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Unsanitized writing practices: Attending to affect and embodiment throughout the research process

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Abstract

Using examples from an ethnographic study of aircraft cleaning, we discuss and illustrate how "writing differently" can be performed throughout the research process—in the literature review, data collection, data analysis, and writing up. We argue that writing differently is an ongoing methodological tool in order to rethink/refeel research practices in ways that generate affective, embodied and caring accounts of empirical organizational contexts, particularly when marginalization is key such as in cleaning work. We turn to poetry to better understand and portray the affective and embodied intensities in different phases in the research project. Furthermore, instead of presenting a sanitized authoritative account of writing so that it becomes recognizable as academic knowledge, we leave in the messiness, struggles, and insecurities in "doing" writing differently.

KEYWORDS
affect cleaning work, embodiment poetry, writing differently

and then we get stuck
our heads split open
one part being there, engaging with
the other trying to make sense

writing it down
our fingers get stuck
hoovering above the keyboard
they will not be disciplined
to tell these stories
in academese
|to soften these experiences
into disembodied abstractions
by using
all the "right" kinds of words
to understand the
not-yet known

we become unruly, resistant
un-stuck
finding words
that will stick
the right ones for the heart
the wrong ones
for this type of paper?
producing
paper cuts, inflicted by the
sharpness
of our poetic endeavors
bleeding our words
into the readers' hearts,
bodies and minds

warning!
writing differently
may hurt

In this methodological paper we want to address the limitations of conventional masculine academic research and writing practices for producing embodied and affective accounts. This echoes the work of scholars who have engaged in "writing differently" in order to voice marginalized perspectives in Management and Organization Studies (e.g., Mandalaki, 2020; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2018; Pullen et al., 2020; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015) and who have successfully opened up space to write about experiences that are usually silenced in academia, such as those around motherhood (Boncori & Smith, 2019; Van Amsterdam, 2015), transsexuality (O'Shea, 2018), religion (Jamjoom, 2020), and race/ethnicity (Anthym, 2018). Many of these papers are written in resistance to academic conventions that tend to colonize the experiences of marginalized people through the value placed on authority, linearity, and productivity. Here, we seek to extend "writing differently" beyond its' usual focus on the life of the academic researcher/writer in order to attend to empirical contexts that exceed our own profession and the lives of academics. To illustrate what this may look like, we use excerpts from an ethnographic research project that the first author conducted. In this project she engaged in 7 months of participant observation, cleaning airplanes at a Dutch airport to gain insight into the embodied experiences of inclusion and exclusion in low-wage cleaning work. As illustrated in the above poem, oftentimes she became "stuck" in trying to translate the fieldwork experiences into conventional academic prose. Thus, we use "writing differently" to better understand and express the experiences of participants and researchers, and to be transparent about the ethical questions and vulnerabilities involved in research that engages marginalized workers.

We do not give a comprehensive overview or analysis of this fieldwork (for more information on this see Van Eck & Van Den Brink, 2019). Instead, we use this empirical research to exemplify what writing differently can offer if applied as a methodological tool throughout different phases of the research process—in the literature review, data collection, data analysis and writing up (including the review process). We thus show how "writing differently" can be used as an ongoing methodological tool in order to rethink/refeel research practices in ways that generate affective, embodied and caring accounts of specific phenomena. As such, writing differently can be considered part of an affective ethnographic approach (Gherardi, 2019) or deep engagement (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015; Leavy, 2017); ethical methodologies that enable deeper levels of care, transparency, compassion and trust than conventional methodologies offer. Poetry in particular has been at the core of Black feminist praxis, as a way of knowing and *feeling* difference, and a political tool toward change (e.g., Anthym, 2018; Lorde, 1984). As Dorion (2021, p. 2) posits poetry can be part of feminist ethnography that "empowers marginalized voices by stressing their legitimacy to produce knowledge."

In conversation with our data and amongst ourselves we reflect openly on the possibilities and the dangers when using writing differently to study empirical contexts and marginalized experiences that are not our own. These include issues of (mis-)representing the experiences of the other (Anthym, 2018), of (de-)colonizing the hardships of others (as a reviewer suggested), as well as dealing with (or against) academic conventions that determine what counts as proper "knowledge" (Manning, 2016).

