Writing and Risk: Magic, Occult, Exorcisms

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Abstract

What does it mean to take a risk when I write? Can I? Should I? The idea of risk has preoccupied a number of scholars recently, including those interested in discourse, writing and education (e.g. McWilliam 2009 and Thesen and Cooper 2014). This paper attempts to trace a concept of risk in academic writing, by asking questions about what "belongs" in academic texts and making use of bodies of knowledge that seem to be beyond the pale of academic discourse – magic, the occult, exorcisms. By thinking of risk as a side-effect of genres and traditions, I use the language of magic and the occult as a device to apprehend what academic reading cannot usually perceive, when there may be more in a text than academic reading can deal with. I draw examples from three inventive academic writers (Mary Scott, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and Nick Sousanis) to think about the benefits and consequences of risk in academic writing, and the limits of what Karen Bennett (2007) calls English Academic Discourse (EAD). I argue for a kind of writing that might, in the words of Jacques Derrida, anticipate the future 'in the form of an absolute danger' (1997: 5).

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What does it mean to take a risk when I write?

Can I? Should I?

Must I?

Perhaps I am a new undergraduate, uncertain of institutional expectations; perhaps I am what universities like to call a "non-traditional" student, and I feel as though academic discourse effaces my sense of self and experience; perhaps I am panicking, and I feel that the best way to deal with risk is to avoid risk altogether, and my assignment becomes a patchwork of sources, its critical through-line scarcely a dream, and its pretensions to authorial presence a hoax. All of these might be called risk states; writing comes with hazards and consequences.

How might I, writing now – for, to or towards you – inhabit the risk state that our students must sometimes feel when they begin to write? How best can I take a risk with you? It is a matter, perhaps, of what is appropriate – with all that word's connotations of propriety, property, property rights and all the concepts we inherit from the Latin *proprius.* What is proper, or appropriate, is about what belongs – to, for

Discourse on Method

Let me put this introductory text side by side with the transmission from EATAW 2017 to your left, where I have, recklessly, heedless of the risks and consequences, jumped right in, as though I were speaking to you. You may find in this column a reader's guide to what follows, written by someone apparently calmer and more enlightened, more attentive to what is at stake. This text is not a standard research article, driving ceaselessly towards an empirical point or key argument. It is an 'essayist piece' (cf. Swales 2017), meaning that it is in places associative, ruminative, asking conceptual questions rather than seeking empirical solutions. Working at the margins – rather than in the mould – of what Karen Bennett calls English Academic Discourse (EAD, see Bennett 2007 and 2014), I am influenced by the essayist and critic Brian Dillon, when he writes that he wants to 'find out what effects […] the subject may produce when turned over to the experiment of writing' (2014: 18). In much of what follows, I want to proceed by association and allusion, trusting the reader in the manner of the 'writerly' texts of Roland Barthes (cf. Barthes 1974). So there

example, a discourse, a text, a genre, a discipline. The risk is in non-belonging. So I am perhaps raising the stakes, risking something, if I say that in the course of these remarks, I will talk about magic. And séances. And ghosts.

I do not share precisely the same risks as a student writer; but if I hazard here the hypothesis that risk is connected with whether one seems to belong, whether a text appears to belong to a certain body of work and its writer to a certain discourse community, such a hypothesis would link the risks shared by writers at all levels of the academy. Moreover, I think we can learn by taking risks, by trying to simulate the anxiety that students experience. This, as we shall see, corresponds to a certain notion of 'cold calculation' (McWilliam 2009: 192, Thesen 2014: 12). Thesen opposes to this a sense of 'warm risk' (2014: 12), which we could think of as a kind of demand: what kind of writer am I if I can only play it safe? If all I can tell my students to do is play it safe?

A Primer on Risk

An exorcism is not without risks, surely. And Horatio and Marcellus (who we will come back to), on the castle walls at Elsinore, 'harrow[ed] […] with fear and wonder' (Shakespeare 2016, I.1: 43) at the appearance of the ghost of Old Hamlet, certainly feel themselves to be in danger. So let us steel ourselves a little, before we proceed, with the work of calmer spirits.

are places where I do not wish to unpack quotations or state conclusions, or metadiscoursally signal what I am up to; it is, rather, a text where I hope the reader will accompany me into the space I try to open up for thinking.

