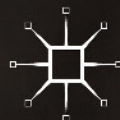


EDITED BY ANGELIKA BAMMER
AND RUTH-ELLEN BOETCHER JOERES

The Future of Scholarly Writing

CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS



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Edited by

Angelika Bammer

&

Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres

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For those who love—and struggle with—writing

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Introduction

Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres

How we say things matters. Some say *freedom*, others *liberation*; some say *discourse* and others *language*. When we speak or write, we take positions laden with social, cultural, political, and personal meanings whose differences can't be treated merely as a matter of different styles. Communication is a wager, an adventure, a dance where the steps keep changing. It is a contest and a competition, a courtship and a site of conflict. We make and unmake worlds in language and define relationships among ourselves in words.

Words are powerful, and what we do with them makes their power evident. When people write, they *use* that power—to present an argument, to convey new knowledge, to tell a story. Sometimes they write to change the way others see things, and in that sense they write to change the world.

Academic writers are no exception to these general principles. We write to make a difference too. Yet to our own chagrin and our readers' loss, we often fail to communicate effectively. Our research may be rigorous, our analyses sound, and our conclusions thoughtful. Yet the importance, much less urgency, of our work is lost if it is perceived—and dismissed—as “academic”: bookish and clever, but in the end, of little consequence, if not irrelevant. We don't help matters by producing scholarship that only the most specialized audience of our peers can understand, much less appreciate. The resulting disconnect between what academics, particularly in the humanities, do and the frequent perception that they're not doing much of anything is a problem that needs addressing.

Stereotypes and prejudices pass as explanations for this situation. Every side has its ready-made take: the American public has been “dumbed down” to the level of sound bites; ivory tower academics are out of touch with the real world; scholars need a specialized vocabulary no less than mechanics or surgeons.

It is easy to make fun of academics and how we talk. But the fact that we aren't effective in communicating what we do—or even, more importantly, why the things we do matter—is a bigger and more serious problem than the trivializing jokes might allow. For while it is felt with particular urgency in the humanities—where the work of ideas and their exchange among us, what we refer to as intellectual community, is the bedrock on which we stand—the problem of communication extends across the contemporary university to the point that it threatens the very effectiveness of our work.

This situation raises serious questions for an engaged scholarship: How could we communicate more effectively with the various publics we might want to reach—be they colleagues in other disciplines or people in the so-called general public? If we want to extend our reach beyond the confines of our discipline or specialized peer group and generate interest in our work among a broader audience, how might we do so without compromising its scholarly integrity? Whom are we writing for, anyway, in a given instance, and what work do we want our scholarship to do? Finally, what about us—the writers—in all of this? What do *we* want to get out of writing? Are there ways we might think differently about what and how we write that would give us more pleasure and a deeper sense of purpose?

The Future of Scholarly Writing contributes to this discussion. As such, it is part of a debate about what is sometimes cast as a writing “crisis”—an uneasy awareness of the fact that established forms of scholarly presentation (the conventional monograph or peer-reviewed article) are no longer adequate to the needs of the contemporary academy, much less those of the world beyond it.

This sense of crisis is our point of departure and the challenge to which our book responds. Yet we don’t cry that the sky is falling, suggest that scholars have failed, or cast blame on the institutions. While laments and critiques like these are valid, our book has a different aim. Instead of looking back to uncover failures, we want to envision what lies ahead and explore the possibilities that change enables. For crises also present opportunities and the writing crisis, which is inseparable from the crisis in the humanities writ large, is a generative moment for the twenty-first-century academy. How we address it has broad implications: for our scholarship and its effects, for the future of the humanities in the academy, and for the role of the university in producing knowledge and promoting practices that support human flourishing.

Toward these ends we have to expand our very idea of scholarship: what it is, what it does, and what it looks like. In particular, we have to take the form of our work as seriously as we do its content. *Matters of form*, we propose, *are matters of content*. When we neglect to attend to form and proceed as if content were all that mattered, a vital source of the power of language is lost. A common assumption is that writing is of concern to writers, while scholars can be left to think. We challenge this assumption. *Form is not a container for scholarly content: it is part of the scholarship*. To ignore this fact is to leave a critical part of our work undone.

Our book explores the consequences of this argument. Taking form as an intellectual matter opens the question of how we write to the full range of philosophical, political, social, and psychological implications. In this light, we make a case for the importance of what one might call consequential writing: writing that does something, that has effects. *The Future of Scholarly Writing* thus represents a critical shift in the approach to scholarship and scholarly presentation by treating *how* we write with the same intellectual seriousness as *what* we write. What would it mean, we ask, to

take the aesthetics of scholarly writing seriously and what difference would such a change of perspective make?

Our answer takes the form of a two-pronged argument. On the one hand, we argue *against* the hold of conventions that have governed scholarly writing in the American academy in ways that often date back to the early emergence of disciplinary formations and methodologies. On the other hand, we argue *for* an expansive range of creative possibilities, both within the frame of writing proper and in the spaces where writing and other expressive media meet. Toward this end, our book examines how different disciplines define their boundaries—how they expect or require adherence to a certain set of forms while devaluing or disallowing other forms—to ask what the effects of such uniformity are.

These are not abstract matters for us as editors or for our contributors. They emerge from a lifetime of professional engagement in the academy, as scholars and intellectuals, as mentors and teachers. We grapple with them in our scholarship, talk about them with our students, and discuss them with colleagues as we design courses, grade papers, and review one another's work.

