

In collaboration, a 'writing differently' production

**On the Fringe/
At the Fringe:
Fleshing out Research**

Featuring Caroline Clarke, Sandra Corlett and Charlotte Gilmore

Edinburgh
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FLESHING OUT RESEARCH
WRITING DIFFERENTLY PRESENTS

Preview

Be ‘open to becoming affected by encounters, rather than simply reporting them’ is the invitation from Fotaki et al (2017: 8), and it is this message that we have taken to heart in our ‘fringe’ production. Inspired by friendship, ideas, and an interest in fleshing out research, we offer our work as an illustration of embodied research as a process *in action*, in terms of both form and content. We share the story behind our research-in-the-making as it emerged over two days, during Edinburgh’s Fringe festival¹. At night we went to performances *at the Fringe*, where life and research experiences were serendipitously reflected back at us in terms of content – topic and genre, as well as form – and enabled us to appreciate the provisional and unpredictable relations between performer and audience. By day, in our research practices, we allowed ourselves to use eclectic, improvisational and experimental modes of expression², that are only just *on the fringe* of acceptability, even within the most enlightened circles of organisational studies.

Using arts-based methods we present our work through a variety of media – a film, play, poem, and a live fringe performance – that serve also as a medium for experimentation. We show how a range of possibilities may arise from touching and moving encounters during fieldwork. We open our work with the first touching encounter, involving Nina and her research with vets, and end with Burge’s encounters with Douglas T Stewart³. Such affective experiences have the potential to spark off a series of unknowable, unpredictable and unending embodied connections, coincidences and relationships. Touching research encounters must be embraced, nurtured and have time to distil, rather than being shrugged off. Incorporating these into our writing is affirmative, for it not only provides recognition of our own, and others’ bodily experiences but illustrates the potentially powerful, recursive and transformative effects of researching, writing and reading. Such writing, however, requires us to relinquish control from the straitjacket of our academic conventions, and the courage to harness any discomfort that may arise from relational, embodied and creative practices of ‘production’.

Adaptation of *On the Fringe* Episode 1. Genre: **Film**; Touching Encounter 1

CAST

NINA, FEMALE RESEARCHER, aged 51

DAISY, FEMALE FRIESIAN COW, aged 5

UN-NAMED FEMALE VETERINARY SURGEON 1, aged 30

UN-NAMED FEMALE VETERINARY SURGEON 2, aged 25

UNNAMED HERDSMAN, aged early 40s

UN-NAMED FEMALE FARM WORKER, aged around 20

SCENE ONE. Music is playing:

...

YOU'RE GONNA FIND ME OUT IN THE COUNTRY

YEAH, YOU'RE GONNA FIND ME, WAY OUT IN THE COUNTRY

WHERE THE AIR IS GOOD, AND THE DAY IS FINE

FADE IN

EXTERIOR – WINTER MORNING – 2015 – DAIRY FARM IN SOMERSET –
ESTABLISHING SHOT

Late morning. Windy with horizontal sleet.

VETS, NINA and DAISY COW are in front of a barn that is open at both ends. The whistling wind is audible.

VET 1 is dressed in scrubs, holding surgical instruments. VET 2 is also dressed in scrubs. DAISY is standing in a metal crush, tied up with a rope around her neck.

There is a CLOSE UP of the cow's left eye so that we can see a lump around the outside.

NINA is standing slightly away from the cow and the vet, but near enough to see what is happening. She wears long red wellington boots and is stamping her feet to keep them warm.

VET 1

So Daisy is a bit poorly, she has a tumour on her eye, but we're not sure yet how bad that is. This must be a baptism of fire for you on your first day of researching? What exactly are you researching anyway?

NINA

Oh sorry, I thought I sent you all the details of my project?

VET 1

You probably did.

A CLOSE UP of NINA shows her shrug, and roll her eyes.

VET 1 is unpacking various surgical paraphernalia.

NINA

So, I work in a business school, and research different occupations...

NINA pauses and looks at VET 1, then VET 2 for a flicker of interest, but there is none. VET 1 continues to arrange the technical apparatus.

NINA

Anyway, I was interested in how vets experience their day-to-day lives, the challenges and joys of their jobs etc., so with the help of my friend Gordon, we are carrying out a qualitative study, you know one without any numbers in. This involves watching you do your job, like this, as well as talking to lots of different vets, you know small animals, large animals and equine vets, doing loads of interviews and just sort of lurking around various vet practices, watching and chatting

VET 1

Hmmmm

NINA stops talking and VETS do not notice. VET 1 is putting her silicone gloves on, which she does deftly.

VET 1

So now we're going to take a look at her eye, and see what's what

VET 2

To see how far it's gone.

The VET looks into the COW'S eye, holding the eyelid up with a silver metal implement, she uses a tool to magnify the eye, squinting at the eye from several angles. DAISY is restless, mooing loudly, but can hardly move as she is contained in the metal crush.

VET 1

So the tumour's grown fast; we won't be able to remove it. We'll have to take out her whole eye. Not squeamish, are you?

HOLD SHOT: NINA'S facial expression is impassive.

VET 1 starts to work on the eye, cutting through the flesh at different angles.

DAISY protests with a lot of MOOING.

NINA continues to stamp her feet from cold, shaking her hands to improve the circulation.

The sleet is getting heavier, and the wind, windier.

CLOSE UP, the VET starts to gouge out the eye, cutting around what seems surprisingly tough skin.

MONTAGE:

-DAISY cow tries to lie down but the cord around her neck means that she starts to asphyxiate.

-VET 1 and VET 2 attempt to get her to stand up, but to no avail.

-The rope has to be untied to stop her choking.

-DAISY is thrashing about.

-After the rope is released she stands up again.

-The rope is retied.

END of MONTAGE

VET 1

Well she isn't too keen on this, is she?

NINA
(with sarcasm)

Funny that.

VET 2

No choice though, is there Daisy? We've got to stop that nasty cancer getting to you before your little calf arrives.

NINA

Calf?

