

Writing representations to life: higher education and the production of equity realities

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This paper deconstructs the often 'taken-for-granted' character of categories, classifications and representations that haunt higher education equity research and writing. It argues that there are no innocent representations. Instead, representations are part of the *production* of divisions: of how categories, classifications and groups are imagined. Far from an objectivist account of 'the real', the category used to represent is a performance of its own production. To speak or write the category is to bring the category into being, making possible particular forms of understanding, knowledge, action and practice.

This paper explores how these lead to forms of 'representational violence' in two forms. Firstly people are grouped into representations that are conducive to the 'dominant imaginary' (Lumb & Bunn 2021). In these, people are constructed by the most convenient forms for their control, measurement and regulation. Secondly, representations are produced through and between people in dominant positions, including policy-makers, researchers and institutional executives. This means that the very people *being* represented by a category rarely have the opportunity to be involved in the category's construction. The paper thus concludes on the need to take the work of representation within equity writing seriously. Ignoring the need for radical deconstruction of categories as a part of equity writing, research and practice is very likely to lead to perpetuation of dominant representations that perpetuate cycles of inequality.

Keywords: representation, equity, writing, higher education

Introduction

This paper explores how equity research and writing produces representations of groups of people. It deconstructs the seriousness of the ‘taken-for-granted’ character that haunts categories, classifications and representations in higher education equity research and writing. It explores how writing in equity research and practice in higher education is an expression of ‘different visions of division’ (Bourdieu 1987, p. 13) and their consequences for equity, equality and social justice. This makes equity writing a deeply political affair. There are no innocent representations. The representations that we take up, that we enact and perform in our writing are part of making them real. Our writing conveys and legitimates the representations we select and carries forward the inertia of their histories. Yet, there is a substantial body of language, terms and concepts that are used to represent the mission of equity and widening participation that too often go without interrogation. The way inequality is represented *matters* and contributes, for better or worse, to the perpetuation of inequality.

Representations are part of the *production* of divisions: of how categories, classifications and groups are imagined. They limit and delimit, they *make* the divisions, and subsequently, the ways that these are acted upon, how they are practiced and how they are habitualised. Representations inevitably leave something, or someone, out. They require a generalisation of a certain characteristic, trait, belief or practice. Far from an objectivist account of ‘the real’, the category used to represent is a performance of its own production. To write the category is to bring the category into being, making possible particular forms of understanding, knowledge, action and ultimately intervention.

Writing is but one instrument in the production of representations. There are numerous ways in which representation is made, remade and circulated that include the media, policy and polling. These serve as the basis for ‘symbolic manipulation’ that ‘tends to be monopolised by specialists in representation – trade-unionists, politicians, state managers, pollsters, journalists and intellectuals’ (Wacquant 2013, p. 276). But the focus on equity writing here is a crucial one, as it is one of the key instruments that equity researchers and practitioners have at their disposal to do their own work of symbolic manipulation. There is a substantial power in the way in which concepts and categories of equity establish the dominant characteristics of recognition of a group of people. The domination of the production of representations is even more exaggerated when we consider that marginalised groups have these representations *constructed about them* without their inclusion in their production. It reflects a colonisation of representation so that certain ways of being are never codified, never *known*, other than through autocratic systems constructed for knowing social groups, communities and people through a narrow, convenient and often politically useful construction.

Equity writing resides in a dangerous space in the work of producing representations. Equity research is ‘implicated in the work of group-making’ through its adoption in governmental policy, often to produce the effect of a ‘falsely rationalised vision of their rule’ (Wacquant 2013, p. 277). The representation of the very issue of equity is produced as something that can be quantified, managed and fixed through the implementations of rational controls, despite the significant body of research demonstrating that this method itself is part of the legitimisation of inequality (Burke 2012; Bourdieu 1996). Equity research is at the heart of this concern, as it is one of the key rational machines used to demonstrate the reality of equity, to measure equity and to demonstrate *change* as interventions are enacted. Dominant classifications and representations tend toward a neutralisation of the relationality of systemic inequality through this rationalised vision and perpetuates instead understandings of inequality that promote it as an unfortunate but inevitable side-effect of modernity, or worse still an individualised failure of

self-production. These representations tend to draw on notions of meritocracy (Littler 2018) to imply that higher education is a fair and neutral system that rewards hard work, merit and aspiration.

