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If on a summer's day a researcher: the implied author and the implied reader in writing differently

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ABSTRACT

You are scrolling through the results of your latest search for papers. You wade through the papers you've been planning to read for ages; papers you could put aside to read this summer; papers you say you've read but really haven't; papers you've *actually* read ... but don't remember; when a paper catches your eye.

You prepare to puzzle through the complex explanations of VERY IMPORTANT CONCEPTS and the (unfulfilled?) promise of a contribution to *the literature*. But as you start reading you are pleasantly surprised. The tone is almost jovial; the writing is fresh and accessible.

But there seems to be an error; the paper is missing the discussion and conclusion.

You try and track down the original paper but end up with a different one. You contact the journal and ask for a replacement, only to find yourself with a different paper again.

Slowly, however, you are beginning to enjoy yourself. Each paper you read leads you on a different journey. A flurry of words, styles, genres, tones.

And in all the papers is you: the reader, the writer, the text.

* * *

Inspired by *If on a Winter's Night a traveller* by Italo Calvino this paper explores the intimate relationships between the reader, the writer, and the text. I interweave second person tales of a writer and a reader, trying to write a text across time and space, with reflections on the value of the concepts of the 'implied author' and 'implied reader' for writing differently in management and organisation studies. In particular, I give attention to an often overlooked, yet ever present, part of writing differently in organisation studies: the reader. I address the reader as someone who, like the writer, is actively produced through engagement with the text and the according political and aesthetic implications. Ultimately, I argue that it matters deeply how readers are positioned in texts and how the reader comes to understand themselves through the text for realising the potential of writing differently.

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You are about to begin writing. Breathe deeply. Do not be intimidated by the white page in front of you. Relax. You know what you would like to say, even if the words are yet thick and obscure. You might have been away from your writing for ... too long, but the ideas are still with you.

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You begin to type:

'The imperative to problematize writing journal articles and books has, as a consequence of protracted activism in the academy, gained recognition and acknowledgement within certain discourses of management and organization scholarship.'

No. Scrap that. It sounds awful. Pretentious. And you aren't pretentious. Are you? How are you ever going to make a difference to the world if you rely on strings of four syllable words? And besides, this isn't just for academics. Your writing isn't for them. Is it?

You try again:

'Writing differently has touched me in a unique way.'

Just stop. No. That already sounds sentimental. And you aren't sentimental. Are you? Who is going to take you for a serious academic if you write like that? And besides, this isn't about you. Your writing isn't for you. Is it?

You feel frustrated. You shift in your seat. You pull at your skirt which has bunched under you as if in solidarity with your annoyance. You move your weight from one side of your body to the other. You push the ideas through your body; trying them in your legs, in your gut, in your head, in your fingertips.

You sigh. It's getting harder not to get distracted now. It's October but somehow still July-cold. The icy southerly whipping at the windows, whistling at you. Your fingers are slightly stiff with the cold. Perhaps typing faster would help? You wish the ideas would flow from you. But they seem choked up. A weight in your chest.

You look up for inspiration. In the fog of thought you'd forgotten you weren't an abstract author, but a flesh-and-blood writer. You adjust your senses. You are hit by a wave of noise. The buzz of an open plan office first thing on a Friday morning envelops you. Colleagues call out to one another, laugh with one another. Some have serious whispered conversations. Doors are closed. Others are opened.

You breathe in deeply. The office smells cold and damp. You look around the office. Colleagues at computers some typing furiously, some stuck on the blank page like you. You look at the white page on your computer. You glance back up at your colleagues.

You write the words:

'I begin by writing about writing.'

The writer

I begin by writing about writing, although this paper isn't about writing as such, but about reading. Or rather, this paper is about the intimate relationship between reading, writing, and text. My examination of this intimate relationship is crafted through two parallel narratives, inspired by Italo Calvino's postmodern novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Calvino's novel is made up of 22 interconnected but distinct chapters. Half of the novel tells the story of the Reader who on purchasing Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* settles in to read only to find that at the end of the first chapter the rest of the novel is missing. Deeply invested in their reading, the Reader goes on a quest to find the complete manuscript, only to be thwarted again, and again (and again), by a series of half-finished stories. These chapters are strikingly written in the second person; the famous

opening line, 'You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*' (3). The other half of the novel consists of genre-spanning and bending chapters of love stories, mysteries, political satire, and others, that end just after they are begun. You, the reader, alongside the Reader encounter a vast array of literary forms, genres, poetic table of contents, meditations on the role of the reader, the death of the author, fiction, publishing, life and death, and unknowability. The novel is labyrinthian, clever, and self-referential. It is a structurally complex novel through which Calvino intentionally (Wood 2013) invites multi-dimensional relationships between reader, author, and text, and prompts reflection on the processes of reading and writing.