This strategy concerns in particular the topics of occult phenomena. Part of my interest here is in finding a language to talk about textual effects (or affects) that academic reading cannot usually perceive – or when there is more in a text than academic reading can deal with. What the norms of academic reading cast aside may be thought of as, literally, occult – hidden, sub rosa, occluded, secret. Bringing these phenomena or effects into focus puts us in the sphere of risk because we are talking about what may or may not "belong" to academic writing. I am actually attempting here something quite modest – to train my ear to the nuances of three texts (by Mary Scott, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, and Nick Sousanis), to attend to the risks they take with academic audiences and genres. Risk often means we are talking about textual experiments or other divergences from the expected, but in these cases something else is occurring, I think – a kind of subtextual current or network of implications that demand we rethink the apparently settled categories of academic writing, innovation, success, failure.

An increasing body of work treats the concept of risk in higher education, including research by Lucia Thesen and Linda Cooper (2014) on writing in the contact zone, and the stakes for writers outside the global north; by Karen Bennett (2014), whose concept of the semiperiphery can be thought of as delineating similar risks for writers; by Erica McWilliam (2009), on the institutional position of doctoral education; by Christine Tardy (2016), on the risks that come with genre experimentation. One of the striking elements of McWilliam's chapter is her documentation of how the concept of risk changes from 'taking a chance' to 'cold calculation':

> The negative connotation of "risk" runs counter to the logic that characterized its historic emergence in pre-capitalist times [...] "risk" evoked a condition of excited anticipation in relation to sixteenth-century seafaring, a more positive connotation than the modern notion of risk as hazard minimization [...] The modernist notion of risk [...] is one that could only be thought after magic, cosmology and the fates had given way to the sort of scientific calculation that gave rise to forecasting, book-keeping and insurance (McWilliam 2009: 192).

There is an interesting subtext to this history, connected with the positive and negative senses of risk. The negative connotation of risk is a 'modernist notion', we learn. If we are to treat risk as potentially positive, then – as Thesen and Cooper do, with their sense of 'warm risk' (Thesen 2014: 12) – it may be that we are reactivating an earlier concept of risk ('excited anticipation' – seafaring, adventure). And if the modern, capitalist sense of risk could only supervene once

'magic, cosmology and the fates' had left the scene, then reactivating an earlier concept of risk may readmit them.

McWilliam's history also raises a question about the relationship between writing pedagogy and risk. The 'cold calculation' she refers to chimes with Thesen's invocation of Pat Caplan (2000) when she discusses the idea of risk in university structures as a 'hegemonic tool to discipline and regulate' (Thesen 2014: 9-10). Picking this idea up, Theresa Lillis argues that risk management thus becomes a concept to push off-limits 'discourses around access, inclusion and participation' (2014: 238).

Mary Scott, whose essay in Thesen and Cooper's collection I want to think about more closely below, explains that the space of writing pedagogy amid risk-averse university structures produces a kind of dilemma. Her 'concern is to help student writers avoid the risk of failure; that is I am anxious to help them conform to the expected norms of academic writing. However, as a researcher I have come increasingly to question those norms and to search for ways of reading student writing differently' (Scott 2014: 203). Attending to textual features of non-conformity that would be otherwise identified as errors, she can also 'perceive where students' attempts to play it safe by following the conventions of academic writing are interrupted or complicated by what cannot be contained by the expected norms' (Scott 2014: 203). What we may be talking about, then, is whether writing pedagogy must be, by its nature, a strategy of risk reduction. Can its aim only be to make writing "safe" for students? Or is there another way of thinking about it – can writing pedagogies steer their participants into risk, into danger? Might doing so even be a kind of responsibility?

Academic Writing and the Occult

What is an exorcism? An exorcism, like matters of genre or discipline, is a matter of what does not belong. It is the identification and expulsion of what does not belong.

