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## Doing academic writing differently: a feminist bricolage

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### ABSTRACT

This article emerged as the product of a collaboration between two individuals at different stages of our academic careers, one a beginning researcher and the other a senior academic. Written as an experimental *bricolage*, the article weaves together two main threads to chart our engagements with feminist research and with writing practices, both of which we envisage as forms of feminist praxis. The red thread explores feminist research as a continuous accomplishment in which becoming-feminist is enacted through our different research narratives. The green thread employs diffraction, as an experimental practice to undo the normalised practices of academic writing by weaving together various kinds of texts. In its entangled quilting of the red and green threads, the article foregrounds *bricolage* as an experimental feminist praxis of doing collaborative writing differently.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Feminism; methodology; diffraction; 'new' material feminism; article; writing

### Threading the needle

This article came about because of our many conversations about what it means – and what it is like – to be a feminist in academia today. We were impelled to write it because of a shared interest in how to 'do' and write feminist research, and in the points of feminist contact, consonance and dissonance between us. More formal origins are located in research which I (Rachel) conducted as part of my MRes research, which involved narrative interviews with two senior women academics – one of whom was Carol – about their career journeys and histories. Subsequently, I have commenced my doctoral study on women PhD students' transitions into academia. I (Carol) was one of Rachel's interviewees for her Masters research, we have worked together on various research bids, and I am one of her supervisors during her PhD. The informal conversations, as well as more formal discussions, circled around our respective feminist identities, actions, practices and allegiances, and the observation by Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf (2000, 7) that 'to understand oneself and others, we need to understand our own histories and how we have come to be what we are', seemed to provide a focused undertow to these ruminations.

When I (Rachel) wrote up my interview data for my MRes assignment, I included reflexive comments on my journey as a researcher and experiences as a woman in

higher education, alongside the analysis of the data from a narrative perspective. The requirement that the assignment be written in a 'regular' form with separate sections on methods, methodology, data and reflexivity in order to meet assessment criteria, felt constraining but I worked within these performative conditions to ensure I passed and passed well. I (Carol) have had 10 years of academic writing under the panoptic gaze of quality indicators for the Research Assessment Exercise and the Research Excellence Framework. During this time, I tried to write stuff that has expressed my embodied and embedded sense of what is of value. In this I have sometimes uncomfortably traversed the terrain of 'quality' while refusing the spectral clutch of the question 'what star rating is your article?' This article with Rachel continues, or at least negotiates with, this refusal.

### The red and the green

The article instantiates itself on the page via two entangled threads, which we eventually named as the red and the green thread and here demarcate, respectively, with Lucida Sans and Bookman Old Style typefaces. We use this font, Arial, for the collaborative commentary which we have written together.

The red thread narrates our feminist research journeys through examples drawn from our respective research endeavours: Rachel's narrative analysis of women's academic careers and Carol's reflections on her doctoral research. We use Bhavnani's (1993) article *Tracing The Contours* as the needle through which to draw this thread and which enables us to illuminate some of the ways in which our respective feminist research practices are a necessary and continuing accomplishment. We chose Bhavnani's text at the suggestion of one of the critical friends who reviewed an early draft of our article, and who thought we had not sufficiently brought to the fore what was feminist about our research journeys. Neither of us had read it before. Coming at it 'fresh' and 'together' produced a lively tangle in the writing-quilting process. We each take up Bhavnani's three principles – that feminist research be accountable, that it should be cognisant of power relations and positioning by taking into account the 'micro-politics of the research encounter' and that it should be aware of difference – and use them as a touchstone to reflect on our own research.

The green thread focuses on writing practices, in particular our reflections on how we wrote this article together, and how the article took an unconventional material form in ways which help destabilise normalised modes of academic writing. This collaborative text-quilting has taken time and patience, sitting and writing together and alone, shuttling back and forth in an iterative process of reading each other's drafts, revising them via track changes and coming (eventually) to a (temporarily) 'settled' text we both (more-or-less) agree on. The different typefaces used in the article enact a re/presentational device that demonstrates materially our efforts to make sense of our feminist research practices, while also illuminating the practice of writing in-between us two.

