


# Writing bodies and bodies of text: Thinking vulnerability through monsters

Line Henriksen<sup>1</sup>  | Katrine Meldgaard Kjær<sup>2</sup> | Marie Blønd<sup>3</sup> |  
 Marisa Cohn<sup>2</sup> | Baki Cakici<sup>2</sup> | Rachel Douglas-Jones<sup>2</sup> |  
 Pedro Ferreira<sup>2</sup> | Viktoriya Feshak<sup>4</sup> | Simy Kaur Gahoonia<sup>2</sup> |  
 Sunniva Sandbukt<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden

<sup>2</sup>IT University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

<sup>3</sup>Independent Researcher, Copenhagen, Denmark

<sup>4</sup>Technical University of Munich, München, Germany

## Correspondence

Line Henriksen, Malmö University, School of Arts and Communication, Niagara, floor 4b, 4c and 5c, Nordenskiöldsgatan 1, Malmö, Sweden.

Email: [line.henriksen@mau.se](mailto:line.henriksen@mau.se)

Katrine Meldgaard Kjær, IT University of Copenhagen, Business IT, Rued Langgaards vej 7, DK-2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark.

Email: [kakj@itu.dk](mailto:kakj@itu.dk)

## Abstract

In this article, we suggest approaching writing as a vulnerable practice marked by an unstable boundary between bodies: bodies of text and bodies of writers. We present an exercise-method that we refer to as Monster Writing, which we have developed in order to engage with these instabilities as well as in order to address experiences of difficulty, anxiety and uncertainty in relation with the text and writing process. Though the writing process can at times be exciting and thrilling, and at other times perhaps a little tedious and mundane, for some it also presents (more than) occasional encounters with one's own insecurities, shame and doubt. We argue that this potentially more painful relationship between writer and text should be awarded more attention in scholarship on writing, and that a way of doing so is through the framework of feminist theory on vulnerability, embodiment, and the monstrous.

## KEYWORDS

feminist theory, monster theory, organizational studies, vulnerability, writing

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2021 The Authors. *Gender, Work & Organization* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Writing is a challenging and challenged process. On a structural level, advocates for “Writing Differently” approaches within management and organizational studies (MOS) have argued that current standards of academic writing do not allow for an exploration of the embodied and vulnerable aspects of writing, nor marginalized positions within academic writing, including when it comes to the authors of academic writing themselves (Gilmore et al., 2019; Grey & Sinclair, 2006; Pullen, 2018). Writing differently, in turn, has been portrayed as an act of care, wonder, love and healing toward your own body as well as those of others (Ahonen et al., 2020; Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018). Speaking to this perspective, approaching writing as a collective process—both in theory and practise—has been portrayed as a subversive action that can enable healing and open a space for vulnerability and feminist solidarity (Handforth & Taylor, 2016; Kjær & van Amsterdam, 2020). Key in many Writing Differently arguments within MOS, then, is often that the structural boundaries of the neoliberal university constitute the central limitations, struggle and difficulties in writing; as Grey and Sinclair argue: “a punitive, even sadistic, way of writing has been created that perpetuates the very problems that critical approaches ostensibly set out to critique and subvert” (Grey & Sinclair, 2006, p. 445). From this follows the argument that if only the structures and boundaries surrounding academic writing were different, writing as such would and should be a liberating, joyful and ethical exercise in representation. However, we suggest that there is also need for a space within Writing Differently approaches to think about how writing can at times be connected to struggle and discomfort, and what this tells us about the leaky boundaries (Shildrick, 1997) that characterize the relationship between the body of the writer and the body of text. In this article, we suggest approaching writing as a vulnerable practice marked by an unstable boundary between bodies: bodies of text and bodies of writers. We present an exercise-method that we refer to as Monster Writing, which we have developed in order to engage with these instabilities as well as in order to address experiences of difficulty, anxiety and uncertainty in relation with the text and writing process.

Writing is often taught as an afterthought in academia, a means of communicating knowledge that is imagined as wholly different from the medium itself: first you do your research, then you communicate it through writing. In line with research that focuses on writing as a mode of inquiry in itself (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018), we suggest that this approach does not prepare the writer for the liveliness and agency of the text, nor the surprises inherent to the writing process. In this article, we explore how this liveliness and agency can involve anxiety, ambivalence and even shame in the encounter with the text. We argue that any writing process is necessarily vulnerable, not only because of the structures that govern academic writing as such, but also because writing involves an opening up and transformation through the encounter between the body of the writer and an “other” body: a body of text. This body of text, in turn, has its own agency and agenda, which is both strangely other and part of the self. With this, we suggest that writing is marked by uncertain boundaries between the creator and the created, self and other, writer and the written, and that the process of writing opens us up to surprises, as text forms what is simultaneously “me” and “not me.”

Most writers will likely recognize the experience of being surprised at how an argument developed differently in writing than it had been imagined before writing. In this instance, as well as many others, text takes on a presence that may partly stem from the writer, but which is also very much not the writer. We argue that the affective relationships between the writing body and the body of text can be understood by examining the body of text as something in excess of the self, something which has its own sets of agencies that the writer must live with. We suggest that the writing body and the body of text mutually construct each other, and that the writing body lives in complex relationships with text both before, during and after writing. This is in line with Writing Differently scholarship such as Brewis and Williams (2019), who theorize writing as skin, arguing that writing in itself is an “adaptable, resistant organism that permits absorption, diffusion, permeability and rupture” (p. 90). We argue that writing text involves living with something that is often just outside of your control; you may be its creator, but it can take on unexpected forms, and it lives beyond you.