Scott's chapter is one of the most striking in Thesen and Cooper's collection, because of its multilayered consideration of risk. We see risk appear when markers find "errors" in students' texts; but we also find that the acts of reading undertaken by such markers are themselves filled with risk, because they miss 'what cannot be contained by the expected norms' (Scott 2014: 203) – "error" is a side-effect of reading as well as writing. Moreover, there is the quality of risk Scott's own text performs, in its willingness to follow 'what cannot be contained,' to embrace it, to 'read […] differently' (Scott 2014: 203). This "reading differently" conjures what Scott calls 'ghost texts', by attending to what is missed by academic reading conventions. The ghost texts occupy the hazardous borderline between what belongs and what doesn't, between what is embraced and what is exorcised.

To read differently: as Jacques Derrida remarks, any text is 'a machine with multiple reading heads for other texts' (1979: 107). So when Scott pursues in her students' writing ghost texts, and asks the question, at the end, of what her own ghost texts are, I can't help but wonder if her text is being haunted by the specter of *Hamlet*. Not least because the ghost texts are, by their nature, of indeterminate status, and so evoke Hamlet's dilemma: what is the thing I see that wears the aspect of my father? Is it a ghost, or is it a demon? Benign or malign? Just as Hamlet cannot be sure what he sees, we cannot be sure what we read: we will never be able to resolve the ghost texts' simultaneous contradictory statuses: created by Scott but not written by her, written by her students but also not written by them, fictive, autobiographical, biographical, academic, para-academic, non-academic, failing, transcending. Ghost or demon? Embrace or exorcism?

Scott proposes two definitions of ghost text, one from de Certeau, at the start of her text, and one at the end, a definition of her own. From de Certeau, she takes the idea of a written text that continues to be marked by a certain oral performance (Scott 2014: 208) – a typical kind of student non-belonging, perhaps: too conversational, not formal, not "written" enough. Her own definition concerns locating what is effaced by norms of academic reading (2014: 215) – in other words, where an academic reader sees "error," Scott attempts to discern the trace of the

'student in the text' (2014: 208) and in particular, the trace of their own journey to the UK and to London (so "error" here perhaps carries some quality of its Latin root, *errare*, to roam or wander). So when a marker identifies a passage in the text of Scott's student Christina as too conversational, too informal, Scott breaks the text up into separate lines, so that it becomes a play, monologue or poem. Christina's original text was prose, an essay, but Scott, by introducing line breaks, insists that we, too, read it differently, read the ghost text. She comments, introducing the ghost text:

> When separated into lines as shown below, the rearrangement converts the points being made into a dramatisation of thinking and rethinking in progress. Each line has its own space and weight, while the spaces between can be filled with the reader's emphases, meanings and questions (Scott 2014: 210).

Scott then presents the ghost text:

> [Zetean] teachers do not let the students write an essay at an early age.[1]
>
> Of course, only letting students write essays at a later age makes the teachers' task easier.
>
> They do not need to do so many corrections.
>
> Meanings would be clearer.
>
> But is writing made easier for students in that way?
>
> I doubt it.
>
> Students would get less practice.
>
> Does practice make perfect then?
>
> Burgess (1973) does not seem to think so (Scott 2014: 210).

The text is also ghostly because of the drama of the signature: Who signs the ghost text? Who can be said to be its author? It is not entirely Christina; and it is not entirely Scott. It is both, and neither. There is no ghost text without host text; but at the same time, in a very literal sense, there is no signatory "Scott" here without the haunting presence/absence of Christina. Like Hamlet, I cannot tell who I am seeing, what I am looking at.

Scott sees Christina's ghost text as 'a dramatisation of thinking and rethinking in progress' (2014: 210), and this description, I think, puts us on the trail of her own ghost texts ('What are my ghost texts?' (2014: 216)), and the extent of the risk she is undertaking. She writes:

> I have sought to suggest that perceived lapses in style, when analysed ethnopoetically, might be more appropriately conceived as ghost texts; that is, as texts which are made invisible or ghostly by a readers' focus on the conventions of academic writing. With an ethnopoetic lens, errors might become, not ghosts to be exorcised, but 'fertile facts' (Virginia Woolf, quoted in Gordon 2006: 366) which might lead us to consider the possible merging of individual, national and international histories and structures of feeling (2014: 215).

Scott's own ghost text here, I think, continues to be Christina. The 'dramatisation of thinking and rethinking' recurs in the second sentence, when 'ghosts' are replaced with 'fertile facts'.