In this paper, the first set of narratives is a series of second person accounts of a writer and a reader engaging with text. As in Calvino's novel, I use the second person in order to displace the writer from the position of God-like textual creator and to alternatively underscore that the reader has an active and indispensable part in textual creation (Panigrahi 2011). I also use these passages to see what happens 'when the words [actively] connect the writer and the reader during the reading process' (Meier and Wegener 2017, 200). The second person accounts are 'interwoven with reprises, which serve to express the fluctuation of time [and space]' (Calvino 1993, 24). In other words, the second person accounts of writing, reading, and text transport the reader across time and space, embodying the unfinishedness, the interrupted process, and necessary repetition of all reading/writing. The passages derive from the years I spent writing and reading this paper, taking us across continents, across seasons, across years. These passages show us the unfinishedness of writing and reading, as well as the identities, values, and beliefs that (un)structured the text. I use these passages to illustrate my central point in this paper: the role of the reader in realising the political and aesthetic potential of writing differently has been overlooked in MOS (management and organisation studies). In this paper, I provide insight into the ways in which the reading/writing process can (re)create political and aesthetic frameworks for interpreting and changing the world and our identities. Accordingly, it matters deeply how readers are positioned in texts by the writer and how the reader comes to understand themselves through the texts. The second person passages in this paper are crafted to address multiple aspects of the reader-writer relationship but seek to emphasise that the reader is always an active part of textual creation and the interpretation of ideas even when not directly addressed.

In the passages written in the first person (such as this passage you are currently reading, and I am currently writing) I produce a second narrative to address theoretical concerns more directly about the position of the reader in academic writing. I offer a more conventional analytic examination of the scholarly literature and practices of writing (differently), particularly for social change, in MOS. My theoretical starting point for this paper comes from the understanding that the inherent instability and unfinishedness of language means that the reader plays an active role in textual production (Helin 2016). In other words, writers can never fully convey their intended meaning through a text so the reader must interpret what is written. I argue, however, that the role of the reader has nevertheless been overlooked in MOS, much to the detriment of the possibilities of writing differently for fostering change. As Calvino says, 'writing must be the respiration of [the] reader' (1993, 165). Accordingly, I extend work that both develops alternative subjectivities of academic writers and challenges the problematic masculinist positioning of the author as 'god-like textual creator' (Phillips, Pullen, and Rhodes 2014), by unpacking the role of the reader in academic texts. In order to develop my critique, I draw on the concepts of 'the implied author' and 'the implied reader' to reframe the political and ethical possibilities of writing differently if we reorganise the relationship between the reader and the writer.

Over the course of the paper, the writer fades and the reader comes to the fore. We start, however, with writing as a concept that has been placed at the centre of debates surrounding writing differently. But do not imagine, dear reader, that the order signals importance. On the contrary, you must remember that you are indispensable to this project. You are always in the mind of your writer. Your engagement with this paper underpins the political and aesthetic goals. Your realisation of this text, however, is not simply through following the logical argument in the first-person

sections, but the very experience of reading, of being unsettled, of being called to adopt the identity of Reader. Through the text, we reach to each other. You have been overlooked, reader, as a true locus of writing and I seek to move us, through logic and through feeling, to reconsider how you are positioned in writing differently. The work of this text – the use of alternating second and first person – is to unsettle the boundaries between us.

Are you ready to begin?

On writing

I start with writing rather than reading, however, as writing is the practice and concept that has received sustained scholarly attention in MOS. And it is fairly easy to understand why. Writing is a fundamental practice for academics; essential for crafting and sharing research within and beyond the academy (Badley 2019; Cloutier 2016). Moreover, scholars across many disciplines have convincingly argued that writing does more than just represent the world; writing actively produces it through circulating political and ethical frameworks for interpreting the world (Clifford and Marcus 2011; Richardson and St. Pierre 2017). Yet for all this potential, academic writing is frequently met with substantive criticism that it can be both aesthetically flawed by being dry, obscure, and clunky (Badley 2019; Sword 2012) and reproductive of Western, masculine, and scientific norms that marginalise other ways of being and knowing (Phillips, Pullen, and Rhodes 2014). In response to these concerns which permeate academia (Sword 2012), the body of writing differently literature in MOS has debated both aesthetic and political considerations and proposed alternatives.

The aesthetics of writing in MOS have received longstanding attention, particularly in reference to the communication of scholarly knowledge (Meier and Wegener 2017; Watson 2000; Westwood 1999). Organisational scholars have advocated to change and play with the aesthetic qualities of writing, such as through storytelling (Boje 1995; Czarniawska 1998; Sinclair 2013), fictocriticism (Rhodes 2015), or poetic synesthesia (Pérezts 2022) in order to improve the effective and engaging communication of ideas to readers. There is much to be said in favour of more 'stylish' academic writing (Grey and Sinclair 2006; Sword 2012) or genre-bending writing (Rhodes 2015; Watson 2000). It is exciting to read and to write.

Other organisational scholars – particularly feminist and anti-racist scholars – have interrogated the politics of writing by creating a range of different approaches including anti-racist writing (Dar 2019; Liu 2018), poetry (Beavan 2019; Kostera 1997; Sayers and Jones 2015); embodied writing (Huopalainen and Satama 2019; Lipton 2017; Pullen 2018), dirty writing (Pullen and Rhodes 2008), feminine writing (Vachhani 2015, 2019), dream writing (Helin 2019) and others (see Huopalainen 2022; Kivinen 2021; Lipton 2022; Weatherall 2020 for examples). Collectively, such writing could possibly be better described as being less concerned with 'writing differently' and more concerned with how scholars 'write difference' (O'shea 2019). These scholars, then, are ultimately concerned with how a different, more inclusive, politics and ethics, could be developed and shared through academic writing.

