In the age of untimeliness, I was always writing water.

– Mona Livholts, ‘Writing Water: An Untimely Academic Novella’

I gently touch the water. A swift current caresses my hand, and a sudden cold seeps into my body. The water is very clear. At this angle, I can see the river bed – sand, stones, and moss fluttering in the current. Upstream, the light is intense – sharp reflections on the rapids seem almost brighter than the low afternoon sun. Downstream, the light is gentle – shifting blues and greens reflect the sky and the surrounding foliage.

I sit on a large stone by the river’s edge. Willows and a few aspens line the river bank.

My mind gently floats to a memory of nearly twenty-five years ago. In a yoga class in Pune, India, B.K.S. Iyengar states, ‘Some people say that you must go out into nature in order to grow spiritually – but there are many ways’.

I agree with him – infinite ways. But touching water is an old way – not quite timeless, but ancient, ancient.

1 In a traditional sense, this article can be viewed as an interview with Mona Livholts by John Farrell Kelly, focusing on Livholts’s writing. However, one major theme in Livholts’s work is how mainstream textual forms may dislocate ways of knowing, particularly by marginalised groups, and the need to explore ways of reshaping these textual forms. In light of this theme, we aspire here to gently reshape the traditional interview form in several ways. First, we invite readers to view this article as a coauthored, conversational piece – it was written through a series of email exchanges from our locations in Colorado and Sweden over several months. Second, we integrate modest amounts of creative writing, which is characteristic of much of Livholts’s work. Third, instead of using a ‘question and answer’ approach, we organise this article into several sections with carefully prepared introductions by Kelly and responses by Livholts. Finally, we have petitioned the editors to use Chicago style (notes and bibliography), which we feel better supports this reshaping.

Denver is a city of contrasting relationships. It is an urban space, but this river runs through it. An architecturally engineered skyline is emerging, but the silhouette of the Front Range stands in the distance.

Conversations between writers and scholars feel essential in shaping writing, scholarship, and ways of engagement with broader communities and environments that facilitate the collaborative development of shared visions.

My first encounter with the writing of Mona Livholts felt unexpectedly timely. I had just submitted my first article—‘Entering Water’, which mixes creative and academic writing—to an academic journal, and I was feeling a high level of anxiety about whether or not it might be accepted and if I could ever find a space in academia for the style of writing and scholarship that I wanted to create.

Then something unexpected happened. I was browsing the Women’s and Gender Studies subject area of the Routledge web site, and I discovered Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies.4

As I read the description and scanned the contents, I felt hopeful that new ways of writing are emerging. In this volume, Livholts assembles a diverse collection of chapters that explore a wide range of discussions about writing, knowledge, and research methodologies:

This volume invites readers to engage in how writing the shape of knowledge in feminist studies constitutes a methodological challenge that has been relatively sparsely elaborated in a field that emphasizes epistemological and methodological critique and renewal. It brings into focus how forms of writing knowledge are becoming increasingly transdisciplinary, transgressing and shifting.5

In writing and editing this volume, Livholts leads a creation of new spaces in academia for new ways of writing and scholarship.

As I explore more of her writing, I begin to gain a better sense of Livholts’s emerging personal style. I feel a deep resonance with her work, and I feel excited to enter this conversation.

Mona: Thank you for inviting me to this conversation on emergent writing methodologies. I feel a resonance with the way you extend movements of the human body to water, the touching and its repercussions for the senses, emotions, thinking, and writing. The architecture of human lives is intimately bound with water through physics and materiality, discourse, and story-telling, and

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5 Livholts, preface to Emergent Writing Methodologies, xii.
I am amazed about the potential of water for writers as an interactive art of seeing: a ‘site’ for writing. Jane Rendell has beautifully developed ‘site-writing’ as a space for the critic to engage with the material, emotional, political, and conceptual practices of research:

Site-Writing explores the position of the critic, not only in relation to art objects, architectural spaces and theoretical ideas, but also through the site of writing itself, investigating the limits of criticism, and asking what it is possible for a critic to say about an artist, a work, the site of a work and the critic herself and for the writing to still ‘count’ as criticism.6

When water is my vision, my sight, I write the most amazing, untimely stories, including ‘Writing Water’.

When you refer to my leadership and the creation of new spaces in academia for writing, I find it important to view this process as part of a critical and creative methodological movement. I have been able to build on what other scholars, including many feminist postcolonial writers, have already paved a way for. The establishment of an international research network – the Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies (R.A.W.) – was only possible because of their earlier work.

Entering Conversation

The R.A.W. network coordinator, Mona Livholts, invites researchers to publicly staged interviews in the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair to talk about the academic, personal, and political contexts of their academic authoring.

— Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies7

John: I am interested in the practice of conversation as a methodology and, perhaps, as a fluid form that emerges and is preserved (or fades) in various sites and textual mediums. One site where you have personally facilitated several conversations over the years is the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair – a periodic activity of the Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies, which you coordinate.