Of late, there are signs that scholarly writing, *as writing*, is being taken more seriously. As the purchase of theory in the humanities has begun to wane, more attention is being paid to practice. How we do things—in particular, how we write—is getting more attention. Courses on writing are increasingly not just offered but required for undergraduates, while graduate students and faculty are urged to take seminars and workshops designed to help them increase their satisfaction and success as writers. Considerable resources are being deployed toward these ends, as universities establish writing centers, hold workshops on grant writing and manuscript development, and organize “meet the editor” events. Meanwhile, outside the academy, a growing number of private writing coaches and developmental editors are offering their services.

A growing body of work on academic writing has begun to appear. Early on, studies in applied linguistics and the academic literacies movement started gathering data on academic writing practices and their institutional and social effects. Building on research on writing in the sciences (Bazerman 1988; Myers 1990), Ken Hyland's *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing* (2000) examined how academics constitute themselves as members of particular disciplines through the kinds of texts they write and how they write them. Proceeding from there, Hilary Nesi and Sheena Gardner (2012) studied student writing in English higher education to reveal the structural links among disciplinary formations, institutional structures, and academic writing practices. In 2003, two edited volumes—*Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena* and *Critical Intellectuals on Writing*—significantly expanded the discussion by exploring the broad range of epistemological, philosophical, political, and personal dimensions of how academic and public scholars write. In short, people were talking about academic

writing. And not just talking: studying it. The outlines of a critical inquiry had been mapped.

In the years since, it has broadened and deepened. In *The Language of Law School* (2007), Elizabeth Mertz applies the perspectives of linguistic and legal anthropology to study how a student learns to “think like a lawyer” (and, we might add, write like one), while Michael Billig (2013) applies the lens of social psychology to the social sciences to understand how social scientists *Learn to Write Badly*, as his title puts it, and what the yield of writing badly is. In *Loaded Words* (2012), Marjorie Garber explores a wide range of cultural texts (from *Mad* magazine to Derrida and Shakespeare) to examine how the words we use come pre-loaded with cultural, political, and affective meanings and how we can use these pre-loaded meanings to create our own, while Jackie Stacey and Janet Wolff in *Writing Otherwise* propose that “writing otherwise” might “expand some of the traditional boundaries of academic practice” (1).

One response both to the growing interest in as well as anxiety over successful writing has been the proliferation of “how-to” books. A few specifically address academic writers and dispense advice on such matters as how to write a dissertation, revise a paper for publication, or turn a dissertation into a book (see, e.g., Germano; Booth, Colomb, and Williams; and Bolker).¹ But by far the majority—from Anne Lamott’s 1994 classic *Bird by Bird* through Stephen King’s *On Writing* (2000) to Verlyn Klinkenborg’s *Several Short Sentences About Writing* (2012), to name just three—are for people with a practical interest in the craft of writing. Usually short on rules, middling on advice, and long on encouragement, their approach is as applicable to academic writing as to the kind of writing that we call creative: (1) learn the craft; (2) try things out; (3) tell the truth (even if it is fictional); (4) above all, keep working at it. At the end of the day, you learn to write by writing.

In classic guides to good writing, the emphasis on style has been foundational and consistent. Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style* has been in print for over half a century, and Joseph Williams’s *Style* for over thirty years.² Yet recent publications suggest that style has become the focus of renewed attention, particularly as a dimension of scholarly form. Within the space of two years, three new books on academic writing all foreground style as a critical dimension of academic writing: Helen Sword’s *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012), Eric Hayot’s *The Elements of Academic Style* (2014), and Steven Pinker’s *The Sense of Style* (2014).³ Rounding out the

¹ While the focus of Germano’s book, as the title makes evident, is not on writing, but on “getting it published,” Chapter 3 (“Writing the Manuscript”) covers basic principles and practices of scholarly writing. In *The Craft of Research* by Booth, Colomb, and Williams, questions of writing are threaded throughout, from imagining a reader through making an argument to “telling your story clearly.”

² Initially published simply as *Style* (1981), it was reissued in 1990, with two additional chapters co-authored by Gregory Colomb, as *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. In 2013, it was in its thirteenth edition.

³ Sword and Hayot are literary scholars; Pinker is a psycholinguist.

picture is the reissue of the classic “Strunk and White” in a new guise with color illustrations (Strunk, White, and Kalman 2007).

The instrumental approach to writing has evident merit. As scholarly work is increasingly evaluated in terms of quantifiable “output,” advice on how to write more efficiently and successfully is obviously welcome. But the limitations of this approach are equally obvious. For one, since the nature of scholarship in the university of the future can’t be predicted yet, it is hard to advise, much less prescribe, how to present it. For another, the real challenge of writing is not mechanical, but epistemological: how we say something isn’t separable from what we know and how we think we know it. The mechanical solution thus begs the deeper question of how and why writing has become a problem in the very environment—institutions of higher learning and in particular the humanities—in which writing has been foundational as a means of inquiry and producing knowledge. This is an irony worth pausing to note.

When asked to describe what the world would look like after the revolution he envisioned had come, Karl Marx (1976) said that he couldn’t provide “recipes . . . for the cook-shops of the future.”⁴ We approach the future of scholarly writing in this same spirit: we don’t provide recipes. But, to stay with the metaphor, we offer samples. Following the dictum that we learn good writing (as well as bad, as one of our contributors, Michael Billig, points out) not from someone telling us how to write but from seeing how others have done it and practicing how to do so ourselves, the contributors to our book don’t provide blueprints but suggest possibilities by modeling various approaches to writing themselves.