1 | WRITING DIFFERENTLY IN REVIEWING LITERATURE

N: Should we also talk about how we're going to do this together, practically?

D: I was thinking, maybe we can start with a google docs where we write "found poetry" (see also Prendergast, 2006; Leavy, 2017) based on our reading of a variety of papers that discuss writing differently through each other.

N: Yes, I like this.

M: I am not familiar with this, what do you mean with found poetry?

N: This means that instead of reading and analyzing texts and subsequently writing a theoretical framework in conventional ways, we will read the selected texts "affectively." Practically, this means that we draw out words and sentences that touch us, move us and change us in that writing, like Rhodes and Carlsen (2018, p. 1297) discuss. By structuring those words in a different way, we hope to open up new possibilities for readers to engage with these texts, through their own resonances.

> academic research;
> a practice that takes
> a not-yet experience
> chopped up
>   into
>   discontinuous
>   static
>   objects   (James, 1996, p. 236)
>
> dissected and stitched up
> as if it were
> a lifeless corpse   (Thanem & Knights, 2019, p. 113)

research methods;
    the master's tools   (Lorde, 1984)
    we have been handed over
    to use with reason and rigor

               desensitized

    the tools
    that keep us at an arm's length distance
    from touching, from feeling   (Dorion, 2021)

               distanced

    the tools
    we have been trained in
    to clarify, define, frame, explain
    and judge   (Grey & Sinclair, 2006; A. Pullen, 2018)

               detached

    are these tools
    dis-manteling, dis-membering
    experiences,
    cutting off possibilities for
    becoming known?

    academic research;
    a practice that takes
    a not-yet experience
    ultimately shaped into
    prescribed, premeditated *forms*
            that are recognized
            that are forced
            that count
            as knowledge   (Gherardi, 2019; Manning, 2016)
            forms that
    ac-knowledge the known
    exclude what cannot fit
    within its order   (Manning, 2016, p. 4)

    there is a danger
    of not hearing
      the voices
      that lurk beneath the words   (Manning, 2016, p. 31)

    there is a danger
    of bearing
      false witness   (Anthym, 2018, p. 184)

there is a danger

of fall

i

n

g

short

D: I would also really appreciate it if we could all share our thoughts and experiences in the google doc. How do you feel about that?

M: I am noticing that I am afraid of looking for things or doing things that are already familiar to me. So I think I would be a bit apprehensive to add things to the google doc. What I like about these meetings, when we would do it the next time, I feel like this is a good way for me to contribute. I am noticing that I am insecure about this, about the way in which I can best contribute.

D: I think that is already a really good contribution, that you tell us how you are struggling with this.

M: Yes, but also, I have to be taught. That's also why I am saying this. It is a learning process for all of us, but particularly also very much for me. I am used to being the one who says "Oh wait, if you do this, then it will fit. And this analysis, and add a table, and in the introduction you have to refer more to whatever." And now I think "Oh help. I think this is amazing but what do I do?"

Different writing practices come with their own set of tensions. Not adhering to conventional frames of reference with regards to capitalist modes of production—in academia related to production of a text—can produce feelings of insecurity. In the conversation above it seemed that unconventional writing practices induced in the third author a fear of not knowing how she mattered because she felt unproductive in relation to this text. Also, in taking on the practice of writing differently, we experienced how the power relations between us as students, colleagues, and supervisors shifted in terms of conventional academic structures. Instead of the supervisor acting as the knowledgeable superior to the PhD student, we noticed that the conventional academic hierarchies in writing this paper became more blurred or even turned around in terms of who is the student and who is the teacher/ authority.

2 | WRITING DIFFERENTLY IN COLLECTING AND ANALYZING (ETHNOGRAPHIC) DATA

In the following, we use three moments from the fieldwork in aircraft cleaning, and one moment from an interview with an aircraft cleaner which stood out because of its specific affective intensity, yet got lost in conventional ways of writing and analyzing data. We argue that insights from the fieldwork of cleaning work offer opportunities to think differently about how we write and what knowledge we produce through our writing.