The example I draw on is the representation of the socio-economic other – a group alternatively recognised in some form of overlap with low socioeconomic status, working class, marginalised, underrepresented, non-traditional and first in family, along with a series of unofficial and derogatory terms (for example see: Pini & Previte 2013; Threadgold 2018). But of all these (and despite my strong preference for class and class analysis), there is a need to understand the way representations are made from social positions of authority to *constitute* a representation as legitimate. One of the difficulties in this constitution is that *only* a narrow aspect of personhood pertaining to higher education participation is represented, typically excluding the broader socio-structural conditions by which these divisions are made. It also hides from view the alternative personhoods and values that individuals may not be willing to simply leave behind. Moreover, this narrow vision allows for the assumed superiority of the values enshrined in higher education. As Skeggs (2004) alludes to, deficit representations of working class values are part of a historical inertia that has continually depicted cultural, if not biological *inferiority*. At the very best, the working class can be righted through the moralist intervention of their cultural superiors. When categories and representations favour or are favoured by the dominant, they invariably do violence to the interests of the dominated. It highlights the importance of these representations, especially when we consider who has the *power* to make representations stick.

Equity writing can challenge these representations. Burke (this issue) presents a much more profound set of possibilities for how to offer counter-hegemonic approaches to equity writing than this paper can fully offer. However, the notion of radical doubt (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) is offered as a tool for making such a challenge. Rather than looking for an answer ‘out there’, radical doubt looks towards how our own socialisation into historical, taken-for-granted representations need to be continually deconstructed. An uncomfortable task, but one that is part of the responsibility to representation in equity writing.

Representation

Representation ‘is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events’ (Hall 1997, p. 17). In contrast, we don’t have the ability to communicate through a detailed description of each and every thing. For, even if we tried, we would have to rely on generalised ideas and concepts to understand what the describer was trying to communicate. Representations are made around common features or likenesses, but it is also possible that the thing in common would not be the most appropriate representational association. Hall (1997, p. 17) uses the example of planes and birds both having the quality of flight, but also must keep in mind that they are distinguished by one another by other characteristics (for example man-made machines versus organic beings).

Writing is a process of representation. It represents a world that you, as the reader, interpret, subsequently providing some sort of information and knowledge about it. As the writer, I anticipate that the reader can decipher my meanings: the words, assemblages, tone, style and so on. These all are built as I write, around what I expect people can and cannot interpret. This can be constantly modified in different texts, for, as I write toward different audiences my style can be changed. I can expect familiarity with concepts in some places, while need to explain them in others. The representations that are selected entail a historical context: we are embedded in a moment in time where certain things make sense to talk about, to analyse, and to represent.

Representations are embedded in long histories, but can be both fluid and monolithic. If in 2017 I was talking about the effects of COVID on higher education, no one would make sense of what I meant. Yet even now, this simple term can be written here with the assumption of a deep sense of my intention.

Representations are necessarily exclusionary – they include the practically relevant aspects required for communication, interpretation and knowledge. However, we don't often dwell on what is being excluded: if someone tells me to get milk, I don't think through all the things that I won't get, or why I wasn't expected to go and milk a cow (goat, soybean or almond) myself. These are functionally invisibilised. However, this functional invisibilisation has a politics attached to what is practically, and what is politically, excluded or alternatively made visible. From the outside, representations seem like they are fairly stable. They don't need to be unsettled for the most part. Most categories, terms and concepts that represented the multitude of differences and similarities of our world at least seem final. Up is up, down is down. Birds aren't crickets, and so on. This position is part of a dominant, or hegemonic representation that is linked with the epistemological dominance of modern science (Santos 2014). This hegemonic vision envisions that we are sensorily (or via instruments and technologies) experiencing the real, and what is being represented is a reflection of this reality. The ordinary representation that science provides is the ability to refine and improve representations in order to bring them in alignment with reality. The things of the world are assumed to be measured more and more accurately and new instruments can be built to inspect otherwise hidden dimensions of their nature. But there are contestations of this approach to knowledge and representation. Different forms of representation, the things that appeared rock-solid, become more ephemeral and porous. From a constructivist perspective these representations are arbitrary human categories for the purpose of having knowledge about them that have been arrived at over long periods of struggle and contestation.