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[1] Scott invents the country Zeta to preserve her student's anonymity; in Christina's original text, her home country is named. But this small moment of fiction, so easily passed over, could be thought of as another dimension of ghostliness. Zeta is spectral, being – to use a phrase from Derrida that I will borrow again below – 'simultaneously fictive and effective' (Derrida 1998: 63).

The errors are not 'ghosts to be exorcised,' but exorcism is precisely what occurs if ghosts are dismissed in favour of 'facts.' But later, Scott wonders what her own ghost texts are – so the ghosts return. The play of meanings here recalls the ruminative back-and-forth of Christina's thinking, and the mention of exorcism – the question of belonging – returns us to the risks of what counts and what doesn't as academic prose. What must be exorcised? And can it be replaced with facts? Are facts not the proper object of a scholar?

Hamlet gives us another answer. The ghost of Old Hamlet is first seen by Hamlet's friends Horatio and Marcellus. 'Thou art a scholar – speak to it, Horatio,' urges Marcellus (Shakespeare 2016, I.1: 41). As Derrida (1998) points out, this instruction positions dialogue with phantoms as the proper work of a scholar, something that *belongs to* scholarship. In other words, it is no coincidence that Scott ends not only with the question of what her own ghost texts are, but with the question of 'Who is this "I" that has read and commented on these small pieces of student writing?' (Scott 2014: 216). This questioning of the self marks the risk of absorbing Christina's dilemmas and reinscribing them across her own text. Who have I been, while I have been writing? As Nicholas Royle comments, 'Am I not, as a teacher, inseparable from those who have taught me?' (2003: 56). We are taught also by our students; Christina is the ghost who teaches us about the limits of EAD (cf. Bennett 2007).

Magic Time

Scott's strategy – the powerful embrace of so-called errors in student texts – could be thought of as deploying Thesen's concept of 'warm risk' (2014: 12), the antithesis of the 'cold calculation' described by McWilliam (2009: 192). Warm risk 'is interested in emergent meaning, and seeks instead to open up possibilities and trace meanings, both those realised and those that are lost' (Thesen 2014: 26). But I wonder if it is possible to go further, too. The slipping away of magic, cosmology and the fates and the birth of a calculating modernity that McWilliam alludes to is, we might argue, something that has eventually led us to the risk-averse management structures that Lillis (2014) is dismayed by. It is the world, as Thomas Docherty (2011) has put it, of the "Official University" and the "Clandestine University" – whereby the "Official University" is a corporate entity in thrall to a vacuous "excellence" and profoundly allergic to actual research, teaching, writing, thinking, which have become clandestine within its governing structures. We might argue, indeed, that magic, cosmology, fate are the things such a 'nihilistic institution' (Royle 2003: 55) needs to encounter again.

By magic, we are not talking here about stagecraft, showmanship, sleight of hand or illusion. It is the world of spells, sigils, curses, extradimensional beings, the Uberconscious – the esoteric phenomena that informed the magical practice of Grant Morrison, the comics writer and erstwhile chaos magician. Morrison has now given up the practice of magic, but here he is talking about it in 2003, discussing the 'magical consciousness' that can accompany everyday perception and is the prelude to spell-casting. He is droll, and 100 per cent serious:

> Magical consciousness is a particular way of seeing and interacting with the real world. I experience it as what I can only describe as a "head-click," a feeling of absolute certainty accompanying a perceptual shift which gives real world transactions the numinous, uncanny feeling of dreams. Magical consciousness is a way of experiencing and participating with the local environment in a heightened, significant manner, similar to the effects of some drug trips, Salvador Dali's "Paranoiac/critical" method, near death experiences, etc. Many apparently precognitive and telepathic latencies become more active during periods of magical consciousness. This is the state in which tea leaves are read, curses are cast, goals are scored, poems are written. (Morrison 2014: loc. 340).