2.1 | Rethinking/refeeling embodied work

The following poem is based on an interview with an aircraft cleaner called Neema who talked about the physical hardships of the work. As Leavy (2010, p. 180) mentions, "poetic transcription" is a technique in which the selected words and phrases of the interviewee become the basis of the poem. This technique allows the writer to stay close to the narrator's voice, rhythm and speech style, stressing the legitimacy of voices that are often unheard, or altered to become recognizable as academic knowledge.

"Until retirement..."
he told me

GO FASTER!
they yell

No.
    more.
        stairs.
my knee begs

I have to force myself

then I will have security
then my money is settled
then I will have peace on my mind

but I can't bear
the pain

Cleaning work is physically demanding labor. Neema, the older female cleaner whose interview transcript we used to write the poem above, emphasized the onerous nature of cleaning. She stated *"in this job you need the strength of your whole body."* It seems that cleaning work is connected to masculine norms of what bodies are supposed to do: they have to be able, strong, fit, and they cannot be injured, sick, old, or delaying the work of cleaning in some other way. *"They think we are robots"* is how one of the other cleaners described the increasing intensification of cleaning work. The physical discomfort of cleaning work is something the first author witnessed and experienced in her own body during the 7 months of participant observation, as the following fieldnote diary fragment indicates:

At the end of the day, after cleaning 12 airplanes, I feel the muscles in my lower back strain from all the bending and lifting under constant time pressure. My body is exhausted. Yet I only "know" how it feels from my little experience working as a cleaner. What if you have to do this full time? Or for more than the few months that I am working here? What if you are older, feel sick or are injured? I sit next to a man called Akwa, who moved to the Netherlands 27 years ago from Egypt. I ask him about his work and how long he has been a cleaner and he tells me: "I have been working as a cleaner for twenty-seven years." Before I can respond he asks me: "How old are you?" "Twenty-five," I tell him. I feel kind of awkward in this situation. He has been doing this work longer than I live. How can I be the authority here? Isn't it naive to think that I can know what this work is all about, from the little experience I have doing it? He continues to explain to me what it feels like to be a cleaner for 27 years: "What happens to a vacuum cleaner, or any other device after using it for twenty years?" "They wear out," I respond. "Exactly, an old body after twenty-seven years of work cannot do the same as a young body. Your boss sees that as well. He will try to get rid of you. You see, when you work your entire life behind a screen you don't have that."

Akwa uses the metaphor of a vacuum cleaner to indicate the physically demanding nature of cleaning work. Here, we see how the "ideal worker" is presented as someone who does not complain and who can perform like a machine. Akwa points out the illusion of this disembodied ideal by stating that even machines wear out in time. The expectation that cleaners are disembodied workers who can perform like machines is augmented by the notion that cleaners and cleaning work should be invisible. The following poem was written to rethink/refeel moments when we could sense this push toward making cleaners and cleaning work invisible.

I see me
in an endless row of chairs
undoing the existence
of the ones before

My work is non-work

They see me
as the coaster that carries their cups
as the cough that interrupts
their more important business

They don't really see me

You see me
as a tool that is
malleable, exchangeable
even if not disposable

You won't make me indispensable

Yet,
without me
you are nothing

Cleaning is a practice that focuses on eliminating the traces (often of people) that seem unsanitary. What is considered dirty is, as Douglas (2003) argues, highly dependent on the context in which this object or trace presents itself. Cleaning is also about making invisible that which does not belong, for example by wiping away the traces of previous passengers. Thus, the result of cleaning work is making it invisible. Within the context of air travel, cleaners become invisibilized too. Not only do cleaners need to wait until all the passengers have left the airplane, they are also often urged to not be in the way and leave the plane as quickly as possible. The participant observations show that the presence of cleaners is sometimes felt as "annoying" by other workers in the airplane or passengers whose activities are stalled because of the cleaning work. Similarly, in their study of the relations between management students and toilet cleaners, Zulfiqar and Prasad (2020) show that it is precisely the invisibility of the workers that clean toilets which perpetuates social inequalities: "how can what cannot be seen, felt or heard be given recognition and legitimation (Butler, 2004)?" (cited in Zulfiqar & Prasad, 2020, p. 39). As Marxist feminists also argued (Duffy, 2007), although the sustainability of society depends on reproductive labor such as cleaning, it is often constructed in contrast to "real work," and therefore remains invisible and unrecognized. Yet, the current increase in strikes of cleaning workers in the Netherlands—walking with signs showing texts such as "never invisible again"—, where they fight for higher pay and more security indicate cleaners' awareness of the value and indispensability of their work.