Our article-text-quilt is inspired by the concept and practice of *bricolage* (Kincheloe 2001) as research stories are layered in, and no one authorial

voice predominates. Writing collaboratively in this way opposes the idea of writing as an 'ablution of language' (Minh-ha 1989, 16–17) in favour of writing as a promiscuous flow, a materialisation of multiple voices, which pull the normalising shape of an academic article somewhat askew. This more complicated telling foregrounds the practices of shaping, crafting, and producing that academics usually hide (and often hide behind) in the production of beautiful and polished surfaces, unpunctured by doubts, hesitations and incompleteness. We see this form of article-text-quilt as a practical act of invention which puts the un/becoming process of writing in play as a means to engage feminist praxis. The article is, therefore, a feminist queer(y)ing of knowledge production; a small collaborative push against the phallogocentric hegemonic regularity of the ordered and rational. As such, it contributes to the developing use of diffraction as an experimental practice of writing where insights are read through one another (Taylor 2013; van der Tuin 2014).

### Writing differently

We situate our work as a feminist attempt to do academic writing differently, aware as we do so of the long history of feminist researchers who have challenged traditional ways of writing (Cixous 1976; Davies and Gannon 2012; Lather and Smithies 1997). Many of these feminist writing experiments play with structure and content in ways which disrupt assumptions about form and linearity in order to instantiate feminist research as a political praxis, and open up different ways of representing women's voices. Perriton (1999), for example, authors her article in two columns divided by a single bold black line, the left of which presents an analysis of how women's identities are 'purchased and consumed' through management discourse, while the right column pulls the reader into an evocative personal narrative which speaks back to this discourse from an embodied feminist praxis. The feminist critique emerges in the entanglement of the two texts which continually 'cross the line' in the act of reading. Lather and Smithies' (1997) compose their renowned work, *Troubling the Angels*, as a text of many layers which puts participants' responses to interview questions at the heart of the text, while integrating extracts from authors' research diaries, personal reflections and analytical notes on key literature with participants' stories. These two examples gave rise to other feminist experiments with the conventions of 'normal' writing practices. One notable recent is Davies and Gannon's (2012) work on collective biography, which lays bare the re-workings of a story created in a writing workshop. In doing so, they expose processes which refute traditional writing practices which fail to make overt the messy nature of writing, with its clumsy original phrases and layers of revisions. Alongside these experiments in form, Jackson (2003, 703) identifies various stages in the representation of women's voices in feminist research and notes how notions of 'authentic' voice, and 'giving voice' to silenced groups have given way to voice itself as a 'concept to be problematised'. The destabilising strategies which resulted from this often attempted to foreground the polyphonic nature of voice as a site of 'creativity, play, ambiguity and a place of departure' (Britzman, cited in Jackson 2003, 705).

We draw on these feminist experiments throughout this article in our green thread, as we attempt to make transparent the tensions implicit in the process of collaborative writing. The entanglement of the threads in our writing-quilting process materialises on the page in two different fonts, which direct the reader both towards our exploration of our 'becomings' as feminist researchers, as well as our reflections on our writing practices. In some ways this article works as a response to Cixous' (1976, 875) call to action 'why don't you write? Write!', and in its activation of the notion of 'l'écriture féminine', it pushes against the established order of writing by embracing and embodying our (supposed) 'otherness'. This has enabled us to play with ways of disrupting the normative regimes of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order.

### **Rachel. Red. Becoming a feminist researcher**

I (Rachel) began my journey as a researcher when I started my postgraduate degree at a university in the north of England in September 2013. Many people talk about the transformative nature of higher education. For me it is certainly the case. My feminist journey has been a relatively short one, in comparison to Carol's. There was no light bulb moment, no dropping of a penny. I did not wake up one day and decide that I was a feminist. At university and in my young adult life I had a series of experiences and discussions which led to the realisation that the world around me was implicitly biased towards men. Seeing women castigated for their choice of outfits in magazines and feeling annoyed at most toys for girls being marketed in a garish shade of pink are just some of the things I remember being frustrated by. A little closer to home, I remember vividly the experiences I had in my first job, working in an all-male team, being made to feel 'emotional' or 'hysterical' when I was passionate about an idea, or when I disagreed with something.

Deciding to research women in academia was something that happened more or less by chance. Other students had come to study on the MRes with a research area in mind – sports sociology, business, health and social care. I had just wanted to know how to do research, and somehow when it came to deciding on a topic I was stuck – I could not see how my interest in Shakespeare (which I had explored in my undergraduate work) was going to help. I decided that I'd better stick to what I knew, and having worked in higher education for four years with a personal interest in the experiences of women, I decided on a project which explored the careers of women in academia. In preparing for my assignments and reading works such as of Oakley (1981) and Butler (1988), I realised that feminist research was exactly what I wanted to be doing, needed to be doing – and over the next year it became far more important to me than my full-time job.