Scholars within the fields of gender studies and feminist theory, among others, have critically and creatively engaged with the subject of knowledge production and communication such as writing as embodied and hence as gen-

dered and affective processes with the potentials of both pleasure and pain (see e.g. Haraway, 1988; Lykke, 2010). As Donna Haraway argues, the focus on objective knowledge production as disembodied means that only subjects considered capable of “stepping outside” of their body and becoming “pure mind,” so to say, are considered reliable and objective researchers, whereas the subjects considered “too much body” to do so are viewed as less reliable, more subjective and hence not properly objective (Haraway, 1988). These understandings are gendered and racialized, with white men considered more “rational” and less under the thrall of their bodies than their gendered and racialized others (Haraway, 1988).

When it comes to the writing process itself, theorists such as Luce Irigaray (1985), Hélène Cixous (1992) and Julia Kristeva (1980)—often referred to as the scholars of *écriture féminine* (Lykke, 2010)—have reimagined how embodiment, emotions, and desire play into the creation of text, focusing primarily on the body of the female writer. Cixous, for example, writes about her struggles with “coming to writing” (1992, p. 1). She critiques the supposed divide between emotion and reason, mind and body, and explores experiences of passion and excitement as well as fear and anxiety in the encounter with the text. Other theorists, such as Judith Butler (2011), also approach the mechanics of language and writing through embodiment. Unlike Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva, however, Butler approaches embodiment not as a question of an inherent sexual difference, but as the ongoing iteration of discursive and normative structures that ultimately shape how one can understand oneself and be understood as an embodied human subject (Butler, 2011). Sara Louise Muhr and Alf Refn, in turn, offer a queer take on writing differently through the notion of “cyborg writing,” which explores the many ways in which the gendered writing body enters into assemblages with various writing technologies (Muhr & Rehn, 2015). We are inspired by such feminist and queer theory on the construction of the embodied subject through processes of language, and in our own engagement with writing and embodiment we turn to feminist scholar Margrit Shildrick (Shildrick, 1997, 2002, 2009) in order to explore experiences of vulnerability in the writing process.

Shildrick suggests that vulnerability, though often associated with something negative within the western imaginary, not least due to its association with femininity, is an inherent existential experience that cannot be done away with but must be acknowledge and addressed (Shildrick, 2002, p. 1). Throughout this article, we present an exercise-method we have developed with the aim of working with vulnerability in writing. We have come to think of the exercise as “monster writing,” as the exercise draws on the figure of the monster to think with and through vulnerability in writing practices. According to Shildrick, the monster is a liminal figure that roams the unsteady threshold between self and other, human and non-human (ibid., p. 3); this, we argue, reflects the relationship between the writing body and the body of text. To illustrate these unsteady thresholds, we interlace the presentation of our exercise-method with our own reflections on the effects of thinking about writing as monster, as well as reflections from our colleagues who have participated in the exercise. Moreover, writing this text itself was a collective and open practice; Katrine and Line wrote the initial draft of text via interval-writing, each taking turns to write on sections for a set period of time, and then passing it on to the other, who then wrote with and through what the first person had written. With this, the text is also a product of our relationship with each other as writing partners who trust each other with vulnerable and unfinished writing. While we, Line and Katrine, are the main writers of the text, we could not have been able to write it without our colleagues, who co-developed the exercise through their participation. Further still, these colleagues participated in a reflection on the exercise at a later stage, and Katrine and Line have added some of these reflections to this article, which means that multiple voices will be braided into the text throughout. We have chosen a collective authorship model that represents the ways in which authorship is always multiple, as well as a process of collective inspiration, thinking and doing. Writing this text was an open-ended and collective process, reflecting the exercise that it presents as well as exemplifying our argument that the writing body and bodies of text are never fully bounded.

The aim with Monster Writing and thinking about writing through the monster is not to do away with the experience of vulnerability in the encounter with the unruly, at times anxiety-inducing text. On the contrary: with this exercise we hope to acknowledge the vulnerability at stake in the encounter with the unruly text and to find ways to live with the monster-text. In this article, we explore how the act of writing can be understood as an act of living with the monstrous “other,” and how despite not being in control of one’s creations, the creator must still remain

accountable for them. As such, we argue that writing methods are fundamentally a question of ethics; one must remain accountable for how one learns to see and write the world (Haraway, 1988), as well as for the text creations the creator unleashes upon the world. By approaching writing through the figure of the monster, we hope to find means of expressing and thinking vulnerability not as an issue that must be circumvented, but as an inherent part of writing (see also Hellstrand et al., 2018; The Monster Network, 2021).