How do conventional academic writing practices contribute to rendering the embodied aspects of work invisible as well as leaving those performing invisible, marginalized work unseen, and unacknowledged? Within conventional academic writing there seems to be little room to capture embodied aspects of work (Gherardi, 2019; Thanem & Knights, 2019). Academic texts often assume a rational production of knowledge that does not afford space to integrate embodiment within the research—both the researchers' and the participants' embodiment are often written out of the research account. According to Thanem and Knights (2019) this is a shame. They call on

academics "to work by way of the body particularly when confronting big political issues: the pains and sufferings of exploitation and oppression are felt by bodies (...) as our own personal troubles resonate with larger social problems and public issues (Mills, 1959), what we feel in here is felt out there too" (Thanem & Knights, 2019, p. 141). In order to work by way of the body, the practice of writing differently already becomes crucial in the data collection phase. Whereas conventional academic (fieldnote-)writing practices emphasize the importance of "factual" observational notes to make sense of what is going on in the field, we argue the importance of writing embodied, affective accounts here. Writing exclusively "factual" observational notes presumes the researcher to be an all-knowing authority. This becomes particularly problematic when writing about marginalized positions that are different from our own. Feminist, postcolonial and queer scholarship addresses the importance of "vulnerable writing" that is explicit about, and recognizes the positionality of the researcher and the fragility of knowledge production in being able to present "what it is like" (Gherardi, 2019; Page, 2017). Admittedly, even in writing differently, studying (marginalized) experiences remains bound by textual forms, which will always be limited in representing embodied and affective intensities. Arts-based scholars have therefore argued for the need to also include methodologies that go beyond text, such as visual art, dance, performance art, and music (e.g., Biehl-Missal, 2015; Leavy, 2017).

2.2 | Rethinking/refeeling embodied normativities

As we portrayed in the previous section, the work of cleaning and those performing the work of cleaning are often rendered invisible and unacknowledged. Yet the following fieldnote diary fragments indicate how those who are considered out of place in cleaning work become extra visible or "hypervisible," although not in the usual ways that hypervisibility is enacted when marginalized groups enter workplaces that are dominated by privileged workers (Buchanan & Settles, 2019).

> The foreman tells us to wait at the side of the hallway. While carrying our cleaning material, we try to make ourselves as small as possible to not be in the way of the passengers that leave the airplane. Most often we have to enter the airplane through the back door and the moment the last passenger has left the airplane, we are allowed to enter the airplane to clean it within 8 min. We are instructed to leave immediately after, to be as little of a disturbance as possible and cause minimal delay. Yet, this time there are no stairs located at the back entrance, so we have to go through the same door the passengers use. Passengers rush by us without looking at us or acknowledging our presence in any other way. It am thinking no one is really noticing us until Sandra, one of the cleaners in my team, leans over to me and whispers: "they are really surprised to see a Dutch girl, aren't they?."

It seems that the first authors' white, young, female body, and her Dutch tongue are connected to assumptions about the type of values she is supposed to produce. Her presence in the cleaning organization disturbed these assumptions that her co-workers and others such as the passengers had about who(se body) is supposed to do the work of cleaning. This also became apparent in the following situation:

> "You are Dutch right?" the airport bus driver asks. I nod and he continues: "You do not belong here [at the aircraft cleaning company]. What are you doing there cleaning dirty toilets? You can do better. I have seen an ad for flight attendant at KLM. That is something for you, you are attractive enough. But you should not be here, not among all those Africans and such." I feel shocked and I don't know how to respond. He asks me to stay in the bus for another round so that he can show me the vacancy for flight attendant. I feel perplexed about what just happened, yet I know I want to leave, so I kindly decline and depart from the bus to exit the airport and go home. The bus driver's "good intentions" explicitly express the ways I felt awkward before when my presence disturbed something in the cleaning company, only because I was seen as deserving of something better than engaging with dirt. I have gotten a lot of questions about my presence as a cleaner: "Are you new?" "Where do you come from?" "Wait- are you Dutch?! I thought you were Polish." "Are you

working in administration?" "Are you an undercover boss?" What are you [a white, Dutch woman] doing here
[in low-wage cleaning work]?