Although all these projects share some common goals, each carves out a unique approach to writing differently. For instance, Weatherall (2020) writes from a decolonising feminist approach, emphasising the responsibilities of white authors to foster epistemic justice through storytelling approaches. As a contrast, Pullen and Rhodes (2008) powerfully argue for 'dirty writing' that retains the ambiguity, the leakiness, and the unfinishedness of the text to challenge masculine authorial writing. Both these projects look to how we 'write difference' and how writing differently can foster change but develop a diverse range of political positions on writing differently.

It is little wonder, then, that so much intellectual energy has been dedicated to thinking about how and why academics should write differently: it is a powerful practice and important vehicle for creating change. The extensive focus on *writing* and a concern about what the *writer* can do with a text, however, has underplayed an important part of the process: the reader. Although scholars do usually suggest that new ways of writing will benefit the reader aesthetically and/or politically

(see for instance: Ahonen et al. 2020; Beavan 2019; Brewis and Williams 2019; Meier and Wegener 2017; Sinclair 2019; Vachhani 2015), the relationship between the reader and the writer is seldom theoretically developed or even acknowledged in a meaningful way. Literature on writing differently that does explicitly consider the reader/writer relationship demonstrates that the reader is an indispensable part of the writing differently project and must receive thorough consideration (Brewis and Williams 2019; Helin 2015; Helin 2016; 2020; Rhodes 2009). Crucially, the reader is a part of the process of making meaning, rather than involved in a decoding an already finalised message (Helin 2015, 183). Accordingly, in order to realise the potential of writing differently, both politically and aesthetically, writers 'need to be more aware of what we are inviting the reader to' (Helin 2015, 184). Readers should be seen, at the least, as a kind of active partner in, rather than a passive receiver of, writing. In Calvino's (1993, 172) words: 'The universe will express itself as long as somebody will be able to say, "I read, therefore it writes".'

In order to think more deeply about how both the writer and the reader are implicated in writing differently, I introduce two concepts from literary criticism, and specifically reader-response criticism: the implied author and the implied reader. The implied author speaks to both the political and aesthetic concerns at the heart of the writing differently literature. The author is no 'invisible point' from which text comes (Calvino 1993, 98), but a ghostly presence within it. I use this concept to explore the writing differently literature, and as a starting point for critique. I draw on the debates around the implied author to consider how focusing primarily on the writer as the creator of the text and the reader as interpreter of the text has political implications for change. To extend this critique I then offer an alternative formulation of reader/writer relationships through the concept of the implied reader; although I follow this concept in a more post-structuralist vein than its initial iteration (Tompkins 1980). The concepts the 'implied author' and 'implied reader' provide a shared language from which to debate how reader/writer relationships could be organised in texts and the political implications of organising reader/writer relationships differently.

Cambridge, United Kingdom – July 2017

You are possibly a little hungover. Or just tired. It's hard to tell. This summer has been a blur. Meetings; reading; conferences; reading; drinks; debates; dinners; reading; writing. You slouch in your chair, thick with the weight of activity. In front of you, the blue-lit monitor flickers. You gaze distractedly at your paltry attempts to write about something oceans distant. The cultivated hush of the library envelops you.

Your thoughts drift.

You sit in your cousins' apartment. Legs curled under you. A beer in one hand. Gesticulating wildly. The conversation flutters. Gender politics. Reading Nietzsche. The Laban-Malmgren system of Character Analysis. Reading Jordan Peterson. The destructive tendencies of social media. Reading French literature of the nineteenth century. Your arguments become less coherent. Your eyes are tired. You pack up your things. Don't walk home through the park, he tells you. Text me when you get home, she says. You wonder if you should be more afraid.

The memories seep into your veins and accrue in your extremities. You are tight weaves of experience.

You shake off the thoughts of last night and type a few sentences. You sigh deeply. Your eyes slide out the window into the cobbled courtyard. The university seeps into your limbs. You are a writer. You write journal articles. You write commentary. You write academic books. You are proud of what you write. Or maybe you aren't proud. Maybe you disagree with what you write. Maybe you feel like

you need to write in a way from which your body recoils. But maybe you need that if you are to be an academic writer.

In the glare of the afternoon sun, you pause to think. You think of your colleagues. What would you write if you were talking to them? You think of the 'big names' you read. What would you write if you were talking to them? You think of yourself. What would you write if you were writing for yourself? You think of all these different strands of yourself. You think of your flesh-and-blood. You think of your self inscribed in ink.

You write:

'The writer, in the act of writing, embeds multiple versions of themselves in texts.'

The implied author

The concept of the implied author was initially introduced by Wayne Booth (1961) in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. In short, the implied author is the idea of the author, and their beliefs, values, opinions, and identities, that the reader derives from the sum of conscious and unconscious choices embedded in the text (Booth 1961, 2008; Shen 2011). Booth (1961) outlined how through the act of writing and the extant text, the writer creates an 'implied author'. The writer, in the act of writing, embeds multiple versions of themselves in and through textual choices that are refractions of a 'flesh-and-blood' person without being directly attributable to that person (Booth 2008). When the reader interprets these choices, they construct their own perceptions of an 'implied author' upon reading the text (Booth 1961). *The Rhetoric of Fiction* was published during a period in the field of literary criticism where 'anti-intentionalism' held powerful sway, and scholarly discussions of author intent were taboo (Booth 1961; Kindt 2006). The implied author was, in this context, a useful concept for circumnavigating arguments about 'real' author intent by giving scholars and readers the resources to discuss the authorial choices embedded in the text without directly attributing the qualities and beliefs to a 'flesh-and-blood' person.

