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RESEARCH ARTICLE (PEER-REVIEWED)

Re-Imagining the Research Article: Social-Semiotic Signposts and the Potential for Radical Co-presence in the Scholarly Literature

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Abstract

As a prestigious form of writing, the empirical research article is vital for communication, assessment and legitimisation of community-based research and practice. Yet, the research article is powerful partly because it draws upon social-semiotic conventions for the proper communication of new knowledge and practice, which are deeply and thoroughly embedded within institutions of higher education 'dominated by technical rationality', as Donald Schön (1995, p. 31) stressed nearly 30 years ago. This inherent tension is an important, but under scrutinised and underutilised, site of engagement for community-based research.

This article sheds light on what genre conventions are, why they are important, and how they might be used and adapted to better support the collaborative, reciprocal and justice-focused change goals of community-based research and practice. Using genre analysis and social semiotics, I undertake empirical analysis of co-authored peer reviewed research articles to reveal authors' innovative rhetorical strategies. By uncovering the emerging shared patterns – what I call here the symbolic 'signposts' for communicating participatory research – I hope to strengthen them collectively. Building on these embryonic efforts, and informed by Santos's (2018) concept of an 'ecology of knowledges', I propose some alternative signposts for reciprocal and non-hierarchical recognition.

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These social-semiotic guidelines seek to ensure that diverse ways of knowing and being are not merely accommodated within our texts, but are radically co-present.

Keywords

Participation; Peer-Reviewed Empirical Research Article; Genre Analysis; Ecology of Knowledges; Social Semiotics

Introduction

The empirical research article is a form of genre writing. Indeed, genre analyst John Swales (2004, p. 217) has described it as 'this prestigious genre, with its millions of exemplars a year'. Within the English-language academic publication of both natural and social sciences, where much of the dissemination of community-based research occurs, to write a research article is to broadly follow well-established and familiar conventions of form. Dominant, top-level conventions influence features such as the order, naming and combination of specific sections, the use of references to the literature, and the inclusion of tables and graphs in particular sections. These genre conventions are consistently present in articles across these disciplines (Lin & Evans 2012). Most journal editors, reviewers and readers will look for and expect to see these '*conventionalised associations of conventions*', as Atkinson (1999, p. 8, italics in the original) describes them. Undoubtedly, these *semiotic* conventions of the research article are profoundly *socially* significant.

Yet, therein lies the difficulty. As a prestigious social-semiotic resource, the peer-reviewed empirical research article is vital to the critical and communal documentation, assessment and legitimisation of community-based research and practice. At the same time, this resource is powerful, at least partly because it draws upon social-semiotic conventions for the proper communication of new knowledge and practice which are deeply and thoroughly embedded within institutions of higher education 'dominated by technical rationality', as Donald Schön (1995, p. 31) stressed nearly 30 years ago. There is an inherent tension here for community-based research and practice which, conversely, has been described as 'research that seeks both to challenge and provide an alternative to externally led and expert-driven research' (Janzen & Ochocka 2020, p. 5). This is an issue of material concern, for it remains the case that too often in journals, but also in scholarly books (and, to a lesser degree, conferences), there is a diminution and erasure of the diverse ways of knowing and being that contribute so substantively and consistently to the research itself. This marginalisation affects community-based partners certainly, but also university-based students and staff (Koekkoek et al. 2021; Sandmann 2019; Santos 2014).

This article is critically and practically focused on this important, yet under-scrutinised and underutilised, site of engagement. While there is an abundance of knowledge and analysis of genre within its associated fields of linguistics, rhetoric, critical discourse, etc, to my knowledge discourse analysis has been only infrequently considered by community-based researchers (O'Meara & Niehaus 2009; O'Meara et al. 2011). This article seeks to shed light on what genre conventions are, why they are important, and how they might be used and adapted to better support the collaborative, reciprocal and justice-focused change goals of community-based research and practice. I argue that without critical awareness of these powerful conventions of form, authors risk undermining their work in the very act of sharing it with external audiences. Moreover, there are significant benefits to be gained from not only understanding genre theoretically, but also discovering empirically how co-authors in the field currently use these semiotic conventions. To do so, I draw on research undertaken for my recently completed PhD thesis as well as new analysis I have conducted for this article. I outline some of the major ways in which published co-authors are using, modifying, adapting or rejecting the standard form of the research article in order to respond to their diverse community-based purposes, contexts and methodologies. By uncovering the emerging shared patterns across individual efforts – what I call here the 'signposts' of authentic community-based communication – I hope to strengthen them collectively.