In *The Future of Scholarly Writing*, scholars from across the contemporary academy reflect on their work. They describe lessons learned and unlearned—and sometimes relearned—as the need arose. But as they focus not on *what*, but on *how*, they write, they change the perspective from which we usually see scholarship. Reflecting on the challenges of writing within the frameworks of their respective disciplines, they weigh the costs and benefits of these frameworks. They note how the norms and conventions designed to facilitate communication within a discipline can become restrictive if we want to communicate with a different audience or simply want to convey our material in a different way. Instead of facilitating things, the conventions then become a hindrance, preventing us from saying what we have—and want—to say. What is more, if we decide to “write otherwise” and break with convention, the problem still isn’t solved, as we risk negative repercussions from within our own discipline: work that doesn’t fit into conventional frameworks risks being discredited, ignored, or dismissed.

Our contributors respond to this dilemma. They remind us that conventions aren’t requirements but options that can be starting points for something new. Offering critiques that contain a brief for change without

⁴ Mentioned in a footnote to the Postface to the second edition of Volume 1 of *Capital*.

demanding it, their pieces provide a doubled focus: they look back and they look ahead. They blend retrospection with anticipation.

* * *

What we write about and how is invariably shaped by the contexts in which we are writing: both the material and intellectual conditions under which scholarly work is produced. The former include a tangle of economic and legal factors that remain invisible as long as we think of our work in purely intellectual terms, but they become manifest when our work takes material form and becomes public in the form of a publication. As authors we think of readers: how will they respond? But for publishers readers are buyers and costs must be weighed against profits. And while the latter can sometimes be measured in terms of a book's reputation (acclaim is a form of currency), the financial costs are undeniably real. Moreover, financial costs have a legal dimension: copyright, permissions, the risk of suits by aggrieved third parties. In the litigious and financially straitened climate of the current market in the publishing industry, balancing competing needs of this order is no small feat.⁵

The intellectual contexts of scholarly work present challenges of a different kind, and our professional training prepares us to meet them. Still, there are times when changes in the material conditions of our work (institutional structures, technologies of production, to name two of the most significant) and changes in the intellectual frameworks and methodological practices of our work converge to present particular challenges. By all accounts, this is such a time.

Recent developments in the American academy—notably the increasing emphasis on public scholarship and interdisciplinarity and the emergence of new media technologies—are putting pressure on the way we write. In many ways, neither the pressures nor the responses to them are entirely new but the result of shifts and changes, at once institutional, social, and cultural, that go back several decades. The work of our contributors spans this broader context. On the one hand, they are subject to the demands and exigencies of academic life in the early twenty-first century and they speak about and from this context. On the other, they carry forward assumptions and initiatives forged in an earlier and arguably more expansive time: the intellectual ferment of the 1970s and early 1980s.

The heightened emphasis on public scholarship and interdisciplinarity reflects the development of critical theories and practices that emerged in this earlier period: feminist studies; ethnic, critical race, and minority studies; and cultural studies in general. In all of these fields, the politics of form was a critical issue. Attention to voice (who speaks and for whom

⁵ Cathy Davidson urges us to take the impact of a changed legal climate seriously: "it is not an exaggeration," she writes, "to say that all forms of humanistic scholarship are threatened by current copyright legislation" (487, n.8).

they speak), mode (how was agency acknowledged in the active mode or hidden behind the passive), and genre (which forms had been valued and which devalued) called attention to the gendered, racialized, and class biases implicit in what had previously been understood as merely a matter of aesthetic principles. In response to what they identified as social biases embedded in form, scholars in these fields set out to explore and develop alternatives. As they brought the norms and conventions of academic production and scholarly work into focus from their perspectives, expanding the range of what we think of as academic work and what it can look like, they ushered in some of the changes that we are now registering. The work of our contributors reflects these developments and the assumptions and values on which they are based.

The influence of feminism is particularly evident. The initial emphasis in academic feminism on its interdisciplinary nature (someone once remarked that feminism was the first “interdiscipline”) identified a problem of communication among the competing jargons and methods of different disciplines. Yet this very problem resulted in a conscious effort to develop a language that different audiences could gain access to and comprehend. Second-wave feminism as an active political and intellectual movement in the 1970s was by definition a grassroots movement, at the outset more present in the streets than in the classroom. Writing came after action. And yet the writing that emerged, at least in the early years, was marked by that connection to action: the very first sentence of the interdisciplinary feminist journal *Signs*, for example, begins with the editorial comment that “journals should have an animating purpose” (v). Calls came for a language that would not only animate but activate language that would clarify, attract, and stimulate. Connections beyond the institution were at once assumed. The desire to communicate widely and expansively reflects feminist scholars’ initial intent to speak to academic and non-academic audiences and respond to the needs of women and men in the worlds both within and outside of academic institutions. The importance of a clear standpoint also resulted in the clear affirmation of self-identification, of the presence of the personal as a source of knowledge and form of evidence. It challenged the normative and totalizing systems of value that had hitherto held sway—the assumption of objectivity, for example, as a given in academic discourse. This intent put the question of form—how we use language, how we write and present our research—at the very center of feminist scholarly inquiry.