VET 1

Oh yes, calf's due soon, won't be long. We wouldn't bother to operate otherwise, it's too expensive and she wouldn't be worth it. But, we need the calf, worth a lot of money, and the milk too.

MONTAGE (repeated)
- DAISY lies down
-starts to choke
-is untied
-stands up
-is retied
END MONTAGE

(Exasperated)

You don't know what is good for you girl. Nearly there...nearly got it.

CLOSE UP as vet digs knife in deeper, groaning with the exertion. Finally, amid much mooing and thrashing, a flick of the knife dislodges the eye, and the release of pressure sends it flying, where it lands in a nearby bucket with a resounding 'plop'.

At last! What a bloody relief.

HERDSMAN is passing by at that moment and roars with laughter. He goes to the bucket and fishes the eye out, holding it up to the light like a jeweller appraising a diamond.

HERDSMAN

Eye, Eye. What have we here?

HERDSMAN turns to VET 2

Better watch out when I make you a cup of tea later

HERDSMAN roars with laughter and winks. VET 1 rolls her eyes. NINA looks flabbergasted.

MONTAGE (repeated)
- Daisy lies down...
-starts to choke
-is untied
-stands up
-is retied
END MONTAGE

VET 1
(frustrated)

Come on Daisy, you don't want us to leave you like this, do you? Here you go

VET 1 passes the instruments to VET 2.

VET 1

She's a better sewer than me. I'm the cutter.

NINA
(to herself)

butcher

So, who names the cows?

VET 2
(laughs sardonically)

Nobody. We call all cows Daisy

DAISY cow has blood running down her face. CLOSE UP shows an empty socket with blood draining out. VET 2 starts to stitch up the wound, working fast, threading the needle in and out swiftly and expertly

NINA
(shivering and shaking, also looking white)

I feel so sorry for her

VET 2
(Smiles wryly at VET 1)

Anthropomorphism

VET 2 turns to NINA

VET 2
(with exaggerated patience)

There's no need, she's only a cow; they don't have the same feelings as us.

NINA stares, a few seconds pass

NINA

So, will she be OK or might the cancer return?

VET 2

I doubt we'll ever find out. She'll go straight into milking and after that she'll be off...

NINA

Off?

HERDSMAN, in background calls over

Off to be a Cheese Burger, love

CLOSE UP of NINA's expression, looking horrified.

VET 2 has finished stitching the eye socket closed.

VET 1 sprays antiseptic aerosol on Daisy's eye socket, which gives a metallic finish. The effect is that half of Daisy's face is sparkling silver, mixed in with the blood already there, which has not been wiped off. The long stitches covered in silver look like eyelashes, and the result is both comedic and tragic.

DAISY looks exactly like a pantomime cow. Without an eye.

In the background, HERDSMAN is chasing FARMWORKER with his arm outstretched, and hand closed around what can only be DAISY'S eye. He is shouting

I've got my eye on you.

FADE OUT

END

This touching tail (*sic*) from the field sparked off a series of thoughts, conversations and actions which culminated in two memorable days of collaboration, connection, and co-production in Edinburgh. Whilst clear that the focus of our research would centre on the affective and embodied nature of Nina's research encounter and Burge's encounter with Douglas [presented at the end], we deliberated as to how might we reconstruct such affective encounters *and* show relational, embodied and creative practices of research in 'production'.

CUT to Edinburgh.

ON THE FRINGE: FLESHING OUT RESEARCH

A Play in Two Acts

in which we get a glimpse of collaborative research as a process in the making, and begin to appreciate the unknowable and unpredictable embodied connections, coincidences and relationships Nina's research encounter set in motion

by

Sandy, Nina and Burge

Cast of Characters

- Nina: A mid-career academic, in her early 50s; Sandy and Burge's friend
- Burge: An early career academic, in her early 40s; Nina's friend
- Maura: 8-year-old daughter of Burge, who Nina has met previously at an academic conference
- Sandy: A late-career academic, in her late 50s; Nina's friend
- Various artists: Including Jay Handley, Mark Steel, John Bishop and Michael John McCarthy, whose shows Nina, Burge and Sandy attend at the Fringe, with whom they connect and from whom they take inspiration for writing differently
- Various authors: Absent physically, but who 'join' the conversation as Nina, Burge and Sandy talk about their ideas

Location

Various locations around Edinburgh, the Fringe Festival city.

Time

Two days in August 2017.

ACT I

Scene One

ON the Fringe

SETTING: A third floor room in an Edinburgh University terraced building. A typical small teaching room, with tables pushed together to form a larger one and chairs along each side. The two windows overlook Venue 189 from which music can be heard.

TIME: Morning.

SANDY enters the empty room, wheels her suitcase to the corner of the room, and puts a bag on the table. She looks out of the window.

Two minutes pass. Enter NINA.

SANDY:

(moving towards NINA with arms outstretched). Hi, it's great to see ya. How are you?

NINA:

(embracing SANDY) All the better for being here, and seeing you. What with having one deadline after another in the last few weeks, I'm just so pleased to be here *(looking out of the window)* working in this lovely place with you. Compared with some of the other bloody stuff I've had to do lately, I'm really excited about this paper *(turning back towards SANDY)* although I must admit I'm a bit nervous as well

SANDY:

Yeah, me too. I've never written *(making quotation marks in the air)* differently like this before so I'm curious to see what happens.

NINA:

(opening the windows, moving to the table and taking things out of her bag) By the way, thanks for sending through those notes on Merleau-Ponty. I've been wanting to work with his ideas for some time but never really got around to it. When I was reading through and commenting on your notes, I was struck yet again by how we seem to work on similar ideas at the same time, without even knowing what the other is doing.

SANDY:

I've just finished this great book called *At The Existentialist Café* which talked about Merleau-Ponty in a really engaging way.

NINA:

No way! I've just listened to that on Audible. It was great, wasn't it? Y'know, so well written and really balanced in the way she treated Heidegger, I thought.

(Enter BURGE. NINA jumps up, walks towards BURGE and hugs her. SANDY stands up, hesitates, moves round the table and gives BURGE a tentative kiss on the cheek.)

SANDY:

Hi, it's good to meet you in the flesh at last.