The production of reality and the power to constitute

When we write, we are not just reflecting reality, but taking part in the historical struggle over its construction. Writing in the research and advocacy of equity in higher education is part of this struggle for what representations are used, who they represent and how the problem of equity is construed. Far from an objectivist account of 'the real', the category is a performance in its own production. To write the category is to bring the category into being, and allows particular forms of understanding, knowledge, action and ultimately intervention that can be conceived only in and through the way in which representations include and exclude.

What we consider to be social reality is to a great extent representation or the product of representation, in all senses of the term. And the sociologist's language plays this game all the time, and with a particular intensity, derived from its scientific authority. In the case of the social world, speaking with authority is as good as doing: if for instance I say with authority that social classes exist, I contribute greatly to making them exist. (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 53–54)

The researcher writes with the authority that allows for an ontological slippage from a thing named to a thing that the reader takes to exist. It is writing *as if that is the reality of what is being written about*. The authority of writing, through style, data, references to support and sustain, peer review and publication, encapsulates a social and political history of constituting academia as both authoritative and legitimate. This authority is produced through social closure: if everyone had the capacity to write and produce in these forms, then no one would have the authority they produce. Expertise and authority are *scarce* and remain so to protect their claims

to legitimate expertise and authority. It is an act of collective ‘illusio’ over the wielding of this symbolic power that is maintained through the critique, support, defence and so on that remain within the academic game. This allows for a representational legitimacy and authority that, through its ability to act ‘without concealment’ demonstrates the backing of an authoritative group that provides the power ‘to constitute and impose reality’ (Bourdieu 2018, p. 77).

Equity research is constituted through this form of authoritative legitimacy. It allows for equity researchers to constitute the ‘problem’ of equity, whether it is through ‘aspiration’, ‘success’ or the type of ‘equity category’ that an individual fits to (or at least is fitted to by the representation). There is a narrow group of representations that are considered legitimate. We can chart the emergence of this in the context of equity in higher education in Australia with *A Fair Chance for All* (1990). This report was released over three decades ago and put into motion formally recognised equity groups. Since this moment, despite contestation of the categories, these must nevertheless be understood as the dominant representations of what counts as equity, what counts as being equitable and what interventions are legitimate. Equity research hence starts at any point with the historical legacy of the constitution of what equity is, what matters and what does not, who is included and who is not. Authority is hence established only insofar as equity research remains part of this ‘dominant imaginary’ (Lumb & Bunn 2021) and placed coherently within the historical constitution of legitimate equity representations. The further an alternative knowledge or representation that might be offered moves away from legitimated representations, the less likely it is to be recognisable as bearing the marks of authority and legitimacy. The representations that are recognised can in turn expect to be legitimated as we invoke them only insofar as both the writer and reader share in a *recognition* of this order. Subsequently, the representations in my writing say as much about my own social position as does the thing that is being represented.¹

Coming to terms with the responsibility of representations in writing must continually be confronted within the power that instils its authority. This is challenging because dominant representations retain an *ease* in their invocation. Alignment with the dominant account of reality creates far less symbolic and affective resistance. Unfortunately, innocence to these paradigms make them no less efficacious: ease is formed through the frictionless causality of the dominant imaginary, as it is a privileged misrecognition of the stakes and effects of representation. As Bourdieu (1986, p. 257, n. 18) neatly summarises, ‘innocence is the privilege of those who move in their field of activity like fish in water’.

The ease of accepting dominant accounts of reality is also owing to their account at least partially reflecting a general experience of reality. If, for example, I propose research on equity and continually refer to people as ‘low socioeconomic status’ (low SES) it may well pass without too much interrogation. There *are* people who have far lower ‘socioeconomic status’ than others. We are likely to see in this representation at least a partial, if not fairly well-developed account of reality. They are concocted through policy, research and law, and formed into a *legitimate* category through scientisation and research. This allows for ‘low SES’ representation to subsequently be measured, valued, quantified, and *acted upon*, subsequently confirming its legitimacy as an account of reality. This becomes a representation that researchers, policy-makers, administrators, institutional leaders and executives, the architects and architectures of

¹ Bourdieu (2020, p. 253) demonstrates how tricky it is to explain this problem: ‘this representation of others is a function of the position that the person representing and the person represented hold in the objective space’. The representations, classifications and categories are produced in the synchronicity between position and disposition and are thus as much about the values, principles etc. that a person holds as it is about what is sanctioned from within the social space that a given person holds. Or put more bluntly, you are more likely to adopt the dominant imaginary when your authority is constituted by the dominant imaginary.

law and so on can all use to act on behalf of, or toward, a group of people that are seen to belong to this category. It allows for people to be recognised by government and institutions in particular ways, and can then be governed and acted upon through the visibility that the representation produces.