### **Carol. Red. (continually) becoming a feminist researcher**

Bhavnani was a fortuitous finding, one which draws a line of flight – and engenders a rupturing alliance – between different feminist times, locations and research endeavours that undoes the linearity of feminist 'waves' and points

to the importance of opening conversations and sharing experiences. Keep the feminist dialogue burning.

Our refusal to collaborate in this killing and dismembering of our own Selves is the beginning of re-memembering the Goddess – the deep source of creative integrity in women. (Daly 1978, 111)

The interview Rachel did with me was a small oasis, an extended moment out of the hectic ongoing of research, teaching, admin, more admin, in which to think, reflect, talk about feminist matters which deeply concerned us both, matters in which the 'significant' enfolds the 'trivial' because the political is always personal. On that Friday, at the end of the day in a dark November, Rachel's enthusiasm infected me. I talked and talked. There was so much to say. The texts which emerged later – first Rachel's written interpretation of my words which gave me a smile and a jolt; second, her assignment (the origin and impetus for this article); and third, this article – are each separate but related instances which diffract my/our (ongoing) struggles with feminist epistemologies, questions of researcher power and the authority of representation. Reading Bhavnani, and then working on and with her text, brought to mind Barad's (2010, 240) recent experiment with writing as a form of 'quantum dis/continuity [in which] each scene diffracts various temporalities [which] never rest, but are reconfigured within, dispersed across, and threaded through one another'. Our purpose here is somewhat similar in that we focus on writing as a gathering of forces which momentarily intra-act in a particular spacetime. This article enacts this gathering as a material play of voices.

### Doing feminist research: the politics of location and the production of knowledge

Bhavnani's (1993) article recalls the urgency generated by the identity politics of second wave feminism. In suggesting we use this article to frame our journeys of feminist becomings, our critical friend had called it 'of its time'. In 1993, issues to do with the place of 'objectivity' in the feminist production of knowledge had a vibrational political intensity, arising in part from the ground-breaking interventions by Harding (1991) on standpoint theory and Haraway (1988) on situated knowledge. Bhavnani (1993) builds on these important feminist foundations to propose a set of criteria or principles against which 'any social scientific inquiry could be evaluated for its claim to be feminist'. The three principles for feminist research are: (i) accountability, in that feminist research should not 'reproduce the researched in ways in which they are represented within dominant society' (98); (ii) positioning, in that the researcher foregrounds the micropolitical processes at play during the research encounter; (iii) to deal openly with questions of difference in the research and its reporting.

Despite initial misgivings, Bhavnani's article seems an appropriate choice and valuable 'tool'. Bhavnani's desire to unsettle the objectivist masculine protocols of 'normal' social 'scientific' research in which the messy and contested

business of producing 'knowledge' is hidden behind the smooth and glittering surface of the apparentness of data and findings which get presented with clean hands as 'knowledge', links nicely with our purpose here to unsettle the normalised protocols of article writing and presentation.

In what follows, we each consider how we enacted Bhavnani's three principles in our own research practice. I (Carol) return to my doctoral research, and I (Rachel) return to research done for an MRes assignment. What we have aimed to produce is a diffractive reading in which insights are read through one another (Barad 2007), enabling thought and meaning to emerge productively and unpredictably (Mazzei 2014), in ways which suited our purposes in this article. Before that, we strike a note of caution that returns us to one of the research problems at the heart of feminist methodologies: representation.

### Green and red. Representation and voice: a partial telling

The bride

Is never naked. A fictive covering

Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind.

(Wallace Stevens, Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction)

I (Rachel) interviewed two people for my MRes: Carol and Lucy. I 'know' Lucy from the words I heard her speak at first hand in the flesh, whereas (Carol) only 'knows' Lucy's voice as diffracted via my selections, which are enactments of power. Mazzei and Jackson (2012) talk of the need to develop methodological procedures and writing practices for 'complicating voice'. Their argument is double-sided. First, they argue the need to move away from dominant modes of representation, which presume that by including participants' voices in research accounts, we will somehow obtain a 'window on the soul' of that person and, thereby, gain access to the essence of the authentic self. This, they say, is a naïve presumption. Second, they attack those supposedly more radical representational practices which 'pluralise voice' by including more of the participant's words, often verbatim and with the 'uhms', 'ahs', pauses and silences included, in a variety of texts. They point out that those representational practices are not any better than the dominant modes because they are still based on the metaphysical assumption that voice provides unmediated access to experience. While we sidestep both these modes of representation, the problem remains: how to represent Lucy's voice? Given that this article is a writerly complicity that both distances 'us' from Lucy and her words, albeit in different ways, and intensifies the problem we were already acutely exercised by. Our temporary 'solution' is simply to highlight the fact that, in the glistening story Rachel and I are weaving, Lucy's voice is present but it is not 'her' voice you hear (or perhaps it is but only in brief moments). We take inspiration from Mazzei and Jackson (2012) to think not what a voice *is* but what it *does*. Thus, Lucy's voice is entangled with ours as we try to work up this diffractive text whose instability keeps meaning open (Hemmings 2007).