## 2 | VULNERABILITY AND BECOMING WITH OTHERS

The relationship between writing and vulnerability plays a central role within Writing Differently approaches in MOS. A particularly central theme here has been an ambition and orientation toward developing methods that offer the possibility of writing vulnerability, which has otherwise been historically erased, suppressed or deemed “not appropriate” for academic writing (Ahonen et al., 2020; Gilmore et al., 2019; Helin, 2019; Pullen, 2018). Outside of MOS, Shildrick argues that vulnerability is primarily associated with something negative within a western context, as it is understood to indicate the inability of the self to protect its boundaries, and therefore an opening up to harm (2002, p. 1). Yet, she suggests, vulnerability is an inherent existential state, a way of being and becoming in the world with others, with the other, which is never quite external, never fully a stranger, but always a constitutive part of the self. Shildrick explores this troubled and troubling relationship with the other through the liminal figure of the monster—another figure that, like vulnerability, has a bad reputation within the western imaginary (Shildrick, 2002, p. 3). According to Shildrick, the monster offers a means of exploring difference and otherness within this very imaginary, considering how the monster's disturbing embodiment—neither fully human, never fully animal, in-between fact and fiction, bio and technology, etc.—proposes liminality and transformation as a fundamental way of being in and of the world. Through a rethinking of vulnerability and the monster, Shildrick expands on an ethics that does not concern itself with the setting out of principles and rules that govern according to what is right or wrong, normal or abnormal, but instead revolves around a rethinking of the embodied subject and how its inherent reliance on the other demands a rethinking of the relationship between self and other that takes as its starting point an openness toward difference and undecidability. Through vulnerability, Shildrick theorizes both the pleasures and pains, as well as the risks at stake in the relationship with the other that cannot be known in advance nor kept apart (2002, p. 3).

Shildrick is not the only scholar suggesting that the figure of the monster as well as the concept of the monstrous are important critical tools of thought. Recent years have seen the flourishing of the emerging field of “monster theory” or “monster studies”; an interdisciplinary field where scholars and artists engage the figure of the monster as a tool of thought, not least when it comes to critically rethinking and reimagining otherness and difference (see e.g., Cohen, 1996; Mittman, 2012). In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that monster theory has roots in fields such as feminist and queer theory (Halberstam, 1995; Hellstrand et al., 2018; Henriksen, 2016; Nina Lykke & Braidotti, 1996; Stryker, 1994), where the figure of the monster and the concept of the monstrous are mobilized to investigate and rethink power structures and processes of othering. Scholars within fields such as decolonial and postcolonial theory as well as critical disabilities studies also approach the monster—as well as its kin, the specter—as a means of thinking embodiment, power and otherness differently (Gordon, 1997; McCormack, 2014; Orning, 2020; Subramaniam, 2014; Taylor, 2019). Monster scholars are not (only) interested in studying why some things or some bodies are explicitly deemed “monstrous,” but often focus on how the figure of the monster might help us think through the very processes that inform the establishing of boundaries between that which we are comfortable with and can control, and that which is beyond our control, uncomfortable and “other.” In other words, the monster offers a means of exploring the embodiment of difference and otherness, and for some scholars it has even become a method in and of itself (Hellstrand et al., 2018; The Monster Network, 2021).

Within MOS, scholars such as Torkild Thanem (2006) has suggested adopting monster studies and monster theory in order to open new radical interventions and possibilities of thinking in organizational studies. He argues that a “monstrous organization theory” may work to encourage organizational researchers to critically reflect on their own

monstrosity, as well as on how monstrous bodies live on the edge of and disrupt organizational boundaries (ibid., p. 163). Indeed, within organizational studies, monster theory has been used to unpack representations of organizations as gothic or even hellish (Höpfl, 2005; Parker, 2005); as well as how this animates questions of liminality, belonging, uncertainty and doubt, for example, in relation to higher education (Hawkins & Edwards, 2015; Hay & Samra-Fredricks, 2016); the conditions of working organizations as neither wholly “dead” or “alive” but rather in a constant state of becoming (Kelly & Riach, 2014); and the contributions of workers who are deemed “other” or even explicitly “monstrous,” as well as the potential these hold for understanding organization differently (Mitchell, 2019). In this article, we wish to bring these thoughts into dialog with the writing process and scholarship on writing, in order to think and imagine the writing body—the body of text and the corporeal body, the two never fully separate—differently. We suggest that by approaching vulnerability as an existential state of being and becoming rather than an exception that can and should be avoided in writing processes, it is possible to take seriously the risks and anxieties at stake in writing (for more on “becoming,” especially becoming with, see Haraway, 2008). In other words, we wish to explore the writing body and how it comes to be through the text itself, that is, how the very process of writing and the creation of text constitutes the writing body in ways that makes it impossible to draw a fully formed line between writer and the written, or in “monster terms,” the creator and creature. We argue that the two create one another, and that the threshold between them is in constant transformation and offers up experiences of pleasure as well as pain.

In line with Shildrick's theorizing, we also bring the question of ethics into this doing and undoing of boundaries between writer and the written, the corporeal body and the body of text, in order to explore writing as something that is “in excess” of the writing body and ultimately never fully under the writer's control. The writing process opens up to new ideas, new approaches to one's material, and what ends up on the paper may be surprising and unplanned for. In this sense, writing is a “method of enquiry” (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018), something that brings worlds into being, not just by representing them in writing, but by changing how one can understand and think the world one is of. Inspired by Shildrick's understanding of ethics, we argue for the development of an ethics of responsibility toward the written and the text, which can never fully be distinguished from the body and the context that created it, but which will also always be impossible for the writer to fully control. In other words, we ask: what responsibilities does the writing self have toward the written creature, the written body, the body of text as it is set loose to roam the world? This creature is part self, part other, never at rest; in its hybridity and in its undoing of stable boundaries between self and other, this text-creature is a monster. How might one learn to live in the company of one's text monsters, both while writing them and while they roam this world, co-creating it as they go, separate from their creator but never fully other? And by taking seriously the unsteady threshold between self and other in the writing process, might it also be possible to work through some of the anxieties that one can experience when writing?