The use of the anthology as a form for feminist scholarship was as much a political and philosophical statement as it was an academic one: it was a genre based on the diversity of different perspectives and many voices. Not just multiple contributors; there were often also multiple editors. Accordingly, *Signs*, which had begun conventionally with a single editor, moved in 1990 to a dual editorship, with the editors representing different disciplines. These were deliberate and intentional shifts that represented not only a particular political position but also an openness to heterodox styles in the effort to reach a broader audience that, while still primarily

academic, was at least multidisciplinary. That animating purpose characterized early second-wave feminism, providing for a directness and an accessibility that have faded in the interim, with the turn toward a more “academic” style and language that were doubtless thought to be more acceptable to the academy in which feminism was trying to gain institutional recognition. The fact that quite a number of the pieces that appear in the following pages are informed by a feminist consciousness is thus no coincidence. The issues addressed and the approaches developed by feminist and minority scholars and activist practitioners decades ago continue to be resonant and urgent.

Already in the 1970s, in both feminism and other emergent critical inquiries, the insistence on relevance and on being able to speak to different, wider publics was apparent. The intensifying focus on public scholarship in our own era, driven by a growing sensitivity to the ethics of scholarly practices, has been a keen reminder of the fact that our work has—indeed should have—effects beyond the boundaries of the university. We don’t just write for other academics: we write for many different kinds of readers. This responsibility toward different publics is an ethical and an aesthetic charge: if we want our scholarship to be consequential and respond to problems in our shared and contingent worlds, it must be part of a public conversation. It must speak to people’s fears and needs, hopes and longings in ways that take them seriously, and it must convey our own concerns in compelling ways. This means finding a language that allows for dialogue, one in which the participants find common ground on which to engage.

The increased awareness of the varying audiences whom we want our scholarship to reach is integrally related to the growing emphasis on interdisciplinarity. Whether produced in the space where fields and disciplines overlap or join or in a new and separate space altogether, interdisciplinary work proceeds from the assumption that it not only represents a diversity of perspectives but speaks to a diverse audience as well. In that sense, interdisciplinarity and public scholarship are often linked. To engage effectively in the material world in which we live and work in community with others requires that we be able to communicate beyond the walls of the academy. At the same time, our scholarly training and experience are resources that can help address the myriad problems that people face collectively. But to use these resources most effectively, we must be able to communicate not just *beyond* the walls of the academy but across disciplinary boundaries *within* the academy as well. A particular issue might call on a public health administrator to engage with philosophy, or a doctor to learn how a poem works, or how the point of view of a story matters. A literary scholar might show a lawyer what a close reading of a text reveals, while a visual artist might show a sociologist how to see the people that his graphs and tables overlook.

Such encounters across disciplines, institutions, and material practices affect what and how we write, but they can also affect when we might choose *not* to write. There are times when language fails or isn’t adequate to

the nature of what's at stake. Some of the contributors to our volume engage the limits of language directly, some more indirectly, as they reflect on the potential of other media as means of inquiry and presentation. Ralph P. Hummel and Camilla Stivers, Kate Nace Day, and Anna Grimshaw use the resources of film—its visual immediacy and vivid embodiment of characters and action—in their scholarship to produce knowledge, present an argument, or propose an interpretation. Susan McClary uses music to explore what we can learn—and in turn express—if we understand language not just conceptually but sensuously. Her claim that speaking and writing are two dimensions of the same experience is implicitly echoed by the other contributors who describe writing in embodied terms as a form of speaking. Indeed, the very metaphors we use to talk about writing—"voice" and "point of view" are perhaps the most obvious—recognize this fact.

The emergence of new forms of scholarly inquiry and representation—from the ever-expanding range of digital media (websites, CD-ROMs, blogs, wikis, etc.) to the hybrid media linking text, image, and sound—addresses the limits of language in yet another way. They don't just ask us to rethink *how* and *when* we write, but to reconsider *why* we write in the first place instead of, say, producing images, streaming video, or recording sound. Perhaps particularly in the humanities, where writing has been the dominant if not exclusive currency, these new technologies raise critical questions about the future of scholarly writing. References to the "digital turn" in the world of scholarship, coupled with claims that we have entered the "visual age," often seem to suggest that a time will come (it might already be here) when texts, along with writing, will vanish and be reduced to the form of 140-character tweets.

In the debate over the impact of the digital humanities on the humanities, there is much disagreement, but one thing is indisputably clear: things *will* change. They already have. As Brett Bobley, Director of the Office of the Digital Humanities for the National Endowment for the Humanities, put it, "technology has radically changed the way we read, the way we write, and the way we learn...three things that are pretty central to the humanities" (Gavin and Smith 61–2). It might be no more than a simple trade-off: "a few more numbers in return for a bit less text" (Wilkens 256). Or it might be a complete transformation. Could conventional text production eventually be displaced by media with a greater expressive and dynamic range that includes such things as color, shape, sound, and movement and can expand space and time into multiple, simultaneous directions? The question is open, and responses to it are often a mix of anxiety and excitement.

While the effect of new technologies and media on humanities scholarship cannot be mapped yet, we can hazard some projections in regard to writing. If we rephrase the question from *will* writing be affected by the digital turn and the emergence of new media to *how* will it be affected, some initial answers appear. They can be summarized in three key terms: *speed*, *collaboration*, *process*. We are much more likely nowadays to write quickly and spontaneously, without taking (or having) the time to ponder the nuances of

a word, or even correct errors. In one streamlined process, we can write it, then send it: *click!* Much of the rethinking and revising that in the humanities have traditionally been the responsibility of individual authors, writing in splendid or tormented isolation, will in the new digital world be done collectively, as the traditional author's function is dispersed among the (potentially infinite number of) contributors to a given text. This dispersion of authorship means that the concept of a text also changes exponentially: instead of a finite product it is a work-in-progress, endlessly revisable, rewritable, rethinkable, subject to the Internet ethos of knowledge production in a way that is collaborative, open access, and crowdsourced. As Cathy Davidson puts it, "There is a latest version but never a final one" (483). What this means is much greater experimentation, or at least the option, since an unfixed text is by definition open and malleable to new forms.