Bhavnani's principle one: accountability. Feminist research should not reproduce the researched in ways in which they are represented within dominant society.



### Red. Rachel. Principle 1. Accountability

The best we can do is accept that our representations ... are always partial and never complete. (Goodall 2008, 24)

I found writing Lucy's story really difficult – more so than Carol's. I was overwhelmed with the sheer weight of data which came from the biographical interview with Lucy, and I felt that the simplest way to go about understanding what I'd found out was to chronologise the events and circumstances that had been described. Intuitively, I made sense of the interview data by constructing a narrative, and in doing so, I gave myself a process for analysing the interview data – narrative analysis. The interview transcripts themselves were viewed as narrative accounts, or 'stories'. By 'storifying' their experiences and creating a plot with a beginning, middle and end, individuals contextualise and can make sense of their experiences. What is gained through the process of interviewing therefore leaves the researcher with a series of choices. My choice was to examine interview data within a narrative inquiry framework. This created an implicit aim, an end to work towards – the constructing and subsequent understanding of a 'story', inclusive of a beginning, middle and end. In the process of negotiating the various anecdotes and reflections expressed in both interviews, an overarching narrative could be drawn – a sum of its component parts.

Bhavnani's (1993, 97) principle of 'accountability' in feminist research refers the need to represent participants in ways which do not reinforce negative stereotypes of women as without agency or power. In choosing narrative analysis and examining the interview data as Carol's and Lucy's 'stories', they are placed at the centre of the research, and their career experiences, decisions and reflections are valued. In this way, I aimed to represent them as agents of their own destiny. In using a narrative approach to construct an account of the interview data, it more accurately reflects the personal nature of the stories shared by Carol and Lucy – I feel that writing their accounts in this way does them justice. Moreover, the broader aim of using this narrative approach was to write research which had the power to resonate with others in similar positions. Bhavnani's argument for accountability in feminist research – that participants should be represented in a way which is fair to them, and which would appear to other to do them justice – reflects Berger and Quinney's (2005, 9) assertion that 'in storytelling sociology, the measure of the "truth" is judged not by conventional scientific standards of validity and reliability but by the power of stories to evoke the vividness of lived experience'.

### Red. Carol. Principle 1. Accountability

What's in a name? During my doctoral research I was acutely conscious of how I designated and wrote about my participants, such that I felt I was held accountable to them.

My 'participants'. Throughout the research and in the thesis, the young students who were kind enough to give me their time and tell me their stories of learning and living in sixth form college were called my 'participants'. That is,



they were not subjects, in that I had no power over them, no resources to subject them to my purposes (or did I? perhaps they volunteered to be interviewed in order to get out of class during lesson time, a form of ‘freedom’). Neither were they informants: I am not a spymaster, although information given was treated as confidential. My accountability to them meant I did not want to name them by the research method: interviewees seemed too cold, too technical. Perhaps, then, they were respondents? But that too seemed wrong, a presumption that I had all the questions and all they had to do was deliver up their responses. But ‘participant’ is not quite right either – what were they participating in? An encounter, a conversation, a storifying process that turned (a few years later) into a product (a thesis) in which they appeared but of, or about, which they did not want to know (I asked) having moved on from college and moved away in many cases. I tried to hold and care for the im/material words they left behind with me as best I can. But perhaps the best I can do, in ‘new’ material feminist vein, is acknowledge that the materiality of knowledge-making is problematic and that any principle of accountability has to reckon with ‘asymmetrical power differentials [which are] ... geopolitical, genealogical and time-bound’ (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 158).

And what about the ‘my’ in ‘my participants’? What grasping and holding does that signal? What *cogito* does that presume? As a feminist, post-structuralist researcher, I reflexively noted the inextricability of self/researcher/author in ways which sought to undo the assumptions about objectivity and separability that are part of the male-authored history of research protocols (Harding 1991). Well and good. But now, accountability has taken on a different hue. As a posthumanist ‘new’ material feminist, the problematic is one of entanglement not separability, such that my researcher body emerges as phenomena alongside/with all others – object and bodies – in each and every moment of intra-action (Barad 2007). Thus the ‘I’ with its presumption that there is a ‘my’ is undone, and the accountability of entanglement takes its place in the ongoingness of space-time that makes all knowledge contingent on embodied experience in which the categories we use are serious matters.