In order to explore these questions, we wanted to develop a writing method that took as its premise the multiplicity and vulnerability at stake in the writing process. Like Shildrick, we looked to the monster to find a figure with which to think and imagine the relationship between the writing body and the written body, creator and created. The result was the writing exercise-method that we call “Monster writing.”

## 2.1 | Monster writing

Hello text

I am not sure I like you

In November 2019, we organized a writing workshop at ETHOS Lab, the IT University of Copenhagen. Our aim with the workshop was to explore the difficult aspects of writing, whatever they may be to the individual writer, and to do so by taking the notion of vulnerability seriously. We had both previously worked with vulnerability and writing, Katrine through the method of collage (see Cosenza, 2014; Elbow, 1997) and Line through the figure of the monster

(Henriksen et al., 2017). We wanted to bring these two means of writing together in order to explore the writing body and the written body as collage, as something stitched together from many sources, different contexts, and ultimately as a monstrous text-body consisting of various body parts and with the ability to question and dodge the will of its creator.

Before the workshop, we circulated the collaborative autoethnographic text *Pieced Together: Writing invisible (dis)abilities in academia* (Kjær & van Amsterdam, 2020). This text is written as a collage and explores experiences with disability and chronic illness in academia. In the text, the authors practice vulnerability both in form and in content. We circulated this text before the workshop in order to show both how Writing Differently can look in practice, as well as to show that we as workshop organizers are also vulnerable writers.

In the invitation to the workshop itself, we wrote:

We will also collaborate on creating something—something different from both old and new texts. So don't forget to bring a text or a draft that you have written, but have stuck away in drawers, are anxious about or just don't want to confront.

Eight people signed up for the workshop, making us 10 in all, that is, all the authors of this article. Later we did a follow-up workshop with most of the participants from the initial workshop, and the workshop-writing we use throughout this article is from this second workshop. All participants knew each other, which has no doubt had an impact on the level of vulnerability people were willing to show during the workshop.

The workshop consisted of three parts: first, participants introduced a piece of their own writing that they had brought with them. Secondly, we cut up our own texts and gave pieces of our texts to each other. These pieces could be single words or whole sentences. We then asked participants to spend 10 min incorporating these text-gifts into their own original and now cut-up piece that they had brought to the workshop. We repeated this cutting and pasting for four rounds. Finally, we read our new stitched together text-monsters out loud and reflected on what the incorporation of new voices had done to our text and writing process.

In the following, we describe the parts of the workshop in more detail.

## 2.2 | Hello text

In the workshop we explored text as something somewhat monstrous, and something open-ended and more than or posthuman. Inspired by Nina Lykke's exercise of "writing the posthuman" (The Monster Network, 2019), in which she suggests that the writer addresses the object of their writing as a "you" directly in the text, we wanted to experiment with the effects of addressing the text itself in this way, as an agent, out loud and together with others. In addition, we wanted to explore how our affective relationships to text could change how we worked specifically with text as being in an open relation to the world, here exemplified and acknowledged through the cutting up and sharing of our texts. We therefore began the workshop by asking everyone to introduce their texts to the group by addressing the text in the first person, beginning with a: "You are." The aim was to tap into an experience Katrine and Line often have as writers, but which can be difficult to articulate: that texts seem to have agencies of their own. Taking this up and building on it, one of the participants of the workshop, Simy Kaur Gahoonia, began her introduction by greeting her text with a "hello": "Hello text, you are ..." The participants then each followed her example, all greeting their texts with a "hello text" before their introductions.

*hello text,*

I had better plans for you. You could have been something interesting to say, something substantial to contribute with

Hello text,

You are, well, in fact not one single text at all, because you are three different texts that have been troubling me

What can this small act of speaking the text into existence, of acknowledging it as an agent to be greeted, tell us about the relationship between text and author, creator and creature, about text and agency? In this exercise, we acknowledged the experience of vulnerability in our relationship with texts as something affectively charged and complex. Moreover, we worked with actively practicing an ethics of responsibility, that is, responsibility as *response* (Haraway, 2008; Shildrick, 2002). Through the address, the participants could respond to their texts, acknowledge their presence, and in this address open themselves up to be responded to in return—not in the means of a human voice, but in the changes and shifts in affect. As mentioned by Shildrick (2002: 3), vulnerability as an opening up to the other is what makes change possible; in this opening the threshold between self and other is renegotiated, sometimes for the worse, sometimes—as was our experience here—in ways that made the relationship between self and other less painful. In the address, thresholds shifted, and the writing body and body of text got a chance to mutually re-constitute one another, suggesting new ways of being-with each other.

Through the “hello, text”-exercise, Line and Katrine hoped to explore how texts may be created by writing bodies, but also always escape the control of said bodies. This is an aspect of writing that is often overlooked or unarticulated, and which we therefore need to develop new methods for—not in order to finally be in full control, but in order to acknowledge that such full control is an impossibility. The spontaneous development of the greeting “hello text” help to illustrate this aspect of lack of control and predictability, as well as how this forms the very starting point for being able to write and create. It also illustrates the co-creation at stake in this “monster method” (The Monster Network, 2021): we had not planned for this structure, but it served to clearly articulate the text as an agent that lives beyond us, as well as something (someone?) that demands a response and an address: *Hello text*.