7 The site for the Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies is in the process of transferring from Mid Sweden University to Linköping University.
Some of these conversations have been preserved, in part, as more traditional written academic texts – for example, your interviews with Nina Lykke\(^8\) and Raewyn Connell\(^9\) are published in *Feminist Review* and *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*. An additional dialogue that you facilitated (outside of the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair) with Carol Lee Bacchi\(^10\) is published in *Feminist Theory*.

Other conversations that you have facilitated in the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair were invited to be viewed as ethnodrama: Sissel Lie – *The Writing Body, Dreams, and Change* (2009); Masoud Kamali – *Writing Against Discrimination* (2010); and Bob Pease – *Writing the Social: Writing for Change in a Socially Unjust World* (2011).

Over the years, it appears that you have managed to integrate a practice of conversation into your own broader academic activities in a rather elegant fashion.

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Figure 1  Mona Livholts in a conversation with Nina Lykke\(^11\)

Mona: One of the major driving forces for establishing R.A.W. was to enter conversations. I wanted to create a space where ‘writing’ was a topic, an intellectual practice. When I founded the network, I created a sign with the words: ‘A Network – A Meeting Place – A Stage – A Book Corner’.

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\(^11\) Livholts, ‘to fill academic work with political passion’, 138.
It was very important for me that the shaping of the network would make it possible to support a variety of communicative forms through writing as textual staging, to reach new audiences, and I began to (re)furnish campus spaces. I had dreamed of running a book shop, because I found Swedish campuses poorly equipped in this sense. So I began by putting up shelves and placing some of my own method books in the corridor outside of my office. I used some of the initial funding for the network to buy books by members, and some members would bring books as a gift. Once I displayed the books, I found that they spoke to me in a different way. Coming to work in the morning, I felt welcomed by the sound of writing, by multiple voices and rhythms of wording. I created a kind of ‘home’ for myself as an academic, I think. This led to the creation of a ‘citation exhibition’, where I collected citations from books and put them on the walls in the hallway and stairs at the department. Every day I noticed something new in these citations, and colleagues and visitors would pay attention to the exhibition.

I also thought that lecture halls had the potential to be used in new ways. When I arranged the first R.A.W. Event in March 2008, I considered how difficult it had been to plan the event and challenge some of the mainstream forms of presenting academic work. In the course of planning the event, I found furniture in the cellar space at the department, a sofa and two blue chairs, which I decided to use to furnish the R.A.W. stage. I then came up with the idea to introduce the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair for publicly staged interviews. I had already worked on a project where I took interest in the writing of other feminist scholars and, as you mention, completed an interview with Carol Lee Bacchi. However, I then thought that it would be really interesting to work on interviewing with an audience present and to ask some of the questions that I often thought about. By the time of the inaugural R.A.W. Event, I created a performance piece where I was sitting in one of the chairs with a book in the other, reading a letter to a friend:

Dear Maj,

I am so sorry you couldn’t come to the R.A.W Event, and I hope we can meet and talk soon. ...

When I walk in a gallery, looking at paintings or other works of art, I feel that an artist who has left a piece ‘untitled’ has created a space of the unnamed for me to interpret. I see this as an invitation to a dialogue, which I understand as a process of interpretation that has no end. If I return to the same work of art on another occasion, I may see other things. The conversations I have, the texts I read, and the landscapes I pass through constitute the in-between the painting and myself in that moment, altering my seeing. I wish for a continuity of the character of R.A.W. Events that presents itself as a painting untitled. For the next Event, I have a plan to furnish the stage with the R.A.W. Chair. The R.A.W. Chair would be a place for dialogue about academic authoring, asking the questions that are rarely being put to academics and producing endings that may not be untitled, but unexpected: Which one of
your publications do you think has been the most challenging to write, or perhaps, which one do you feel a commitment to in a way that you do not feel for the others? Have you ever asked someone you trust to finish your manuscript for you if something would happen to you? How do you perceive the conditions of writing academic texts in the society you live in right now? What were the reasons behind your choice to become an academic author?

... I am so much looking forward to continuing our conversation about these issues, and I think I dare to say, that despite the problems of ruling lecture halls and endings untitled, it has been a great first day at R.A.W. Event 1, an event to be continued.

Love, Mona

As you so well describe, John, this event became a series of interviews of which only some are published. I am truly grateful to the scholars who generously shared their time and engagement to enter into these conversations with me. I found an interesting dynamic developed with the presence of the audience in the room. These publicly staged interviews were truly an exciting experience for me, but much more challenging than I expected. The interview I completed earlier with Bacchi, before I began to invite scholars to the publicly staged interviews, demonstrated some of these challenges. It took me years to finish this interview and to publish it. I was taken by the things Bacchi had written, especially in her memoir on mothering, and what she told me in the interview. I gained insight into the complexity of interviewing and found it difficult to do justice to her knowledge and work. It was also difficult to find journals to publish the interviews, because I wanted to theorise my ‘findings’. Journals tended to look upon single interviews as ‘just interviews’. It was actually in the process of theorising the interview with Bacchi that I developed the idea of post/academic writing. I also used this theoretical framework to frame the interview with Lykke.

