 12, 19, 20
- beauty
 - experiencing 8
 - Keats’s poem about 6
 - Schultz’s view about 6
 - writing about 4, 5, 6
 - see also* aesthetic(s)
- Beavan, Katie 37, 186
- Becker, Wolfgang 11
- “becoming change” poem (Boncori) 125
- “being un/sure” poem (Mandalaki) 198
- Bellear, Lisa 46
- Bell, Emma 191
- “belonging(less)ness” poem (Mandalaki) 196–7
- Berardi, Franco “Bifo” 10

- Berger, John 6, 7, 190
 Bernhard, Sarah 20
 Biden, Joe 32
 Blake, William 2, 18
 Bloom, Peter 14
 Boncori, Ilaria 27
 about academic writing 28
 poems about workplace landscapes
 64–128
 Borgström, Benedikte 37
 “breaking the mould” poem (Boncori)
 78
 “breathless, again” poem (Kostera) 135
 Brewis, Deborah N. 187

 “call and response” poetry 33
 “can we just remain?” poem (Mandalaki)
 183
 capitalism 21
 cardinal sin 17
 “cesspool days” poem (Kostera) 144
 Chanez-Cortés, Iván 37
Changeons de Voie (Morin) 11
 Christianity 17
 Cixous, Helene 31–2, 45, 46, 55, 177,
 189, 200, 202
 Cohen, Leonard 18
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 28
 collegial system 16
 colonial heteronormative domination 56
 commoning 9, 17
 communism 13
 communityship 17
 complexity
 to coordinate organizations 16
 critical mass of 16–17
 Dreyfus learning model 20–21
 of ideas 15–16
 perspective 14
 space for poetic 16
 “connecting” poem (Mandalaki) 200
 conversations, writing about 5
 corporeal connectedness 9
 “counting my blessings” poem (Boncori)
 72–3
 COVID-19 pandemic 11–12, 205
 craftsmanship 19
Craftsman, The (Sennett) 19
 creativity 3
 imaginative impotence affecting 10

 Olah’s writing about 6
 “wild” 7
 critical poetic inquiry 32
 cultural lag 18
 Cunha, João Vieira da 37
 Cunha, Miguel Pina e 37
 Curry, Patrick 2–3
 “CV” poem (Kostera) 150

 dandelions 5, 145
 Davis, Kathy 202
 decontextualization 6
 Derrida, Jacques 55
 “deserters” poem (Kostera) 148
 dialogue with dominant order 49
 Dickinson, Emily 47
 digital surveillance society 12–13
 Domínguez, Giazú Enciso 37
 Dotson, Kristie 36
 dreams, Kostera’s poems about
 “airport dreaming” poem 151
 “imagine” poem 173
 “impossible symmetry” poem 146
 “lamentation” poem 165
 “last summer, and back again, the”
 poem 155
 “list of longing, the” poem 134
 “lockdown” poem 138
 “map, the” poem 131
 “mind, atoms” poem 129
 “mourning is the most radical thing
 we can do these days” poem 154
 “pay slip” poem 169
 “Prospero’s book” poem 137
 “red” poem 168
 Dreyfus learning model 20
 skill development 20–21
 stages 20
 “dystopia” poem (Boncori) 70

 Eastern Bloc collapse 11–12
 “elegies for the living” poem (Kostera)
 136
 Elytes, Odysseas 45, 48
 embodied
 experiences 39, 52, 55
 motivation 21
 reflexivity 31
 ways to speak of marginalized people
 31