The implied author has since been a popular, albeit intensely debated (see Kindt 2006), concept that continues to 'haunt' narratology (Lanser 2011). The enduring popularity of the implied author has been less because of its theoretical rigour and more because it speaks to concerns at the heart of textual interpretation and the implications of different interpretations (Rabinowitz 2011). In particular, the implied author points to the ways that texts are crafted with intent at communicating a certain meaning and simultaneously addresses the interpretative element to the realisation of this intent which lies with the reader (Lanser 2011). The implied author also allows scholars to talk about how writers choose (both consciously and unconsciously) to present themselves in a text and how this has implications for the values, beliefs, and attitudes embedded in the text that are interpreted by the reader (Rabinowitz 2011). Accordingly, the implied author is an effective concept for thinking about how norms of the text are established and shared (Chatman 1978) and thereby how political and ethical elements of a text are realised through both the writer's aesthetic choices and the readers' engagement with these choices.

Although the implied author has primarily been used for the analysis of fictional texts, the concept is also useful for analysing non-fiction (Phelan 2011), including scholarly texts (Lanser 2011). The implied author can be used to highlight how certain academic (and other) identities of the writer are constructed 'rather than another through her choices of technique, subject matter, narrative sequence, ethical values, and so on' (Phelan 2011, 128). For instance, in organisation studies the conventional construction of academic texts leaves the reader with an image of a white, masculine, straight researcher from the Global North (Weatherall 2019), which is perceived as the normative position from which 'good' research is conducted (Pullen 2018). Although there have been efforts to expand the idea of who the author is or could be (see Huopalaianen 2022;

Sayers and Martin 2021; Einola et al. 2021 for example), these norms are still noticeably embedded in MOS. The concept of the implied author, however, also underlines that the textual construction of the writer (the implied author) is a refraction of the ‘flesh-and-blood’ academic who writes, rather than directly attributable to them. Therefore the ‘flesh-and-blood’ academic may not embody the values of the text in their lived experience or daily practice. In relation to writing (differently) in organisation studies, the implied author encapsulates the political tensions around writing difference and the complexities of carving space in academia for marginalised voices to ‘speak’ (Einola et al. 2021; Parker 2014; Pullen 2018).

I hope, dear Reader, that you are finding this explanation engaging.

The implied author, nonetheless, simultaneously emphasises an important interpretative element of the text undertaken by the reader. The implied author points to how the conscious and unconscious choices of the writer ‘instructs us [the reader] silently, through the whole design’ (Chatman 1978). Accordingly, the (constrained) choices made by an academic writer operate to create a certain landscape of possible interpretations for the reader through the text, through which the reader comes to understand the academic and the social world, as well as associated assumptions about the perceived value of social phenomena and social relations. The reader, however, is not a passive receptor of these textual landscapes, but an active interpreter of the text. The reader can question the embedded identities and values espoused by the implied author, although the norms of the text are powerful and operate to constrain potential meanings. The implied author is, then, necessarily a reading effect; it is something that happens during and in the wake of reading (Lanser 2011). In other words, meaning, purpose, and an understanding of writer (whether conventional or non-conventional), are only realised by the reader engaging with a text.

Accordingly, in addition to encapsulating to both the aesthetic and political issues for the *writer*, the implied author highlights the implications of different ways of writing in relation to the reader. For writing (differently), the implied author directs writers toward a deeper consideration of the implications of writing choices on the reader. If writing is only realised through the readers interpretative act, then writing differently needs to be crafted to understand the reader as an active participant (for example see Brewis and Williams 2019; Helin 2015). A writer can consider the reader by questioning which ‘instructions’ are being given to the reader through particular styles, genres, and embedded beliefs in the text; particularly if the aim of writing differently is to foster change (Mandalaki & Daou, 2021; Sayers and Martin 2021). Importantly, the implied author also encourages writers to recognise reading as an indispensable part of writing and therefore the impossibility of writers in directly communicating a ‘message’ through the text; as Helin has demonstrated (Helin 2013, 2015, 2020). Alternatively, writing, and writing differently, should be understood to offer a landscape of possible interpretations which will have multiple and varied impacts on the reader.

Although the implied author is useful for me here to draw explicit attention to the active role of reader in texts, it is my intention to use the concept as a starting point for a critique of this positioning of the reader. The key assumption underpinning the position of the implied author is that it is the *writer* who is the origin and creator of writing and meaning, and the *reader* is the end point and interpreter of this writing and meaning. I contend that this assumption remains embedded in much of the literature about writing differently in organisation studies which position the writer at the core of writing differently. Ultimately, however, this assumption can relegate the reader to a secondary (and subordinate) position in textual creation and minimise the ways that writing and research is dialogic (Ahonen et al. 2020; Helin 2015, 2016; Rhodes 2009). Barthes (1967) was a fierce critic of ‘the writer as origin of meaning’ assumption underpinning the implied author, arguing that it ‘tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions [*sic*]’ (1). He proposed an alternative formulation based on the argument that ‘the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its *destination*’ (Barthes 1967, 6 – my emphasis). Following the lead of this alternative position, I move to rethink the role of the reader in writing differently, starting from the point that: ‘we know that to restore to writing to its future, we must reverse its

myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author' (Barthes 1967, 6). Calvino (1993, 154) asked a similar question: 'How is it possible to defeat not the authors but the functions of the author, the idea that behind each book there is someone who guarantees a truth in that world of ghosts and inventions?'