The purpose of this research article is thus twofold: one, to analyse how community-university co-authors of empirical research articles currently use and modify some key genre conventions; and two, building off those emergent yet institutionally fragile innovations, to propose some alternative social-semiotic signposts for critical, collaborative and change-oriented scholarly communication and dissemination. In fact, this discussion comes with a proposal: that there is ample room – indeed, need – for peer-reviewed, co-authored empirical research articles that are deliberately experimental, innovative and imaginative in their form and intent. The key question here is: what might a peer-reviewed, co-authored empirical research article look like – what would be its social and semiotic conventions – if we were to seek not just accommodation but radical co-presence?

To frame this discussion, both of what is and what could be, I begin by briefly introducing social semiotics as a theoretical and analytical approach to understanding meaning-making in our texts. Next, I outline the exemplary work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018). His proposal of an 'ecology of knowledges' imagines diverse ways of knowing and being engaged in dialogue and dissent, while resisting the reimposition of hierarchy or false unanimity. My empirical analysis of current practice follows, finishing with a more exploratory consideration of the ways in which an ecology of knowledges might be made material on the page, proposed as a wager on a better world for all.

A note on the author This article is offered as a contribution to the critical conversations on knowledge democracy and participation in the scholarly literature that are undoubtedly underway globally. Technological innovations in online publication have a vitally important role to play in increasing participation, such as with the creation and sharing of open-source software and the development of open access and self-archiving institutional repositories (Abbott & Tiffen 2019; Piwowar et al. 2018). This potential is clearly greater when harnessed to social purpose. I was interested, for example, in a recent editorial by *The American Historical Review*. In it, the editor argues that if the journal is to 'rectify decades of exclusionary practice [it] requires more than a well-intentioned commitment to diversity", which consists primarily of adding extra flavours to the stew' (*Future Issues* 2018, p. xiv). The journal's response, as detailed in the editorial of the following year, was to adopt an 'ecumenical approach to form' (From the Editor's Desk 2019, p. xviii). The editor was able to point to new sections featuring contributions in a range of formats: essays, interviews and podcasts, as well as reviews of non-traditional historical material such as films, graphic histories, public history sites and historical fiction.

I am the Executive Editor of *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement,* and PhD student at UTS Business School. In a recent editorial, I somewhat similarly traced the journal's evolving use of the metaphor of the 'global research table' from its potential to argue for the legitimacy of non-disciplinary-based experts having a seat at that table to an emerging appreciation of the dangers inherent in this same metaphor, of an 'already-made destination, a place at which community-based research arrives' (Malone 2022, p. 4). I reflected that this rhetorical framework risked perpetuating the very thing the journal sought to challenge: an uncritical acceptance of a hierarchy of what constituted valid knowledge, the criteria by which it is recognised, and the purposes for which it is shared. That is, of an institutionally ordered space at which diverse 'others' are accommodated and integrated, but rarely acknowledged as being *present* (Visvanathan 2005). This article is, in part, a response to that reflection: a critical examination of the research article, whose powerful conventions are resources we can use to modify, reject and transform these hegemonic metaphors.

This discussion draws primarily on my PhD thesis and is intended for a wide audience. But unquestionably, it is reflexive of my editorial work. As an editor of long-standing, steeped in the genre conventions of research writing and the processes of academic publication, I very much include myself in this exhortation to greater critical and action-oriented awareness.

Multimodal social semiotics and genre: A brief overview

In order to make any claim about the social salience of signs – be they speech, text, image, art, dance – there must be some sort of theoretical framework accounting for the relationship between signs and the world. In this, my work is deeply informed by social semiotics and critical discourse analysis. As social semioticians Kress & van Leeuwen (2021, p. xiii) argue, 'meanings are made in social action and interaction, using existing, socially made, semiotic resources that change ceaselessly in their use'. Further, this motivated sign-making responds to and is shaped by '*environments of communication*' which are marked by differences in power (Fairclough 1993; Kress 2011, p. 209, italics in the original). For discourse analysts and social semioticians, among others, the semiotic resources authors utilise in texts such as the research article are powerful precisely because they influence 'the distribution of social goods', such as authority, relevance, credibility, legitimacy (Gee 2014, p. 10). Through systematic analysis we can gain clear insights into how texts do this: how they help shape access to and exclusion from these social goods.