In sum, the preserve of writing doesn't need protection from the incursion of new media or digital technologies. By forcing us to make a case for writing rather than taking it for granted as the default mode, they present a challenge, but not a threat. Whether as background or horizon of possibilities, the emergence of new media and digital technologies confronts us with the obvious (but often ignored) fact that writing is not a given, but an option. The question then becomes why choose it? What does writing offer that new and digital media, with all their fancy "functionalities," foreclose? Our book doesn't offer a particular answer to this question; we don't resolve the problem. But we take it seriously. It is the context in which our argument unfolds. Our response to the question—why choose writing—is refracted through the pieces we have assembled.

We don't present an apology for writing, because we don't think that it needs defending. *The Future of Scholarly Writing* rests on our conviction that writing as a means of scholarly inquiry and communication will endure. The material conditions of producing texts—of writing—will change as new technologies continue to be developed, but no matter what new technologies, cultural shifts, and disciplinary transformations will emerge to shape scholarly inquiry in the future, we will still be writing. One of our contributors, Rita Charon, offers a small example from her field of medicine. Medical records used to be written "in longhand on paper medical charts," she writes, whereas now they are recorded electronically. But this "move from hand to keyboard," she observes, doesn't change the fact that the narrative of a patient's story—what happened that brought her to the clinic to see the doctor and results from their consultation—is still recorded through the written word. The mechanics of writing has changed from pen and paper to keyboard and screen, but this shift "does not change the action of writing."

* * *

The question of how we write is often dismissed as beside the point, as if the only point worth attending to were content: the data we assemble, the

information we provide, the analyses we offer, the theories we create. It is as if the aesthetics of our work were incidental.⁶ By way of response, we will briefly turn to literature.

A good reader of literature would no doubt concede that it's not the story but the way a writer tells it that makes it "literature." It's not the story but Shakespeare's rendering of it that makes *Romeo and Juliet* a work of literary art. Readers of literature know that writing is an art. To do it well, one has a craft to master. This is why the question of how successful writers write is a topic of manifest curiosity for those who read their works and perhaps aspire to be writers also.⁷ What do writers do? What can we learn about our craft from them? Do they write on a schedule, or when inspired, standing up, or glued to their chair? Do they write by hand on a yellow notepad or on a laptop? Do they have a quota of pages per day? How do they write scenes, create characters, or sequence pieces? How do they get started?

In the case of scholars, we rarely show such interest, as if thought were simply transferred to the page. In its focus on the art of writing as a dimension of intellectual work, *Critical Intellectuals on Writing* is a rare exception. Most of the interviews begin with a question that scholars are rarely asked: "Do you think of yourself as a writer?" Many of them, not surprisingly, prevaricate. But quite a number admit that "Yes," they do. Some, like Jacques Derrida, deflect the specifics of a term like "writer," yet insist that "I'm interested in the way I write, in the form, the language, the idiom, the composition" (62). In the end, this volume suggests that if "writing... is the staging of an idea" (37), as Homi Bhabha put it, then the dichotomy between "a scholar/critic versus a writer... [is] not useful to us anymore" (Tompkins, *Critical Intellectuals* 182). We agree. Yet the dichotomy persists. "Scholarly" and "creative" are still seen as virtual oxymorons. You are either a scholar or a creative writer. Not both. But how different are they really?

The conventional neglect of the aesthetic dimension of scholarly writing is undoubtedly based on the perception that scholarship and art are two different things. They are. But how to define the difference and where we could—or should—draw the line is much less evident. *The Question of Hu* by Yale historian Jonathan Spence can provide a useful example. Spence's account of a Chinese man from Canton who came to France with Jesuit missionaries in the eighteenth century reads like a novel from the opening to the closing chapter, in which the children of his hometown beg him to "tell us what it's like over there, in the West." As Spence tells it, "Hu pauses for a moment, and closes his eyes. 'Well,' says Hu, 'it's like this'" (134). Is this (still) history, or have we moved into the land of the imagination that

⁶ Unless we are in a field where art practice is considered content (such as the performing or visual arts), the aesthetic merit of our work is not generally considered a determining factor in hiring or tenure or promotion decisions or in annual performance reviews.

⁷ *The Way We Write* is one recent example of such vicarious curiosity.

we call fiction? The extensive notes and bibliography, the range of archival sources consulted, not to mention the author's reputation as one of the preeminent contemporary historians of China, assure us that we're still on the solid ground of historical scholarship. Yet the form—the vivid descriptions, the narrative energy, the inclusion of dialogue, and even characters' thoughts—has the texture of creative writing. So which is it: creative writing or rigorous scholarship? The question, like the dichotomy, seems beside the point.

One of our interventions is to challenge this divide and ask where—and if—we should draw the line between *making an argument*, *offering an interpretation*, or *presenting an analysis* (standard criteria for scholarly work in the humanities) and *writing poetically* (the way one might describe the language of creative writing). Are they compatible? Can we make an argument (offer an interpretation, present an analysis) in poetic writing? In the form of a poem? How far can we take the idea of “poetic” and still be scholarly? How fluid is the boundary between creative and scholarly writing?