I began with the idea of what is appropriate, of what marks a text as belonging to a field or discourse; and Morrison's, surely, does not belong to any subgenre of what we still call "academic writing." And yet: drawing magic into a potential encounter with academic writing, Alan Moore, also a comic book writer – best known for *Watchmen, V for Vendetta* and *From Hell* – and still a practicing warlock – makes the case for a re-encounter between magic and science. He says:

> Einstein offers us a good example. He claimed that he had received the inspiration for his work on relativity while in a kind of visionary daydream where he pictured himself running neck-and-neck beside a beam of light. James Watson, co-discoverer with Francis Crick of the DNA molecule, allegedly deduced the structure from a dream of spiral staircases.
>
> Sir Isaac Newton was an alchemist who shoehorned indigo into the spectrum in accordance with the alchemical fondness for the number seven.
>
> It could be argued that when science and magic were first separated, each lost something vital: science gave up its ability to address any kind of inner world, while magic to a certain extent would seem to have forfeited much of its intellectual discrimination […] [A] reintegration of these divorced areas of human consideration would, I feel, be of great benefit to all parties concerned (Moore interviewed by Proctor 2016).

I have many reactions to placing these words at the centre of my own text. I cannot pretend it doesn't make me anxious. I cannot pretend that the version of me who has spent so long in higher education settings does not watch this text appear with some kind of astonished bewilderment. But Morrison and Moore's texts most surely are at the centre of this one, and have something to tell us about genre, belonging and academic writing, for reasons I hope will become clear. So I want to stitch these small sections of text into my own to animate it, to let magic leak into it. I don't want to comment on them in an academic fashion – to distance myself, to keep them at an arm's length. Instead of recuperating them, I want them to start working in this text, a pocket of something other parasitically intruding into this world, this text, something wholly other to academic discourse, spliced in here and remaining irrecoverably alien.

Morrison thinks that magic happens more often than we think – he sees the viral transmission of corporate branding and, indeed, counter-cultural ideas as magical – symbols that remake consciousness, remake the world. So if magic is more common than we think, perhaps we might expect to find it in academic texts too. This expectation would attune our perceptions to the mysticism that characterises much of Walter Benjamin's work, and Freud's fascination with telepathy, a subject he returns to in three lectures that were written but never delivered. And we also find a connection with one of the most remarkable academic texts of recent times, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses* (1991).

'A Mode of Speech Which Has Hitherto Not Been Possible'

Making more explicit the connections between magic, writing and risk, I want to think here about a specific section of Yerushalmi's book. Taking as a point of departure Freud's writing of *Moses and Monotheism* (2001), Yerushalmi, for four chapters, dazzling in their scholarly reach and interpretive acuity, probes Freud's statements, public and private, about his relationship with Judaism. By themselves, these chapters would make the book a classic, but then, in the final section – which I hesitate to call section, let alone a chapter – something very unusual happens. This part of the book is called 'Monologue with Freud.' Imagine that: *Monologue with* Freud. Not a standard, academic-sounding "discussion-about-Freud," "analysis-of-Freud," and not even a monologue to, about, on, on-the-subject-of. Instead, something that promises what we might call, after Derrida (cited in Royle 2000: 6), the 'experience of the impossible': "Monologue" (solitary, even solipsistic), "with" (together, togetherness).

It is an apostrophe, but troubles the definition of apostrophe. In the 'Monologue,' Yerushalmi no longer writes about Freud, but addresses himself to Freud, and says, 'you are real and for me, curiously present' (1991: 81). And because it is not a monologue to Freud, but with him, it opens up – as Derrida (1998) observes – the idea that the phantom might reply or, indeed, that the phantom is somehow already replying, the reply is inextricably coded into the words that Yerushalmi writes.

Or, indeed, the words he speaks – for these chapters and this monologue were originally spoken. Easy to call the chapters lectures, but the 'Monologue' remains something other than a lecture. I can only guess at the reaction of his audience when Yerushalmi spoke its opening words: 'Dear and most highly esteemed Professor Freud…' Did they think he had gone mad? What happens when an intellectual of no small renown begins to treat a lecture as though it were a séance? What kind of risk is this? Yerushalmi begins:

> Dear and most highly esteemed Professor Freud – Four lectures on your Moses, but for what remains I feel an inner need to speak to you directly and to have the audience eavesdrop, as it were. Whence this compulsion (for it is not merely caprice) I cannot fully articulate even to myself. I know only that this fiction which I somehow do not feel to be fictitious enables me a mode of speech which has hitherto not been possible, but which becomes imperative because we have reached a time of reckoning (1991: 81).