Genre thus provides an important site for critical analysis of language-use-in-the-world. In her early influential article, Miller (1984, p. 151) argues for an understanding of 'genre as social action'; an evolving communal response to the challenge of communicating in recurring social situations. Subsequent research further supports an understanding of genre as socially and historically situated; generative and underspecified; and involving both competence and performance (Devitt 2015; Swales 1990; Tardy & Swales 2014). Atkinson (1999, p. 8) writes that genres 'provide answers to the fundamental human question, "What is going on here?"'. His observation once again points to the *social* significance of *semiotic* conventions. Genre is deeply and dynamically interconnected with what is at stake in society at large, and perhaps this is nowhere more so than the research article. When Wallerstein and Duran (2008) argued that community-based participatory research is an intentionally critical approach that seeks to engage with questions of knowledge, power, relationships and agency in order to effect positive social change, they may well have had in mind the empirical research article as a key site for that engagement.

In this article, I focus primarily on two key conventions of the research article: the Introduction and the organisation. Swales (1990) first revealed how the Introduction in natural and social science articles normally follows a three-step move: establish the research territory; establish the gap; occupy the gap. The organisation of articles too follows a pattern broadly emerging from Western experimental science, typically Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion (IMRD), often with a Literature Review before the Methods section. Social semiotician Theo van Leeuwen (2005, p. 126) writes that these overarching genre conventions form the 'structure of the telling of the story'. For Charles Bazerman, another, related way to think about these 'top level' structures is metaphorically: these conventions are the signposts of our 'symbolic landscapes' (Bazerman 1997, p. 19). We may not use these dominant conventions of the empirical research article naively or rigidly, but as signposts or structures to frame 'new knowledge', their use cannot be considered 'an apolitical practice of documentation' (Rhodes 2019, p. 26).

From commodity-based to community-based research

A recent report by UNESCO (2022, p. 44) argues that, if institutions of higher education are to move on from 'bulldozer notions of modernity and ideas of saving the world', it becomes necessary to consider 'what knowledge and knowing are about in the first place'. The report argues that 'mainstream' ideas of knowledge, even when 'recognised as taking different forms', can often remain 'notionally static and measurable – as a "resource", or "asset", or form of "capital"' to be integrated 'in supposedly additive ways' (UNESCO 2022, p. 46). The work of sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos offers a rich conceptual and methodological alternative framework. Across his comprehensive and decades-long efforts, Santos (2018, p. 276) has argued that there can be 'no global social justice without global cognitive justice'.

Central to Santos's thinking is his analysis of the 'abyssal' nature of modern Western thought, in particular science and law, which has rendered other ways of knowing and being invisible, erased, non-existent and thus 'justifying the current state of affairs as the only possible one' (Santos 2018, p. ix). Yet Santos's project is not concerned with establishing 'one more line of criticism' and even less with replacing one hegemonic world view with another, even if now 'subaltern' (Santos 2014, p. viii). Instead, he articulates an expansive understanding of the epistemologies of the South, using the metaphor of ecology as the basis for a thoroughgoing rejection of what he calls the 'five monocultures that have characterized modern Eurocentric knowledge: valid knowledge, linear time, social classification, the superiority of the universal and the global, and productivity' (Santos 2018, pp. 25–26). Instead, he proposes a set of ecologies: 'of knowledges; of temporalities; of recognition; of trans-scale; and of productivities' (Santos 2014, pp. 179–180).

Of these five, the 'ecology of knowledges' is perhaps most relevant for my focus on the scholarly communication of community-based research. Santos defines it as an experiential, pluralistic and pragmatic dialogue that involves scientific and 'artisanal' knowledges. These latter are described as 'practical, empirical, popular knowledges, vernacular knowledges that are very diverse but have one feature in common: they were not produced separately, as knowledge-practices separated from other social practices' (Santos 2018, p. 43). The ecology of knowledges urges the following: to take seriously other knowledge-practices without forgetting one's own; to acknowledge that all knowledges are incomplete, all ignorances partial; and to engage with diverse others in reciprocal and non-hierarchical dialogue and dissent. Only thus can we proceed together. Far from being excluded, modern Western science is a crucial presence in this intercultural dialogue, its contributions vital once understood as being neither disinterested nor universal. In essence, what Santos is proposing is an engagement, *a wager* on the possibility of a better world.

In relation to the research article, Santos's analysis of the abyssal nature of Western thought utterly rejects the metaphor of the research territory as some sort of stable, uncomplicated landscape, able to be called fully into existence through reference to the literature and subjected to 'incremental gap spotting' and gap-filling by new research (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 129). As Grosfoguel (2013, p. 76) writes, the notion of the research territory, so often the starting point for the research article, is based on the Eurocentric 'myth' of knowledge production as 'monological, unsituated and asocial'. Equally, the epistemologies of the South call into question the standard IMRD (Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion) organisation as being fundamentally partial and incomplete. Gieryn (1983, p. 781) writes that 'the special ability of modern science to extend "certified" knowledge [is] a result, in part, of the institutionalisation of distinctive social norms (communalism, universalism, disinterestedness and organised skepticism)'. The IMRD organisation, even if understood as idealised, is nevertheless a powerful semiotic affirmation of those social norms. Here, in countless articles, the production of new knowledge is rendered as ordered, linear, unidirectional, compartmentalised. While not used uniformly or equally across the disciplines, the IMRD organisation predominates in the natural and social sciences (Lin & Evans 2012).