BURGE:

And you!

SANDY:

Just remind me, when did you two meet? for the first time, I mean.

BURGE:

We met last year at the OS Workshop conference dinner in Greece. We just got chatting about my indie music research and the conference paper that had come from that. Nina had heard it at a Discourse conference the year before. So that kind of led on to us talking about our different affecting research encounters.

NINA:

We were talking about how my research with vets led me to becoming a vegetarian, even though (*slight laughter*) I don't like vegetables. I was the most unlikely vegetarian ever.

BURGE:

And remember Maura also experienced her own affecting encounter later that night, after eating three desserts at the dinner (*both laugh*). She'll be joining us later.

ACT 1

Scene Two

ON the Fringe

SETTING: As before, but now BURGE, NINA and SANDY are sitting at the table, on different sides.

TIME: Slightly later that morning.

NINA:

So, what do we mean by writing differently? Differently to who, what, how, it's like Richardson's problem, 'what to write, how to write, for who to write'? From those first pieces of work we sent each other, we could see how we all write very differently. Being here and doing this, is also extremely different, compared to our usual way of approaching academic writing (*BURGE and SANDY nodding in agreement*)

SANDY:

And it's perhaps about how we use our time together experimenting with different ways of fleshing out, to use Merleau Ponty's term, our different approaches

BURGE:

(sighing, and covering her eyes with her hands) But how much of a risk are we taking by writing differently? I know Emma Bell and Amanda Sinclair talk about daring to be different but *(hesitating)* if it's too out there, we might struggle to get it published, published in a top rated journal I mean.

SANDY:

I can appreciate what you're saying but I am in a different situation. I may not even be in academia by the next REF. So, for me, I'm happy to go with the flow and see what emerges as we talk through our ideas. Isn't that what academic life is *meant* to be about any way?

NINA:

Absolutely; why is it that some people think of research only as the bit where they *(making quotation marks in the air)* collect data, I hate that term, it sounds so positivist. Reading, thinking, having conversations with people are all legitimate, but why aren't those activities considered part of what we insist on calling 'productive'? I think it was Cloutier who talks about writing also being about non-writing, you know talking and eating, being in close proximity to others, watching and just being *(pause)* and it's the same with research (*SANDY makes notes as NINA is talking*)

BURGE:

I do understand what you're saying, but we have three weeks until we have to submit. I'm feeling really uncomfortable, it feels like we're in freefall *(pausing, looking upwards as if recalling something)*, rolling around in the blood and carnage, as Duglas would say in his writing processes, the importance of not walking away from the car crash metaphor he uses and looking at it from a distance

NINA:

(looking concernedly towards BURGE) I can see that you're struggling but isn't that what embodied research is about? Getting together and discussing our ideas already feels very different to me. I think it's sad, 'cos of what's happening here, I'm starting to realise how little of what we do involves this stuff *(pause)* talking, sharing ideas. Doesn't real collaboration mean letting ideas emerge from stuff^d. Discomfort *(pause)* pain *(speaking emphatically)* is good, enjoy the car crash! *(slight laughter)* Isn't that what Negri means when he talks about 'really being there'? *(BURGE, typing as NINA is talking, now looks up towards NINA)*

SANDY:

Yeah, but it isn't easy to let things just emerge, is it? I always feel as if I need to be in control. Mind you, Burge, you gave some really great examples before, of what that letting things happen *(slight pause)* feels like, going with the flow, like when you had the conversation with Douglas. You didn't even call it an interview. How you talked for four hours and felt as if you were really there with *(speaking emphatically)* for him as he talked about some really difficult issues. I suspect you embody research much better than me...

NINA:

And by embodying research, what are we talking about? What do we mean? Really connecting with people? Letting a conversation happen rather than trying to control it?

SANDY:

I know I have a real thing about control...

NINA:

...I think we all do, it gives us an illusion of safety, of security.

BURGE:

Yeah, I feel a real tension between needing to be in control, wanting to be free and feeling insecure *(pause)* feeling vulnerable.

NINA:

Vulnerability is a strength, though, isn't it? 'cos once you understand you know very little, and will never really know much anyway, you don't keep striving constantly for what Ekman calls the limitless possibilities of identity. It's like Alan Watts says, once you stop trying to secure yourself, insecurities recede, so it's our desire for security that makes us insecure. Easier said than done though, I'm the worst person at practising this stuff.

SANDY:

I know! I've even written about vulnerability, but I still find it really hard to let myself be vulnerable. But vulnerability is about accepting that we can't control everything, it's about being open to different ways of responding, different ways of being.

BURGE:

I think vulnerability's about creating space to be free, letting go and being present in the moment.

NINA:

Yeah, exactly. Watts says the present, the current activity, whatever it is, that's what's important. It's about being engaged in something for itself (*SANDY makes notes*). It shouldn't be about (*putting on a different voice*) Look at me, look at me doing this, and about being too preoccupied with our own image. The purpose of the dance (*speaking emphatically*) is the dance. The whole purpose of having research conversations is to engage with people and ideas, not to (*making air quote marks*) network and gather data.

BURGE:

The thing about dance makes me think of dance as a performing art, like music. It reminds me of that line from Yeats, how can we know the dancer from the dance? The dancer or musician's body is an integral part of the performance. You can't separate the body, the voice, the person, from the performance. It's the same with research, isn't it? We are the ones doing the research, but with all the others. Performing the research, as it were (*NINA and SANDY nod*)...

SANDY:

...and using our bodies as a resource, which I wrote about in my notes on Merleau-Ponty and his ideas about the flesh. (*SANDY looks at her laptop screen and types*) Wait a minute, I'm trying to find the bits you commented on, Nina. Like here, you wrote 'yesssssss' against the extract I took from Amanda Sinclair and Donna Ladkin's chapter, about the body being the 'author, disrupter and transformer of academic knowledge'. And against this bit, where I was talking about Merleau-Ponty's ideas about us (*reading from the screen*) not being able to perceive without our bodies, you highlighted the bit from Strati, about how sensory perceptions - seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting provoke emotions, both in the organizational actor and the researcher, that are sometimes of (*reading from screen*) considerable somatic intensity

BURGE

I think bodily sensations and emotions are really important. It makes me think of that article by Ann Cunliffe and Christine Coupland where they talked about the researcher's emotions and bodily sensations as data that help us make sense of our research encounters.