- writing 54, 56–7
 epistemic injustice 36
 eroticism 53
 ethico-political bearing 51, 56
 ethnographic imagination 3
 ethnographic poetry 3
 “every new ceiling” poem (Boncori) 91
 excellence 17, 18
 exterminism 13
 Extinction Rebellion movement 18
- Faiz, Rafia 40
 family 72, 95
 Faulkner, Sarah 33
 feminist diffraction, poetry as 49–51
 feminist ethico-political act 57
 feminist poetry/poetics
 becoming with 45–9
 feminist diffraction, poetry as 49–51
 beyond language 51
 by Moraga and Anzaldúa 44–5
 poetry as relational sensemaking 51–5
 van Amsterdam’s “let’s just sit” poem 55
 writing difference, power, and vulnerability differently as/through 55–7
 writing differently from/through affective bodies 46
 see also poetic(s)
 “figs from thistles” poem (Kostera) 167
 flat relational ontology of becoming 51
 Flyvbjerg, Bent 14
 folk art 6
 “for you” poem (Boncori) 82–3
 Fotaki, Marianna 185, 200
Four Futures: Life after Capitalism (Frase) 13–14
Four Ways to Forgiveness (Le Guin) 9
 “fragility” poem (Boncori) 114–15
 Frase, Peter 13–14
 Furman, Rich 38–9
- Gabriel, Yiannis 27, 32
 Garcia-Meneses, Javiera 37
 Geertz, C. 32
Gender, Work & Organization (Beavan, Borgström, Helin and Rhodes) 37
 “gloria” poem (Kostera) 140
 “going beyond” poem (Mandalaki) 204
Good Bye, Hayek (film) 14
Good Bye, Lenin! (film) 11
 good life 7, 10, 14, 210
 Gorman, Amanda 32
 “great again” poem (Kostera) 159
 Guillet de Monthoux, Pierre 15
 Guimarães-Costa, Nuno 37
- haiku 3
 Han, Byung Chul 8
 Haraway, Donna 33, 35, 50
 Harding, Nancy 185, 200
 Harjo, Joy 46
 “heart of feather” poem (Boncori) 79
 Heidegger, Martin 40
 Helin, Jenny 37, 47, 55, 200
 hermeneutical injustice 36
 “heroes no more” poem (Kostera) 142
 higher culture 6
 “Hill We Climb, The” poem (Gorman) 32
 Hitler, Adolf 7
 “home” poem (Kostera) 171
homo economicus 16
 hooks, bell 183, 185, 200
 Höpfl, Heather 10, 200
How Much is Enough? (Skidelsky and Skidelsky) 7
 Huggins, Ericka 46
 human gestures, writing about 4–5
 Hussein, Rima 200
- “I am afraid” poem (Mandalaki) 185
 “I am November” poem (Kostera) 175
 identity 56, 72
 poetic collective 15
 social 19
 “I dissent” poem (Boncori) 71
 imagination 3, 10
 ethnographic 3
 poetic 9
 imaginative impotence 10
 “imagine” poem (Kostera) 173
 imperfections 17
 “impossible symmetry” poem (Kostera) 146
 inclusivity
 affect as vehicle for 36
 key issues in 26
 role of mentorship in 40

- institutions of power 12
 “in the drawer” poem (Boncori) 74–5
 Irigaray, Lucy 185
 “I search for you” poem (Boncori) 89–90
 “it’s a new dawn” poem (Boncori) 102
- Jarmusch, Jim 4
 “job’s secret” poem (Kostera) 141
 junk jobs 20
 “just before” poem (Kostera) 143
- Kaur, Rupi 46
- Keats, John 5
 definition of negative capability 8
 poem about beauty 6
- Kempton, Beth 29–30
 “keynotes and laundry” poem (Boncori) 126
- King, Daniel 191
- kintsugi approach 30–31
- Kivinen, Nina 47
- knowing through poetic discourse 54
- Kostera, Monika 129
- “lamentation” poem (Kostera) 165
 “last summer, and back again, the” poem (Kostera) 155
- leadership, Kostera’s poems about
 “breathless, again” 135
 “cesspool days” 144
 “CV” 150
 “deserters” 148
 “elegies for the living” 136
 “figs from thistles” 167
 “gloria” 140
 “great again” 159
 “heroes no more” 142
 “home” 171
 “I am November” 175
 “job’s secret” 141
 “just before” 143
 “make no bones” 163
 “Medea” 156
 “Medusa” 152
 “Mephistopheles was downsized and his job was outsourced” 170
 “message in a bottle” 147
 “Mr. Brainwash life philosophy, the” 160
 “new train is not blue, the” 139
- “old man, the” 133
 “one more letter” 157
 “Professor A. Z.” 153
 “redemption” 174
 “riddle of the Sphinx” 176
 “ride through the material world, A” 162
 “self-guided tours” 161
 “after the flood” 132
 “transparency” 158
 “what would saint valentine say” 166
 “words” 149
- learning 56, 57
 Dreyfus learning model 20–21
 ethnographic mode of 3
 Kostera’s “What would saint valentine say” poem 166
 “leave” poem (Boncori) 96–7
- Le Guin, Ursula 9, 18
- lesbian poetry 46
 “let’s just sit” poem (van Amsterdam) 55
 “life that’s cheap and rich, A” poem (Boncori) 100–101
 “like silence” poem (Kostera) 164
- Lindsay, Jo 38
- linear management 14
- linguistic and sexual differences 54
 “list of longing, the” poem (Kostera) 134
- Liu, Helena 200
- “lockdown” poem (Kostera) 138
- Lorde, Audre 31, 45, 46, 178
- “make no bones” poem (Kostera) 163
- management 15
 academic writing of poetry 29, 35
 collegial 16
 linear 14
 necessary diversity principle 16
 negative capability 31
 neoliberal rhetorical 22
 perfection vs. imperfection 17
 poetic 15, 22
 poesis 29
 reflexive inaction in 15
 requisite variety principle 16
 rhetorical 10, 14, 15, 17–18
 traditional ways of writing in 27
 weak 9
- Mandalaki, Emmanouela 177
 “a-void-ing” poem 179