A thread leaping through all of these publicly staged interviews is the passion that these scholars express for their work and for social change. An unexpected experience was when I read a selection of the literature of each scholar and found how their texts in various ways made such an impact on me. There was a great diversity among the scholars I interviewed. Some had published non-academic works, such as plays and memoirs, while some wrote according to recognised academic style conventions. I discovered this diversity of styles within acknowledged mainstream writing and the emotional impact of this diversity. I also realised how emotional it could be for an author to read a text they had written. Interviewing is truly an art, and I think we should use university lecture hall stages much more actively.

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13 Livholts, ‘To theorize in a more passionate way’.
15 Livholts, ‘to fill academic work with political passion’.
We should pay much more attention to the role of academic audiences and open up to extend spaces in-between communities and universities. I also think that the diversity within academic audiences is underestimated. As is well recognised in academic work, the division between academic life and society is not self-evident and clear cut! Not least, many students were relieved to learn about the struggles and many years it had taken for some of these authors to write their books, which later became influential and path breaking texts. I look upon these interviews in the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair as installations, as performances. However, I have learned that live performances tend not to ‘count’ yet if you are a social work and social science scholar.

Texts in Conversation

The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. ... Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations.

– Graham Allen, Intertextuality

John: In addition to discussing your efforts in facilitating conversations in the R.A.W. Dialogue Chair, it is interesting to think of your efforts in writing and editing Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies as facilitating a network of textual conversations.

In your introduction, you set broad themes for chapters in the collection to speak to in diverse ways, and you organize and preview these chapters in ways that signal readers and guide our engagements with the text. In the first four sections of your introduction, you develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for engaging this volume – and I would like to briefly mention a few highlights.

In the first section, ‘Relocating Dislocation in Writing’, you note the exclusion of some writing methodologies in academia and invite a creation of new spaces:

Dislocation referred to the way in which creative, reflective, and experimental writing methodologies have tended to be marginalized or even excluded from academic space. ... Relocation referred to the creation of a meeting place that placed these methodological issues at the focal point of dialogue, reflective practice and collaboration.

You further note a concurrent epistemological marginalisation: ‘A central issue here is that mainstream textual forms are often related to a system that privileges certain kinds of knowledge over other, subjugated knowledge’.\textsuperscript{18}

In the second section, ‘The Untimely Resistance of Post/Academic Writing’, you discuss theories of the untimely in the work of Elizabeth Grosz,\textsuperscript{19} Hélène Cixous,\textsuperscript{20} and your previous writings, and you develop a theoretical relationship between post/aademic writing and the untimely:

The term \textit{post/academic} writing can be used to illustrate a contemporary condition of critical, creative, and multiple and shifting movements of interdisciplinary writing. ... Such writing styles consider the outcome of writing as a product of the \textit{untimely}; that is, change is understood as delay, dislocation, and lateness with unfinal endings.\textsuperscript{21}

In the third section, ‘De-hegemonized and Intersectionalized Writing’, you discuss the work of numerous theorists, including a decolonialist science of Gail S. Canella and Kathryn D. Manuelito\textsuperscript{22} and the intersectional work of Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana,\textsuperscript{23} and you note that ‘intersecting dimensions of power are intimately related to methodologies of textual forms, and that the exclusion of certain ways of thinking about the world is intertwined with this’.\textsuperscript{24} You also discuss the performative autoethnography of Tami Spry\textsuperscript{25} and the memory work of Frigga Haug\textsuperscript{26} and note that ‘de-hegemonizing writing and locating the body and society as entangled and extended entities have been elaborated in ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches and memory work’.\textsuperscript{27}

In the fourth section, ‘Writer, Reader, Audience’, you link to themes discussed in the first section and develop these themes to include theoretical discussions of reading and audiences:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
Relocating dislocation in writing also applies to reading. It is linked with the untimeliness of how certain texts are placed so that a reader happens to see them, pick them up and begin reading. The outcome of reading is not known, and never the same, but it does have the potential to evoke change in the life of the reader.\(^{28}\)

Again, you discuss the work of several theorists and writers, including the scholarly autobiography work of Margaret K. Willard-Traub\(^{29}\) and the ‘non-academic’ writing of Epeli Hau’ofa.\(^{30}\)

In the fifth and final section, ‘This Volume’, you develop a three-part thematic organisation for the book and preview each of the twelve chapters: Part I: Politics, Ideas, Thinkers; Part II: Privilege, Power and Subjugated Knowledge; and Part III: Imaginative and Poetic Spaces, Readers and Audiences. As the book concludes with attention to relationships with readers and audiences, it may be appropriate to note a passage from Dawn Mannay’s recent review in *Gender and Language*: ‘when I began to read the text it went beyond a purely academic engagement and felt almost like coming home’.\(^{31}\)

Mona: As I read your words about *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, the first thing that comes to my mind is that I believe that this volume benefits very much from the tone(s) that streak through the different chapters. As Leavy so vividly describes, when method meets art, researchers ‘compose, orchestrate, and weave’ their texts.\(^{32}\) I think this is what the authors in this volume do.