But if I replaced low SES with ‘the proletariat’ or ‘the exploited workers’ in my writing I would expect at least a raised eyebrow. I have substituted a dominant representation with another one that maintains at least a partial overlap with that of low SES. But what is common across these two representations? Is it poverty? Is it that they only own their labour power? Even as I reflect on it, the representational overlap seems to only be at face value. They represent different philosophies that incorporate a much broader view of history and politics. What ‘the proletariat’ may signal is that I am also carrying into this representation a sense of a political history, one that I would expect to be understood as Marxist, and one I would certainly expect demonstrates a sense of a fundamental injustice imbued in the social representation of those being represented. It reflects elements of the relationship that ‘low SES’ people have with economic systems and the means of production that the dominant account of reality does not ordinarily recognise. I would be unsurprised to be dismissed for using this account for carrying such a political position into my work. Using low SES as a representation is easy in the same way that Bourdieu’s fish doesn’t recognise water.

The representation of people as low SES in equity policy could be called an individualised ‘teleological intervention’ in that it assumes that individuals can continually *improve* themselves and that our society is in a process of advancement. But this advancement has not been occurring for low SES people. An intervention can be had where the advancing (or advanced), if not enlightened, bureaucrats, policy-makers, higher education institutions staff and so on can step in and disrupt this failing trajectory and *right it*, turn it back towards progressive improvement and advancement. But say this underlying logic of teleology was substituted here with ‘Sisyphean intervention’. What would that do? If we represented these interventions as a cruel punishment, whereby we continually demand of someone to perform a task of ‘righting themselves’ through a modification and realignment of aspirations that, even in the imminence of its completion, will never be properly completed, what would change? Firstly, there is the more conservative representation that would indeed see this as Sisyphean because low SES people are terminally incapable of these sorts of changes. They are in their situation *because* of their relegation, if not resignation, to this fate. This is present in debates about quality, and the ‘watering down’ of higher education by allowing the low SES to participate (for example see Gale & Parker 2017). On the other, the more critical position would be that ‘yes, it is terminal, because the structures of our society consign people to this fate’. There are large bodies of work that surgically demonstrate how these systems reproduce inequalities intergenerationally (Bourdieu 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). For example, the argument that widening participation has led to deficit constructions of the working class is not new (Burke 2002; Lawler 2005). Nor is it new to argue that this position is held together through an individualising of attributes while neutralising social conditions and circumstance.

This example demonstrates that the wide web of educational inequalities are made invisible to instead focus on personal attributes as *a priori* to the social. Interventions such as ‘raising aspirations’ are predicated on a deficiency in the low SES that can be intervened in through remedial programs (Gordon et al. 2021; Burke 2012). These are often run by equity practitioners who are dedicated to social justice – but are nevertheless based around a rapid injection of middle-class dispositions that would take a middle-class person their young lifetime to attain. They assume the natural superiority of the middle class, and tend to fail to recognise, or at least cannot accommodate, the suffering and class injuries that are likely to be experienced within this

transition – no matter how successful it is. Abrupt transformations are often accompanied by the painful ‘hidden injuries’ (Lehmann 2013) and shame (Burke 2017; Loveday 2015 & 2016) associated with trying to join a space not meant for them (Reay 2017). What this example shows is how these representations become imbedded with philosophies and beliefs that are not necessarily brought to conscious scrutiny each and every time we enact them discursively.

While we can and indeed do contest dimensions of dominant representations, there is an *ease* when they align with a neo-liberal teleological individualisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and psychologisation (Walkerdine 2019). When we adopt strategies for intervention that reflect dominant values, we can ‘fight the good fight’ because we don’t become its casualties. Thus, the most *neutral* condition of higher education is also its most doxic – the innocent ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of liberal subject formation is the basis from which judgement of competence, aptitude and success revolves. Thus, the representation of alternative subject formations is so routinely absent within policy (and to a large extent, research) that it ‘goes without saying’ that this is the *natural way for humans to be*. Thus social justice, widening participation and equity interventions will often be based around the most neoliberal subject within the larger group that is traditionally ‘underrepresented’. Moreover, the more severely marginalised groups are less likely to be both formed and subsequently interpellated by the dominant act of group-making, a point I will explore further below.