There are many examples that press this point. There is the groundbreaking study of American economic and labor history in the 1930s, *An American Exodus*, a collaboration of the photographer Dorothea Lange and the Berkeley economist Paul S. Taylor. It is a study marked, among other things, by Taylor's break with the conventions of his academic discipline: instead of viewing economics from the distance of scholarly objectivity, Taylor went close-in, documenting events, in stories and images, from the dust- and fear-filled present of their unfolding. There is Terry Kapsalis's slim and elegant little book *The Hysterical Alphabet*, with Gina Litherland's evocative drawings, which traces the history of medical professionals' perception and treatment of “that curious malady of the womb... known as HYSTERIA” (1). *The Hysterical Alphabet* is unmistakably a work of literary and visual art. It is also a work of scholarship that continues and extends, albeit in radically different form, the research that Kapsalis had first presented in her Duke University Press book on gynecology. There is Eric Kandel's brilliant *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind*, which he describes as “an intellectual history of the extraordinary scientific accomplishments in the study of mind that have taken place in the last fifty years [as well as] the story of my life and scientific career over those five decades” (xv). The almost seamless mingling of memoir and history, biology and behavioral science, is as interesting in its illustrations as in the verbal text, with the mix of scientific charts and graphs and photos from Kandel's own adventurous life from his Viennese childhood to his receipt of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

What would “good” scholarly writing look like? Should it be beautiful? Why, toward what ends, and for whom? And how would we define “beauty”? The question of the aesthetic—its place and import—resonates throughout our book. Each of the pieces takes it up in a different way. It is

cast as a premise, a necessity, a longing, and a mode of resistance. It is seen as an ethics, a politics, a social commitment, and a practice of everyday life. But whatever the differences in approach or assessment, it is implicit in all of them. Our book leaves the answers open. Yet by shifting attention from content to form, by thinking of writing in terms of craft, we posit a framework in which the aesthetic and the scholarly engage each other. The resulting tension between “getting it right as scholarship” and “getting it right in form” is one of the challenges that our book explores.

What does it mean to talk of beauty in relation to scholarship, particularly in relation to scholarly writing? We know that beauty isn’t always pleasing; it can disturb and unsettle and enrage. William Butler Yeats, for example, reminds us of the dark and “terrible beauty” born of rage and violence. This is a beauty that isn’t decorative or polite or elegant. It stomps and stutters and howls. What makes it beautiful—and at the same time “terrible”—is the boldness of its dream, its “excess of love,” its fierce and uncompromising sense of purpose. Is this a beauty that our scholarly work accommodates? Or, as Joseph Williams insists, are “clarity and grace” the defining criteria of aesthetic value when it comes to writing?

Williams posits clarity as a first principle: “Whatever else a well-educated person can do, that person should be able to write clearly and to understand what it means to do that” (2). But Williams’s insistence notwithstanding, the matter is not all that clear. To judge from the recurrent and acrimonious debates about the value of clarity (which is often paired, if not equated, with accessibility), there is wide and lively disagreement.⁸ Clarity and obscurity are commonly cast as antitheses, with all manner of moral judgments attached. From the perspective of clarity and accessibility advocates, writing that can be understood by and is thus accessible to a wide range of readers is, by a democratic standard, “good.” By that same criterion, obscure—or, as some put it, difficult—writing is “bad,” because it excludes all but a select and exclusive in-group. This argument is undeniably persuasive.

But its obverse is persuasive too. For those who make a case for difficult writing, “good” writing resists the easily accessible and ready-made formulae that have become commonplace and appear self-evident in a given context. It is writing that makes us think by giving us texts that aren’t easily digestible, writing cast in language that demands attention and requires the reader to do critical work. From this perspective, difficult writing takes the high road, morally, politically, and intellectually, while accessibility becomes a form of dumbed-down pandering.

The battle of “good” versus “bad” writing remains unresolved. Assumptions are often cast as conclusions: accessible language is democratic, and difficult language is elitist; difficult language resists and accessible

⁸ Even *Just Being Difficult?*, which presents a richly textured exploration of the stakes on both sides of this debate, is unapologetic in its advocacy for one side, namely that of “difficult” writing.

language conforms; clear language allows readers access, but difficult language makes them think. The argument ends in a draw or an equally inconclusive relativism—"good" and "bad" depend on your viewpoint.

From an intellectual perspective, we probably all agree that good writing should make us think, not just entertain us. But surely both difficult and accessible language can do just that. Moreover, how would we distinguish difficult and accessible anyway, without reverting back to questions of taste or preformed positions?

So, what *is* good scholarly writing? What aesthetic yardstick do we apply in this book? Our contributors provide a range of answers.

We approach the problem of scholarly writing from diverse perspectives, refracting it kaleidoscopically. While the essays speak to shared themes, each introduces a different disciplinary frame, critical practice, or angle of vision. What they share is a humanities sensibility. Most of our contributors are based in the humanities (literary studies, philosophy, cultural anthropology, history, musicology, or the interdisciplinary ground between), and those based in professional fields outside the humanities (medicine, law, public administration, or sociology) either use materials or interpretive methods that are humanities-based.⁹

Faced with challenges to their real-world relevance or the truth-value of their claims, humanities scholars are sometimes tempted to incorporate methods or materials from the sciences, as if talking of data, including graphs, or using terms like "prefrontal cortex," would boost their credibility. The contributors to our volume buck that trend. Rather than suggest that the humanities need reenforcement from other fields, they display the riches that the humanities offer: a sensitivity to language, an appreciation of narrative, an understanding of theory, an investment in stories as a means of knowing, and the ability to make meaningful connections between who we are, how we live, and what we know. In the spirit of critical thinking on which the humanities prides itself, they call into question hegemonies of generalization, denigrations of the personal, pretensions to mastery, specious claims to relevance, and adherences to standard discursive forms, all in the interest of encouraging modes of scholarship that are appealing, inclusive, capacious, and transformative.