When I wrote the introductory chapter, I was guided by the sound of writing in the various chapters in the book; I listened to the multiplicities of voices and the rhythms of the writing to develop writing methodologies for social justice in intersectionality studies. I find it increasingly important, as Hau’ofa argues, that we should listen to textual shaping and think about the effects. What do you hear? This is particularly relevant when writing about power. When I read the first reviews by Mulinari and Rendell, which are published on the back cover of the volume, and the recent review by Mannay, I am very pleased that they take notice of this listening and tone in particular.

‘Relocating dislocation in writing’ is an expression I built on from the Women’s Worlds conference theme in 2008 to communicate that R.A.W. is part of an emergent movement for more structural changes in academia. In 2005 I made a decision to leave the institutionalised context of gender studies and return to social work as a basis for my daily work, but I was really


looking for alternatives to both of these disciplinary fields. One of the main reasons for establishing R.A.W. was to create a space for scholars who wanted to explore beyond their current disciplinary settings and who wanted to experiment with new ways of writing to contribute to new types of knowledge.

I was taken by Mannay’s words that the volume took her beyond the purely academic and that it felt almost like ‘coming home’. I was curious to read some of Mannay’s writing, and I found her engagement with creative and critical academic work, but I also found anger and dispute over ways in which some academic contexts tend to make jokes of poor and marginalised people. Some of ‘them’ are in the room as Mannay reminds us – something I have experienced many times and still experience. This is partly why social work is such a challenging disciplinary space to be in that always needs to be critical and reflexive about the risk of also reproducing otherisation, including examining how ‘clients’ and marginalised people constitute the basis for ‘social workers’ in a very paradoxical way through language and in institutionalised settings as well as NGOs.

I very much like how you introduce this section in our conversation with attention to intertextuality and the role of reading in the shaping of textual relations. For a long time I have been resistant to identify readers, which is a problem in current institutionalised authoring, which is expected to be quick, to the point, foresee readers, and generate citations. When it comes to my own published work, I have been surprised to learn that readers are increasingly appearing in unexpected fields, such as architecture, art, and design. I definitely look upon my

own writing as intertwined with other texts; otherwise it would not be possible. However, for me using a variety of forms of writing is a way of creating movement, to look at things differently. I would say that poetic writing and the theatre most strongly have the potential to communicate social injustice and to promote agency for change. Audre Lorde’s poetic writing is amazing, and I often return to her powerful and engaging texts on intersectionality.

John: In addition to facilitating a complex network of textual conversations in *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, you also demonstrate an emerging personal style of untimely, post/academic writing in your trilogy of untimely academic novellas – ‘The Professor’s Chair’, ‘The Snow Angel and Other Imprints’, and ‘Writing Water’ – and I would like to explore each of these novellas further in the next few sections of this article.

A Chair of One’s Own

*The crouching fearful character, who had its home within the white walls of the corridors, was ready to announce its existence as a thinkingwriting subject.*

– Mona Livholts, ‘The Professor’s Chair. An untimely academic novella’

John: Early in ‘The Professor’s Chair’, Mona reveals an unexpected desire to her friend Maj in a personal letter: ‘A persistent thought has taken root in my mind and I cannot get rid of it even in my I sleep. I want to become a professor!’

But Mona is ambivalent throughout this letter, in part, due to a sense of a danger in academia: ‘It is true you see that academic life may cause serious illness’. Part of Mona’s concern arises around the activity of academic writing:

The way academics write provides the basic ground for creating collective belonging and identity. However, I have discovered that the strict academic format prevents developing new knowledge and I keep asking myself: what is the alternative?

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37 Livholts, ‘The Professor’s Chair’, 156.
38 Livholts, ‘The Professor’s Chair’, 157.
40 Livholts, ‘The Professor’s Chair’, 157.
‘The Professor’s Chair’, itself, works as a very elegant alternative. Structurally, the piece consists mainly of lyric elements, narrative elements, and personal letters – however, an introduction situates the text in a theoretical and literary context and signals the academic reader to expect something different:

It can be described as critical reflexive writing strategy inspired by poststructuralist feminist theory and literary fiction. ... In particular, it draws on work by the theorist, critic and writer of fiction, Hélène Cixous, and the feminist author and theorist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, drawing on interpretation of Cixous’ essay ‘Enter the Theatre’ and Gilman’s story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’.41

A ‘Reflections’ section follows the main text and further develops theoretical and literary contexts. These contexts center around the work of Cixous42 and Gilman,43 and expand outward to include the work on theorising letters of Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley,44 the memory work of Frigga Haug,45 and the autobiography work of Christine Overall46 and Margaret K. Willard-Traub.47

I am engaged by numerous elements of this story, and I am haunted by one image:

In a circle, a group of women sat on the cold concrete floor with their legs crossed. Text strips were attached over their eyes and mouths. ... Would she join the circle of ignored, ran down, invisible? If so, the next generation would be forced to pass through so many women’s bodies and lives during all the hundred years to finally become professors.48

Mona: Thank you, John, for your reading of ‘The Professor’s Chair’ and for allowing me to return to this text, although I must admit it is a challengingendeavour!

