

RMIT University

David Carlin

Encounters with nonfiction and its awkwardness

Abstract:

How does the ‘claim to truth’ of narrative nonfiction affect the way it is read, in a way that marks it out from fiction? What is the nature of the encounter with the real promised by narrative nonfiction, and how can this be viewed as an intertwining of ethico-political choices and aesthetic strategies? This paper enacts a series of encounters with nonfiction, arguing that the awkwardness of the form when it cares more for ‘works of art rather than accumulations of information’ (Shields 2010, 64) is what lends it both its urgency and beauty. The first encounter is an autoethnographic account of a cross-cultural scene of storytelling in Addis Ababa. The second surveys theoretical approaches to the definition of nonfiction. The third offers a case study: some recent works by American lyric essayist John D’Agata and the critical reaction to them.

Biographical note:

David Carlin is a writer and Co-Director of the nonfictionLab in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, where he is an Associate Professor. Previous jobs include directing Circus Oz on New York’s 42nd St, writing and directing award-winning films and plays and a (short-lived) role as the world’s scrawniest department-store Santa. He is the author of the critically acclaimed memoir *Our father who wasn’t there* (2010); his essays and memoir writing have been published in *Griffith REVIEW*, *Overland*, *Victorian Writer*, *TEXT* and *Continuum*. He currently leads an ARC-funded media/design/cultural memory project creating the Circus Oz Living Archive.

Keywords:

Storytelling – John D’Agata – Lyric essay – Narrative – Ethics

This essay presents a series of encounters with ‘nonfiction’. My argument in brief: the thrilling thing about nonfiction is its awkwardness. (Even its name is awkward: does it live with or without a hyphen?)

First encounter (storytelling)

The impetus for this paper came to me when I was sitting in a backstreet family restaurant in Addis Ababa. The restaurant was closed for a week during the time of the funeral of my friend Sosina’s father. I was there doing a research field trip for the nonfiction book project I’ve been working on with Sosina – a negotiated memoir, I have called it (Carlin 2011).

These observations then, we might say, are autoethnographic: I was sitting having lunch with Sosina’s brother Jonathan and a group of eight or so young men, Jonathan’s friends and relations. Lunch today was *injera*, as usual, but with a creamy vegetarian *wat* (sauce) and cabbage dish instead of the usual meaty fare.

‘Why are we fasting today?’ I asked. (It wasn’t the usual Wednesday or Friday.)

The explanation embarked upon by one of the men, Andnet, and translated for me by Jonathan, began like this: *The sky and earth were fighting. God created Adam and Hewon...* and proceeded from there at great length. (People still have time to talk over lunch in Ethiopia.) The details of the account were quite precise but in being so were sometimes challenged by the other guys, one of whom more than once called up expert advice – from his girlfriend or his sister, perhaps – on his mobile phone, so as to bolster his position in the argument.

It struck me as I listened to them and feverishly scribbled down notes that the long answer to my question was not to them metaphorical but literal: an explanation of the facts behind the nature of today’s lunch. I am an atheist; to me the Christian God is a convenient and comforting (for some) mythological construct, rather than the founder and ruler of the universe. But they weren’t trying to persuade me of their faith, or sharing their beliefs: they were simply talking nonfiction.

Anthropologists might, in earlier times at least, have considered this type of discourse a ‘mythology’. For hundreds of years white people have been studying black people and the funny things they say. But my hosts turned the questioning back on me. When they found out that I had no religion and didn’t believe in God, they looked at me with, variously, curiosity, surprise or amusement. They had a number of questions designed to reveal the flaws in my argument. Firstly: who created the world? Nobody. Well, how did the world begin then?

I shuffled my brain to that particular folder and found it rather thin. The Big Bang – that explains it. That seems to be the answer. I would swear that the scientists know what they’re talking about. I take them on faith, actually, but I am confident that my faith in reason and science has a grounding in valid epistemologies.

In the restaurant in Addis Ababa, I lifted my hands in front of me to shape an imaginary bowling ball. Well, I said, the entire universe was very small... Like a ball? Jonathan tried to help. Yes, kind of like a ball, I said, realising that I had no idea what

was actually supposed to be between my hands. And then it... kind of... all started expanding... really quickly...

I moved my hands away from each other as if the ball was being inflated like a balloon, and thought: I *think* I *know* this to be true, and usually I live in a world where, by and large, this is taken for granted. But here, I watched myself from the point of view of my Ethiopian hosts, and also thought: if I was hearing this, I would not read it as nonfiction that the universe began as a bowling ball that one day exploded...? This is the thrilling awkwardness of nonfiction as felt experience.