NINA:

That was what it was like in my research with the vet, you know, the one with the operation on the cow? Even now I can recall, *really vividly* my bodily sensations and how my gut reaction, and actual visceral rejection of what I saw was squashed by the vet saying (*putting on a different voice*) 'animals don't have feelings, you know', which (*hesitating*) made me doubt myself as being overly sentimental.

(*SANDY continues to tap on her mousepad. BURGE and NINA look towards her expectantly.*)

SANDY:

I'm now at the bit where I was talking about Merleau-Ponty's idea that perception is a (*reading from the screen*) reciprocal, dynamic and mutually affecting process, as Ladkin puts it. You wrote a comment against that, Nina, against the bit where I quoted from Strati about (*putting on a different voice*) just as I reach out and touch the Other, in its turn the Other touches me.

BURGE:

So that's like how Nina and I both talked about being touched by our research encounters, and how being touched continues to ripple out in various ways.

NINA:

(*nodding*) Yeah that and Haraway's idea that, without embodiment everything is transformed into an object, with potentially destructive consequences, that's really powerful stuff.

SANDY:

(*speaking excitedly*) Yeah, and for me that relates to ethics and flesh, as I understand it, this bit here (*reading from the screen*) about flesh-within-flesh and flesh of the world. In other words, flesh is our sensing body but it's more than that - it's the medium through which relations are formed. You highlighted this bit, Nina, where Bannon says (*reading*) flesh is a relation between bodies, the connection between them that isolates each as a separate body and yet holds them all together in one world. And this bit, from Ladkin, that the flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world.

NINA:

That bit was making me think about Levinas and the face-to-face encounter with the other. Since my encounter with the cow, I have stopped eating meat. It was as if, somehow empathetically, seeing and feeling the actual flesh of the other wanted to stop me consuming it ever again. In a kind of Derridean sense, the cow was the unexpected other, I think it's called *l'avenir* or something, meaning the other whose arrival is completely unexpected and cannot be anticipated.

NINA:

Studying the vets, and the animals, also made me realize just how much we disregard our own bodies. Ironic, isn't it? So, isn't there something about embodiment as being (*pause*), isn't it the opposite, to when we abuse the body just to achieve an outcome? (*questioningly*) Like, subordinating the body to the activity? That research made me realize how much the vets are affected by what they do, physically and mentally affected I mean, for instance vets talk about their aches and pains and their occupation has one of the highest suicide rates, y'know.

BURGE:

Talking of pain makes me think about Douglas. He seemed to suggest that it was when he felt pain that he was most creative, but rather than running away from pain, he seemed to revel in it. He talked about how he stayed with the experience. Ann Cunliffe talks about 'arresting moments', doesn't she? And it's as if, rather than closing himself down or coming up with rational explanations for what's happening, he wants to be alive to what he's feeling, and he's trying to capture his feelings in each

moment, in his song writing. I think Contreras talks about having to really resist, (*questioningly*) resisting the affective?

NINA:

Sounds like we are talking about being open to becoming affected by encounters, rather than just reporting them as Fotaki et al said in that editorial, which brings us back (*slight laughter*) to where we started, the SCOS presentation. When you were presenting in Rome, Burge, and 'cos you'd told me how worried you were about it, it really made me think about how affect (*pause*) or uncomfortable feelings, are usually the segue to something else. So, like in Marilyn Strathern's piece, which I think about a lot, she says, when she hits rock bottom or meltdown, and is paralysed about writing and feels depressed, (*speaking empathetically*) THAT is when things are about to start happening. It's a really handy point to remember, in a sort of 'it's always darkest before the dawn kind of way'.

SANDY:

(*looking at her watch*) By the way, d'you realize it's now twenty past two? We said we were going to stop for lunch, and talking of bodies - my stomach's rumbling, and I need a wee. Shall we go?⁵

INTERMISSION

(Teas, coffees, ice creams, and dinners are served)

AT the Fringe

(The evening: a time when our three intrepid researchers are engaged happily in *non-writing* and watching others perform)

A POEM

*On matters of identity and
being*

I've long desired		with this
to see	Lamented	bloody
or be?	opportunities	awful yearning
at the	lost, at	conforming,
fringe;	what	norming
	cost?	and
binge		performing
on	But wait,	
things	now	stalling
that are	I'm arriving,	falling
funny	finally	failing
	here	flailing
but each		
year	and thriving,	corpsing
August	unlike some,	trying
(unsunny)	glum	while
	fledgling comedians	really
this festival	(a little green),	dying
city comes	Jokes	
and goes	unfunny	cringe
unseen	best unseen?	squirm
shows		like a worm
	Or all part	on a whim
	of life's	they
	long learning?	can

make us

sink

or swim

drowning

not waving

only

craving

laughs

that

never come

and yet

from

some

yes!

a little

titter

but

only bitter

sweet

I am live

even as

I writhe

in

agony

and

torture

I am

lamb

off to

slaughter

Words

once easily

found

remain

elusive,

no longer

sound

It's a

car

crash

smash

Put yourself

out

there

share

your

life and soul

it takes

its toll

strive for

more

fame

and wealth,

make a name

for your

self

a work

in pro-

gress?

Yesss!

but

never

ever

quite right

a constant

blight

on your

life

this thing

'career'

may appear

or come	ringing	so long
and go.	Revise	as
Am I	Revise	all your
good?		quirks
hope so	<i>That</i> didn't	means
	work, you	it works
Identities	jerk	
on the	better luck	no rules
line,	next	(so no
of course		transgressions?)
it will be	time	
fine;	it will rhyme,	just one
there's still	don't	we need
time	do <i>this</i>	to prove -
	instead	our audience
exhilaration	do <i>that</i>	<i>must</i>
terror		<i>be moved</i>
faux pas,	Break a leg	
trial	put a peg,	what
and	that's square	they
error	in a round	wanted
	hole	all
all is	be all	along?
learning,		
but	right	or is it
critics words	on the	still
my ears	night	somehow
are burning		wrong?
		structures
stinging		challenged

collapse,
fall into
the abyss -
perhaps?

or have we
found
a better
song?