When guided by you to re-visit some of the scenes in the novella, I think about the multiple stories behind writing it and how it is bound with a much longer process of life writing and attempts to move my authoring into a literary genre that gradually turned into scholarly autobiography.49 The early attempts to write ‘The Professor’s Chair’ consisted of a draft for a criminal story about death, intrigue, and power struggles set in a university. These attempts

41 Livholts, ‘The Professor’s Chair’, 155.
42 Cixous, ‘Enter the Theatre’.
45 Haug, Female Sexualization.
46 Christine Overall, A Feminist I: Reflections from Academia (Toronto: Broadway Press, 1998).
48 Livholts, ‘The Professor’s Chair’, 159.
49 For further reading about this term that I think very well describes my intention of textual staging for critical work see Willard-Traub, ‘Scholarly Autobiography’.
went on to parallel the writing of my dissertation (1997–2001), but weren’t successful. I could not fictionalise the story well enough and gradually transformed it into ‘notes from academia’ that eventually became ‘The Professor’s Chair’.

I remember how Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ made an overwhelming impact on me when I first read it and how it helped to shape the mood of ‘The Professor’s Chair’. I had already used Cixous’ ‘Enter the Theatre’ in my dissertation, and combining these two texts created a framework to design my autobiographical story. I joined a feminist writing group (2005–2007) with untimely academic novella writing as a project, and the first version of ‘The Professor’s Chair’ was published in Swedish in 2007.50

I remember that despite the fact that I chose to publish it, I thought it was a failed project. I felt very tired, self-indulgent, and ethnocentric. I was critical of the ways I failed to address multiple power relations and my own privilege.

Later I had the opportunity to go to the Centre for Narrative and Auto/Biographical Studies in Edinburgh and present ‘The Professor’s Chair’ as a paper. The Centre is led by Liz Stanley, who has developed amazing work on auto/biography and life writing. Her support was very important for me then and throughout the writing of the trilogy. I received a very positive response, and within a few years (2010) it was published in the journal Life Writing. I am not sure why I felt so different about the text then, but I think that although it is challenging to write in English, for me it was liberating that no one in my near surroundings would take interest in what I wrote if I published internationally. I hoped for unexpected readings and have always done so with all three novellas; citations or confirmation was not the goal. I had changed perspective on readership and thought that every reader counts. I was honoured to be read and receive commentaries on ‘The Professor’s Chair’ by the other scholars that published in that issue of Life Writing.

However, there was also another underlying reason for writing this first novella. Like so many people, since I was young I had used writing to ‘document life’:51 I wrote letters that I never sent to communicate the messiness, misunderstandings, and injustices of everyday life; I wrote poems to speak about things I found difficult to bear; and periodically I wrote a kind of diary to scribble down notes when things happened that I did not want to forget. Sometimes I thought of this writing as ‘evidence’ to support my version of a story, should there be a need for it. I grew up in a rural environment, which made outdoor landscapes, fields, and the working body part of my self-perception.

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When I entered academic spaces, I found it challenging, with the architecture of indoor landscapes, rituals and codes for communication, and the denial of the working body. In my view, textual design is a part of a textual politics that shapes thinking, and my view as a newcomer was that these textual qualities tend to force research into simplifications. The citation from the opening line in ‘The Professor’s Chair’ that you identify is an expression for critical interrogation of the conditions of academic life through writing. For a long time, I wrote ‘The Professor’s Chair’ through emotions of anger and shame. Anger about injustices related to racism and sexism and classism in society and academia. Shame that my writing revealed constant doubts of being in the wrong place, and shame to insufficiently combine work and motherhood and social relations. Even shame that I was marginalised on the grounds that my work was regarded to be so different. However, I never claimed I am outside of the discursive production of power, and inspired by Foucauldian notions of productive power, I recognise my own agency and resistance in these power struggles.

The symbol of the chair itself needed poetic writing to be transformed into something that could be formulated ‘aloud’, and the letters to my friend made it possible to speak past the institution and even the wider audience, revealing things that one would only be able to say between friends. The potential of the letter to speak about personal things in public is fantastic. I also think that these letters appear in a somewhat old-fashioned style in contemporary society’s flow of communication.

In ‘The Professor’s Chair’, as with all of my untimely novellas, I attempt to challenge a view on social change as linear and something that can be planned by experts, which is one of the dilemmas in many areas of social work that mainly build on ideas of ‘progress’ for interventions. The writing of these untimely academic novellas can be described as writing from within the discipline of social work that questions dominant ideas of the shape of knowledge for social work. I think that alongside the practice of engaging the major challenges of the worldwide increase in unequal living conditions and the impacts of globalisation, critical social work scholarship needs to challenge the mainstream shape of social work and explore the link between questions of social justice and writing. Writing ‘The Professor’s Chair’, and perhaps more so for ‘Writing Water’, is also a way of addressing the fact that the image of Swedish society as one of the most equal countries in the world makes it very difficult to speak about social injustices, and knowledge producing institutions have important things to say about these


injustices. As I write in ‘The Professor’s Chair’, on one occasion I am told that, unfortunately, it will take at least a hundred years before we have equal conditions between men and women in academia in Sweden. The citation from ‘The Professor’s Chair’ that you refer to that made such a strong impression on you – women sitting on the concrete floor with text stripes over their eyes and mouths – represents symbolic institutional violence. In a wider perspective of social injustice, I wanted to link the force of language use and power to speak to people who perceive social injustice as a part of their everyday life by saying that during their lifetimes there will not be social justice.