### Article-text-quilting

We try to notice what this looks like on the page: the **bold**, the ‘...’s, the brackets, the paragraphs and the white around the 

boxes
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 and paragraphs. These devices are typographical attempts to hold and direct the reader’s attention. The white around the paragraphs contains our words but also allow them to reverberate out from the page. Thus, the text materialises on the page in an immanently apparent becoming which both textually locates an encounter between-the-two (Rachel-and-Carol) and radiates outward in a material-virtual gathering of the other-and-more-than-human forces (the cups of coffee, the keyboard with its crumbs and dirty residues, the mouse with its mat, the buzz from the overhead light, and the intangible atmosphere imbued with the warmth of thought, to name but a few of these agencies) that find a merely temporary coherence in this provisional article. The cuts

we have made (cut is Barad's word for making interventions which produce meanings and differences) and are making in writing and un-writing (together) materialise the practice of article production.

Bhavnani's principle two: positioning. In feminist research, the researcher should foreground the micropolitical processes at play during the research encounter.

## Red. Rachel. Principle 2. Positionality

The very act of writing a story ... changes not so much how or what we know ... it alters the way we think about what we know.  
(Goodall 2008, 14)

I (Rachel) interviewed two people, Carol and Lucy for the purpose of my MRes research. Both participants were known to me, having worked with them previously. Considering Bhavnani's (1993, 98) principle of positionality and the 'micropolitical processes at play' during the interviews, the research encounters were undoubtedly shaped by the prior relationships I had established with both women, their positions of seniority in academia in comparison with my own, and my inexperience as a researcher in addition to my awareness of it.

I approached Carol about the first interview because in a previous conversation she had expressed strong opinions on gender equality, and I thought that she therefore might be interested in participating. Her passion and convictions made me feel that I could learn from her experiences, and that conducting an interview with her would generate some interesting insights into the career of a senior woman academic. Yet, actually conducting the interview was a daunting prospect. It required me to negotiate 'the relationship of domination and subordination' (Bhavnani 1993, 83) as I felt I was in a position of lesser knowledge and experience than Carol. I had read about the different approaches and theories of interviewing, but the actuality of being in that situation with someone who had significantly more experience and knowledge than I did was more than a little intimidating, as the following extract from my research diary reflects:

4.30pm on a Friday afternoon would probably always be a less than ideal time to interview someone. Particularly when it's your first experience of conducting an interview, and you're interviewing someone with significant experience in the field of qualitative research. Acutely aware of my inexperience, I knock timidly on Carol's office door five minutes before we are due to begin.

My second interview was with Lucy, someone who I'd worked for briefly. I was interested in hearing her story because I knew that she had worked as an academic in a male-dominated, science-based discipline, and I was interested to learn about her experiences in this role. I wanted to understand how she viewed her career in relation to the various posts she had held, and whether or not she perceived that her gender had shaped any of her experiences.

Bhavnani (1993) highlights the need to discuss the micro-politics of the research relationship which is created. The interview with Lucy was a more challenging encounter than I had expected. Having worked her in a professional context, asking in-depth questions about her career and her life felt very personal, perhaps unsurprising in a biographical interview, but I felt this was intensified by our pre-existing relationship. It seemed almost intrusive, perhaps because the discussions we had in the interview were so markedly different to the kinds of conversations we would usually have had.

In addition, I had not realised prior to conducting the interview with Lucy, that our views on gender would be so different. Judith Stacey observes that ‘feminists can suffer a “delusion of alliance”, if they assume common interests in woman-to-woman research’ (cited in Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, 106). This is certainly something I experienced in this interview. Having many feminist colleagues, having recently seen her at an International Women’s Day event and knowing that the participant had worked in male-dominated environments, I naively had expected her to identify as a feminist. The participant’s lack of identification with feminism was clearly expressed in her reference to someone who had asked a question at the International Women’s Day event had we both attended – ‘it was interesting, the **feminist** who got up, and ... it was kind of like “what?”’. The way the participant uses the word ‘feminist’ is clearly derogatory, and it was emphasised in such a way as to distance herself from the word.