Intermediate encounters (theory)

Nonfiction is described by Raymond Williams – wonderfully dismissively – as a ‘curious 20th-century back formation in library and book trade use’ (Williams 1985, 134). By back formation he means a term that could bracket out what was designated as ‘fiction’ – it is everything which is not *that*, if *that* being fiction could be adequately defined. Fiction itself, as we currently understand it, is a relatively recent invention, dating from the beginning of the 19th century. Before that, novels were typically cast as true stories and the distinctions between history and poetry were quite differently arranged (Paige 2011).

Williams goes on to mention in passing that ‘some public libraries will reserve or pay postage on any nonfiction but refuse these facilities for fiction’ (Williams 1985, 134). Here, we can detect a sign of the moral undercurrent at stake in the distinction, for the library policy clearly implies that it is somehow in the public interest to subsidise the transmission and circulation of nonfiction texts, whereas the same cannot be said for fiction. Nonfiction is worthy, this discourse tells us; the reading of it should be encouraged because it will be of benefit to society in a way that the reading of fiction won’t. Williams argues that what lies behind this moral distinction is the other meaning attached to fiction: ‘the sense of invent falsely or deceptively’ (ibid). Here, fiction is basically equated with lying, and lying is not something most public officials want to be seen to be supporting. However, Williams proceeds to suggest that the ‘contrast between fiction and fact’ is not only ‘conventional’ but also ‘*artificial*’ (ibid, my emphasis). What could he mean: artificial?

My undergraduate students of ‘literary nonfiction’ often enter the class bringing assumptions that there is a hard-and-fast opposition between fiction – with its capacity to lie and make things up equated with its licence to be creative – and nonfiction, which is bound, as if unmediated, to the facts. Some of these students start writing their nonfiction after the style of a Wikipedia entry – which is of course ironic since Wikipedia has, with wonderful success, substituted the supposedly transparently authoritative factual texts of the old *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and its cousins with a publicly performed ongoing contestation of the facts of every article, available to every reader to witness and contribute to.

But is nonfiction simply a negative way to define what Walter Benjamin calls ‘storytelling’? In his essay ‘The storyteller’, written in the long shadow of the carnage and upheaval of World War I, Benjamin declares mournfully that ‘the art of

storytelling is coming to an end' (Benjamin 1968, 83). He considers the 'rise of the novel' (87) a symptom of this decline. He argues that storytelling is about 'the ability to exchange experiences' (Benjamin 1968, 83), a fundamental part of the long oral tradition of human cultures: 'The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale' (87).

The novel, by contrast, for Benjamin represents a separation from that tradition:

The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. (Benjamin 1968, 87)

Theorists such as Gerard Genette (1993) and Kate Hamberger (1968) have attempted to tease out the narratological distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, isolating symptoms such as fiction's unchallenged capacity to provide 'direct access to a character's subjectivity' (Genette 1993, 65) – in nonfiction direct access is only possible, barring mind-reading, if the character is identified with the author. John Searle (1969) has argued influentially that the difference between fiction and nonfiction is fundamentally paratextual (outside the text), grounded by the intention of the author as to how the text should be read. This can be a matter of signage and packaging and side commentary: 'a memoir', 'a novel', 'a fictional autobiography' etc. This argument aligns with Philippe Lejeune's idea of the 'autobiographical pact', an implied contract between author and reader in which the author vouches for the 'truth status' of the narrative (Lejeune 1989).

The distinction between nonfiction and fiction for Eric Heyne (2001) is that a nonfiction account may have competing versions. The 'factual status' of the text is a matter for its author to declare, pace Searle, but its 'factual adequacy' is a judgment call open to readers (Heyne 2001 480–81) – and an activity supposedly not relevant to fiction, where no claim of factual status is being made.

