

The Materiality of Research: 'Writing with Resonance' by Charlotte Wegener and Ninna Meier

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11/16/2016

In this feature essay, **Charlotte Wegener and Ninna Meier** explore the idea of 'writing with resonance' as a crucial yet often underexplored question for academics. They suggest that to write with resonance is to forge a relationship between writer and reader that produces a reading experience capable of inspiring creative production, ideas, vigour and action.

This essay is part of a series examining the material cultures of academic research, reading and writing. If you would like to contribute to the series, please contact the Managing Editor of LSE Review of Books, Dr Rosemary Deller, at lseviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk.

Writing with Resonance



Image Credit: Old Piano Keys ([Stephen DePolo CC BY 2.0](#))

Although a sufficient handful of people apparently think that I have written interesting papers, there is no way I can explain how I might have done what they believe I did, because I don't understand it myself. Thus, my final caveat: If you expect to learn how to write an interesting paper by reading this essay, you should stop reading now and go listen to rock and roll (Barley 2006, 16).

Does [Stephen R. Barley](#) suggest we cannot *learn* to write in ways that will resonate with readers? No. What he suggests is that we may learn more from listening to music than from following a recipe for interesting writing. Over the years, we have listened to music and sought to let it inform our writing, but we have also consulted great writers and asked of their texts: how do you write with resonance? What can I learn from you? And we have stayed at it,

pressed against the bruise continuously (Shapiro 2013), because we knew ‘there is something *there*’ to be explored, as comedian Jerry Seinfeld puts it when he talks about comedy.

As readers, we can often just know when something is well-written and will have an impact on us in some way. We may not all agree, but most people find it quite easy to say whether a text is good or bad or when a text leaves us cold or hot, even though we might have a hard time explaining what exactly it is that puts us off or turns us on. Some texts leave us feeling sick to our stomachs (consultants’ evaluation reports often have this effect on employees), angry and pacing up and down the floor (if we disagree with the writer) or emotionally touched by a sentence, a situation or a story that ends up staying with us for years (novels and poetry often have this ability). Being able to do this holds a potentially very powerful key for all writers, and academics should be no exception. Academic writing is *the* method of dissemination and potential impact, yet paradoxically how to write with resonance seems to be the most under-appreciated question in academic life and work.

To remedy this, we wrote a paper in which we explore our own moments of resonance during encounters with great texts. ‘Writing with Resonance’ is built around letters we wrote to each other about reading and listening experiences that have resonated with us and furthered our research and writing.

We chose to share reflections and experiences usually left out of academic papers because we want to demonstrate three main points about resonance: 1) you cannot deliver resonance, you can only accomplish it with your reader through the potential relationship you offer with your text; 2) resonance arises from the *combination* of the writer, the text and the reader; and 3) a resonant encounter results in a surplus – it makes the reader *do* something that consists of, but is more than, the sum of the parts.

Perhaps this surplus is exactly what makes a text resonate with us, formed by whatever experiences we carry with us into the reading of the text and what it makes us want to do. Thus, a text that allows for resonance is not solely a transfer of knowledge. It sparks ideas, vigour and action. If this is so, then this is what we need to acknowledge as we write to achieve impact: the way we write influences not only the reception of our papers, but also what people will do with it. In the paper, we refer to the young Danish novelist Josefine Klougart, who writes of rereading the French writer Marguerite Duras. Her first encounter with Duras ten years earlier had been instrumental in her decision to write, and even in getting a sense of what writing means. Klougart tells us about this encounter with a voice that resonates with her (translated from Danish):

Duras introduced me to a voice I could trust. A voice which made me think that literature first of all is borne by a voice that you simply believe in. Deceitful and affected, plain and waffling, but always in some way present and consistent, maybe in its discontinuity and/or abruptness always a voice you feel safe about because it has a kind of authority which cannot be ignored. A voice which can do everything – and the things it cannot do becomes insignificant to the reader at that moment (Klougart 2014).

This is indeed a moment of resonance. Klougart describes how this experience of resonance influences her own writing. She is staying at a writing refuge to undertake a final edit of a newly finished novel before it goes into press but instead finds herself ‘irreverently’ rereading Duras (switching between different novels, reading only parts of chapters) and writing new documents herself. She returns back home with an almost complete manuscript for a new novel. She did not spend as much time as planned on the editing, but instead she creates something new by making Duras’s texts resonate with her during her own writing. This is what an encounter of resonance looks like to us: a reading experience that provides the power of creative production in its light.

Klougart writes fiction, but in academia this can almost feel like cheating: exploiting another person’s text and using your writing skills to engage readers, as if your *own* skills and your *own* scientific contribution was not enough in itself. However, when we connect our experiences to each other and to the writing of other scholars, we place them

in a space of appearance: we make them public, sharable and thus potentially powerful (Arendt, 1958). We make it possible for readers to recognise them as truly human and genuinely academic. They strengthen our ability to convey in writing not only *how* and *that*, but also *what it is like* (Worth, 2004). This is a first, important step in our work to develop a new academic writing practice which we call 'Open Writing' – writing practices that take on the challenge of achieving impact in practice and put emphasis on the variety of ways we can write with resonance.

Charlotte Wegener is Associate Professor at Department of Communication, at Aalborg University. **Ninna Meier** is Associate Professor at Department of Sociology and Social Work, at Aalborg University. They have been co-authors and writing friends since their doctoral studies. Since then, they have written about and explored writing in several ways. They seek to expand academic writing as both process and product, for instance by involving other modes of expression such as fiction, music, blog posts, dreams and standup to mention but a few. Specifically, they aim to make academic knowledge production more democratic, open and fun. Read more by [Charlotte](#) and by [Ninna](#).

This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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