**Bodies and Landscapes**

*A bodily imprint; white on white.
Creation of the timely; dissolvable by time.
Translations of body and landscape.*

– Mona Livholts, ‘The Snow Angel and Other Imprints: An Untimely Academic Novella’

**John:** The second novella, ‘The Snow Angel and Other Imprints’, is similar structurally to ‘The Professor’s Chair’ in its use of lyric elements, narrative elements, and personal letters, and further develops the use of photographic elements as visual representations.

Introductory and concluding sections – ‘Abstract’ and ‘Reflections’ – again serve to situate the main text in theoretical and literary contexts. As in the first novella, these contexts centre around Cixous’ ‘Enter the Theatre’ and Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, and also include ‘methodological approaches in the humanities and social sciences, such as theorising of letters, memory work, and narrative, and autobiographical approaches’. In the ‘Reflections’ section, however, a more complex theoretical context is developed that includes detailed discussion of geographies, family, whiteness, photography, and writing:

‘The Snow Angel and Other Imprints’ is an attempt to translate the materiality, symbolism, and geographies of class, gender, and whiteness in academia, and to interpret un/homeyness as the movement from rural farming life to academic life.

One way that this translation occurs is through an exploration of the lives of three generations of women. As a reader, I resonate strongly with a theme of ‘unhomeyness’ – a longing for a sense of belonging in landscape, relationship, and academia – a longing for a sense of home.

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54 Livholts, ‘The Snow Angel’, 104.
56 Livholts, ‘The Snow Angel’, 118.
Mona: Someone in the audience asks the question: ‘I would like to know – what is it like to do snow writing?’

I don’t know why the question makes such a strong impact on me at this moment, but before I even begin to think, my arms begin to make the moves I had made lying on the ground, writing snow angels. Receiving this question as a keynote speaker at a symposium in architecture, I try to describe the writing in words as I continuously move my arms in a ‘snow angel pose’. In this moment I realise how writing snow is an embodied experience that cannot be translated into words. I sense the power of the figure, the outdoor weather phenomenon, with its transformative and shifting body, that I have used to create a childhood story.

Snow is very important to me. It represents feelings of dis/location and un/homeliness as a transformative and changing perception. It represents silence and space for reflexivity, but also the great variety of language use that can develop out of the shifts that weather conditions intimately bind with people’s lives. There is a scene in ‘The Snow Angel’ where I sit in the window at my grandmother’s house, thinking about my future. I can only remember that I wanted to leave my hometown to create a working life for myself. But I also remember how the silence and the slowness of social life in the society where I grew up encouraged me to develop my imagination and my thinking.

However, what I did not know then was that entering into academia with this imaginative and creative thinking would be difficult, and result in several movements between disciplines, departments, and universities, and the constant search to feel ‘at home’. In Swedish academia it

is rather unusual to move both geographically and between disciplines, and these movements reinforced my feelings of being different, and also, at times, of letting my children down for forcing them to move so often.

With ‘The Snow Angel and Other Imprints’, I drew inspiration from stories where the main character’s life unfolds through a generational story. I wanted to learn more about the discomfort of spatiality that I felt in academic rooms. I reacted to the sharpness of shadows in the daylight, and felt that I developed a sensitivity for relocating my own dislocation.

It had become obvious to me that the landscape of academic corridors, seminar rooms, and lecture halls made it difficult for me to orientate. I identified the physicality, the colours, and the architecture of buildings as suppressing my creativity and writing. ‘The Snow Angel’ was a powerful project that moved me very much, and I learned from some readers that they found emotional resonance with this text. I used snow writing and photography to further seek out new knowledge about the geographies where gender, whiteness, and class intersect.

‘The Snow Angel’ is the only article that I have published so far that required almost no changes, and I was allowed to publish all of the photographs. I could see how the three generations of women involved in this history embodied particular rural landscapes that I was also a part of. I was able to locate women’s poverty beside men’s wealth in the same family. Most of this text was written during the most snow-rich winter that I have experienced in my life, and in an untimely way my stepfather became ill, which caused my mother and sisters to arrive in the town where I lived. While they went to the hospital to take turns and sit beside his bed, I went to work each day. I valued my office space; I brewed tea for the R.A.W. book corner; and I reconsidered homeyness at this point in my life. I used the imprints in snow, and their ability to transform into ice or water, to reflect on the shifts in my writing and image making and the untimely elements in both my reflexive writing and my life.