David Shields's *Reality hunger* (2010) is a brilliant polemical collage that celebrates the awkwardness of the very concept of nonfiction, especially when it focuses on creating 'works of art rather than accumulations of information' (Geoff Dyer's words, quoted Shields 2010, 64). In the absence of any great theoretical advances to understand this awkwardness, some of the most insightful contributions are coming in the form of essayistic meditations in the spirit championed by Shields, such as Ander Monson's remarkable 'Voir dire' (Monson 2010, 3–23). In 'Voir dire', Monson, against the backdrop of a jury appearance, teases out the contradictions in attempts to lock down 'facts' in writing, even as he acknowledges the importance of the effort. Monson is not only analysing but at the same time consciously enacting the awkwardness of nonfiction:

[T]he self-consciousness, the self-analysis, that I return to as a kind of habit is perhaps an antidote to the pressure I feel writing nonfiction, of claiming that humans can ever actually present the truth, the whole truth and nothing but, on paper, permanently... I can only try to make my own burden of proof, and show you a preponderance of evidence, of fact and fiction, on my behalf. I can only stand up and

(think about what it means to) speak for myself. (Monson 2010, 23)

A further encounter (case study)

John D'Agata is an American writer who has tried to reposition the conversation about nonfiction writing. To counteract the view that what is sometimes called 'literary nonfiction' is actually a brand-new movement of 'creative nonfiction' springing up in the wake of the New Journalism of the 1960s and '70s, D'Agata, alongside others such as Philip Lopate, Vivian Gornick and Carl Klaus, has devoted his energies to highlighting and reframing the long tradition of the essay. D'Agata is searching to uncover the heterogeneous roots of the essay and to rejuvenate the original Montaignean sense of the term as an attempt, an artful impression of a mind in dialogue with itself and with the world.

D'Agata is particularly associated, both as a writer and a promulgator of the form, with the subgenre dubbed 'lyric essay'. The lyric essay, write D'Agata and Deborah Hall in a manifesto for the form in the US literary journal *Seneca Review*:

[...] partakes of the poem in its density and shapeliness, its distillation of ideas and musicality of language. It partakes of the essay in its weight, in its overt desire to engage with facts, melding its allegiance to the actual with its passion for imaginative form. (D'Agata & Tall 1997)

The lyric essay is an outlier form from the point of view of conventional understandings of nonfiction. It is doubtful whether the 20th-century public libraries mentioned by Williams would have paid postage for books of lyric essay! Their form is suspiciously, proudly artful.

In January 2010, John D'Agata published an essay in *Believer* magazine entitled 'What happens there', refracting a vision of the culture of Las Vegas through the story of the suicide of a 16-year-old boy named Levi Presley. Later in 2010 elements of the essay were incorporated into a larger work, *About a mountain* (D'Agata 2010b), which interweaves Presley's story with a (lyric) investigation by D'Agata of the phenomenon of Yucca Mountain, slated for 50 years to be America's permanent site for dumping nuclear waste.

D'Agata's writing in these works is replete with what David Shields has called 'beautiful facticity' (D'Agata 2010b, cover blurb). *About a mountain* is jammed with quotes from expert reports and interviews, and a rich panoply of information sources ranging from newspapers and television programs to anecdotes and rumours. D'Agata loves deploying lists as a rhetorical device laying bare the strangeness of facts through an accretion of specific instances. For example: a chronological list of predictions of the end of the world; or a list of noteworthy events in the history of the Stratosphere Hotel since 1993, ranging from the awards it has won (including 'Building most deserving of being imploded'), to the fluctuations in the hotel's stock price, to the series of violent deaths that has occurred there preceding that of Levi Presley (D'Agata 2010b, 104–05).

The latter list moves seamlessly from a direct quote attributed to an Elvis Presley

impersonator with regard to the suicide of a person he had known, to the following statement: ‘There is [the Stratosphere’s] appearance from a schoolyard trampoline: alone in the sky on the long brown horizon’ (D’Agata 2010b, 105). Here, without warning, D’Agata has led us across the gap from what appeared to be akin to journalistic reportage into the territory of metaphoric imagery. To whom might the Stratosphere be visible in such a way? The reader presumes that this is a reference to the boy Levi Presley. Perhaps D’Agata has visited Presley’s school and noticed that there is indeed a trampoline in the schoolyard from which Presley, if he jumped on it, would have been able to fix upon the image of the Stratosphere ‘alone in the sky’, an image that might well have revisited the boy later in his suicidal despair. The image of the observed trampoline, perhaps again, has lodged in D’Agata’s mind and from there he has imaginatively but plausibly linked it with what could have been the gaze, one day or many days, of this all-too-real boy –? Or perhaps the existence of the trampoline itself is a flight of fantasy on D’Agata’s part, brought to his mind by observation of a schoolyard trampoline elsewhere, or by his own memories of personal trampolining experience as a space of revelry.