To me, the process of addressing the text as monster has to do with attempting to change or at least slightly alter my relation with the things I create. Rather than seeing myself in the text, what we came to think of as the ‘hello text’-exercise helped me see the other in the text. Something unintended and something not-me. Something I had a responsibility toward. Even as – or especially as – I recoiled in shame at the sight of my creation.

The addresses to the texts took the shape of stories in and of themselves: stories about how we relate to the monsters we create, as well as about regrets and anxieties about both the process and the creation. Participants also voiced uncertainty about whether this particular text-monster could survive; whether it was worthy of having a life of its own, of being part of the world. These considerations, in turn, were also related to the period of time that had formed the text, as well as the space in which the words first appeared, for example, at a particular time in a life or as a reaction to a certain event. In approaching the text as something to care about and enter into a relationship with, that is, as an entity that was beyond but also a part of the writing body, greeting the troublesome texts offered the possibility of explicitly articulating emotions such as shame, unhappiness, uncertainty, guilt, and excitement. This made clear how writing text is always an embodied practice, and that questions about the relationship between body and text may go beyond representation and liberation; even when we are allowed to write freely from the body “as our mothers taught us” (Pullen, 2018), writing is a process that involves complex affective relationships, and which is not always, may be not ever, entirely joyful or unproblematic.

### 2.3 | Monstrous collages

After the introduction round, we cut our texts into pieces, and shared them with each other, creating individual collages in which we tried to rewrite our own text using the words of other creators. With this exercise, the text returned to the author in different guises, never fully deleted nor fully other or the same. Here, we wanted to encourage a space of collaborative writing that magnified the multiplicities at stake in writing as well as the many different voices that inform our writing. We also wanted to acknowledge that no writing can happen alone, in a vacuum, cut off from its context; writing is a situated practice (Haraway, 1988). By acknowledging this, we aimed to also acknowledge the writing body as a vulnerable body, as a body whose boundaries are transformed in the encounter with the written and writing other. We did not attempt a moral judgment on this vulnerability; following Shildrick, vulnerability is neither good nor bad, but rather an inherent experience of corporeality and relationality that cannot, and should not, be done away with. This vulnerability allows us to change, transform, become something different in the encounter with the other—an encounter that, as pointed out by Shildrick (2002, p. 3), we can never be fully prepared for.

I'm often excited by the process of writing, caught up in the creativity of it and feeling inspired to write more, create more. But just as often, when the writing is done and I sit back and observe what I have created, I am ambivalent. When I show it to others I can easily become embarrassed, want to hide it away so that others do not see it. It's after my fingers have stopped writing on the keyboard that I see that my writing has become strangely different than what I had thought it would be, hoped it would be.

While exchanging text parts, we attempted to address the openness between self and other in writing in ways that do not brand this openness as a failure of the self to protect its own boundaries (Shildrick, 2002, p. 1), but instead approaches it as a necessity for the writing process as well as a possible act of generosity and a means of responding to and with the text of the other. Here, we were especially inspired by methods from collage writing and fragmented narratives. Fragmented narratives (Markham, 2005) and collage writing (Elbow, 1997) play with the expected text rhythm and linearity of an academic piece of writing; in collage methods, the argument appears in the gaps, disruptions or pieced together parts of the text (ibid.). This requires other types of engagement from the reader, as the reader becomes a co-creator of meaning in these gaps (Cosenza, 2014). Actively using collage as a writing method thus highlights the multiplicity of voices that are present in a final written text, as well as engage explicitly with the ways in which the text is not under the control of a solitary author. Moreover, collages or fragmented narratives challenge both the traditional academic writing format, as well as the belief that this is an accurate representation of research processes, and as a result allow for a different way of approaching the production of knowledge.

In the exercise-method, we thus wanted to magnify how the writing process is indeed not an isolated act by showing the collective action of writing explicitly in the performative stitching together of text parts, like the creation of a monstrous Frankensteinian body. This, we suggest, is what the monster may teach us: that nothing springs into being from nothingness—not the writer, not the written—but is created through the stitching together of contexts, bodies, words, meaning and matter, the writer creating a creature that in turn creates the writer as writer.

Nevertheless, painfully at first, bits of this text wound up distributed, and made its way into other people's writing. As they read their newly assembled texts aloud, hearing snippets and fragments of what I had provided, giving context for other people's thoughts felt comforting, reassuring even. Just look at that little text, I thought, making something of itself in spite of its malnourished origins.



Here, the monster may have a lesson to teach us about accountability and responsibility in the process of creature creation. The texts we created during the collage part of the workshop was our attempt at working with an acknowledgment of the collectivity and multiplicity in the writing voice and the openness of the writing body toward the text, toward other bodies in the room, toward other ideas, thoughts and imaginaries. Through the cutting up and stitching together, we also wanted the writers to gain a different relationship with their monsters, and hence to renegotiate the threshold between writer and written—the written creates the writer as much as the writer creates the written, and by addressing the affective responses, not least those grounded in (Frankensteinian) shame and horror, we hoped to create a space where these responses could be addressed, worked through and not ignored.

## 2.4 | On ethics and responsibility

After addressing my own text, telling it how horrible I found it, I turned to a colleague and said: I'm so happy it cannot respond. But I'm no longer so certain that it did not.