Dear Reader, is yours a world of ghosts and inventions?

Sydney, Australia – March 2019

Summer is dying. You gaze through your office windows at the heavy banks of grey cloud obfuscating your usually sunny prospect. Your thoughts stagnate; weighted in the same dreary mist. Ordinarily, you would be excited by this singular afternoon, carved out, and miraculously retained, for reading. You had hoped that the sanitised office surrounding you would fade, and instead vibrant, kaleidoscopic images of other possible worlds, traced in ink, would compose themselves in your mind.

Yet, as you wade through the results of your latest search for papers you feel disheartened. Uninspired. Constrained. You start reading one paper, and then another, and another, and yet another. You toss each to the side pre-emptively with unfairly sharp criticisms: obscure; unkind; oppressive; indifferent. The social world held at arms-length. Engineered to within an inch of its previously nebulous effervescence. Combative toward the reader.

You stop. You force yourself to pick a paper and read. As you progress, you feel each word inscribe itself on your flesh and burrow under your skin until your blood runs in black and white. You experience a subtle, but powerful, pressure in your lower back, orienting you to adopt a position that feels uncomfortable. You are not who you are. Your resolve dissipates and you toss it once more onto your desk.

Then, a paper catches your eye. Or maybe it doesn't. Maybe you read it with the same empty hope. But maybe, maybe, something about the tone of the paper strikes you. Captures you. Causes you to pause. Perhaps you feel the vulnerability of the first few lines. Perhaps you feel that the writers are speaking to you. Perhaps you see yourself in the writing. Perhaps you don't see yourself in the writing at all and are intrigued. Perhaps it is all of them. Perhaps it is none of them. You keep reading. You find a piece of yourself you already knew here. You discover something about yourself you never knew there.

You reconsider what you once knew everywhere.

The reader

Whichever page you open, there you are. (William Kentridge)

Barthes suggestion that scholars should embrace 'the death of the author' was an attempt to 'restore the status of the reader' (Barthes 1967, 2). Although debates around the implied author had included the reader in the framework of textual creation and realisation, critics, including Barthes, had argued that the importance of the reader had been significantly underplayed in such conceptualisations (see Eco 1979; Gibson 1949; Suleiman and Wimmers 1980; Tompkins 1980). In particular, critics emphasised the indispensable role of the reader in realising any text which would otherwise just be ink on page (Tompkins 1980). Not all critics were as adamant as Barthes that in order to consider the role of the reader all concerns of authorial intent or craft must be forgone, but there was, nevertheless, a strong sentiment among these critics that the notion of the writer as 'God-like-creator' of textual meaning should be rejected. The reader, these scholars proposed, should be at the heart of

reader–writer–text relationships as ‘the true locus of writing is reading’ (Barthes 1967, 5). We are readers before we are writers, writing is born in reading (Helin 2020) and ‘reading is going toward something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be’ (Calvino 1993, 70).

In literary criticism, scholars proposed a number of alternatives to rethink writer/reader relationships in terms of the reader (Tompkins 1980), one of the most influential being ‘the implied reader’ (Iser 1974). The concept, like the implied author, attempted to take into account both ‘the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process’ (Iser 1974, xii). Unlike ‘the implied author’, however, the focus on the implied reader was on the innumerable possibilities that the *reader* could realise through a text. The focus shifts from how the reader finds the author and their intent embedded in the text, to how a reader finds *the reader* embedded in the text. As Iser argued, the reader is ‘forced to discover the hitherto unconscious expectations that underlie his [*sic*] perceptions ... in this way he [*sic*] may then be given the chance of discovering himself [*sic*]’ (xvi). In other words, the reader discovers many versions of *themselves* in the text rather than another abstract figure (i.e. the author). While Iser acknowledges that ‘it is true that [texts] consist of the ideas thought out by someone else, but in reading, the reader becomes the subject that does the thinking’ (Iser 1974, 292). Accordingly, the implied reader has two primary considerations: the ways in which the reader is positioned by text and the ways in which the reader becomes the subject through engaging with this positioning.