In sharp contrast, Santos's proposal for an ecology of knowledges asserts that research occurs in and with sociohistorical terrains that are neither even nor unchanging nor inhabited by those who cannot think credibly and critically for themselves. In essence, this is the principle of non-hierarchical reciprocity, of radical recognition, perhaps the most profound contribution offered by the long-standing, diverse and growing movement for change that I understand community-based research to be a part of. Extending the metaphor of the wager to the research article, its conventions must (because they already do) involve those with most at stake. The wager calls for social-semiotic conventions that will afford 'the constitutional right of different systems of knowledge to exist as part of dialogue and debate' (Visvanathan 2005, p. 92). Australian ethnographer and linguist Stephen Muecke (2017, p. 1, italics in the original) puts it perfectly when he writes that the task is to find a way to articulate plurality 'without the one cancelling the other out, without cheap relativism, and without that old-style scientific condescension that has "us" acknowledging "their" *beliefs*, while *we* really *know*'.

Santos (2009, p. 117) writes that the implications, possibilities and challenges of an ecology of knowledges only arise when 'the ways of knowing are faced with problems which, on their own, they would never pose'. Our scholarly writing is only beginning to grapple with this, but other genres may offer insights. Australian cultural and creative researcher Ross Gibson offers a vivid example of this in his discussion of *Patyegarang,* a production by Australia's First Nation Bangarra Dance Theatre Company. He calls it a 'choreographed rendition of colonialism playing out on stage' (Gibson 2016, p. 79). History, danced. Reflecting on its implications for conventional written historical practices, Gibson writes: 'What if you encountered history that spurred you to mutter: I was just about to sense that! I was just about to get that feeling!' (Gibson 2016, p. 76). In addition to the experimental, he suggests that what is needed are '*experiential* modes of history. Modes that put you inside and outside the phenomenon that you are seeking to understand' (Gibson 2016, p. 82, italics in the original). The history he envisages is one that seeks to communicate not just knowing, but understanding, too: is technical *and* deeply felt, multiperspectival *and* cohesive. Such a history would pose 'questions concerned not only with detecting *how* vital a force might be but also with detecting how one might get a sense *in the vitals*' (Gibson 2016, p. 83, italics in the original).

Genre analysis of co-authored research articles

To empirically explore the above, this discussion draws on the findings of the genre analysis of 15 articles I undertook for my thesis, to which I have newly subjected six recently published articles (numbered 16–21). All were published in *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* from 2010 to 2022. Authors were from the USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. To be included for analysis, articles had to be community-university co-authored, peer-reviewed and share the empirical results of a locally based community-university research partnership. As a result, many articles were excluded, including sole-authored articles; theoretical articles; evaluations of perceptions and experiences; non-peer-reviewed articles (practice-based and snapshot); and articles featuring other types of engagement, such as volunteering and service-type outreach, and international and multijurisdictional partnerships. Additionally, a number of articles co-authored by university-based partners only were not referenced this discussion, even though they met all the other criteria (and were included in the thesis).

This select group of articles are thus a partial representation only of the full range of partnerships, undertakings, outcomes, author teams, and critical and practical offerings present in the published literature of even just this one English-language online journal. However, given my focus on examining the ways in which genre conventions can both enable and impede participation, this fairly strict criteria enabled a sharp focus on the rhetorical impact of that under-represented and under-scrutinized cohort of contributors to the research literature: community-based partners. There were no peer-reviewed empirical research articles sole-authored by a community-based partner available for analysis in *Gateways* journal (non-peer-reviewed articles, yes).

For each, I conducted careful manual (line-by-line) genre analysis of the above mentioned two key conventions: the three-step move in the Introduction (establish the research territory, establish the gap, occupy the gap); and the overall article organisation (IMRD). For space reasons, I do not provide detail on genre analysis as method, other than to note my reliance on the seminal work of John Swales (1990, 2004) and Dwight Atkinson (1999), in particular. Nor do I include all of the findings (for a full discussion, see Malone 2023). My intention here is to present the major repeated rhetorical strategies which were used across the author teams despite their differences in time and place, focus, content, partnership and methodology. A final article, a small 'snapshot' published in *Gateways* journal in 2019, is used as the basis for the more speculative discussion on how we might build on these rhetorical moves to achieve a more transformative co-presence in our written scholarly texts, as suggested by an ecology of knowledges.