The ethics of writing is often of central concern in Writing Differently scholarship. In line with other post-qualitative methods, ethical considerations here are in particular articulated in response to the lack of possibility for traditional academic accounts of lived experiences (Schwandt, 2007). Indeed, researchers have argued that embodied experiences have been marginalized or completely excluded from academic writing (Gilmore et al., 2019; Grey & Sinclair, 2006). From this follows a thinking about ethics as revolving around being open toward and creating space for that which is other or foreign to academic reporting, or which may have been marginalized within it. We suggest that this way of thinking ethics is aligned with and may be further expanded upon by Shildrick's understanding of ethics as an openness toward otherness and difference, although she does not herself write about writing. For Shildrick, the rethinking of vulnerability and the monstrous through one another forms part of reimagining an ethics that revolves around the open encounter with the other in the self. Shildrick thus argues for an understanding of ethics that is not the moral compass of right and wrong, but instead an openness to an encounter that cannot be determined in advance (Shildrick, 2002, p. 3). The ethical imperative here is to refrain from assimilating the "otherness" of the "other" in order for the "other" to become more recognizable, more like the self. Rather, one must remain open toward that which makes one uncomfortable, that which one does not fully control or even fully understand. Shildrick refers to this ethics as an ethics of risk (Shildrick, 2002, p. 132), as it is the very threshold between self and other that is renegotiated in this openness, in this undecidable and surprising encounter. There is risk in this transformation, as it cannot be controlled, and the changes it sparks can be painful and troubling, yet also ultimately necessary and impossible to avoid (Shildrick, 2002, p. 132). In relation to writing, this can be seen when texts "respond" and work against the writer; for example, in writer's block, anxiety or when writers read something they wrote long ago and do not recognize or remember having written to the extent that the encounter with one's former writing self becomes almost disconcerting. For some, experiments in collective writing can bring these instances of "otherness" and multiple voices in all writing to the forefront and show how all texts, including those written by a singular author, ultimately consist of multiple voices, some of which are familiar, some of which may seem completely strange (Hernández et al., 2020; The Monster Network, 2021).

However, the same renegotiation of boundaries can also be exhilarating. In the context of writing, this may be understood as the moment when the writer is in "the zone," so deeply engrossed in their writing that it can be experienced as a dissolution of the self, or—as described by a writing coach Line once met at a writing boot-camp—as a "forgetting of oneself." There can be pleasure in this forgetting, which magnifies how neither writer nor the written pre-exist the encounter, but come to be through the embodied, vulnerable, open relationality of the writing process. The ethical imperative, then, is not to control the text monsters one produces, as this is impossible; they will always be partially in excess of the author, of its creator, and one cannot control how they will interact with future readers. Instead, following feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway (1988), the ethical imperative

revolves around the need to remain accountable. Applying this to writing, this entails that writing is situated, and comes from some-body—whether this body is of a (supposed) singular writer or a collective or an institution—and as the bodies that create text, we are not innocent or separate from these texts. At the same time, however, the writer cannot claim to fully control the text or the writing process. Remaining accountable to this duality, then, is cultivating an ethical relationship with writing and text, as well as the interaction between writing bodies and bodies of text.

The different parts of the monster writing exercise highlighted the practice of these ethics; in “Hello Text,” we recognized and responded to the text as both created by us and as a strange agent in its own right, as well as attempted to address the vulnerability at stake in this tension. In sharing pieces of writing, we opened the boundaries between our text and other texts, remaining vulnerable to the pain but also potential joy that might come from this openness and acknowledgment of the multiplicity and collectivity at stake in all writing. At the end of the exercises, we re-addressed our texts (“hello, text”), this time in their new forms. In this final part, we attempted to practice accountability for what we had created, and how the creations of others had moved us. Through all of these exercises, the body of text and the writing body mutually shaped each other, as affective flows between the bodies co-constructed them.

### 3 | INVITATION: HOW TO CREATE AND LIVE WITH/AS A WRITING MONSTER

In this article, we have argued for engaging with vulnerability as a way of addressing the at times anxiety-inducing, at times joyous process of writing and living with one's texts. For this final part of the article, we shift into a more playful tone and instead of concluding—which often works as a means of closing a text by explaining how it should be understood—we extend an invitation to you, the reader, in the hopes of opening up the text further, making it a little more monstrous. The invitation is in the form of a manual or recipe to the exercise-methods of writing monsters. Creating writing monsters is easier than it seems—living with them, however, now that is a slightly different story, but we will return to that. Follow these easy steps to have your own writing monster ready in no time at all:

#### 3.1 | Hello text

##### 3.1.1 | You will need

For 1 greeted text:

- A text you are not completely happy with and/or that fills you with existential dread
- People/creatures you trust
- Slight trepidation
- A space in which it is ok to be vulnerable

##### 3.1.2 | Aim

To try to see your text in a different light and possibly change how you feel about it enough to start working with it again. To acknowledge it as a creature in its own right—an other—over which you do not have full control, yet which remains a co-constitutive companion.

### 3.1.3 | Method

1. Address your text out loud, beginning with the words: “Hello text, you are ...” Try to tell the text what you feel about it, what concerns you, why you have not been writing on it, why it makes you anxious, etc.
2. Finish the round—everybody gets a chance to address their text.
3. After the round, take 5 min to write some notes on how the experience was, whether you got some inspiration to work on your text again, what you would like to do differently, etc.
4. If you have another writing exercise after this one—for example “collage monster” (see below)—you can do one more round of “Hello text” at the end of your workshop, this time with your revised or new text. Compare: has your relationship changed? Does the text still make you uncomfortable? Do you understand it a little better? Does it understand you a little better? Etc.