The implied reader acknowledges that texts do shape the readers understanding and social world through offering a particular landscape of possible interpretations. The focus is, however, on how the ‘pre-structuring’ of the text positions the reader. In other words, the text also contains assumptions about the *readers’* identity, beliefs, values, and so on in the aesthetic choices made in the text. As Brewis and Williams (2019) attest: ‘as readers, we peer inside the worlds of others and in doing so read ourselves in refraction’ (94). In order to realise the text, the reader must adopt, or at the least engage with, these positionings. Similar to the implied author, the implied reader is neither fully flesh-and-blood nor fully ink. Generally speaking, texts are usually structured in such a way which expects the reader to align with the beliefs, values, and identities carved out through the text. Academic writing, for instance, carves out a place for the reader where they are expected to adopt a particular position that values certain forms of logic, theory, ethics, and reflexivity. The position embedded in the text implies a particular kind of researcher; as feminist scholars point out, usually a white, masculine, positivist, heterosexual one (Pullen 2018; Weatherall 2019). Different kinds of academic texts imply different kinds of readers; underscoring why writing difference is such a crucial enterprise. The best texts can enchant, enrage, transport, encourage us into different positions, opening up the reader to the eternally unfinished project of the self and the world. Importantly, the implied reader suggests that when a reader engages with the position(s) embedded in a text they are coming to understand themselves; rather than the author.

A reader can, nevertheless, resist any conceptualisation of certain identities, beliefs, or values embedded in the text (Gibson 1949). Texts can be abandoned, critiqued, debated, rejected, or questioned by the reader. As Iser (1974) notes ‘the “stars” in a text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable’ (282). Accordingly, the reader is an active and primary participant in textual creation rather than a passive and secondary receiver. Nevertheless, the text itself, in offering particular landscapes of possible interpretations, shapes how active readers are expected to be in their engagement, a phenomenon described by Helin (2020, 4) as ‘when you allow the book to read you, at the same time as you read the book’. As Iser notes, writing can be open or closed; inviting, or expecting, singular forms of engagement and positionings of the reader or multiple forms of engagement and positionings of the reader. Most writing, however, continues to embed certain identities, beliefs, and values; at the exclusion of those whose lived experiences diverges from the ‘default’ (Kubowitz 2012). In organisation studies, feminist and anti-racist scholars, have noted that particular identities and values are often embedded in texts at the exclusion of the voices of women and scholars of colour (Dar 2019; Pullen 2018). The implied reader speaks to both the possibilities of inclusion

and exclusion of the reader as well as their ability to resist particular positionings; focusing on the role of the reader, rather than the writer.

Related to the possibilities of resistance, the second key component the implied reader involved the positioning of the reader as a subject, rather than an object acted upon by the writer and the text. In other words, the reader becomes the subject of writing rather than the writer. In part, the positioning of the reader as a subject is related to the process of reading. The reader establishes 'inter-relations between past, present, and future, [and] actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections' (Iser 1974, 278). While the reader must 'accept certain perspectives' (i.e. the pre-structuring) their active participation 'inevitably causes [those perspectives] to interact' (278) in novel ways. 'The text, when you are the reader, is something that is there, against which you are forced to clash' (Calvino 1993, 66). Accordingly, 'the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realisations' (280). The reader draws different lines between the 'stars' of the text and in the process creates something that is neither the flesh-and-blood reader or a purely textual version of themselves, but the multiple possibilities of what the reader could be or know through writing. To draw on an earlier metaphor; the reader orchestrates silently through the design of the text to produce an effect greater than the sum of individual parts. In less poetical terms: the reader becomes the subject and creates new political possibilities through their engagement.

There are a range of views on the implied reader, as there are on the implied author (Tompkins 1980). Post-structuralist critiques of the implied reader/author question the simplistic shift from a passive reader to an active reader. To do so is to overlook that readers and authors are already embedded in a context (Tompkins 1980) and that 'pre-structuring' is not a neutral activity, but enmeshed in power relations. Complete freedom to interpret a text, pre-structuring or not, is an impossibility and built on the notion of a 'context-free self' (Tompkins 1980). By contrast, Kubowitz (2012) argues that there is a 'flesh-and-blood' reader whose life and sense of self is already intertwined with contexts of inclusion and exclusion. For instance, Kubowitz discusses queer readings of texts, arguing that heterosexuality is embedded in texts and in society which thus shapes the construction of the implied reader. Readers and writers can be constrained through texts as much as they are opened. Writers can be constrained by their imagined reader. They can imagine 'reviewer 2', combative critics, readers unfriendly to difference. Nevertheless, through a critical engagement with the lines of power embedded in the text, the recognition of the contextedness of all readings, and the (implied) reader/author as continually constructed ideas, change can still emerge.

The repositioning of the reader from object to subject of writing, and recognition of subject-in-context, has implications for how scholars in MOS think about the possibilities of writing differently. A primary focus on the reader does not deny the influence of the writer, their practices, or their political implications. The focus on a complex, intimate relationship between reader/writer does, however, alter the role and professed value of the writer. Many scholars in organisation studies emphasise that writing differently is freeing for the *writer* (see for instance: Beavan 2019; Kiriakos and Tienari 2018; Rhodes 2018); and the assumed associated benefits for the reader. However, even if writing is freeing for the *writer*, it does not necessarily follow that it is also freeing for the reader. A reader can still be presumed an object within the text and relegated to singular subject positions or just as a 'default' reader (Kubowitz 2012). The implied reader, alternatively, emphasises that writing must be open for the reader and recognise the contextedness of all engagement with the text.