Evocative?
Provocative?

The proof
of the
reading
lies in
the (editorial)
meeting

so
there's no point

in us just
bleating

on
and on

about
writing
differently,
proficiently

Without
You,
we are
nothing

ventured
nothing
gained

dare to
be
different
and still
the same?

Shame

cast off
chains

but
what remains?

a cow's eye
a man's
finger, do any
images
linger?

or even

matter?
after
all this
inane
chatter?

dear reader
is this
genre
preferable?

is it
possible
to write
the
ineffable?

please now
(do share)
were you
ever
*really there?*⁶

ACT II

Scene One

ON the FRINGE

SETTING: First floor room, a different location⁷ (Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop). A single table with eight chairs. A large window overlooks a residential street of tenement flats. BURGE is sitting at the end of the table with her back to the window, typing.

TIME: Morning.

(Enter NINA and SANDY.)

BURGE:

(brightly) Morning! How are you both? And how was Mark Steel last night?

SANDY AND NINA:

(speaking together) He was...

NINA:

...really good, he didn't disappoint. I could really relate to some of the things he was talking about *(slight pause)*. I guess you could say *(slight laughter)* it was another touching encounter. I tweeted about drawing comfort from his show, and about everything that makes me feel weary, hitting 50, the Tories, lack of compassion everywhere, obsession with money *(slight pause, then speaking emphatically)* and measuring the value of everything. Like we were saying on the first day, about the transactional nature of productive writing, quantifying it in terms of time, value, REF, impact, y'know, Elbaz-Luwisch calls it the tyranny of academic expectations, and Bochner says that's why it's so difficult to take risks.

BURGE:

It sounds interesting. I'ts a bummer to have missed it. .

NINA:

I was thinking about what we were talking about yesterday, and what we want this paper to do, y'know what we were saying about showing research in action rather than describing it, and fleshing out the embodied process of research. *(SANDY makes notes on paper)*

SANDY:

Yeah, so, during this doctoral methodology summer school we run, we do this viva role play and the students really like it 'cos it demystifies what happens in an exam, and *(enthusiastically)* I think this paper could give insight for new researchers into what research is *(speaking emphatically)* really like *(BURGE nods)*, helping the reader to put themselves in our shoes...

NINA:

...showing research in action. (*SANDY and BURGE make notes.*) And I've been thinking about being here at the Fringe. At breakfast, Sandy and I were talking about how, since we are here at the fringe we might try out writing different genres (*slight pause*) to experiment

SANDY:

...a bit like the show last night, where the comedians were testing out new material⁸. Some of it worked, like the Canadian guy was really funny, but some, oh my god, it was embarrassing, wasn't it? Cringe! I s'pose you only know by trying (*slight pause*) and failing – putting yourself out there? (*BURGE nods*)

NINA:

So I've come up with a title (*pausing, uncertain*) - 'On the fringe, at the fringe' (*SANDY makes notes. BURGE taps on the laptop keys*), 'cos it's like we're teetering on the edge (*slight pause*) of what's acceptable. The Fotaki quote - being open to becoming affected by encounters, rather than simply reporting them, that's central. People liked our field work when we presented at the SCOS conference

BURGE:

(*talking enthusiastically*) yeah, yeah, they thought it was really good

NINA:

so experimenting with different genres (*SANDY makes notes*) from our field encounters (*slight pause*), perhaps a film or a radio play? (*SANDY looks up*) with an academic thread woven throughout.

BURGE:

(*enthusiastically*) sounds cool. It's like we're on the fringe and also at the Fringe (*slight pause*) drawing inspiration from the Fringe. But how do we do that? I've never written a play in my life, or anything like that (*slight laughter*)

SANDY:

Nor me (*slight laughter*). I agree we want to show research in action but how do y'show action in a play, for instance?

NINA:

I did an OU module on creative writing a few years ago, you show action through dialogue and stage directions, it's like show (*speaking with emphasis*) not tell. You show the characters (*speaking deliberately*) in action. I'll send you what I did on that module.

(*SANDY and BURGE's laptops beep*)

(*All look at their laptops, reading. Time passes.*)

NINA:

So, shall we have a go? (*Looking towards BURGE and then SANDY*) I'm thinking I could do a film script around my field encounter, with film directions like zooming in on the cow's eye.

BURGE:

For me this writing retreat¹, quite unexpectedly, has become about remembering and sharing different experiences and stories of music, in certain places, with certain people. So I like the idea of doing something like Turntable⁹ which I went to see the night before you both arrived. I'll have a go at that.

SANDY:

What do y'think I could do, then?

NINA:

How about the overarching narrative? Of what we've been doing while we've been here, in action so to speak. Starting with Tuesday when you first walked into the room. A play might work.

SANDY:

Ok, I'll have a look online then, for the layout of a play. *(taps keyboard)*

(They all start working. NINA starts by writing notes in her notebook and then taps away at her laptop. SANDY and BURGE work on laptops.¹⁰)

NINA:

Being here together is even better than I expected. It's weird, cos last week I read Amanda Sinclair and Emma Bell's piece about how academic conventions render us disembodied and strip out the opportunities to love and enjoy academic life. I reckon they're right, but *(pause)* we've just experienced how it can be otherwise.^p

SANDY:

I didn't know what to expect. And I certainly didn't think I'd be writing a play!

(Working in silence, minutes pass. SANDY places her hands on the chair seat and moves her body to the left. She looks at her watch.)

SANDY:

I need a break. Ahh, I can start to feel me hip

NINA:

(raising her arms above her head and stretching) Yeah, I've got a twinge in my shoulder. If I was at home, I'd be putting out the washing or loading the flipping dishwasher in between bouts of writing – and getting distracted.