It is this passage that begins to draw connections not only between writing and magic, but magic and concepts of genre. It is something impossible: it is a fiction that Yerushalmi does not feel to be fictitious. How can that even be? How can he know it is fiction and feel it not to be? And how can he present this paradox to us, an audience of scholars? If we take magic to be an experience of the impossible – a contradiction of physical laws whereby an object is itself and simultaneously something else – then this text is, precisely, magical. Fiction and non-fiction, solitary and together, a real ghost, fiction and non-fiction. 'Simultaneously,' says Derrida, 'fictive and effective' (1998: 63). And because of this impossibility, something new is transmitted into the world, a kind of writing we have not seen before: the 'Monologue-with […] enables,' says Yerushalmi, 'a mode of speech which has hitherto not been possible' (1991: 81).

Such a mode of speech – magical, because it is two contradictory things – also gives us another way of looking at the student texts examined by Scott. Scott, too, is taking a magical approach, not only because of her texts' spectral nature but because "reading differently" allows two contradictory perspectives: they fail, and they succeed; their failures (errors) are their successes (what the ghost texts tell us about their writers' journeys). The 'expected norms of academic writing' (Scott 2014: 203) demand exorcism; magical reading permits contradiction.

Innovation as Interruption of EAD

Another way of thinking about the magical aspects of (academic) texts, and the will-to-exorcism of certain modes of academic reading, is to think about the relationship between risk and tradition. We could say that risk is not only a matter of the interruption of a genre, but the interruption of a tradition. A key question, as Tardy observes, concerns the kind of innovation that might be met with approval by a discourse community, and what might be frowned on (2016: 76). It's worth bringing this idea into relation with Karen Bennett's use of the term epistemicide (Bennett 2007). One of the things Bennett brings into sharp relief is the historically constructed nature of EAD, the way what seems natural to those who habitually use it – empiricism, objectivity, unemotional language – can be seen as originating in the discourses of the northern European Reformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The academic discourses of southern Europe – where the Reformation didn't take hold, and where academic traditions were shaped by scholasticism and Jesuit traditions – use language differently and have a different relationship to objectivity.

Moreover, as Susan Bordo argues, 'objectivity' is something that became gendered in the seventeenth century – the prizing of 'objectivity' became a way of prizing masculinity, in the stroke that dismissed emotions and subjectivity as merely, and problematically, feminine (Bordo 1987: 58). What this means for us is that innovation with genres or forms might be risky; but sometimes the innovation is enacting the recovery of something repressed or suppressed by the dominant intellectual traditions of the day. To recover something, to haul something repressed up from the foundations of a tradition – here the risk is greater. So in the case of Nick Sousanis – the author of the third text I want to think about here – the innovation of working in comics is the innovation of invoking so many things effaced or rendered occult by EAD – emotions, style, aesthetics, the body.

Drawing, Feeling, Exorcism

In *Unflattening* (2015), Sousanis argues – visually – that comics can capture modes of knowledge and experience inaccessible to traditional academic formats. At its most forceful, *Unflattening* argues that academic work's insistence on language as the only legitimate mode of explication and dissemination is a distortion and limitation of thinking, knowing and understanding. *Unflattening* is a performance as much as an argument – here, for example, where Sousanis thinks about the relationship between comics and the temporality of reading:

Figure 1. From UNFLATTENING by Nick Sousanis, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Copyright © 2015 by Nick Sousanis. (2015: 62). Reproduced with permission.

We could say that Sousanis here, to adapt Dillon's (2014) phrasing, gives his subject (the relationship between thought and seeing) over to the experiment of drawing, or the experiment of comics. And what happens here is that by recovering what is occult – the emphasis on seeing

that academic modes of reading miss – Sousanis inaugurates a new kind of academic reading, one that utilizes the comic strip's unique enactment of narrative time. This page is one of the most striking examples in *Unflattening*, but it is a microcosm of the entire text, which constantly deploys visual foreshadows and echoes across its entire expanse.