- “being un/sure” poem 198
 “belonging(less)ness” poem 196–7
 “can we just remain?” poem 183
 “connecting” poem 200
 “going beyond” poem 204
 “I am afraid” poem 185
 “moments fecund” poem 203
 “mouthless inter-faces” poem 193–4
 “positive for Covid” poem 205
 “putting words?” poem 190
 “shame in silence” poem 184
 “shameless space” poem 189
 “speaking writing shame” poem 188
 “there is more” poem 180
 “these moments” poem 181–2
 “tik tak” poem 191–2
 “(un)gendering words” poem 201–2
 “words again” poem 187
 “writing ↔ unshaming” poem 186
 “you are not alone” poem 199
 “map, the” poem (Kostera) 131
 Massumi, Brian 35
 matter-realities 54
 McMindfulness 22
 “Medea” poem (Kostera) 156
 “Medusa” poem (Kostera) 152
 Meegeren, Han van 2
 Mekas, Jonas 4
 “mentoring” poem (Boncori) 107
 “Mephistopheles was downsized and
 his job was outsourced” poem
 (Kostera) 170
 “message in a bottle” poem (Kostera)
 147
 Mierzecka, Janina 4
 “mind, atoms” poem (Kostera) 129
 modern feudalism 13
 “moments fecund” poem (Mandalaki)
 203
 Moraga, Cherríe 45, 46
 Morgan, Clare 38
 Morin, Edgar 11, 14
 “mourning is the most radical thing we
 can do these days” poem (Kostera)
 154
 “mouthless inter-faces” poem
 (Mandalaki) 193–4
 “Mr. Brainwash life philosophy, the”
 poem (Kostera) 160
 music 6
 mutuality 17
 mutual vulnerability 9
 mystery 2–3
 nakedness 51, 53
 necessary diversity principle 16
 negative capability 9–10, 14, 31
 neoliberal capitalism 21
 neoliberalism 6, 7–8, 12, 18, 21
 neoliberal rhetorical management 22
 “new train is not blue, the” poem
 (Kostera) 139
 “new year, A” poem (Boncori) 123–4
 Nietzsche, Friedrich W. 204
 “nostalgia” poem (Boncori) 121
 Ogburn, William 18
 Olah, Nathalie 6
 “old man, the” poem (Kostera) 133
 “one more letter” poem (Kostera) 157
 organizational miasma 18
 organizational shadow 17
 organization studies
 academic writing of poetry 29, 35
 negative capability 31
 poiesis 29
 traditional ways of writing in 27
 O’Shea, Saoirse 200
Other, the 49, 51, 52, 54–6, 201
 writing about 4
 writing differently as/through
 feminist poetics 56–7
 “packing up” poem (Kostera) 130
Paterson (film) 4
 Paulsen, Roland 27, 32
 “pay slip” poem (Kostera) 169
 peacemakers 14
 perfection 17
 physical space 10
 “picture of my old self, A” poem
 (Boncori) 108–9
 Pizarnik, Alejandra 46
 plants, writing about 5
 Plath, Sylvia 46, 178
 “pockets full of you” poem (Boncori)
 122
 poetic(s) 9
 collective identity 15
 contextualization 7