SANDY:

Yeah, I know what ya mean. Shall we go for some nosh? *(Looking towards BURGE, who looks deep in thought and focussed on what she is doing)* Are you coming, Burge?

BURGE:

No, I'll stay here. *(talking without looking up from her laptop)* I got side-tracked by the music I wanted to include, and now my ideas are starting to flow. I think I'll stay and carry on t for a bit *(slight pause)*, is that Ok?

(NINA and SANDY leave as BURGE continues to tap without pausing on the laptop keyboard.)

Non-writing AT the fringe

Venue 30

Turntable

Created and Performed by Burge (with inspiration from MJ McCarthy).

Tickets: On the door (£8 / £5 concessions)

A musical tale from the field

at which Burge invites Douglas T Stewart to make his choice of music and to talk about the importance of music in his life.

Burge sits front (and centre) of the audience. A record player on a small table, with a pile of vinyl records beside her.

Sandy and Nina take their seats for the performance, just as Burge begins;

“What music were you into when you were 5 years old?”

I was into ABBA when I was 5 years old. I’ve still got my double sided picture disc of Super Trooper and The Winner Takes It All, in my red corduroy box of 45s. Playing vinyl and dancing was a thing of my childhood. In our house each room had a record player, and vinyl records.

She started dancin’ to that fine fine music, you know her life was saved by rock and roll.

Lou Reed

I remember reading how we never come innocent to any research task, so it is always an expression of the self, I think it was Clough, and this resonated because music continues to be a big part of my life; academically and personally. I write about musicians, I research musicians and form friendships and relationships around sharing and experiencing music.

I’d like you to welcome Douglas T Stewart

[Audience applauds as Douglas T Stewart takes a seat beside Burge]

I have talked with Douglas over the past five years, it’s been a lasting research relationship that began when we talked for over four hours, over honey tea (with two sugars).

I suppose I should call it an interview, but it didn’t feel like one. It was more of a conversation and connection over life, love, music and creativity. This is how I always seek to approach my research, ‘differently’ and ‘honestly’.

I first met Douglas T Stewart back in 2012, amongst the vinyl of 45s and long players. I was late – and not really knowing where I was going. It was the first time that I had been to Monorail. I have a map and I check it as I reach the end of the street. I’m flustered but there’s no-one around in the deserted street to ask directions. I worry that I am going to be late for Douglas. I turn back on myself and eventually find it set back, slightly hidden within a concrete pavement courtyard off the street.

I need not have worried about being late for Douglas, as he was later than me. I order a cup of tea. I deliberate as to where to sit. I choose, and wait for Douglas. I keep an eye on the door, and I scribble on my notepad, nervously. The door opens, and Douglas T Stewart enters. He is smaller than I imagined, with a tired, lived in face. We say hello. Douglas orders his first honey tea, and sits down opposite me. I am put at ease by his Kermit the Frog badge on his tweed jacket. There is a story behind this.

“I think, being in the Bandits is a bit like Hotel California, you can check out any time you want but you never want to leave. Someone actually said to me the other night ‘you don’t ever really leave the BMX Bandits you might appear to have left but it is still like once you have been a BMX Bandit you are a BMX Bandit *forever* whether you like it or not’. I think it is also a bit like, one of my big role models, I am not sure if it is Jim Henson or if it is Kermit the Frog, you know Kermit the Frog is Jim Henson’s kind of alter ego, who plods on beyond Jim Henson and becomes the star. The thing in the Muppets, they are a sort of family, you know, they are kind of dysfunctional and sometimes they get angry, and fight, but it is almost like The BMX Bandits is just a sort of family who, this time it can be these people but at other times it can be other people, I think I am sort of the main part of the family...”

BURGE selects the Eagles record and unwraps the vinyl ...and puts the needle on the record.

...Welcome to the Hotel California
Such a lovely place (such a lovely place)
Such a lovely face.

...Last thing I remember, I was
Running for the door
I had to find the passage back to the place I was before
'Relax' said the nightman,
'We are programmed to receive.
You can check out any time you like,
But you can never leave!

BURGE fades record

Douglas continues

“I mean there has been 26 members in 26 years and I am the only constant... Long-term members of the band have all said in interviews, oh, BMX Bandits *is* Douglas. I think that is a kind of confusing statement because it is sort of true on one level but on another level it is not true, because it kind of sounds like it is belittling all these other peoples’ contributions that I could not exist without. I am Douglas who had these people as parents, who went to this school, who has friends, so all these other people are a part of me as well, so that is why, I guess, you could also say the band *is* Douglas. I guess it is a kind of ongoing portrait of me and my life.”



BURGE and DUGLAS talk about the making of serious drugs, and how DUGLAS finds inspiration for his song writing.

“...When I was in that middle place I would never write songs, it would always be when I would be in a more heightened state, I was not feeling like I was so desperate I was going out to buy an axe to cut one of my fingers off... you know but that is maybe a good way of dealing with pain. I have got round to buying the axe but never got round to chopping my fingers off. I’ve always thought it was an interesting idea...

It is a bit like your average person, I use the thing of a car crash more as a metaphor than an actual car crash. A normal person when he sees a car crash walks away from it, or if they are in it then they try to get out of it...I am really hurt, what can I get out of it...that heightened sense of real pain and instead of trying to do the logical thing ...you are going well... I will stay here for a while, rolling around in the blood and the carnage. I want to capture this moment, I don’t just want to capture how it looks, how that makes me feel...the smell, the taste, the emotion...creating beauty out of ugliness and pain. You know there is that amazing piece of music, which is a good example of that magical thing. The Girl from Ipanema. You can feel and see it.”

BURGE turns to her pile of vinyl, to take out the Girl from Ipanema.

Frank Sinatra sings...

Tall and tan and young and lovely
The girl from Ipanema goes walking

And when she passes

Each one she passes goes "ah"

When she walks, she's like a samba
That swings so cool and sways so gently

BURGE fades the record down.

Duglas continues.

Now you might not get the detail of what colour of hair she had, or what colour of eyes she had or what she was wearing as she walked by, these are just little details, but they are needed for the sensuality, and the romance to be re-created in song. You might not know about a girl walking by a café but there is something there that is captured in the notes, in the rhythm and in the sound...and the beauty within that has always been my kind of obsession...