These fieldnotes show that the first author's embodiment made her a space invader in this work context (Puwar, 2004), yet a privileged space invader who is expected to belong in higher valued, higher paid places. Her white middle-class body seemed misaligned with the working-class bodies of color that dominate the space of aircraft cleaning and thus could not blend in and become invisibilized in this space (cf. Ahmed, 2006; Vitry, 2020). Her presence in the cleaning company led to affective circulations such as surprise, frustration, and discomfort.

Who is seen as a legitimate cleaner is shaped by norms around embodiment. Gendered, racialized, and ableist notions about embodiment inform who is seen as an appropriate worker in certain contexts (Puwar, 2004; Vitry, 2020). In the academic work context, this principle operates in a similar way but with a different somatic norm than in cleaning: white male bodies are presumed the natural authorities. Their voices and experiences are overrepresented in academic writing as is critiqued in calls for decolonizing or democratizing academic knowledge (e.g., Cruz, 2008; Diversi & Moreira, 2016; Rhodes, 2019). In the context of cleaning, migrant, often non-White and female bodies are considered the somatic norm. With our attempts to write embodied and affective accounts, we aim to engage with what we encountered in the field and open up space for alternative knowledge creation and dialogs that could lead to political action. "The personally embodied experience may be a source of knowledge, which mobilizes individuals and collective affects with significant political effect" (Thanem & Knights, 2019, p. 135). Yet, as we have argued, academic writing conventions mostly eclipse such possibilities (Gherardi, 2019; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2018; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015; Thanem & Knights, 2019). Therefore, we turn to poetry again here.

a privileged space invader

you do not belong
here
you are not supposed to be
in a place like this

This is what I am told
a well-meant attempt at
pushing me
                    the right way out

I wonder about this *you*
that makes it so evidently
incompatible
with this place

I wonder how
                    bodies
become connected
                    to space
and how   space
becomes connected
                    to bodies

as a glass slipper   (Ashcraft, 2013)
that only fits
the foot
it is designed for
as "nude" underwear
that only goes with
white skin

as something fabricated
kept *in* place
by making my body
                          out of place   (Puwar, 2004)

as a cleaner

D: I remember how I wrote this poem after this event in the bus happened. At that time, it *felt* important, as something that I needed to reflect upon. Yet, in a conventional data analysis, this event and my embodied response might get "lost" through all the rational coding and categorizing that is required.

N: Exactly, and what we are doing is showcasing how our own bodies and those of our participants matter in the research process. We don't edit out the complexity and the mess of all the feelings that circulate and that we feel in our bodies.

D: Writing poetry from our fieldnotes really exemplifies this for me. We used our intuition there. You sort of need to turn on your senses and your emotions in order to write those poems. So that you can show what happens in the affective realm.

Our participant observations of cleaning work and its analysis through poetry urged us to think about the ways in which embodied normatitivies (in)visibility and (dis)embodiment play a role in our academic practices. Thinking through academic writing with the ideas of "sanitizing" and "making invisible" in mind, we see how editing out what does not belong, what is considered dirty and messy is characteristic of academic writing (cf Pullen & Rhodes, 2008), albeit obviously in less physically demanding ways than in the cleaning work the first author engaged in. The highly valued masculine ideals of rigor, validity, and reliability compel researchers to get rid of the chaotic, intuitive, and embodied parts inherent in the data collection, analysis and writing as well as the insecurities and doubts we feel throughout the research process. We are pushed to present a sanitized linear account of writing so that it becomes recognizable as academic knowledge (Gherardi, 2019; Manning, 2016). We feel that both the chaos of the research process and the affective intensities within the data are eclipsed in most research accounts, which is particularly problematic when marginalized groups or experiences are central to the research (Anthym, 2018; Gilmore et al., 2019; Weatherall, 2019). These experiences are difficult to grasp in the majoritarian language on which conventional ways of writing and knowing are based (Manning, 2016).