They look back at their professional practice as scholars, teachers, and public intellectuals across a range of institutional settings: public and private colleges and universities, liberal arts and professional schools. They

⁹ A word is in order here about the fact that our contributors do not include anyone from the sciences or quantitative social sciences. This exclusion is based on the radically different norms and conventions for writing in these fields, in which "critical interventions," much less experiments, in scholarly writing are not irrelevant but a distraction (if not detraction) from the actual scholarship. In the sciences and the quantitative social sciences, the experimental dimension of the scholarly work *precedes* the writing: it is the experiment that the written text records, as fully, accurately, and clearly as possible, so that it can be replicated and put to the test by others. The premise of our book, that "form is not [just] a container for scholarly content: it is part of the scholarship," is not valid in or applicable to these fields.

reflect on their experience with writing and language in different settings: the public places where their work has taken them—from classrooms and hospital rooms to court rooms and corporate board rooms, and the private places, such as offices and studies, where they do their writing. Along the way, they express vulnerabilities that traditional academics usually more readily conceal than admit.

Each piece attends to the disciplinary perspectives that shaped its author—the conventions she was trained in and the institutional contexts in which she works—to consider how they inform her scholarship. Adopting a stance that is at once critical and self-reflexive, the authors we have brought together here don't presume to generalize, proposing guidelines for others to follow. Each author offers her own experience as an example of how things worked (or didn't) for her. The lessons she learned might apply to others. And they often do. But their validity is not based on their generalizability. They are not presented as normative or exhortatory, but stand as options offered.

* * *

Jane Gallop's "The Work of Writing" lays the foundation and sets the tone. Structured in two parts—the first, a story of how she came to write her book, *The Deaths of the Author*; and the second, a three-way conversation among her and the editors about what it means to write a book—Gallop's piece explains how scholarly writing is more than thinking on paper, putting down thoughts. It is a process of crafting an argument, turning ideas and disparate parts into a whole, with a form that is coherent and compelling. Scholarly writing, she explains, is work. It requires mastery of the scholarly conventions and rules of evidence in a given field and the confidence to know when to set them aside and rethink them. It takes time and effort and patience and commitment to the task at hand. It can be frustrating, and the challenges can at times feel terrifying, but the rewards, when we succeed, are significant. "Nothing," Gallop confesses, "makes me happier than feeling I have done good work."

Naomi Scheman's "Writers, Authors, and the Extraordinary Ordinary" expands the discussion of writerly authority that Gallop raised, focusing on the kinds of authority we invoke—and in turn embody—when we use language. Drawing on her work in twentieth-century philosophy, in particular the language philosophy of Stanley Cavell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, she posits that we utilize different languages when we speak or write: on the one hand, there is the language of our professional contexts where we speak as members of particular fields or disciplines; on the other, there is the language of our everyday lives, in all of their cultural, social, political, and material variety. But while professional language is governed by rules and conventions, the ordinary language of everyday life can't be confined by norms, as it includes that which a normative perspective would consider "extraordinary": the marginalized, the innovative, the different.

And because this “extraordinary ordinary,” as Scheman calls it, “resists being . . . professionally disciplined,” it is where writerly language resides: language imbued with the vitality of the lives we live, not just the personae we perform professionally. By resorting to all of the languages at our disposal, Scheman argues—the professionally disciplined, the ordinary, and the “extraordinary ordinary”—we can be at once authors (whose authority is grounded in our disciplinary knowledge and expertise) *and* writers (whose ability to tell stories and create worlds with language has the power to delight, disturb, seduce, surprise, and astonish).

This ability to be both authors and writers is Angelika Bammer’s point of departure in “Tribal Rites: Academic-Speak and the Promise of Belonging.” How, she asks, does this work in practice? Within the context of institutional frameworks, we want the status of authors, and in order to do so (since academic institutions are still largely organized around disciplines or fields—humanities, social sciences, sciences, medicine, law, etc.), we are taught to follow the norms and conventions of those disciplines or fields. We learn the language of our academic tribe. But we also want the freedom to explore new ways of thinking, imagining, and writing. Her piece examines the resulting dilemma: do we stay within the safe confines of our tribal customs and fit our scholarship to the authorized forms, or do we strike out on our own and explore alternatives. Drawing on her own experience of scholarly writing—its possibilities and its frustrations—and her work with students struggling to find their place in the profession, she considers the costs and gains of “experiment” vs. “conformity.” She acknowledges the risk of failure when we experiment with new forms, but she proposes that it’s a risk worth taking.

Like Angelika Bammer, Lisa Ruddick explores the costs and gains of our desire for recognition and affirmation within our disciplines, but her emphasis is on the costs. Through a symptomatic reading of articles published in one of the leading academic journals in her field of English, “When Nothing Is Cool” reveals a culture of crippling disregard for the very humanist principles that “the humanities” claim to stand for. As that which “seems human, alive, and whole” is regarded with suspicion, if not contempt, from a largely theory-based poststructuralist critique of selfhood, those who hold to such “uncool” values are shamed and silenced. Her study of graduate students in her field and the writing coaches who help them with their writing problems reveals the emotional, political, and intellectual fallout. Ruddick sharpens Jane Gallop’s question—what do we need, and what are we willing, to do in order to gain professional approval for our writing—and casts it as a Faustian bargain: we can submit to the rules of disciplined discourse in fashion at a given time and win approval, or at least acceptance, but it can cost us our inner freedom. Not only do we risk losing a sense of what we really think, believe, or feel, we risk losing the very sense of ourselves that enabled us to write (or at least want to write) in the first place.