Writing and the Body

*Once she allowed herself to feel the rhythms of the water in her bodily senses, movement occurred from within.*

– Mona Livholts, ‘Writing Water: An Untimely Academic Novella’

**John:** I love the above epigraph. It feels like a beginning – a genesis of something essential. I am also very fond of your opening citation in ‘Writing Water’ of Helga Nowotny:

Nobody has anywhere succeeded for very long in containing knowledge. Knowledge seeps through institutions and structures like water through the pores of a membrane.

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Knowledge seeps in both directions, from science to society as well as from society to science. It seeps through institutions and from academia to and from the outside world. The broader context of Nowotny’s assertion also resonates strongly with themes in your writing, including the transgressive nature of transdisciplinarity.

The final novella in your trilogy, ‘Writing Water’, serves to nicely balance a sense of completion with a sense of open-endedness – an uncertainty about the future. One interesting characteristic of ‘Writing Water’ is its situatedness – as a chapter in Liz Stanley’s _Documents of Life Revisited_, it speaks to other chapters in this volume and to Stanley’s opening themes of critical humanism and narrative and biographical inquiry. It also speaks to broader themes explored in Ken Plummer’s _Documents of Life_ and _Documents of Life 2_.

Another interesting characteristic is how you create cohesion for the trilogy by weaving in elements of your previous novellas in a series of revisits, for example: ‘Another revisit concerns dissolvability of the professor’s chair as a carrier and as a structure of the power of privileged mainstream knowledge produced mainly by white men and mainstream research’. In another way, this weaving transcends the novellas: ‘I realize I have been writing novellas over a period of ten years, which have actually led to creating a life story rather than just documenting it’.

In this novella, you approach and describe water writing in several ways, including the following:

Her academic writing was a social justice project beyond disciplines, an attempt to transform academic social work to a critical and humanist-oriented discipline. She saw herself as part of a community of dissident water writers that slowly but consistently changed the conditions of research and knowledge.

As I reflect on your descriptions of water writing, I am drawn to reconsider Donna Haraway’s ‘Situated Knowledges’ and to consider water writing as an emergent style – an emergent

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64 Livholts, ‘Writing Water’, 181.

65 Livholts, ‘Writing Water’, 179.

transdisciplinary theory and praxis that exists in a complex tension and resonance with mainstream research and knowledge.

Figure 4  Water. Photo: Mona Livholts

Mona: ‘Writing Water’ is the most compelling text that I have written so far, and I believe, as you suggest, that it may be valuable to theorise an emergent style of inter- and transdisciplinary writing.

‘Writing Water’ emerged as a result of many circumstances in my own autobiographical history and academic life. When I wrote the first novella, ‘The Professor’s Chair’, I had planned the final part of the trilogy, ‘Writing Water’, to be written after I had become professor, narrating scholarly life and work, allowing for the untimely to evolve. Inspired by Cixous, I wished to explore relations of power and change as untimely, plagued by delays and the unexpected in human relationships. I actually believe that the authoring of ‘Writing Water’ reshaped my life in powerful ways. As you recognise, writing is intimately related to the body, and ‘Writing Water’ is a narrative of movement that works through multiple layers of memories, generations, families, university settings, and struggles.

What I did not see – and I cannot say that it would have changed my choice – was how establishing the Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies and the continuous writing of untimely academic novellas and other texts over the years, which were considered too different and ‘non-disciplinary’, transformed conditions of academic life and the basis for my own scholarship.

68 Cixous, ‘Enter the Theatre’.

http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/writers_in_conversation/

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It is actually possible to say that ‘Writing Water’ is ‘The Professor’s Chair’ in ‘real’ academic life.

With these stories, I attempt to say something about how the dissolving of disciplinary boundaries, the inter- and transdisciplinary features of my academic scholarship, goes beyond recognition of established disciplinary traditions in social work and in the social sciences. In other words, ‘Writing Water’ creates distance from traditional recognition and leadership as a professor of social work, and perhaps even as a professor in the social sciences. This is what I experienced in a Swedish context.

Writing water is for me bound with ‘a methodological movement, which reshapes conditions of knowledge and human life simultaneously by re-writing its expressions’.\(^69\) I wish to acknowledge how the personal, family, and society interact in writing, so that movement that occurs from within is also very much about how I live my daily life informed by my relationships, in particular with my three sons. Without them there would be no writing water.

I must say that one of the most difficult things about writing autobiographically and touching layers of complexity in the intersection of personal and academic life was to be able to say something about how my passion for academic work and my struggles influenced my personal life. Another aspect was that I felt, and still feel, that it is difficult to speak about the injustices and dispassions in academic life. In regard to my sons, my academic life shaped their lives; it caused geographical movements, separations, and changing schools – as well as it opened new possibilities. I tried many times to write about some of these effects on my sons, but it is not until ‘Writing Water’ that I actually said something about them. I asked my sons for permission to write these things, but when the text was published I found it terribly difficult to handle that I felt I had exposed them after all.

\(69\) Livholts, ‘Writing Water’, 178.
\(70\) Livholts, ‘Writing Water’, 186-7.