Poetic inquiry, as a form of writing differently, allows us to focus on what touched, moved or changed us in the data or the literature, as well as on what our participants are moved or touched by (e.g., van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019). Playing with the rhythm of the text poetry enables us to better approach the chaotic and not-yet-known experiences related to marginalization that we tried to capture. Poetic inquiry also equips us with the sensibility to grasp the affect that circulates through the data, the literature and us as researchers. And, importantly, because poems are open to different readings or interpretations—also called verisimilitude (Ward, 2011)—they enable us to

give an account of our findings that is based in and on humility rather than ascribed expertize (Anthym, 2018; Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018; Richardson & St Pierre, 2008). As Rhodes and Carlsen (2018, p. 1297) describe, this means letting go of one's own epistemic authority and render the self-vulnerable and radically open to learn from other people.

3 | WRITING DIFFERENTLY AS A REFLECTION ON ETHICS

One of the reviewers who commented on an earlier version of this paper wrote an emotionally charged review in which they stated that they felt hurt by the parallel we drew between academic work and cleaning work because they felt we were colonizing the hardship of others. In reaction to this we felt a host of emotions, ranging from shock, shame, and annoyance, to confusion and gratitude. The three of us got together to make sense of our (emotional) responses and discuss how to move forward. One of us wrote the following poem based on this conversation:

The review

"You are colonizing
the hardship of cleaners"
Are we, in this paper?
I feel a defensive urge
boiling up inside
Is this my privilege
that has come knocking?

"But that was not what we
intended"
I want to shout
but the words stumble
over my tongue
and disintegrate
before they reach my lips

I have received this
care-less, self-indulgent response
many times myself
and I can still feel the
throbbing ache of disavowal
left behind

It is my response-ability
our responsibility
to do better

But how?
How can we try to
engage with marginalized others
from our privileged position
within academia

|ethically,
without inflicting (more) hurt?
The pain seems to circulate
through our poetry
from participants, to writers,
to readers and reviewers,
and back to writers
Affect seeping into our pores -
social, political and individual
at the same time

We draw parallels
between the work of
cleaners and academics
meant to be symbolic
but read as literal
And it hurts
on all sides of the
looking glass

How can we write about
and feel through
our common humanity
without white-washing
real, material, economic
differences?
Without downplaying
precarity, austerity;
written all over
cleaners' bodies,
cleaners' lives?

Where do the assumptions
come in?
How do we draw them out
ethically,
without drowning in this sea of
self-doubt, and
academic critique?

We try to carefully move forward here, keeping our idea that as academics we can learn from cleaners' work, but at the same time stressing that the difficulties we experience in writing are not the same as what cleaners' experience. In response to the reviews, we have thoroughly rewritten the text in order to more clearly signpost our aim of using "writing differently" in every part of the research process, from literature review, data-collection, and analysis to the writing-up in order to attend to and learn from an empirical organizational context beyond the academy, in which marginalization is key: airplane cleaning.

D: I worry about how people will read our work here. I don't want to be seen as someone who colonizes the experiences of my participants or uses them simply to get ahead myself. I wonder, can writing differently or writing affectively only be done in an ethical way when writing and researching ourselves?

N: I don't think so. I think we shouldn't underestimate how we as researchers become entangled with the research setting and our participants, and thus ultimately co-construct the findings. There are many (feminist) scholars who make this point, for example those who draw from Haraway's ideas about "situated knowledge" (e.g., Prasad et al., 2019). But I do not think this should mean our experiences as scholars in and beyond the academic world should be the sole focus of our research endeavors. I don't want to assume that academics all have the same privilege; we are a heterogeneous bunch. Yet I still think that it would seriously limit the knowledge that gets produced if we cannot venture beyond the Ivory Tower of the academy to other workplace settings, especially those producing marginalized workers and experiences in other ways.

M: Exactly. Wouldn't it be unethical to *not* report on their experiences? In our current project we argue that many scholars in our field of gender and diversity studies have a preference for studying white and golden color workers. Our main aim was to engage with workers and work settings that are often neglected. These will remain unseen or silenced if the fear of colonizing or misrepresenting their experiences pushes us to refrain from engaging with them in the field.

D: And again here it is important that "writing differently" is not something that can be added at the end of a research process, in the writing up phase, but needs to be performed throughout the research process. A deep engagement with and care for the field and the people we do research with are required when conducting this type of ethnographic fieldwork. But I also think there will always be some form of misrepresentation, I will never be able to fully understand and feel what it is like to perform physically demanding work for a minimum wage for over a lifetime as Akwa explained to me. Yet we should not hide these limitations and pretend to be this all-knowing authority.