- exploration into feminist writing 48
- imagination 9
- impulse 10, 13
- living 14
- management 15, 22
- power of 16
- prose 3
- reality 16
- of space 10
- see also* feminist poetry/poetics
- poetry 10
 - as feminist diffraction 49–51
 - Kostera’s “ride through the material world, A” poem 162
 - Kostera’s “like silence” poem 164
 - as relational sensemaking 51–5
- Poetry and Work* (Walton) 38
- poetry *for* organizing 26, 27, 56–7
 - affective and relational potential of poetry 35–6
 - data interpretation 34
 - epistemic injustice 36
 - inclusion in inaugural events of US presidents 32–3
 - limitations and expression 34–5
 - political interventions 33
 - relational engagement 36–7
 - sympoiesis 33, 53
 - Western-focused and Anglo-centred writing 35
- “poetry in motion” 37
- poetry *in* organizing 26, 27
 - academic writing 27, 28
 - from aesthetic and embodied ways of knowing 31
 - Coleridge’s definition of poetry 28
 - kintsugi approach 30–31
 - poiesis 29, 31
 - Quasimodo’s poem 29
 - around scientific writing 29
 - thick description 32
 - wabi-sabi approach 29–30
- poetry *on* organizing 26, 27, 37–40
 - “backstage” investigation 37
 - personal narratives and arts-based expression 40
 - in scholarly context 39
 - in social work context 38–9
 - work and poetry relationship 38
- poiesis 29, 31
- “positive for Covid” poem (Mandalaki) 205
- positive thinking 22
- power 18
 - institutions of 12
 - of poetic 16
 - writing differently as/through feminist poetics 55–7
- Prasad, Ajnesh 200
- prepositional liminal spaces, explorations across 26
 - poetry *for* organizing 26, 27, 32–7
 - poetry *in* organizing 26, 27–32
 - poetry *on* organizing 26, 27, 37–40
- prepositions 26–7
- profession, moment of 21
- “Professor A.Z.” poem (Kostera) 153
- profiteor* 21
- “Prospero’s book” poem (Kostera) 137
- Proverbs* 17
- Pullen, Alison 47, 185, 200
- “putting words?” poem (Mandalaki) 190
- Quasimodo, Salvatore 29
- “rainbows in the distance” poem (Boncori) 92–3
- rain, writing about 4, 5, 87, 139, 140, 155, 165, 174
- “rainy days” poem (Boncori) 98–9
- “recipe to survive work alienation, A” poem (Kostera) 145
- “red” poem (Kostera) 168
- “redemption” poem (Kostera) 174
- “reflexive inaction” of leader 9
- relational embodied ethics of commons 9
- relational reflexive process 53
- relational sensemaking, poetry as 51–5
- Renteria-Uriarte, Xavier 36
- rentism 13
- requisite variety principle 16
- resistance 102
 - to boundaryless lives 87
 - to socialization 126
- response-ability 47
- retrotopia 12
- rhetorical management 10, 14, 15, 17–18
- rhetorical rationality 9–10
- Rhodes, Carl 14, 37, 200

- “riddle of the Sphinx” poem (Kostera) 176
 “ride through the material world, A” poem (Kostera) 162
 Ronai, Rambo 178
Room of One’s Own, A (Woolf) 47

 Saint-Exupery, Antoine de 22
 Sappho 46
 Schultz, Bruno 6
 scientific writing 18–19, 36
 self-confidence 22
 “self-guided tours” poem (Kostera) 161
 self-monitoring practices 13
 Sennett, Richard 19–22
 sense-abling 187
 sensemaking 27, 28, 40
 female 118
 relational 51–5
 “sensory words” poem (Boncori) 110–11
 “shame in silence” poem (Mandalaki) 184
 “shameless space” poem (Mandalaki) 189
 shaming 184, 188
 silences through poetry 31
 Skidelsky, Edward 7
 Skidelsky, Robert 7
 skill development 20–21
 “sleepless nights” poem (Boncori) 94–5
 smell, writing about 5, 86, 94, 110, 114, 134, 154, 159, 180, 209
 Smith, Patti 18
 “snowfall” poem (Boncori) 105–6
 social change 18
 socialism 13
 social science 14–15, 18–19
 “speaking writing shame” poem (Mandalaki) 188
 “splinters” poem (Kostera) 172
 Stalin, Joseph 7
 “staring at me” poem (Boncori) 64–5
Steal as Much as You Can (Olah) 6
 street poetry 33
 superficial dictatorship 8
 Svallfors, Stefan 18–19
 sympoiesis 33, 53
 synesthetic-making processes 52