### Red. Carol. Principle 2. Frieda’s look

I wrote this during my doctoral research, reflecting on a lesson I’d observed the previous Friday:

This second observation did provide me with some insights into Richard’s [the teacher’s] questioning technique, how he responded differently to individual students, [and] reiterate[d] the same things with little variation time and time again. I guess the students will accept me as a ‘presence in the room’ more and more as time goes on. There was what I can only describe as a ‘moment of intimacy’ with one student, Frieda, who, when Richard lost his track and bumbled on a bit, looked over to me, held my gaze for a long time, and then we exchanged a wide smile. What did that mean, I wonder? For me, it meant ‘these things happen, we can all lose our track’ but I wondered if that’s how she interpreted it.

What did this look mean? What did the exchange mean? What was ‘exchanged’? What passed between Frieda and me in that classroom at that moment on that day? I accounted for it in the thesis as follows:

Although I have pondered on this event various times since I am no closer to knowing what it ‘means’. Its meaning was in the moment and on the surface, part of the flux, but certainly by her gaze and smile Frieda disturbed the disciplinary flow. Was it to introduce a moment of doubt or recognition into her performance of ‘ideal student’? Or to open the possibility that Richard’s words were going unheard? Perhaps she meant to introduce an element of gendered complicity between us? Was it a normative social play to include me (the ‘outsider’) into the A2

Film Studies community of practice? I don't 'rationally' know what it meant but I did feel it as an opening of space, as an appeal to an intimate disorder, a disorder juxtaposed to the everyday, mundane, disciplinary routine of 1:1 tutorial practice. Baker (2001, 284) describes such dis-ordering events as part of a 'horizontal circulation' of power juxtaposed against 'ascending pathways [of] systems of knowledge and regimes of truth'. Frieda, apparently displayed to my researcher gaze, returns the gaze to me and our shared gazes both eluded Richard's own.

In the thesis, I used this fragment of data as a theoretical hinge to move from disciplinary practices which produce what is 'sayable' and 'visible' within classrooms as highly regulated spaces, towards a re-thinking of the subject and agency. Frieda's gaze enacted her agency as the 'subject who sees, [who] has a claim on scopic power, a claim which gives her the power to elude/delude the panoptic gaze' (Taylor 2009, 181), and who thereby exemplifies the 'poly-valent and complex character of visual experience' (Yar 2003, 267). This incident does note, in accordance with Bhavnani's second principle, the micropolitical processes at play during the research encounter. And yet, there is more going on here.

Now, in new material feminist frame, I consider this incident diffractively. The Frieda moment was 'untimely' in that it broke 'linear' time apart, disrupting the flow of the tutorial encounter (albeit unnoticed by one participant), and extending the moment in a number of directions all at the same time. This untimeliness seemed to deepen the *frisson* of our mutual gaze and smile. It was not a frozen moment out of time but, rather, gave onto a 'dynamism that is integral to spacetime-mattering' as Barad (2014, 169) says, in which 'each moment is an infinite multiplicity [and] "now" is not an infinitesimal slice but an infinitely rich condensed node in a changing field diffracted across spacetime'. Thus, this data fragment works as a 'hotspot', an empirical instance that refuses to settle under the weight of any coding or analytical framing. It is an intensity, a snag, a 'lucky find' (Maclure 2013, 173). But, as well, the Frieda-me-look-smile moment was also *unheimliche*, and has remained so: uncanny, beyond my ken, producing an unsettling uncertainty, a never to be known, that is also a source of continuing curiosity. Perhaps, as a compound of sensation and forces, that moment concretises and discloses the instance in which 'the eye thinks, even more than it listens' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 195). Perhaps that is all I can ever really 'know' about it.

What does resituating this incident diffractively in a material feminist frame do? First, it foregrounds the micropolitical processes at play during the research encounter (*pace* Bhavnani); second, in offering a different reading of the moment than the first (thesis) account, it thereby discloses the mobility of moments, data, interpretation and feminism – what counts as a feminist reading depends on the feminist interpretive position(s) being activated, in ways which speak to the multiplicity of feminisms plural. And, third, it narrates the continuing journey of my own feminist becomings: I now embody and co-exist with Butler, Deleuze, Guattari and Barad, none has displaced the other; they jostle happily in my theoretical knapsack as I continue to travel.