4 | POSTLUDE: TOWARDS AN ETHIC OF CARE

We want to end our writing here with some thoughts on the politics of academic knowledge production. We have illustrated our insights with affective fieldwork notes and poetry from the research with airplane cleaners, who are at the margins of western society and the bottom of our capitalist value chain. We needed to write differently, because the lived realities of marginalized groups tend to escape conventional language practices (Anthym, 2018; Weatherall, 2019). White, middle class, masculine normativities inform conventional academic writing practices, and thus substantially limit the knowledge that can be produced to mostly disembodied, rational accounts. Conventional writing practices therefore seem better suited to articulate experiences that align with embodied normativities in academia related to gender, race, and class. We have tried to show that writing differently allows space for sensing, analyzing, and voicing experiences of those who occupy the margins (Dorion, 2021). We thus consider writing differently as a political act that can open up possibilities for *thinking* differently and *feeling* differently, and thus making the experiences of marginalized laborers such as cleaners more relatable to an academic audience (Gherardi, 2019; Manning, 2016; Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018; Steyaert, 2015). There is much more that can and should be done to improve the lives of those who are marginalized, and we thus need to be humble and realistic about what we can achieve with an academic text like this one. The material and affective potential of this writing is limited to embodied resonance and reflection on experiences that are mostly underrepresented and/or silenced in academic work. We have used writing differently as a way to affectively connect—to the literature, to our research participants, to reviewers, and to each other. We see our poetry as a feminist methodology that, as Faulkner (2018,

p. 86) writes, "… can be a means of demonstrating embodiment and reflexivity, a way to refuse the mind-body dialectic, a form of feminist ethnography, and a catalyst for social agitation and change." We acknowledge, however, that our writing is not anywhere near enough to undo the inequalities we touch upon in this text, but it is a start. We, therefore, end with a call to scholars to foster an ethic of care by filling the silences present in academic knowledge production with other kinds of words.

academic writing is full of

silences   (Armitage, 2014)

silences induced by fear

of not knowing

not understanding

not-yet   (Manning, 2016)

how do we relate?

do justice to

      painful

      marginalized

      embodied

      experiences   (Thanem & Knights, 2019, p. 34)

how do we

       flesh

out/our lived realities?   (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019)

becoming faithful witnesses   (Gunaratnam, 2008)

to the subjective realities

of our research participants   (Anthym, 2018, p. 204)

does it suffice

to just be   t/here

or do we need to be

with and *in-between*?   (Gherardi, 2019, p. 745)?

it is a scary

enterprise

to challenge this

status quo

but

if we wait in silence

for that final luxury

of fearlessness

how do we prevent

the silence

      from choking   (Lorde, 1984, p. 44)

      or shattering   (Ahmed, 2017)

an "us" that is more

than the disembodied,
un-affected/in-effective
researcher-participant;
author-subject
en-counter?

we might need
counter-narratives   (Delgado, 1989)
art   (Manning, 2016)
and affective pedagogies   (Gherardi, 2019, p. 752)
based in and on humility   (Anthym, 2018, p. 199)
to be able to
                                  respond to
                                  engage with
                       these experiences

do we have the courage
to see/write/read poetry
as a practice of resistance
and reclamation?   (Anthym, 2018, p. 79)
is that how we can practice
an ethic of care?

DATA AVIALABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Cleaner unions in The Netherlands have asked for "retaining the pensionable age at 66 years old, ceasing the fines on retiring early, and to acknowledge cleaning work as physically demanding labor" (see https://schoongenoeg.nu/goedpensioen/). In other strikes cleaners have also demanded "higher payment, more leave possibilities, equal rights, easier access to permanent position for temporary workers, being treated with respect and a holiday at International Worker's Day on the May 1st" (see https://schoongenoeg.nu/respect-is-een-leefbaar-loon-niet-2-per-jaar/, Accessed at: November 21, 2019).

[2] We have also created a website where we present our research poetry such as from this project (www.poetryatwork.me). The reason for this website was to make our research poems open-access and readily available for an audience also outside of academia.

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