THE INTRODUCTION

The standard procedure for research article Introductions, as mentioned, consists of a three-step move: Step 1, establishing a research territory; Step 2, establishing a gap; Step 3, occupying the gap. This widely used strategy was first revealed by Swales (1990, 2004) and has been confirmed by many others over subsequent decades. It is used throughout the science-based disciplines. According to Swales, among the many minor variations, there are two obligatory features: references to the literature must be included as part of Step 1; and the essential act of Step 3 is 'Announcing the present research' (Swales 2004, pp. 230-232). The major implication of these two obligatory features is to make plain that presenting one's research in the academic literature is to participate in that literature. It is a conversation principally with the scholarly archive. Yet community-based researchers are equally talking with and accountable to other audiences, a socio-cognitive principle which needs to find semiotic realisation. My analysis reveals that authors' engagement with these dominant conventions of the Introduction is not simplistic or passive. Authors modify the three-step moves in three main ways. In the examples given below, Step 1 is in blue, Step 2 is in red, Step 3 is in black.

1. The research territory is established from the outset as engaged, already a space of community-university collaboration. As a consequence, gaps found related to the challenges and potential of community-based research. The specific research being shared responded to that identified gap in the collaborative research territory. For example:

   > *Community-university partnerships (CUPs) often aim to address societal injustices, but in practice are challenged by the same unequal power relations they seek to confront … In this article, we use a relational view of power to examine both institutional and interpersonal levels of power, which are not separate at all, but rather deeply intertwined.* (no. 16)

2. The research territory is established in a traditional top-down manner, often with extensive reference to the literature, revealing a specific community marked by significant need. The next step identifies a gap, as is expected, but it is not a gap *in* the research territory but *of* the research territory. That is, the conventional research territory, established through reliance on external, documented expertise, is found to be fundamentally incomplete. To address this, the research response, by necessity, must be collaborative. For example:

   > *Rural coastal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada, are often cast as victims in the story of the 1992 fisheries collapse that shook the province's foundations (Ref). In particular, the Great Northern Peninsula (GNP) is often associated with high rates of population ageing and youth out-migration (Refs). However, these narratives overlook the GNP's many assets, such as natural resources, social cohesion and cultural heritage (Refs) … In this article, we explore the potential for communities to use storytelling to challenge top-down narratives of rural sustainability.* (no. 20)

3. Just under half the author teams dispensed entirely with Steps 1 and 2 (establishing the research territory and establishing a gap). These authors appeared to consider the conventional research territory a place better avoided; perhaps, a badlands. Instead, these articles began immediately with Step 3 (Announcing the present research) and focused on establishing the authenticity of *the partnership*. In fact, in every article under analysis, authors spent time doing this, but this group did so in the Introduction (the rest generally in a dedicated 'Background/Context' section). This rhetorical strategy featured 'markers of credibility', as I've called them (underlined in the example below), often written in the first person (Malone 2023, p. 124). They included myriad details, such as the location,

project, authors' credentials, partnership arrangements and history, community role/s, funding, size, scale, growth, longevity and future plans. In a couple of articles, authors introduced themselves with a paragraph each. Their inclusion in the Introduction points very strongly to the perceived importance of partnership authenticity as the starting place for undertaking research together in uneven and complex historical terrains. For example:

> *The context for this CEnR project starts with the work of the community partner. The Guelph-Wellington Action Committee on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence (the Action Committee) is chaired by a local violence against women agency and represents 29 organisations from various sectors (including law enforcement, victim services, child welfare, social services, religious community, addictions and mental health, health care and education) within the Guelph-Wellington community, which provides services and support to women and children who have experienced sexual assault and/or domestic violence. The Action Committee has been meeting in different forms for approximately 20 years. It is one of about 48 Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committees (also known as DV3Cs and Violence Against Women Coordinating Committees) in Ontario, Canada, and receives annual funding from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. Some of this funding has been used to create the position of an Action Committee Coordinator, who supports the work of the committee. The Action Committee Coordinator and a representative from Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health (one of the 26 agencies mentioned above) represent the community partners in this community-engaged evaluation research and are two of the authors of this article.* (no. 10).