BURGE turns volume on the record slightly up...

But I watch her so sadly

Yes, I would give my heart gladly

But each day, when she walks to the sea

She looks straight ahead, not at me

Record fades.

...So the process of singing or recording the song for the first time, there is a sense of release, almost like a sense of climax or some release, almost like a sexual thing, but not a sexual thing, but a thing that becomes heightened... and it does not actually feel like a healing thing, it just *feels*...it is like a little tune will come into my head and it is like a little bit of a movie soundtrack, it will conjure up a little bit of a melody.

Do you write these down?

Usually the first day all I have is a tune. With lyrics I would try to write them down, but music I try not to make any note of it the first day.

Why?

To see if I could still remember it the next day and if I cannot remember it the next day then it probably wasn't that good. So I remember hearing that ABBA did that, you know the ABBA guys would write a song and come back to the piano a week later, and if they could not remember what they had done they would go, oh well that was not good enough because it did not stick.

Fade

And so we return to ABBA.

My experiences with Douglas over the years will be a part of me *forever*. This first affecting encounter with Douglas came at a time when I too was dealing with my own vulnerabilities.

Perhaps in a way connecting through our different “vulnerable selves”, such as those that Ellis refers to, our mutual vulnerability allowed for an ordinariness of connecting on a human level, that contrasted with my expectations and anxieties of being late for *Douglas T Stewart*. The constraints of academic norms would have meant a sanitised encounter of the depths of heartbreak, and mental illness that led to thoughts of self-harm and mutilation, which feeds Douglas' creative self. This is why this paper and the relationships that have grown through our different experiences of being *on the fringe*[s] present an honest account of the ordinariness and extra-ordinariness that ‘writing differently’ allows.

Such processes are reflective of the creative processes of musicians. The lived experiences and struggles of becoming and continuing to be an academic; the idiosyncrasies, routines and rituals that are a part of this in order to express ourselves through our work. The places in which we need to be in to write (both physically and mentally) and find ourselves in, the people we need with us, that become meaningful and inspires us to write, be it *on or at the*

fringe[s] or centre stage. There is the open-ended need to question and for reflection, and of the need to create a new every time, that is a part of creative and academic lives.

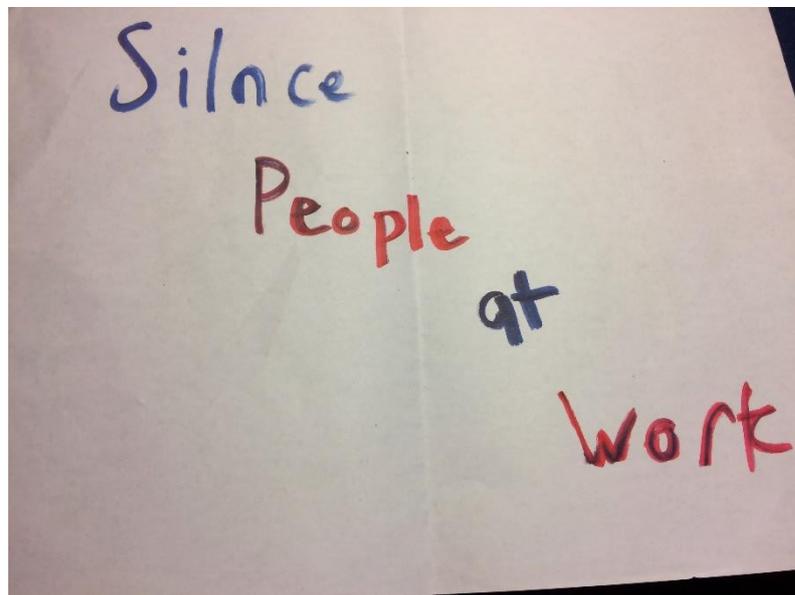
As creators ourselves, in Clegg's words to 'imagine alternatives', we can perhaps learn from the lived experiences of those who live and work by and through Springer's thought of the 'art of not being governed.'

Our experiences led us to be ON the Fringe/AT the Fringe.

Notes

Inspired by Martin Parker's *Management Learning* article and encouraged by Alison Pullen, we have added notes throughout our piece to offer some reflections on the process and to locate further our thinking within specific literatures.

1. The Fringe is held in the city of Edinburgh, Scotland's capital, for three weeks every August. On hundreds of stages all over the city, 'shows for every taste' (edfringe.com) are presented. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival is described as 'the world's greatest platform for creative freedom' (edfringe.com).
2. Within the Fringe's 'explosion of creative energy' (edfringe.com), we developed our ideas to reflect the experimentation, eclecticism, improvisation, and testing of audience reaction that we encountered as we attended different Fringe events and venues.
3. Douglas T Stewart has been the frontman and lead songwriter of the iconic Glasgow indie band the BMX Bandits (<http://bmxbandits.net>) for over thirty years. Famed for his mix of sugar sweet melodic pop, Douglas' song writing and his interviews with Burge document the extremes of his struggles with his mental health.
4. There were many instances where we had to remind ourselves and each other to let things be, and emerge, rather than, say, plan where we were going or review where we were, all of which would have led (in our view) to a lesser piece.
5. One of the 'out takes' we agonized over was a delightful encounter with Maura who joined us after lunch on day one and wrote a sign saying 'silnce (*sic*), people at work', an observation that suited brief moments of our intense writing, but was also strangely at odds with our 'writing differently' ways of working.



Picture by Maura, created in Act 1

6. Do we accept Hansen and friends' view when they say 'no text, no matter how detailed and colourful can describe what it feels like to hit a perfect golf drive' (2007, p.553), so to 'be there' do you have to actually have to *be there*? Others, like Watts (1966), have struggled with this paradox; 'my problem as a writer, using words, is to dispel the illusions of language while employing one of the languages that generates them' (p. 51).