## Article-text-quilting

The contradictory and complex history of embroidery is important because it reveals that definitions of sexual difference, and the definitions of art and artist so weighted against women, are not fixed. They have shifted over the centuries, and they can be transformed in the future. (Parker 2010, 215)

The rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand' ... the 'bricoleur' may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it. (Levi-Strauss 1966)

Denzin and Lincoln's (2005, 4) view of bricolage as 'quilt-making' provides a definition of research as a practice that is at one and the same time an image of homeliness, a crafting of community and a radical act of feminist consciousness. This is brought out nicely in Parker's quotation, which figures quilt-making not simply, or only, a skilled, technical process of making but as a political act of intervention such that stitching together meaning from whatever lies at hand (cotton, fur and fabrics of all colours) skews dominant forms of research practice. For us, putting the concept and practice of *bricolage* as quilt-making to work in writing this article means that heterogeneous elements can (must) be brought together, that no one authorial voice predominates in this collaboratively written ensemble, and that we foreground the practices of shaping, crafting, and polishing that academics usually hide (and hide behind).

This article is not (has not been) an easy text to write, but it has been fun. There have been moments of effervescence when the delight of finding the right word/phrase/quote filled us both with an infectious joy as we sat at the computer together pounding out the sentences in my (Carol's) hot office. One such was with the phrase 'these are pearls that were his eyes', of which I (Rachel) said: 'You know when something just stabs you in the stomach', and which sent me (Carol) on an internet surf to locate the forgotten origin of a quote that's hung around in my head – from Shakespeare? From T. S. Eliot? – for nearly 25 years. There have also been moments of doubt and despair, days when the article to me (Rachel) seemed like a burden, and to me (Carol) little more than a dog's dinner. There's also the sheer graft of the act of writing-between-the-two, a phrase Gale and Wyatt (2010) use for writing which emerges from genuinely collaborative endeavours to enact relational forms of meaning-making. This in-between space is a difficult and messy business, marked by our individual and very different histories, investments and institutional locations, but one we thought it worth having a go at working within.

Bhavnani's principle three: difference. Feminist research should be aware of difference.

## Red. Rachel. Principle 3. Questions of difference

Lived experience is constructed, at least in part, by the stories people tell about it. Goodall (2008, pviii)

Bhavnani (1993, 102) refers to ‘issues of difference’ and ‘non shared experiences’ within feminist research encounters, arguing that they should be ‘seen and dealt with explicitly’. I found the differing views that Lucy and I held on gender to be the most difficult part of the MRes research, and both in my own reflections on our interview and in the writing of my assignment, I had to take into account what Stanley calls ‘the conundrum of how not to undercut, discredit or write-off women’s consciousness different from our own’ (cited in Acker and Piper 1984, 136).

Lucy described being frustrated at being asked to be involved in a project about women in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine subjects) just because she is a woman with a science and engineering background. The language she used to describe this was highly charged, and expressed her anger at being ‘tokenised’: ‘I have been **told** that I have to get involved in it because I’m the token woman, and I was really **pissed** off by being **told** that I had to do this.’ Moreover, when we discussed her involvement in this project, Lucy was sceptical about the notion that some women in male-dominated disciplines experience barriers to progression, given that she had had positive experiences: ‘Sometimes I think people ... say “ooh, we can’t get on because we’re women in a male-dominated environment”, and I’m not sure, I’m not convinced by that.’ Whilst I did not want to directly disagree with her, I felt it was important to acknowledge that this was not necessarily always the case: ‘but you can only go by your own experience, can’t you?’

Questions of difference were also raised in my interview with Carol, as non-shared experiences also formed a central part of our interview. In her career, Carol has acquired knowledge and understanding that I was not – still am not – in possession of. This meant that our interview contained a kind of ‘knowledge dynamic’. This knowledge dynamic had a significant effect on how I reflected on the research encounter, as this extract from my research diary shows:

In our interview, Carol mentions her sociological stance as a Foucauldian. This, and other references she makes to relevant theories and academics, remind me once again of how much I don’t know. I make a mental note to go home and search for the particular ones she has mentioned.

### **Red. Carol. Principle 3. An unholy mixture**

Bhavnani’s third principle – that feminist research needs to deal openly with questions of difference in the research and its reporting – causes me a little more difficulty in relation to my doctoral research than the first two principles. Bhavnani’s (1993, 96) point is that ‘racialised, gendered and class-based inequalities are embedded in the creation of knowledge’, and that feminist research ought to be attuned to these social and positional differences *and* create the conditions for recognising and valuing different or alternative forms of knowledge production, emanating from those whose voices have been marginalised. On one level, the doctoral work I conducted actively seeks

to privilege the perspectives of 16–19 year old students', whose voices are often unheard, disregarded or wilfully stereotyped. This led me to:

Critique those theories of student voice which posit students as transformative agents of self and learning; or as agents of participation and democratisation of schooling; or as subjects emancipated by empowerment and dialogue. (Taylor 2009)