 Thatcher, Margaret 12
 “there is more” poem (Mandalaki) 180
 “there is no alternative” (TINA) 12
 “these moments” poem (Mandalaki) 181–2
 “these poems” poem (Boncori) 128
 thick description 32
 thinking, Kostera’s poems about
 “like silence” 164
 “packing up” 130
 “recipe to survive work alienation, A” 145
 “splinters” 172
 Thompson, Flora 6
 Tienari, Janne 200
 Tikkanen, Marta 46, 188
 “tik tak” poem (Mandalaki) 191–2
 “Time is my enemy” poem (Boncori) 80–81
 “tired” poem (Boncori) 76
 “tracing back the steps” poem (Boncori) 112–13
 trainers, writing about 5, 8
 “transparency” poem (Kostera) 158

 “(un)gendering words” poem (Mandalaki) 201–2
 unlearning 57
 Unnahar, Noor 46
 unshaming 186
 un-silencing 188
Until the dust settles (Helin, Kivinen and Pullen) 47

 Vachhani, Sheena J. 185
 van Amsterdam, Noortje 39, 55
 vertical writing 55
 “vertigo” poem (Boncori) 103–4
vita negativa see apophatic theology
 vivre poétiquement 14
 voicing affective experiences, space for 56
 vulnerability 17, 39, 188
 mutual 9
 recognizing as social condition 56–7
 valuing of 31
 writing differently as/through feminist poetics 56–7

 wabi-sabi approach 29–30

- “waiting game, the” poem (Boncori) 84–5
 “walking away” poem (Boncori) 116–17
 “watch me” poem (Boncori) 86
 “weak management” approach 9
 Western Bloc 12
 Western logos 49–50
 “what if” poem (Boncori) 120
 “what it takes” poem (Boncori) 68
What Poetry Brings to Business (Morgan) 38
 “what would saint valentine say” poem (Kostera) 166
 “who is we” poem (Boncori) 87–8
 Wilde, Oscar 15
 Williams, Eley 187
 “wolves in sheep’s clothes” poem (Boncori) 118–19
 Woolf, Virginia 46, 47
 “words” poem (Kostera) 149
 “words again” poem (Mandalaki) 187
 work 19
 alienation of labour 21, 22
 Dreyfus learning model 20–21
 Kostera’s “mourning is the most radical thing we can do these days” poem 154
 Kostera’s “recipe to survive work alienation, A” poem 145
 satisfaction in 19–20
 work and poetry relationship 38
 working class 6–7
Working Hand (Mierzecka) 4
 workplace landscapes, Boncori’s poems
 about
 “affective solidarity” 67
 “are we safe” 127
 “becoming change” 125
 “breaking the mould” 78
 “counting my blessings” 72–3
 “dystopia” 70
 “every new ceiling” 91
 “fragility” 114–15
 “for you” 82–3
 “heart of feather” 79
 “I dissent” 71
 “I search for you” 89–90
 “it’s a new dawn” 102
 “keynotes and laundry” 126
 “leave” 96–7
 “life that’s cheap and rich, A” 100–101
 “mentoring” 107
 “new year, A” 123–4
 “nostalgia” 121
 “after office hours” 69
 “picture of my old self, A” 108–9
 “pockets full of you” 122
 “rainbows in the distance” 92–3
 “rainy days” 98–9
 “sensory words” 110–11
 “sleepless nights” 94–5
 “snowfall” 105–6
 “staring at me” 64–5
 “in the drawer” 74–5
 “these poems” 128
 “time is my enemy” 80–81
 “tired” 76
 “tracing back the steps” 112–13
 “vertigo” 103–4
 “waiting game, the” 84–5
 “walking away” 116–17
 “watch me” 86
 “what if” 120
 “what it takes” 68
 “who is we” 87–8
 “wolves in sheep’s clothes” 118–19
 “workplace poetry” 77
 “work was love” 66
 “workplace poetry” poem (Boncori) 77
 “work was love” poem (Boncori) 66
 writing
 Cixous’s about 31–2
 poems in/for academia 177–8
 scientific 29
 scientific 36
 the *other* in/for academia 195
 vertical 55
 “writing ↔ unshaming” poem (Mandalaki) 186
 writing differently
 as/through feminist poetics 55–7
 from/through affective bodies 46, 48
 Yellow Vests movement 18
 “you are not alone” poem (Mandalaki) 199