Done! You have now addressed your text and acknowledged it as the strange(r) creation that it is. Hopefully you have not made it too angry. Hopefully it is not the vengeful kind. Hopefully.

## 3.2 | Collage monster

### 3.2.1 | You will need

For 1 collage monster:

- Pen
- Paper
- A text
- Scissors
- Glue
- A blank piece of paper
- People/creatures you trust
- A time-keeper with a timer
- Optional: tears & anxiety.

### 3.2.2 | Aim

To recreate your own text using other people's sentences.

### 3.2.3 | Method

#### *Preparation*

Cut sentences from your text—the same amount as the people/creatures participating in the exercise. *Important: you do not need to use all your text!* When you have the sentences you need, put the remaining text aside.

#### *Round one*

- Share a sentence with one of your collaborators. Choose something that you think they will like.
- Receive one sentence from one of your collaborators.

- Take 5 min to glue the sentence you received onto a piece of paper. You can modify it in any way you want: delete or rearrange words, add words with your pen, write a new sentence using the words you were given, etc. *Just keep in mind: you are still trying to write about the subject of your old text.*
- The time-keeper will let you know when the time is up.

#### Round two

- Share a sentence with one of your collaborators (not the same as before). Choose something that you think they will like.
- Receive one sentence from one of your collaborators (not the same as before).
- Take 10 min to glue the sentence you receive onto your paper. You can modify it in any way you want: delete or rearrange words, add words with your pen, write a new sentence using the words you were given, etc. *Keep in mind: you are still trying to write about the subject of your old text.*
- The time-keeper will let you know when the time is up.

Repeat the rounds until everybody have received a sentence from everybody else.

#### Final round

Take 10–20 min to reorganize and polish your text in any way you please. Add sentences, glitter or/and drawings. *Keep in mind: you are still trying to write about the subject of your old text.* The time-keeper will let you know when the time is up.

Finished! You have now created your very own collage monster. Bask in your own accomplishments with lightning, a good thunderstorm and some hubris before the consequences of your actions catch up with you.

### 3.3 | Living with/as writing monster

The writing monster is not the text in and of itself, for the text is not a contained entity, but exists both in excess of its creator and through its creator. In this sense, the writing monster is embodied, it has many limbs—corporeal, discursive, temporal, textual, spatial—it is open-ended, and in constant transformation. In this transformation lies perhaps also the invitation to and possibility of living with and as such a vulnerable writing monster; in the knowing that no text is complete, nor can it ever be perfect. It is a monster, always in becoming, in transformation through texts that have come before and texts yet to come. It is your monster, and you must be accountable for it, take responsibility for it, but that does never mean perfect it. It is as open-ended and vulnerable as you, for it is you, and it is not you, and when it returns to ask why you created it, you do not need a perfect answer, but you do need to respond.

#### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

#### ORCID

Line Henriksen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4902-624X>

#### REFERENCES

- Ahonen, P., Blomberg, A., Doerr, K., Einola, K., Elkina, A., Gao, G., Hambleton, J., Helin, J., Huopainen, A., Johannsen, B. F., Johansson, J., Jääskeläinen, P., Kaasila-Pakanen, A.-L., Kivinen, N., Mandalaki, E., Meriläinen, S., Pullen, A., Salmela, T., Satama, S., ... Zhang L. E. (2020). Writing resistance together. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27(4), 447–470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12441>
- Brewis, D. N., & Williams, E. (2019). Writing as skin: Negotiating the body in(to) learning about the managed self. *Management Learning*, 50(1), 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507618800715>