THE ORGANISATION

Overwhelmingly, each article under analysis utilised the basic organisation (IMRD), although always with some modifications. It was possible to see that different rhetorical patterns aligned with different communicative purposes, shared by authors despite the differences of time, place and context. The patterns to the use of conventions related to top-level features such as the order, combination and size of different sections, subheading variation and the inclusion (or not) of tables, graphs, quotes and references to the literature. Steven Shapin (2018, p. 12) divided his seminal book on the scientific revolution into three chapters that 'deal sequentially with what was known about the natural world, how that knowledge was secured, and what purposes the knowledge served. What, how, and why'. These articles do the same: what, how and why. Broadly, those articles I've grouped as 'what' featured case studies; 'how' related to articles with a focus on partnerships, processes and projects; and 'why' signalled an explicit focus on critical reflexive methodologies. A brief discussion follows.

1. The case study

This type was the most recognisable of the articles analysed, often self-identified by authors as a case study. This group adhered most closely to the standard IMRD organisation and clearly articulated a shared primary purpose: the communication of situated, empirical new knowledge. Notably, the IMRD format was consistently amended through the addition of a 'Background/Context' section immediately preceding the Methods and Results. This section often included the Methodology and the Literature Review. The result – semiotically simple, but socially profound – was the clear assertion on the page of the legitimacy of situated, multiperspectival knowledge, deeply interconnected, rather than simply transitional, across Background/Context-Method-Results. As I wrote in my thesis, these three sections marshalled 'a mass of context-dependent details, covering social, political, economic, geographic, environmental, historical, methodological, evidential, analytical and technical aspects. In every case, two or more different means of gathering data were used, including focus groups, public meetings, interviews, participatory mapping, art-based workshops, questionnaire surveys and kitchen table discussions' (Malone 2023, p. 141). Here, empirical evidence was not extracted from, but inextricably connected to all those, people and place, with a stake in it.

2. Partnerships, processes and projects

The shared focus of these articles was to theorise, analyse and share lessons regarding the processes, principles, characteristics, challenges and benefits of community-based research projects. How collaboration secures knowledge is understood as a research question, with significance for others in different locations, contexts and histories. The conceptual thread running through these articles is the social basis of knowledge production; its semiotic realisation is through communicating the *movement* of research as exploratory and explanatory, relational and systematic. This article's subheadings are illustrative:

(no. 5)
Introduction
The partners
The Building Castles Together project
Analysis of the partnership
- *Mutuality/reciprocity*
- *Interdisciplinarity/diversity*
- *Community integration*
- *Dynamic interaction*
- *Asset enhancement*

Conclusion
Acknowledgements

3. Critical reflexive methodology

Only a very small number of the articles under analysis comprised this last group. Their explicit focus was on a question critical to community-based research as a whole, yet more often left implicit: does collaborative research address issues of social and cognitive injustice, and if so, how? Again, the standard IMRD organisation was used, but this time the critique of its limitations found primary expression by challenging the assumed sufficiency of the Literature Review. Here are two examples used in its place:

A research program on epistemic injustices and participatory research (no. 15)

Surfacing knowledge (no. 17)

These articles also brought the voices of participants into the 'structure of the telling of the story', as van Leeuwen expressed it. Here, with traces of IMRD still present, community perspective and expertise became part of the signposting. An extended example:

(no. 20)
Introduction
Conceptual approach
Rural sustainability narratives on the Great Northern Peninsula (with quote by community co-author, and map of region)
Community-engaged research methods (with timeline and Table of participants)
A deep story of sustainability on the Great Northern Peninsula (with quotes and images)
Honouring the past while looking to the future

Re-imagining the research article: Signposting the radical potential of an ecology of knowledges

While the bulk of the articles analysed fell into the above three broad groups, shaped by their purpose, a handful did not, or did not completely. These scattered, fragmentary examples of alternative semiotic strategies suggested the potential for something else, or something more. That is, in addition to 'what, how, why', the wager. Here, following Santos, I finish with some tentative yet serious musings on alternative social-semiotic signposts to support the articulation of knowledge plurality in our texts without false unanimity or a reliance on hierarchy. These proposals are offered in the first instance to authors. However, ultimately, without a transformation in the institutional space, which includes editors and reviewers, radically different research articles will not often be assessed as legitimate or credible.

To anchor this discussion, I draw on this editor's equivalent of the fish that got away. A few years ago, *Gateways* journal published a co-authored, non-peer-reviewed 'snapshot' article, 'Political economics, collective action and wicked socio-ecological problems: A practice story from the field', by Adams et al. (2019). The article discusses the work of the Victorian Rabbit Action Network (VRAN), first established in 2014 in Victoria, Australia, which developed a unique response to the management of destructive feral European rabbits. At the heart of VRAN's work is a 'systems-based, participatory, democratic approach to strengthening the social systems for tackling problems caused by rabbits' (Reid et al. 2021, p. 352). Their approach has been recognised internationally, winning a 2019 UN Public Service Award in the category of 'Delivering inclusive and equitable services to leave no one behind'. I focus here on the research they undertook at that time (their work has continued to develop, see VRAN 2022), starting with a simple description, based on their article (Adams et al. 2019):

