

# FOREWORD

## L'avant-coup

*Jane Rendell*

### L'avant-coup

So here, once again, we have two places, two epochs, and two processes. The conscious and the unconscious, the past and the present, the anticipatory event (*l'avant-coup*), and the retroactive attribution of new meaning (*l'après-coup*). However, an analysis of the German term *Nachträglich* shows that it contains two ideas. On the one hand, the idea of coming at a later date and, on the other, the idea of a supplement. In other words, between two psychical events, I and II, the second is recognised as having a connection with the first, to which it now gives a fuller meaning that its initial, isolated, memory-trace suggested. So, retrospectively, II gives I a meaning that only existed in a state of virtuality, but which was by no means bound in advance to take this direction, among the other possibilities in a polysemic context. The progression of meaning involves, then, a return backwards in time which adds, retroactively, to the content it had initially, as well as a choice 'fixing' one of the various possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

### II

16 July 2015, 12:29

Dear Jane,

I hope you are well. I am able to glean bits of your news from P.A.! I have spent the last few years having babies (two girls), but am now enjoying getting back into the swing of making and thinking.

I am putting together a book proposal at the moment, with a friend of mine (Katja Hilevaara) for an edited collection which brings together samples of creative

modes of critical enquiry. Much like the brilliant ‘-writing’ event that you organised in 2010, we would like to ask a range of interesting people, mainly practitioners, to offer a piece of writing (which may include or consist of film, image, sound) that they have had fun producing but that also does some kind of critical work in itself. Really we would like to bring together a range of models of writing (in the loosest sense) by practitioners who are thinking about their own work or work that has inspired them. One of my main motivating forces has been my experience of giving a yearly talk to postgraduate students about using performative and other modes of creative writing in their theses and drawing together my own examples of work (by experts as well as recent graduates and emerging artists) to show as examples. Your *Site-Writing* book is at the top of my list – I have now recommended it to so many MA and PhD students that I’m getting predictable! During her PhD research (in the field of performance studies), Katja explored the criticality inherent in the act of responding creatively to a performance, and she too began to gather a prolific yet diffuse set of creative-critical writings across artistic and other disciplines. There does not seem to be a collection that offers a range of examples of such writings (in the way we’d like), so we want to put one together. We are in discussion with Routledge, who have shown interest. We are thinking of calling it something like ‘The Creative Critic: writing as/about practice’ but have made no decisions yet.

We were wondering, then, if you might make a contribution (however small) to the collection or perhaps (and I feel rather bold asking this) consider writing the foreword? You have inspired me in so many ways and your writing has been such an important, empowering part of my research journey that I would be honoured. We can send you the book proposal when I have finished putting the finishing touches to it, mainly firming up who the contributors are.

We would also like to ask your permission to approach several of the people from the ‘-writing’ event that you ran to contribute to the collection? There was such a rich range of inspiring presentations that day (already five years ago) but it was very much your event and all the people there had a connection with you so I would not want you to feel I was poaching! We will, of course, acknowledge the event in the book.

Anyway, I hope you are enjoying the summer and having a break (of sorts) or at least getting to do the work you really want to do.

Sending warm wishes,  
Emily (and Katja)

27 July 2015, 09:02

Dear Emily,

How lovely to hear from you!

I think about you often and wonder how you are, and I’ve had a little news through PA too.

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Massive congratulations on becoming a double mother: two daughters – that’s wonderful!

Your book project sounds excellent; such a volume is most definitely needed! I am rather over-committed right now, so nervous about saying yes to a chapter, but a foreword would be an honour.

And please feel free to contact the other authors from the *-writing* event . . . it would be great to get some of the geographers involved since there is often an unhelpful disciplinary split between place-writing and art-writing, and actually we have a lot to learn from each other especially regarding the different relation we have to our ‘objects’ of study.

Very best wishes, and I hope we meet in person again before too long!

Jane

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But whatever I have said cheerfully and confidently to Emily in my email, I do feel a little nervous. A foreword? How to write into that border between the outside and the inside of the book? Perhaps I could write a kind of paratext?

Lovely of Emily to check with me that I don’t mind her contacting the presenters from *-writing*, how typically thoughtful and considerate.

A kind of paranoia is often with me these days, as I have somehow become the oldest rather than the youngest at the conference, on the podium, in the book. I seem constantly anxious that my earlier work is getting lost. I’ve seen this kind of behaviour before in other older academics, feminists amongst them, and in the past found this need for recognition unappealing in its self-regard. It’s not ‘just’ paranoia though; some of my best ideas have been purloined and remain out there on the internet in someone else’s website uncited. I know too that this is not only my experience, that – ‘seeing your work live on in others’ – as the Guerrilla Girls liked to put it, is a condition of academic womanhood (and malehood too, but usually less often). And in general my work is treated with respect and referenced in a way that balances my own, sometimes obsessive, citation in my writing of those others who I come after.

So why this rather unpleasant need to hold on to what has gone before . . . Why worry about possession and authorship? (It must have something to do with the ‘lost object’, it usually does, I’ve found.)

Isn’t writing something to share? Isn’t that what I believe in? In writing together? Collectively?

Isn’t writing something to let go? Is any word, or combination of them, really mine to possess in the first place? Didn’t Mallarmé suggest that when we write, we are to cast our words adrift, off to sea in a bottle, for whoever may or may not come to find them?

When did I stop being the one who comes before, who is anxious to get noticed, and start to become the one who comes after, who expects to be recognised?

Maybe I can write a paratext embued with this kind of temporality . . . a writing before and a writing after?

**Note**

1 Green (2002: 36).

**Reference**

Green, André. 2002. *Time in Psychoanalysis: Some Contradictory Aspects*. Translated by Weller. London and New York: Free Association Books.

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