Writing and reading can offer opportunities to discover oneself, resist default assumptions about oneself, and even change the way one thinks about oneself and the social world. There are numerous ways to begin to explore the complex and intimate relationship between reader and writer, including vertical writing (Helin 2020), feminist dog writing (Huopainen 2022), and speculative fiction (Sayers and Martin 2021). The aim is to 'move in thought, [with] images ... created and offered to the reader' while remembering that writing is born of reading (Helin 2020, 2). The implied reader and implied author gives us language to discuss both the 'flesh and blood' reader and writer, as well as the interconnected readers/writers which emerge through the process of

writing and reading. A key challenge for the writer is to craft *readerly* texts which displace the author from their god-like position and opens, rather than closes, the possibilities for an intimate engagement with the reader. There are many writing strategies, such as the second person, which help us to realise this potential.

While useful for exploring the role of the reader/writer, the implied reader and the implied author give us the impression of a tug-of-war between two poles with the text mediating betwixt and between. That it is either the writer or the reader who is at the fore. Yet, readers are writers, and writers are readers. We read what we write, and we write what we read. We inhabit both identities, often simultaneously and the boundary between reader and writer is always, at least somewhat, blurred. In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, the journey of the reader is one that is always unfinished. As Calvino writes: 'The true nature of things being revealed only by disintegration' (Calvino 1993, 55). Our reading, writing, and politics are always unfinished. The reader/writer relationship can be understood as one of disintegrating boundaries, an intimate relationship through which time and space, what is written and what is unwritten, what is read and what remains unread weave together in complex and dynamic ways. Writing can also be haunted by readers. Just think of the spectre of the reviewer in academic texts, another almost-author who shapes what is said and how it can be said. Reading/writing is polyphonic.

Carfraemill, Scotland – June 2019

Breathe in deeply. Taste the cool Scottish summer air; just like the air of home, 18,000 kilometres away. Fill your body in ebbs and flows. In and out. Rise and fall. Deep and shallow. Listen. You can hear the birds enthusiastically swapping their stories, nesting in the eaves above you. You envy their too happy ease.

Rest your fingers on the sun-warmed keys and squint through the glare on your computer screen. You continue to read. You will write soon. The words will come. A concise argument. A clear contribution. Or maybe the words won't come. Perhaps the words will stay in your body. An inarticulate feeling. A sharp stone in your gut. You continue to read. Immersed within the pages. A sentence you wish you'd written. A sentence that was freeing to read.

You write:

'Any creative project changes us in ways that we could never imagine at the outset.'

You read:

'Any creative project changes us in ways that we could never imagine at the outset.'

The sun is hot on your neck. You erase the sentence. Or perhaps you don't. Perhaps you will leave the sentence on the page with its awkward syntax and obscure subject. You will read the sentence over and over considering whether that is precisely-what-you-meant-to-say or mostly-what-you-meant-to-say or only partly-what-you-meant-to-say and whether or not it is precisely/mostly/partly-what-you-meant-to-say if that even matters.

You find conclusions difficult. Your writing never seems to end. A pursuit of shadows. Your reading never seems to end. Lost within the leaves.

You reflect on all the comments you've ever had about writing. Clarify. Cut. Embody. Alter. Expand. Define. Follow the guidelines. Be brave. Be bold. Be different. Edit. Or perhaps you ignore their erratic cries for attention. Perhaps you focus on finding a voice that only you possess. You laugh at your naivety.

You think of all the pages you've ever read. Introduction. Literature Review. Findings. Discussion. Conclusion. You shake off the binds, letting them disintegrate into a blur of words.

You think of readers. Him. Her. Them. The critics. The friends. The critical friends. The intended audience. The unintended audience. You.

You write:

'Writing is always unfinished. Reading is always unfinished.'

You read:

'Writing is always unfinished. Reading is always unfinished.'

The reader/the writer/the text

It matters deeply how reader–writer relationships are organised in texts and how the reader comes to understand themselves through the text for writing differently in MOS. Yet, as both the concepts of the implied author and implied reader illustrate, reader/writer relationships are not a matter of writer OR reader but a matter of *the process* of writing and reading as interdependent acts of making meaning and identity construction. The inside/outside of a text is malleable and porous (Brewis and Williams 2019); just as the reader/writer relationship is malleable and porous. Writers are also readers (Rhodes 2000), just as readers are also writers (Cloutier 2016) and writing inscribes our skin as writers (Pullen 2018) as the ink of writing inscribes the skin of the reader. What is crucial here, then, is to embrace and explore the ways in which reader/writers are intertwined (Brewis and Williams 2019) and engaged in a contextual dialogic relationship (Helin 2016) in which readers and writers come to know themselves, each other, and the social world through the text. As I have advocated throughout this text, writers and readers need to question the dominance of the writer, particularly as the originator of the politics and ethics of a text. Alternatively, we can consider the political possibilities of writing differently through the concept of the implied reader, as well as through an examination of the complex connections between reader, writer and text. In this penultimate section of my writing, I reflect on what those aesthetic and political possibilities might be and how they may be realised.