As mentioned above, there is another performative dimension to Sousanis's enterprise, and the recovery of something else usually exorcised from EAD (but not other traditions). Drawing is something we *feel*. In the extract above, I seem to be enmeshed in the branches Sousanis draws; I feel them cluster around me. A useful set of co-ordinates here is the distinction made by Jean-Francois Lyotard between *Discours* and *Figure* (cf. Bennington 1988). As Geoffrey Bennington puts it:

> Drawing deep on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard stresses the richness and complication, or implication, of the body in the world: the visibility of the world is only made possible because my own seeing body is a visible thing in the world, the nexus of a "chiasmus" crossing subject and object, in which the world is of the same "flesh" as my body and that body of the same "objecthood" as the world it sees. And if it is felt that against this mutual belonging of body and world the experience of looking at a painting will approximate more closely to the experience of reading a text, then Lyotard insists on the plasticity of the painted surface, the rhythm of the lines which solicit an answering rhythm in the body of the viewer, and the chromatic values which allow the flatness of the canvas to recede and open (Bennington 1988: 57).

In other words, the work of art is not simply mimetic, and is not, like a text ("*Discours*"), flat, an object in the world. The work of art, understood as *Figure*, is something that answers and replays the 'richness and complication' of the body in the world. Sousanis is on similar terrain to Lyotard when he discusses the way even minimal linework can conjure feeling, or, to use the language of Bennington and Merleau-Ponty, can awaken our sense of the chiasmus of the world and the body:
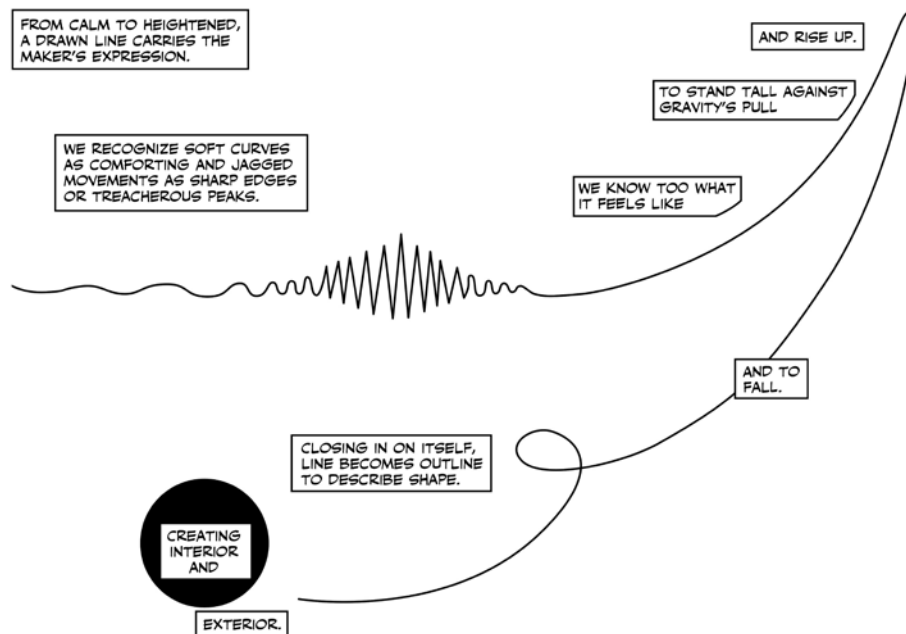

Figure 2. From UNFLATTENING by Nick Sousanis, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Copyright © 2015 by Nick Sousanis (2015: 75). Reproduced with permission.

The immersion, or implication, of the body in the text is the effect, or affect, occasioned when an artist such as Sousanis presents scholarship in the mode of comics. It recovers, de-occults, affect and the body as integral to academic work, writing, thinking, reading. Another word for this risk might be "pleasure.

Envoi

Sousanis's work, above, is very much what John Swales calls for in 'Standardisation and its Discontents': 'experimentation in both style and substance should be open to all the bolder-hearted, to all the malcontents of excessive and stultifying standardisation, whoever they are, and wherever they be' (Swales 2017: 251). There is another dimension of risk connected with experimentation, which I would like to conclude with. A concept of risk must open onto a concept of danger, and even "absolute danger". This reconfigures experimentation into something urgent and necessary, beyond the risks of misunderstanding, rejection by peers, bewildered examiners.