Rita Charon’s “Writing in the Clinic, or What Might Be Expressed” takes Lisa Ruddick’s identification of writing as a site of harm—or, conversely,

healing—a step further into the realm of medicine. If, as Ruddick argues, what and how we (can) write affects our intellectual and emotional well-being, Charon reminds us that our physical well-being is affected also. Drawing on both her clinical experience as a doctor and her teaching experience with students and interns in medical school, she posits that writing is a way of attending to language actively and intentionally: what am I saying, what am I not saying, how am I saying it? And such attentiveness, she argues, is no less critical when we are listening to a patient describe her symptoms than when we are reading a story or a poem. On the strength of this insight, Charon has developed a new field called “narrative medicine” in which “the giving and receiving of accounts of self” are an intervention into the standard practice of institutionalized medicine. Patients are encouraged to tell their stories, and those involved in patient care are taught to listen. And learning to listen involves a writing practice: what did I hear this patient say and what did I think and feel in response to the patient’s story? As the art of writing is thus integrated into the practice of medicine, it becomes a critical diagnostic and therapeutic tool. It becomes what Charon calls “consequential” writing: writing that “does something,” that has effects.

Paul Stoller’s “Looking for the Right Path” echoes Charon’s belief in the potential of writing as a source of healing. Not only is writing a way of “giving and receiving accounts of self,” as Charon put it, but, according to Stoller, it is “a process of existential discovery.” Reflecting on his writing as an anthropologist in these terms—as a process of discovery, in which he learns as much about himself, the writer, as about the lives and selves of those he is writing about—he concludes that writing has the potential to reveal “not only the ‘truth of statements’ but the ‘truth of being’ as well.” This power to reveal truths, about ourselves and others we (or they) might prefer not to face, entails a deep ethical responsibility for the writer. On the strength of this premise, Stoller describes what can happen when a person tells his story and another listens well. Taking both his ethnographic fieldwork and his experience with serious illness as moments of existential encounter where “the subjective and the objective are inextricably linked,” he, like Charon, insists on the value of listening—and, by extension, of reading—closely. For it is in “the texture of the story” that the truth resides. And it is in the exchange of stories between and among us that spaces of connection across differences emerge.

Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres echoes Stoller’s insistence on the importance of listening—and reading—closely. In “Found in the Details: Essaying the Particular,” she draws on her training in the art of close reading and her love of the essay as a textual form to reflect on how “the texture of the story” (Stoller) carries meaning in ways that a theoretical articulation of meaning misses. Casting her piece itself in the form of an essay, Joeres notes that while the essay does not eschew argument, as a form that blends “the philosophical, the particular, and the personal,” it cannot be reduced to “an argument.” In an essay we are not told what “the meaning” is by

the author who holds the authority. Rather, meanings are created through a process of discovery in which both author and reader participate. It is a process that involves “a search, a wandering, a willingness and a desire to leave a prescribed path now and then.” As writers and their readers leave the prescribed path of argument to discover what they can’t yet know, the new paths they explore are marked by what Joeres calls the particular: an image that catches our fancy, a word that startles us, a story that breaks our heart. These details, these concrete particulars, she proposes, bring the text to life, enabling us to be enlivened by it.

Gyanendra Pandey continues this reflection on the connection between life and text from his perspective as a scholar of colonial, postcolonial, and subaltern histories. In “The ‘State’ and the ‘Plantation’: Writing Differently,” he proposes two different models for writing history: the first, seeking knowledge on a scale that is both systemic and comprehensive, strives to be objective and coherent in its account (this is history from the perspective of what Pandey calls the “state”); the second, keenly aware of the impossibility of rendering the chaotic messiness of historical events as History, offers an account that is subjective and partial (this is history from the perspective of what Pandey calls the “plantation”). But, he reminds us, these models are not equivalent: the former counts as the legitimate and official form of academic history, while the latter is considered “hardly . . . adequate to historical knowledge, even if it won applause as a literary or artistic comment on the human condition.” What, then, is a historian to do if she wants to be accepted as a scholar of History, yet the history she wants to tell can only be rendered in a form that is in-coherent? Indeed, what *is* the truth of history, Pandey asks: the summarizing narrative that the professional historian gives us or the fragmented traces that events have left in the lives and memories and stories of the people they touched? A solution to the historian’s dilemma might be to allow the scholarly account to be shot through by the shards of story, by the “particulars” (Boetcher Joeres) that can’t be assimilated into a unified narrative, but disrupt it and require that we write history differently.

Kate Nace Day writes from the perspective of a legal scholar. Yet her “Stories and the Language of Law” is a critical intervention into traditional forms of legal scholarship, as she presents cases of rights violations in ways that challenge conventional legal argumentation in her field. Her piece echoes Pandey’s dilemma of a scholar faced with conventions of representation that countermand the very truth of the story she is telling. Like Pandey, she wants to write about harm and justice from the perspective of those whose version of events doesn’t fit the framework that defines how the story should be told. How can a young woman who was raped be heard when “the language of the law” excludes her? And how can a scholar of human rights law like Nace Day write in a way that re-presents what the law excluded and re-inscribes what it has erased? Her solution is to create an alternative form in which she tells the same story twice: once, from the perspective of the victim, and once from the perspective of the law. The two