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In the age of untimeliness, I was always writing water.
For the love of my sons, I became a water writer.
With the passion to transform knowledge for social justice, I am writing water. ...
For the son who is an image writer and defends the right for boys to cry, I am writing water.
For the son who is a diary and letter writer and struggles against exclusion from society and family, I am writing water.
For the son who is a fiction writer and resists violence by not using the master’s tool to bully, I am writing water.\(^70\)
Open Water

Or something is untimely not only to the extent that exerts forms of the past in the present, but perhaps more interestingly and in less secure and predictable mode than an exploration and revivification of the past is the ... leap into the future without adequate preparation in the present, through becoming, a movement of becoming-more and becoming-other, which involves the orientation to the creation of the new, to an unknown future, what is no longer recognizable in terms of the present.

– Elizabeth Grosz, ‘The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory’\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fremont-lake.jpg}
\caption{John Farrell Kelly swimming in Fremont Lake, Wyoming. Photo courtesy of Tom Brown.}
\end{figure}

\textbf{John:} I am interested in discussions of untimeliness – theories of the untimely.

For Cixous, the untimely is linked with solitude as ‘the most incontestable example of the tragic’,\textsuperscript{72} misunderstanding, and the pain that occurs from delayed understanding: ‘the lateness, the too late, the lag, the untimely arrival of the message. ... The tragic is the insurmountable anachrony: the missed appointment.’\textsuperscript{73} However, for Cixous, there is also the unexpected: ‘hazard,

\textsuperscript{71} Grosz, ‘Untimeliness’, 48-9.
\textsuperscript{72} Cixous, ‘Enter the Theatre’, 26.
\textsuperscript{73} Cixous, ‘Enter the Theatre’, 26.
chance, a grain of sand in the works: the possibility that the tragic programming will break down, the grace of a totally unforeseen development.\footnote{Cixous, ‘Enter the Theatre’, 27.}

In addition to exploring Cixous’ theories of the untimely, it is also interesting to take up Grosz’s sense of the untimely to view your trilogy of untimely academic novellas. From this theoretical perspective, one way your trilogy demonstrates untimeliness is in its sustained attention to Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, a story that is over a hundred years old, which you revive, integrate, and reconfigure in a contemporary context and form.

However, aligning with Grosz, perhaps a more interesting and ‘less secure and predictable mode’ of untimeliness is how your work leaps into the future – how it becomes-more and becomes-other – something difficult to recognize, accept, and celebrate.

I find this leap to demonstrate tremendous courage.

\textbf{Mona:} On a few occasions when I have been invited to be a speaker, I presented myself as an ‘untimely academic novella writer’. I found it amazing how this re-naming of ‘who I am’ in writing opens up for different kinds of performative acts and more interactive conversations with the audience. I learn much more academically and analytically when this mode of theorising sets the scene.

I think it is interesting that you talk about \textit{theories} of the untimely, and although I touched upon this earlier, I wish to emphasise how important I think it is to theorise writing. The meaning of \textit{untimely} is, of course, not invented by me, but the usage that I have developed, inspired mainly by Cixous, is new. As Grosz also so thoughtfully brings up, feminist theory needs to be untimely in order to ask new questions! This does not imply sameness within a particular conceptualisation of writing, but a way of making new writing legitimate, to relocate dislocation in writing, to make a claim that writing counts as a methodology for new knowledge to emerge. It is ultimately about changing discourse. When mainstream writing is allowed to perform without examining why language and texts are shaped in a particular style, scholars who practice new forms are often questioned. This resistance is similar to what I have experienced in feminist, gender, and intersectionality studies when they were ‘new’.

\textbf{Courage is needed when it comes to moving beyond the comfort zones of mainstream and traditional forms of expression.} As you mention, Grosz talks about how untimeliness requires the ‘less secure and predictable’, so I would say that bodies who conduct untimely writing should be prepared to take risks and not to expect acknowledgement and confirmation, but even to expect degradation of their work. This may be a contradictory and discouraging thing to say, not least in the light of my own work to some extent now becoming more acknowledged. However, as many scholars who have paved ways for new thinking and writing may have experienced, acknowledgement is not how it begins or even ends.

\footnote{\textit{Enter the Theatre}, 27.}
John: An invitation for courageous new beginnings in writing and scholarship feels like an
appropriate way to end this conversation – for now. Thank you very much, Mona, for your
collaboration on this article and for your broader work. It means a great deal to me.

Mona: Thank you so much, John. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have this
conversation on emergent writing methodologies. Your engaged reading of my work and the
thoughtful writing of entrances for me to build on have opened spaces for further untimely
writing.

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Imprints: An Untimely Academic Novella’ (International Review of
Qualitative Research); and ‘Writing Water: An Untimely Academic
Novella’ (in Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical
Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism).

John Farrell Kelly studied literature, theory, and writing at the University of Hawai’i Maui College
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Shamanism’ (Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality); ‘Creating Ceremony: Healing the Spirit
of Suicidal Veterans’ (Transnational Literature); ‘Things I Carry: Technologies of a Homeless
Veteran’ (Transnational Literature); and ‘Finding Water: Developing New Research Approaches in
Suicidology’ (Liminalities).

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