A new and transformative knowledge or thinking is not something we can remain inert before. So I find myself thinking of Derrida's remark at the beginning of *Of Grammatology*, on monsters and the future. It tells us something, I think, about genres, traditions, risk and novelty. He writes:

The future cannot be anticipated except in the form of an absolute danger. It is what breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity (1997: 5).

In other words, a future that is genuinely the future – something utterly inconceivable now, a future that is not merely a repetition of the present – could only appear to us as monstrous. Its radical novelty would be something we have no way of understanding, reckoning with, collapsing back to our own terms of reference. Confronted with some presentiment of it, we could react only with the panic of dissolving certainties and knowledge.

But there is another element of this discussion that brings us back to risk and writing. Derrida's remarks about the future take place in the context of a discussion of writing:

Perhaps patient meditation and painstaking investigation on and around

Conclusion

In the above, I have been thinking about risk as connected with departure from expectations, norms and conventions of EAD. Writing that takes a risk looks like writing that fails to meet expectations, and I have sought in the concepts of "magic" and "the occult" a vocabulary for talking about textual strategies that may remain hidden from "academic norms" of reading and writing. In some ways, the present text is a companion piece to John Swales' 'Standardisation and its Discontents' (2017), seeking to complement Swales' discussion of atypical academic lexis and forms by seeking the unexpected currents that might traverse texts, but remain occulted to academic eyes, or, when seen, require exorcism. These currents are not easily separated out into matters of "content" or "style"; it is not clear if they are ghosts or demons.

Why might it be a good idea for those of us working in writing pedagogy to reflect on such things? The chief answer, it seems to me, is that there is a benefit in being familiar, even treating as normal, "divergent" kinds of writing. Rather than thinking of textual experiments as being outlandish, ill-advised and rare, writing tutors might think of them as a repertoire or reservoir. They give us other moves to practice; they replenish us; they make us think differently about texts. And they are more common than we think. I am tempted to hazard that the prevalence of the IMRAD model in academic writing articles themselves makes experimentation seem more unusual than it really is, and makes it seem more off-limits than it needs to be. Writing tutors and learning developers are familiar with genres as a teaching resource; is it not also good to have genre innovations and divergences as a teaching resource too? It seems worthwhile to be able to say to students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, *Not all texts in your field are the same – what can we learn from the atypical, as well as the typical?* Indeed, we might profitably ask students the question, *What was writer X risking with her approach?*

what is still provisionally called writing, far from falling short of a science of writing or of hastily dismissing it by some obscurantist reaction, letting it rather develop its positivity as far as possible, are the wanderings of a way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which proclaims itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge (1997: 4).

Writing, in other words, makes the future. It is as though a sentence is a rope or line cast out across a void, and I haul myself along it into whatever it is that waits.

The risks that are built into genre are one of the ways this future appears. Yerushalmi, addressing Freud in a mode that is both fictive and not, inaugurates a new genre and a new way of thinking about genre. Genres that are mixed, crazy, magical, impossible, make possible new kinds of knowledge and experience. It is one of the things Yerushalmi retrieves from what Grant Morrison would call the Uberconscious. And it offers an antidote to the wretched tyranny of the language of excellence: instead of seeking excellence, we might seek experiences of the uncanny, the magical, the bizarre, the eccentric, the comical, the exorbitant, the preposterous, the hazardous.

It would be valuable for students to be aware of the opportunities for stylistic variation, and of the idea that texts may diverge from a kind of overly pious, straightjacketed "academish" when the subject matter (or even instinct) demands it. As Scott points out, some knowledges, awarenesses, sensations, thoughts are not best captured, may even be obscured, by a devotion to an ideal of academic writing. This awareness would give added impetus for the concept of regenring (English 2011) – allowing the subject matter and the thinking to mould the form.

In addition, we might note that issues of voice and creativity are perennial topics in academic writing; discussions of risk and experiment may be a sideways entry point into these quite slippery topics.

Such are some pedagogical reflections on risk, drawn from reading Scott, Yerushalmi and Sousanis. A way of ending might be to return to the idea of exorcism, with which we began. An exorcism is not without risk, we observed. But the risk may lie in not knowing what we see. An exorcist's zeal may risk banishing the things we miss as well as those we are sure we see.

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