Representational violence

Representational violence refers to a mode of separating between necessary exclusion as a part of the formation of representation, and the *violence* in the construction of forms of representation that can be used for the intent to retain domination through symbolic/constitutive power.² It is a violence that means that people do not have access to the constitutive power used to produce representations of them. The representational violence that is contained in equity categories is made invisible in the way that the concept is focused and the way it is deployed discursively.

Those that engineer such policy are also the beneficiaries of the policy, institution and social positions presented as successful, or on a trajectory towards success:

One of the major stakes in these struggles is the definition of the boundaries between groups, that is to say, the very definition of the groups which, by asserting and manifesting themselves as such, can become political forces capable of imposing their own vision of divisions, and thus capable of ensuring the triumph of such dispositions and interests as are associated with their position in social space. (Bourdieu 1987, p. 13)

Higher education is a powerful example of this. It requires a form of success that fits the narrow confines of liberal subject formation: all else – other ways meaning and success could be interpreted are marginalised, ridiculed and subjected to symbolic violence. They are stigmatised. As Walkerdine (2021, p. 63) elaborates, ‘liberal regulation naturalised the bourgeois subject

² Using interchangeable terms to refer to a ‘fuzzy’ concept can be a useful exercise in remaining vigilant in thinking about what the concept is trying to do, rather than getting caught in a dogmatic overture to an authoritative reference. For example, Bourdieu exchanges ‘symbolic violence’ at times with ‘recognitive violence’, which, I find a usefully freeing moment in my own thinking. Here I want to use the concept of ‘representational violence’ as linked to symbolic violence, but also sharing in the meaning contained in other concepts, including epistemic violence, or even constitutive violence. All of these retain shades of unique analytical value, but also bear a common intent.

while pathologizing and regulating other ways of being'. Many equity representations are reduced to a narrow subject, focused only on the attributes relevant to higher education participation as this bourgeois subject. These representations imply *raising* people from their abject condition, one that can be overcome in social mobility (assimilation) into a middle-class form of being. Representation hence focuses on the parts that can be modified or fixed to suit the higher education space and relegates the rest to a social 'background' (see Bunn, Threadgold & Burke 2020).

The case of low SES is a powerful one to understand representational violence. As I have alluded to earlier, there are many coinciding representations of 'low SES'. I used a broader one – the proletariat – but this also shares in the representational space of 'the working class'. For the purposes of this paper, I am using them synonymously, even though they represent important differences. An important shared trait in the representations of this somewhat broad and amorphous group throughout history has been its production by policy-makers, bureaucrats, capitalists and intellectuals. The pattern is a familiar one. Writing the representations contributes to its production as a reality that *excludes* competing representations.

Historically, the working class have been represented within middle and elite culture as inferior. The working class still, today, is broadly represented as abject (Ringrose & Walkerdine 2008; Tyler 2013) and disgusting (Lawler 2005). Class, in these instances, does not need to be always recognised in overt, deliberate ways. It is often enacted through subtle dimensions of the understanding of taste (Bourdieu 1984), of 'affect' (Threadgold 2020) and even the way that a person walks, talks and acts in the world (Charlesworth 2000). Representational violence is exercised through the act of intervention to *reform* an entirely deficit 'culture'. As Skeggs (2004, p. 39) points out, these interventions are 'reliant on the knowledge and "expertise" of bourgeois reformers'.

The danger in writing is that we enact this 'expertise' as part of a continual reinforcement of the representation. There is a real risk that the representation of the 'low socioeconomic status' student as being deserving so long as they maintain the sufficient level and types of 'aspiration' turns equity work into a form of middle-class value production, in that it becomes part of a sense of moral sense and worth, lifting the 'deserving poor' without ever having to acknowledge the power within the ability to assign who is deserving within equity interventions. The supplanting of the eroding 'working class' with decontextualised measurement of the vertical differentiation of wealth, income, status and education is suitable to the individualised, psychologised accounts of the neoliberal era.

However, representational violence marks both the classified *and* the classifier (Bourdieu 1984). Its use simultaneously elevates and distantiates those with the power to constitute and legitimate representations:

This is what the representations of the working-class should be seen to be about; they have absolutely nothing to do with the working-class themselves, but are about the middle-class creating value for themselves in a myriad of ways, through distance, denigration and disgust as well as appropriation and affect of attribution (Skeggs 2004, p. 118).