- Butler, J. (2011). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge.
- Cixous, H. (1992). *Coming to writing and other essays*. Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, J. J. (1996). *Monster theory*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Cosenza, J. (2014). The crisis of collage: Disability, queerness, and chrononormativity. *Cultural Studies—Critical Methodologies*, 14(2), 155–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708613512272>
- Elbow, P. (1997). Collage: Your cheatin' art. *Writing on the Edge*, 9(1), 26–40. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43158837>
- Gilmore, S., Harding, N., Helin, J., & Pullen, A. (2019). Writing differently. *Management Learning*, 50(1), 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507618811027>
- Gordon, A. (1997). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Grey, C., & Sinclair, A. (2006). Writing differently. *Organization*, 13(3), 443–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508406063492>
- Halberstam, J. (1995). *Skin shows—Gothic horror and the technology of monsters*. Duke University Press.
- Handforth, R., & Taylor, C. A. (2016). Doing academic writing differently: A feminist bricolage. *Gender and Education*, 28(5), 627–643. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1115470>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3, 575), 575. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Haraway, D. (2008). *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Hawkins, B., & Edwards, G. (2015). Managing the monsters of doubt: Liminality, threshold concepts and leadership learning. *Management Learning*, 46(1), 24–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507613501736>
- Hay, A., & Samra-Fredericks, D. (2016). Desperately seeking fixedness: Practitioners' accounts of 'becoming doctoral researchers. *Management Learning*, 47(4), 407–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507616641599>
- Helin, J. (2019). Dream writing: Writing through vulnerability. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(2), 95–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418810984>
- Hellstrand, I., Henriksen, L., Koistinen, A.-K., McCormack, D., & Orning, S. (2018). Promises, monsters and methodologies: The ethics, politics and poetics of the monstrous. *Somatechnics*, 9(2), 143–162.
- Henriksen, L. (2016). *In the company of ghosts: Hauntology, ethics, digital monsters*. PhD thesis. Linköping University Press.
- Henriksen, L., Kvistad, E., & Orning, S. (2017). Monster pedagogy. A failing approach to teaching and learning in the University. In *Theories of Affect and Concepts in Generic Skills Education: Adventurous Encounters*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hernández, K. J., Rubis, J. M., Theriault, N., Todd, Z., Mitchell, A., Country, B., Burarrwanga, L., Ganambarr, R., Ganambarr-Stubbs, M., Maymuru, D., Suchet-Pearson, S., Lloyd, K., & Wright, S. (2020). The creatures collective: Manifestings. *Environment and Planning E Nature and Space*, 4(1), 838, 863). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848620938316>
- Höpfel, H. (2005). The organisation and the mouth of hell. *Culture and Organization*, 11(3), 167–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759550500203045>
- Irigaray, L. (1985). *This sex which is not one*. Cornell University Press.
- Kelly, S., & Riach, K. (2014). Monstrous reanimation: Rethinking organizational death in the UK financial services sector. *Culture and Organization*, 20(1), 7–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2013.851678>
- Kiriakos, C. M., & Tienari, J. (2018). Academic writing as love. *Management Learning*, 49(3), 263–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507617753560>
- Kjær, K. M., & van Amsterdam, N. (2020). "Pieced together. Writing invisible (dis)abilities in academia". In A. Herrmann (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Organizational Autoethnography*.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press.
- Lykke, N. (2010). *Feminist studies*. Routledge.
- Lykke, N., & Braidotti, R. (1996). *Monsters, goddesses and cyborgs—feminist confrontations with science, Medicine and cyberspace*. Zed Books.
- Markham, A. (2005). "Go ugly early": Fragmented narrative and bricolage as interpretive method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(6), 813–839. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405280662>
- McCormack, D. (2014). *Queer postcolonial narratives and the ethics of witnessing*. Bloomsbury.
- Mitchell, L. (2019). Volunteers as monstrous workers: 'Monsters' in UK live-action roleplay game organizations. *Culture and Organization*, 25(3), 233–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2016.1241254>
- Mittman, A. S. (2012). *The ashgate research companion to monsters and the monstrous*. Ashgate.
- Muhr, S. L., & Rehn, A. (2015). On gendered technologies and cyborg writing. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(2), 129–138. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12057>
- Orning, S. (2020). Monstermekanismer—Fryktingytende blandinger og rasjonalitetens makt. *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, 1(37), 19–33.
- Parker, M. (2005). Organisational Gothic. *Culture and Organization*, 11(3), 153–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759550500203003>
- Pullen, A. (2018). Writing as labiaplasty. *Organization*, 25(1), 123–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417735537>
- Richardson, L., & Adams St Pierre, E. (2018). Writing: A method of inquiry. In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.).

- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). Crisis of representation. In *SAGE Research Methods* (3rd ed.). <https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/the-sage-dictionary-of-qualitative-inquiry/n55.xml>
- Schildrick, M. (1997). *Leaky bodies and boundaries—feminism, postmodernism and (Bio)ethics*. Routledge.
- Schildrick, M. (2002). *Embodying the monster—encounters with the vulnerable self*. Sage.
- Schildrick, M. (2009). *Dangerous discourses of disability, subjectivity and sexuality*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stryker, S. (1994). My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing transgender rage. *GLQ*, 1(3), 237–254.
- Subramaniam, B. (2014). *Ghost stories for Darwin – the science of variation and the politics of diversity*. University of Illinois Press.
- Taylor, L. (2019). *Darkly: Black history and America's Gothic soul (illustrated edition)*. Repeater.
- Thanem, T. (2006). Living on the edge: Towards a monstrous organization theory. *Organization*, 13(2), 163–193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508406061677>
- The Monster Network. (2019). *Creative writing workshop with Nina Lykke: 'Writing the posthuman ...'*. TheMonsterNetwork.Com. <https://themonsternetwork.com/2019/03/19/creative-writing-workshop-with-nina-lykke-writing-the-posthuman/>
- The Monster Network. (2021). Collective voices and the materialisation of ideas: The monster as methods. In *Monstrous Ontologies: Politics Ethics Materiality, Caterina Nirta and Andrea Pavoni*. Vernon Press.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**ETHOS Lab** is a critical feminist methods laboratory dedicated to experimentation at the intersection of digital methods, ethnographic inquiry, and speculative fabulation. We aim to understand how digital and computational methods migrate into humanistic and organizational understandings of social relations. We work with methods from experimental writing to role play to game design to discover ways to come together in vulnerability and play. The Lab is a place of collaboration, it is a network of researchers at the IT University of Copenhagen and beyond, of students, and occasionally artists, organizations, etc.

**How to cite this article:** Henriksen, L., Kjær, K. M., Blønd, M., Cohn, M., Cakici, B., Douglas-Jones, R., Ferreira, P., Feshak, V., Gahoonia, S. K., & Sandbukt, S. (2022). Writing bodies and bodies of text: Thinking vulnerability through monsters. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 29(2), 561–574. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12782>