7. We were aware of the importance of place and consciously went to different places to create space for our ideas and research and to enable them and us to be created by that space.
8. The place of our writing differently as production-in-action was important. We drew inspiration from the Fringe to experiment with different genres, including some which did not make the cut (such as a film poster, and a set of play study notes). Our aim was to provide an eclectic range of media and to improvise both in ‘making it up as we went along’ and being innovative and creative in our writing and ‘representation’ and, as one reviewer observed, ‘by purposefully refusing to qualify this creative endeavour with traditional, routinized writing practices’.
9. Turntable celebrates the resurgence of interest in vinyl 45s and long-players, but it is more than that: it is a show about listening, reflecting, relating and sharing records and the feelings that music can evoke. Turntable is about taking music from the cloud, and putting it back in your heart. Michael John (MJ) McCarthy, a composer, musician and songwriter who presents Turntable, is wary about describing the show as therapy but concedes the Turntable experience may be therapeutic. The music evokes embodied connections, memories and feelings to share.
10. As part of our taking meat off the bones, extracting the fat, removing our pound of flesh and generally being mean to get lean in our final production piece, we cut a number of stage directions within the play around embodied practices, particularly pauses and bodily movements such as ‘*she taps the mousepad and leans in towards the laptop screen*’.
11. When we decided to meet up in Edinburgh, we had referred to our time together as a writing ‘retreat’ and, for Nina and Sandy, it was a retreat in the sense of being away from familiar places and work- and family-related routines. However, what we called a retreat was, in practice, very much the opposite of what it became. It was more like an opening up of space than a retreating into one – especially because of our presence at the Fringe.
12. We have included actual reviewer and editor comments. It would seem that our being touched managed to touch others; we suspended our own discomfort by going out onto the fringe of academia, and by doing so we also took others with us.

Closing credits

Cast/Performers (in order of appearance)

Nina: self
Female Friesian cow: Daisy
Female veterinary surgeon 1: Unnamed
Female veterinary surgeon 2: Unnamed
Male herdsman: Unnamed
Farm worker: Unnamed
Sandy: self
Burge: self
Maura: self
Douglas T Stewart: self

Written, produced and edited by Nina, Burge, and Sandy

With inspiration from original ideas by:

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Entertainment managers Nina and Burge

Location manager: Burge

Fringe Performers and Locations

“American Comics from all Across America” in *Escaping Trump’s America*, Venue 304

John Bishop in *Winging It*, Venue 302

Jay Handley in *Hansplaining*, Venue 438

Michael John (MJ) McCarthy in *Turntable*, Venue 30

Mark Steel in *Every Little Thing’s Gonna be Alright*, Venue 35

“In the country”

Written by Shaun Harris and Bob Markley

Sung by Cliff Richard

“Rock and Roll”

Written by Lou Reed

Sung by Lou Reed

“Hotel California”

Written by Don Felder, Don Henley and Glen Frey

Sung by Eagles

“The Girl from Ipanema”

Written by Antonio Carlos Jobim, Norman Gimbel, Vinicius de Moraes

Sung by Frank Sinatra

CURTAIN CLOSES

Cutting the Fringe: taking meat off the bones, and extracting our pound of flesh

We had an aspiration to show both the unpredictability and unknowable aspects of research encounters and the more mundane and quotidian details of research processes and practices. Although we relished fleshing out the research process, peppering it with valuable illustrations of non-writing and enactments of embodied *being*, we were not unfettered. Our constraints were primarily word count. Thus, our expansive fleshing-out had to come to a halt, for our piece was not merely fleshy but corpulent (if not obese), and beautiful details suddenly became a nuisance (200 valuable words to describe eating chocolate brownies – come on!). And so we reluctantly and painfully removed the excess flesh from parts of our embodied practices of non-writing and writing, while wary of falling into the trap Bradley’s warns – of stripping away our personal style.

One of our profound discoveries of our relational, embodied and creative practices of ‘production’ was how *non-writing*, in Cloutier’s (2016) terms, became just as, if not more important than writing, for as she suggests ‘it is at the intersection of writing and not writing that our creative energy lies’ (p. 79). Hence, eating; talking; sitting together; writing in comradely silence; watching shows and laughing at the absurdities and follies of humans; swapping computers and seats; walking; sleeping; riding in taxis; discussing genres while eating poached eggs; and finding a release in comedy, must all preside over the disembodied processes Dewsbury (2014, p.150) calls ‘writing for production’. Although ironic given our chosen theme, we believe that in crafting our offering we have experienced *writing-as-production*, rather than *for production*- that which emerges from a series of gentle, flowing, embodied encounters, sparked off by two affective fieldwork encounters that we wanted to share.

It is not research (or writing) in itself that is problematic, but its narrow interpretation as a specific action and outcome, rather than as being processual. We wanted to convey how research is born out of a vast array of embodied writing and non-writing practices. We also tried to embody how writing is not an activity merely conserved for production, but can be a potentially productive process in its effects, especially if we can postpone concerns about output, rigid prescriptions around format, and anxieties related to maintaining control and following linear steps. This enabled the possibilities for experimentation and improvisation that can never be known in advance e.g. merits of non-writing.

What we found was what we knew all along; affect trumps strategy, friendship endures over networking, and writing is born out of a vast array of *non-writing practices*, those very activities that open up a space for beautiful possibilities. Researching *can* always be otherwise – it’s only ourselves that get in the way.

Critical Reviews

'I enjoyed reading this manuscript. For me, it is really successful, in a range of ways – aesthetically, intellectually, and in terms of praxis, for example. It communicates beautifully, in script, poetic, social science, and satirical forms. This work has really made me think, in lots of ways' (Reviewer 1¹²)

'a beautifully written, intelligent collaborative piece about the affective nature of research encounters. I very much enjoyed reading it and the journey it took me on; challenging my ideas of academic writing and pushing me to the 'fringes' of my own comfort by purposefully refusing to qualify this creative endeavour with traditional, routinized writing practices' (Reviewer 2)

an excellent example of 'writing differently' about management, organisations and research. I loved the structure of the 'paper' (Reviewer 3)

'The account of the operation on the cow was visceral – we all felt physically repelled, so the writing worked on us through our bodies' (Editors)