> *The European rabbit was introduced to Australia in the 1850s for hunting. Within a decade, the rapidly growing wild rabbit population was raising alarm. Today, it threatens over 300 vulnerable native species and costs agribusinesses more than AUD$200 million per year. In response to this wicked socio-ecological problem, a publicly funded research project was established to support community-led action in rabbit management. Those most affected by rabbits – public and private land managers, scientists, government officers, First Nations communities and others – engaged in a participatory planning process. A first-person narrative of interview extracts informed a subsequent workshop, which identified their common passions and concerns, the sheer complexity of the problem, the location-specific nature of solutions and the critical role of coordination to help ensure long-term change. These ideas were further developed using rich*

picture maps and complex systems thinking. This process led to the creation of VRAN and a skills-based steering group.

This example stands in for the work of so many others. When the manuscript was first submitted, I wondered if it could be worked into a research article, but, after discussions with the lead author, it became clear that the authors were making a point by deliberately not submitting it to the research section. They were concerned that to do so would have undermined the very thing they had worked so hard to establish: a small 'p' political approach grounded in 'the experience of people at the frontline of rabbit management, with scientific and government expertise regarded as "on tap not on top" (Boyte 2016)', (Adams et al. 2019, p. 6). Perhaps, instead, it is the journal that could be 'worked into' an appropriate place for their work.

The following is an effort to harness all the evidence from the articles I analysed, the conceptual framework that inspired me and the theoretical insights I gained from the social and political potential of semiotic conventions. I propose six key social-semiotic principles for radical co-presence in co-authored texts.

1. *Overall purpose of the research article as wager*

Broadly, co-authors of community-based research submissions seek to authentically and authoritatively present in the text the diversity of ways of knowing and being present in their research partnership, and to do so in ways that do not result in the imposition of hierarchy or false unanimity. At heart, authors are seeking to make material on the page their commitment to reciprocal and horizontal dialogue. Diversity is understood not as a variation on a (universal) standard, but as its own wager on the possibility of a better world.

2. *Specific purpose and partnership authenticity*

Author teams seek to articulate a very clear central purpose, or thread, in their submissions. This may take the form of a research question, or it may relate to an aspect of the partnership, processes, pedagogy or methodology, for example. Justification for the validity and significance of this focus can draw on a range of sources, which may include references to the relevant literature as well as the lived experiences and know-how of research participants. Overall, substantive theoretical and practical justification will be provided: what in participants' diverse sociohistorical contexts does this specific research respond to?

Establishment of partnership authenticity is vital. This can cover reasons for creation, duration, funding, location, focus, agreements, roles and involvement of partners, including community, faculty, staff, students and other agencies or organisations. It may also include details of the disciplinary, professional and community-based expertise, institutional and lived: open the black box of expertise. These various 'markers of credibility' are an important part of establishing the authenticity of the partnership and are understood and valued as such by readers.

3. *Introducing the research terrain*

The conventional research article Introduction follows three key moves: establishing the research territory; establishing the gap; occupying the gap. These semiotic moves are widely used by authors, with modifications. However, authors may seek to displace and decentre, if not replace, the metaphor of the ahistorical and neutral research territory. In uncertain, uneven and complex research terrains, the Introduction for a dialogue-based, non-hierarchical and multiperspectival research article could involve the following alternative three-step moves:

Move 1: Establishing complexity by presenting context without unity
Move 2: Establishing the wager by introducing those with most at stake
Move 3: Presenting the problem, that which sets thinking, feeling, knowing and action in motion

For example: Lisa Adams has written elsewhere that she started by asking, '"How does rabbit management in Victoria work?" No one could give me an answer' (Howard et al. 2018, p. 47). Following this crucial insight, the original research team purposively sought out stakeholders with diverse interests, experiences, expertise and concerns. As a group, they then developed the following wager: 'the hypothesis that sustainable strategies are those created by the people most affected' (Adams et al. 2019, p. 3).

4. The structure of the telling of the story

The conventional organisation of a research article is Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, with variations. This may or may not be appropriate, or it may be useful for just one strand of the manuscript. As with the Introduction's three-step moves, the organisation of a text (through top level 'infrastructure' such as subheadings, the order and the mix of sections) is a resource that can be modified, challenged or replaced. The importance of these semiotic resources comes from what they signal: they are significant metaphors for the larger discourses that the research seeks to be part of and is shaped by. Thus, while the organizational infrastructure can foster internal cohesion, balance, direction and pace, it also reaches out externally to larger ongoing discussions and debates.