Academic writing which considers the aesthetic and political dimensions of writing must be read and written in recognition of an intimate relationship with the reader. The reader can usefully be repositioned as the subject of a text but not in the sense of pre-determining the identity and alignment of the reader. A shift to positioning the reader as the subject of the text requires layers of political, and aesthetic engagement and the development of novel writing strategies that 'open' writing for the reader. A first step is to consider how the reader is being positioned in the text. As the implied reader emphasises, not only does the writer inhabit multiple subject positions (Pullen 2006), but the reader also inhabits the multiple subject positions through the text. Thus, for the writer it is important to consistently reflect on who the reader is assumed to be. A seasoned academic? Someone new to the field? A native English speaker? Heterosexual? Queer? A feminist? A Marxist? A critic? A friend? White? Black? Able-bodied? These identities and political positions are embedded in the conscious and unconscious choices made in the text. The identities and political positions embedded in the text are also permeated with ideas of value. We must ask: Which identities of the reader are valued in academic texts and which are silenced? These choices are not reduced to singular identities, quite the contrary, the aim is to trouble 'who and what counts as the writer' (Huopainen 2022, 972), who and what counts as the reader, and how both reader/writer can transgress restrictive boundaries. The processes and positions embedded in the text are never static, never a simplistic back and forth between writer and reader. Writing is always unfinished. Reading is always unfinished.

To develop the intimately interconnected possibilities of the reader and writer, the development of different writing and reading strategies is fundamental. The way a text is crafted shapes the implied reader and the implied author, as well as what kinds of relationships are made possible between them. The unfinishedness of these relationships is crucial, and as Calvino (Wood, 2013, 502) says of his novel he has 'attitudes toward the world which one by one I end up eliminating, while always in the background there remains the impossibility of accepting the world as it is.' This refusal to be finished, to be neatly divided into 'written' and 'read', requires writing strategies and reading strategies that seek to open up possibilities of new kinds of relationships.

I have experimented with such writing and reading strategies in this paper. The second person, while unconventional, is a powerful way of bringing the central role of the reader in writing to the fore and the making explicit the role of the writer leaving ghostly traces throughout a text. The second person emphasises the ways in which the reader is (i.e. you are) involved in the realisation of the text and the variable ways in which the reader joins 'the lines' between the constellation of the text. Perhaps most importantly, the process of reading actively produces political frameworks for interpreting the world, which can be powerful vehicles for change. Those necessary layers of aesthetic and political engagement are crucial here, as you become the subject that does the thinking. The 'reader' is never a singular person or individual. On the contrary, the *potential* of a text is centred on the reader, meaning all the many political, and aesthetic possibilities of a text are realised through reading. Reading and writing is polyphonic. Writing and reading strategies must therefore also be polyphonic.

The second person is effective for directly engaging the reader in considering how they come to know themselves through a text. It can be both striking and confronting for the reader to be placed directly in the text and this potential can be used effectively for both the communication of ideas and for the consideration of the ways in which academics write difference. The second person can also be used in the process of writing, for the writer to make salient their embedded assumptions about the reader. Other strategies include directly asking the reader to read differently (Sinclair 2013), explicitly writing to a group of readers (Liu 2018) addressing the porous relationship between reading and writing (Brewis and Williams 2019), writing with resonance (Meier and Wegener 2017), or as a dialogue (Helin 2016). These strategies actively embrace the role of the reader in writing differently and explore that entanglement of reading and writing.

A re-centring on the reader in writing differently also points to numerous ways in which scholars can realise the potential of writing differently. One important way is to deepen the understanding of how writing is only part of the process of realising the aesthetic and political dimensions of a text. The implied author and the implied reader offer different theoretical approaches to understanding the relationships between the writer, the reader, and the text. The implied author positions the reader as the interpreter of the text and the writer as the creator of the text. The focus here is on what the writer can do with the text and the possibilities of change for readers by getting to know the writer, their identity, their beliefs, and their values. Alternatively, the implied reader positions the reader as the instigator of textual meaning and that the reader comes to know themselves and other possible versions of themselves through the text. The reader, from this perspective, is not merely peering into the 'I' of the writer (Brewis and Williams 2019), but actively constituting their own polyphonic identities, beliefs, and values through the text. There is, then, both an ethical responsibility of the writer to deeply consider the 'landscape' of identities, values, and beliefs and the 'pre-structured' positionings the text offers the reader *and* a responsibility of the reader to consider how they are constituted through texts, to question, to resist. We must recognise ourselves as both readers and writers, and as an 'I' and a 'You' and possibly as a 'We' or 'They'.

Both the landscape of the text and the contextedness of all texts is crucial to writing/reading differently. Although identities are important, they are only one dimension of the text as a whole. Texts can be powerful for a whole host of reasons, sometimes related to identity, but also for their aesthetic value, their politics, and their stories. Restoring the status of the reader is not to reduce readers or writers to their identities but to open up readers and writers to becoming

more. Reading/Writing is an intimate dance, and one that is never finished. We cannot create fixed positions for the reader, as Barthes argues ‘there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader’ (Barthes 1967, 4). Although, I disagree with the singularity of Barthes’ focus on the reader only, the context of reading and the reader is crucial to engaging these multiplicities. Accordingly, the political possibility of the text lies just as much in the reader as it is as it does in the writer. In that unfinished dance, we need to consider the political possibilities of inclusion, exclusion, engagement, resonance, and inspiration realised through the reading(s) of the text and the landscape into which we spill. As Calvino (1993, 102) says: ‘imagine so many lives, each with its own past and the pasts of the other lives that continue to become entangled one with the others (102).’ So it is with writing and reading, and reading and writing.

Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa – April 2023

Breathe.

Read.

Write.

Breathe.

Write.

Read.

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