It is easy to see equity work as simply 'good', but this approach ignores the stakes in struggles for equality. The terms used to represent equity in our writing can be as much about the validation and confirmation of the person with the constitutive power to make representations stick. Notably, claims to practicality that wish to overlook the historical contexts and production

of inequality for the purpose of immediately producing change conceal the way in which representations form part of practice that limit and delimit modes of knowing and action.

Final reflections: Radical doubt and reflexivity

What has been discussed to this point is the difficulty of coming to terms with the way that we write representations when so much of this is established in ways that exist prior to our conscious comprehension; that we feel an ease, a naturalness, when we adhere to the dominant imaginary. It demonstrates the stakes in trying to turn against this current, to feel the weight of the water. While this point can be read as somewhat pessimistic, systems of authority are neither perfect nor complete. Moreover, there are plenty of ways that the improvisational character of people (even when they are trying to be thoroughly conformist) continue to bring new adaptations into the formation of social spaces (see Bourdieu 2000). While these should be understood as part of the dynamic, fluid and adaptive character of power and domination, they always leave the door ajar to resistance, transgression and transformation.

Thus, one of the key tasks of writing in equity research is the need for a ‘radical doubt’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 235). Radical doubt refers to the endless labour of deconstructing even the most innocuous components of our understandings and practices. Though in proposing such a thing, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 235) also acknowledge just how monumental a task this is:

How can the sociologist effect in practice this radical doubting which is indispensable for bracketing all the presuppositions inherent in the fact that she is a social being, that she is therefore socialised and led to feel like a “fish in water” within the social world whose structures she has internalised? How can she prevent the social world itself from carrying out the construction of the object, in a sense, through her, through these unself-conscious operations or operations unaware of themselves of which she is the apparent subject? (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 235).

Unlike ideology, which implies a much more cognitive model, the notion of doxa aims at looking at how we are inevitably produced as people through socio-historical processes (Bourdieu & Eagleton 1992). We cannot not be doxic. Our culture, practices, accents, perceptions and dispositions are built deeply into our understanding both of how to be in the world, and how the world is.

When I consider growing up as a working-class kid, I reflect on just how many stories are told and how many lives that are lived that have little power over the representations that are produced of them. They are grouped according to an alienated representation, rather than one forged through solidarity. Socioeconomic status, to put it bluntly, is a term that sounds like it was made by bureaucrats, for bureaucrats. It does little to incorporate alternative dimensions of representation and attempts to distil the causes, effects and affects of inequality into the most ‘accurate’ – read sterilised – types. Nor does it engage reflexively with just who comes up with these theories, for what audience, and why questions of representation tend to be treated as superfluous. Opting for forms of representation that appear safer, more palatable, or even ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ is inevitably a political act. The terms and intent thus need to be interrogated to consider how they were formed, who was involved, what were the stakes and what were the intentions. Writing in equity requires a radical doubt, a vigilant deconstruction of the minutiae of representation. Working towards counter-hegemonic representations requires a

willingness to be unsettled, and to continually be left in the discomfort of confronting the taken-for-granted. Questions of what is represented in the dominant accounts of value, success and aspiration throw into doubt a substantial part of the orientating power of the dominant imaginary. Writing equity requires a 'patient praxis' (Bunn & Lumb 2019), one that is able to sit within the discomfort of picking apart the taken-for-granted and ease of the hegemonic.

This paper has been concerned with deconstructing the representational violence of writing. It explores the need to critically examine what and how we write, so that we do not fall prey to dominant accounts of reality aimed at invisibilising competing accounts of reality through hegemonic representations. Whenever we try and unearth the challenges of representation, we inevitably draw them back into being as part of making sense of our efforts. They are historically situated, and we can do little but to know the world through them. Representation is a labyrinthine challenge that has no simple answer. It is something that comes from the structural and relational conditions in which we find ourselves. It well surpasses our individual claims to agency, as grand or as limited as they may be. But a continued commitment to a 'radical doubt' can provide a counter-hegemonic rendition. We can write towards the goal of counter-hegemonic challenges, but this will remain uncomfortable and unsettling. It is an endless labour of vigilance and reflexivity in our writing.

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