One way authors can consider the organisation of their manuscript's content is to think of this overall structure as one of movement. This is always the case, but not always noticed. The conventional arrangement of Introduction-Method-Research-Discussion is linear, segmented and uni-directional. The research journey is presented as one from A to B to C. But perhaps it could be one of A *and* B *and* C, etc. It is the 'and' that can mark this organisational arrangement as an experimental and experiential journey of attachments, so that the point of view changes, challenges and evolves. Of primary importance is that this top-level organisational decision-making is participatory and not out of bounds for non-academic experts.

For example: The original snapshot article described how, based on first-person narratives and complex systems thinking, the research team developed 'rich picture maps' which revealed that 'there were multiple systems depending on whose perspectives, interests, narratives were being shared or considered' (Adams et al. 2019, p. 5). These maps revealed an interconnected problem that was experienced differently at local, regional and state levels. The maps also revealed the depth of local and disciplinary-based expert knowledge, know-how and on-the-ground action underway. Here, the three geographic scales could form the overall structure of the telling, with different sections the responsibility of different individuals or groups, narrated in the first person, if they wished.

5. Voice, practice and empirical material

Following on from the above, a key, ongoing question for authors should be, 'Whose voice needs to be part of this submission?' Second, what kinds of empirical material needs to be included, and how could that be presented? Well-established conventions exist for bringing the world to the text, by documenting matters of fact and stabilising and fixing them in place (such as in tables, numbers, quotes). Authors may consider turning this activity on its head: *to where*, in the research terrain (populated, uncertain, complex), does the text need to travel? Consider what needs to be attended to – seen, felt, counted, heard, remembered, drawn, sung – in order that the reader may fully know and understand a problem, and who should participate as knowledgeable guides in this communicative journey of attachments.

For example: VRAN's wager necessitates the active participation of all those with a stake in the wager. This includes community groups and individuals, private landowners and public land managers, First Nations members caring for Country and burial sites at risk from the burrowing habits of rabbits, government agencies, industry and scientists. Also participating are the rabbits themselves, described as 'powerful agents' (Adams et al. 2019, p. 4), plus the 300-odd threatened species of flora and fauna made more vulnerable by the rabbits' actions (Woolnough et al. 2020, p. 211). This last group of plants and animals, with the least powerful presence, is arguably the wagerer with most at stake in the research. What semiotic resources might best represent them?

6. Authorship

Authorship is understood to be an acknowledgement of, and responsibility for, two main things: an essential involvement with the text (which doesn't necessarily mean with the writing); and accountability as to the wager's integrity. Of greatest consideration is to include all those individuals and/or organisations without whom the manuscript could not have been created. Research partnerships should make their own decisions: there is greater variety than many journal guidelines would suggest. For example, the record for the most authors on a single article is 5154 (Patience et al. 2019). Another, considered response can be seen in a series of articles in which Bawaka Country, in Northeast Arnhem Land, Australia, is accredited as the 'lead Author and an active partner of our research collaboration' (Country et al. 2019). A statement of contributor roles by each signatory and acknowledgements of other contributors are other options (see, for example, Project CRediT (Brand et al. 2015). For a discussion of its challenges and limitations, see Larivière et al. (2021).

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been on the empirical research article as a form of genre writing, and the significance of those institutionalised conventions for the communication of community-based research and practice. Over the past few decades, the English-language scholarly literature on participatory and action-oriented research has grown rapidly, yet there remains a persistent and troubling lack of substantive contributions by non-academic experts in aligned academic journals. One contributing factor, I argue, is the conventionalised form of the research article itself. Those familiar, well-established rhetorical strategies that mark out a piece of writing as a research article carry significant social, political, intellectual and institutional weight. The dominant social-semiotic principles shaping the communication of new, empirical knowledge are often in conflict with the goals and purposes of community-based research. Yet they are not inert or unchanging. As this research into a select group of published articles has shown, co-authors of community-based research are actively aware of their ability to affirm, modify, challenge and reject these dominant discourses through their creative use of key genre conventions. Further research into other types of articles (theoretical or practice-based, for example) would add to our critical and practical understanding of diverse social-semiotic strategies.

These authors demonstrate an awareness of what rhetorician Charles Bazerman (1997, p. 1) wonderfully articulated some time ago: 'Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action … Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar'. I have argued that genre is an important social-semiotic resource for community-based research. It offers a relatively untapped potential for exploring where we are and where we might wish to be. By making material on the page the non-hierarchical reciprocity that is at the heart of many research collaborations, genre conventions can help create research terrains in which the radical co-presence of diverse ways of knowing and being are not merely accommodated but are fully and authentically present.

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