On the other hand, I remain uneasy about claiming my doctoral research meets Bhavnani's 'standard' for principle 3. I am white. The students were white, with one exception, and 'race' and ethnicity were largely subsumed within gender narratives, as were issues of class, and dis/ability was not raised. And yet. Perhaps now, as a material feminist researcher, I worry less about the politics of identity, and instead want to re-think the research through the lens of an ethics of relationality. This encourages me to think not just that my research may fall short of a particular 'standard' but, rather, that some shining moments did occur and that these were moments that mattered. For example, one young woman told me about the oppression (her word) she felt at the hands of her boyfriend, in particular the constraints she felt to dress a particular way, and we discussed how and why this is a problem and what to do about it; another talked about the promise of feminism and the theoretical resources her studies had given her to actively fight sexism (Taylor 2011); while another focused on finding her feminist identity through the practice of academic writing. In these moments, ethical relationality materialised not as a matter of ethical protocols and universal rights but as an 'iterative reconfiguring of [feminist] possibilities' (Barad 2007, 364), a relation of responsibility and accountability in which the students *and* I were entangled together.

Accountability Difference Positioning
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Bhavnani's principles retain their feminist force. Now, we wonder whether the need to justify what we – as post-structuralist, materialist or any other sort of feminists – do via a set of 'principles' that applies to all feminist research in all conditions of research is something we still need to worry about. Isn't the desire for such universal principles a decoy? A rationalist device? Just another form of using the master's tools but not destroying the master's house with them? New empirical material feminist research (Lather, Maclure and Mazzei) encourages us to use our feminist tools to trouble the need for 'research evaluation principles' in the first place. We follow Lather (2007, 128) in wanting new and 'scandalous categories' which help us notice and unpick the frames which frame our seeing to better achieve our feminist ends. She suggests that it is only by unmasking the masks of methodology that will we do this. The result will be a less comfortable social science but, as we continue on our collaborative feminists journeys, this seems okay to us. It is friction that keeps the feminist fires burning.



## Coda: article-text-quilting

These fragments I have shored against my ruins. (T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*)

This article does not, could not, have a conclusion. Instead, we agreed to end the article by each writing about our thoughts on the process of writing it. Carol's 'ending' is followed by Rachel's.

This article is a multiple object. It reminds me that we all start our feminist journeys intermezzo and continue rhizomically. The important thing is remembering, keeping the feminist body together. Methodologically, the article continues my ruminations about the materiality of things: the article as a material thing, alive and growing on our screens as we add word after word; an agency connecting our minds-hearts-bodies, drawing our time from us to 'it'; a force attracting the creative impulses and propelling the imagination; a plural space for becoming 'other' in the writing; and a thing which makes writing an event of knowing-in-being. The article pushes diffractively at how selves get made, and are constituted, through particular methodological techniques and, as here, through the de-re-composition of academic article writing. I hope that the performative, diffractive practices we develop here are not just the reserve of 'us' with the luxury to ponder and play in academia. Rather that, as embodied and felt ethico-onto-epistemological practices, they connect with, plug into and intra-act with new material feminist practices which are calling to account not just 'earlier' forms of 'reflexivity' but the very boundary-making practices which constitute 'inside' and 'outside' as locations from which one may reflect (Barad 2007). If we're all already and always entangled as feminists – in text, in meaning-making, in reality – then we're all already responsible for each other – and for the feminist praxis we enact.

This article has been a learning curve. Reading over some of what I wrote for the MRes I cannot help but feel dissatisfied. In places, it sounds like I'm rambling. It has been a challenge to return to data I collected for two assessments and then to re-imagine and re-work it. I have been glad of the opportunity to write and think, and to consider how far I have come since then. Writing this article has challenged me to leave behind the 'safe' and known parameters of academic writing that I learned in my earlier studies, and embark upon new and exciting approaches. Reading Richardson's (1994, 970) description of the process of writing as method of inquiry in which 'thought happened in the writing. As I wrote, I watched word after word appear on the computer screen – ideas ... I had not thought before I wrote them' was, I realised, exactly how I felt in writing of this article. Writing with Carol has been good. Having the opportunity to ask questions, pose arguments and write less-than-perfect drafts has been invaluable, and the moments of epiphany we shared were far more enjoyable than the experience of writing alone would have been. The interviews I did with Carol and Lucy, like the production of this article, and the article 'itself', emerge from and mark particular moments in my feminist journey.

What remains of a story after it is finished? Another story. (Berger and Quinney 2005, 1)

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