I would argue that D’Agata’s aim, precisely, is to lead the reader into this zone of uncertainty, this zone of *awkward reading* in which one is forced to encounter the interplay between reality as reported and reality as experienced, or what might be called the drama of the performance of facts.

At the end of *About a mountain* is a section called ‘Notes’, detailing the references from which the various quotes, statistics and other facts in the text are drawn, and providing a stable footing from which to read the book as nonfiction, rather than as some kind of elaborate postmodern masquerade parodying or mimicking nonfictional tropes. Here indeed one can discover that the Elvis impersonator’s quote came from the *Casino City Times* of 13 April 2005 (and the reputation of the publisher, we suppose, is at stake in the reader believing this to be accurate rather than itself fabricated). Not surprisingly perhaps, there is no reference for the trampoline, or any ‘appearances’ from it.

Reviews of *About a mountain* praised it for its ‘terrific writing and reporting’ (Gifford 2010) and its ‘subtle brand of experimentalism – a fluid mix of reportage and conjecture’ (Ulin 2010). But while some celebrated it as ‘a meditation on the nature of fact and fantasy’ (ibid), the *New York Times* opined ‘unfortunately, there’s a problem’ (Bock 2010). And the *Washington Post* asked: ‘does he care more about “dramatic effect”, one wonders, or the truth?’ (Gifford 2010). These anxieties were prompted by D’Agata’s own statement in his notes that he had at times conflated or amended facts for ‘dramatic effect’ (D’Agata 2010b, 203). The *Washington Post* worries about things such as this:

In the text, he asserts that the teen’s suicide occurred the same night as a key Senate vote to shut down Yucca; in his notes, though, D’Agata admits that ‘in reality’ the events were three days apart. This is called fudging. (Gifford 2010)

D’Agata would, I imagine, argue that by pointing out to the reader in his own note that this detail has been changed, he is not ‘admitting’ to this as if a confession of guilt or a sign of moral turpitude; on the contrary the notes function as a skeletal

meta-text depicting the complexities and sometimes, the deliberate artistic ruses, involved in his deployment of verified sources. But here we have a different issue from that with the trampoline. Here, D'Agata simply wants to change a fact for artistic effect: painting a word picture of a particular day, he *wants* to connect *that* day with Presley's death, even though the reality was slightly different. Many of his readers, if the reviewers are representative, might feel betrayed by D'Agata's arrogance in willfully manipulating facts. Which brings us back to the question: how do we read nonfiction differently from fiction?

D'Agata repeatedly returns to his theme that 'facts' are not as stable and secure as we might wish them to be, that facts are assembled and produced and indeed have lifespans (it was once an accepted 'fact', universally agreed, that the Earth was flat). For example, reporting on the partisan debate in the US Senate on the potential abandonment of plans for Yucca Mountain to become a nuclear-waste dump, he writes:

They discussed its cost of \$4 billion.

They discussed its cost of \$7 billion.

They discussed... the 4000 [shipments] by barge that would be needed to move the waste.

The 10,000 by rail, and the 22,000 by rail.

The 50,000 by truck, and the 100,000 by truck. (D'Agata 2010b, 37)

In 2012 D'Agata published a new book called *The lifespan of a fact*, co-authored with Jim Fingal, the fact checker employed by *Believer* to fact-check the original essay. This book reprints D'Agata's submitted version of the essay as the focal point of a dialogue between D'Agata and Fingal as the latter painstakingly fact-checks every assertion made in the essay. The book is an extended debate explicitly focused on the question of how literary nonfiction, or what D'Agata prefers to call the essay, negotiates its engagement with the 'real' as an assemblage of contested facts and experiences.

Publication of *The lifespan of a fact* unleashed a literary furore in the US, with reviewers at high-profile publications and fellow nonfiction writers weighing in, a high proportion of them venting their spleen at D'Agata for his cheek in selfishly, indulgently dancing with veracity. For Dinty Moore, the editor of *Brevity* magazine, the problem with the book is its style and framing:

[it] reads like a work of literary memoir/journalism... it does not – to my reading – signal genre hybridity... the readers should know and understand upfront that they have entered fact shifting territory. (Moore 2012)

Moore sees D'Agata's action in publishing the book(s) as 'self-promotional manipulation' (ibid) and not only that but providing dangerous political fodder for those who would happily discredit the whole field of literary nonfiction and even journalism as playing fast and loose with the truth. Moore and others became doubly peeved when D'Agata described in an interview the dialogue between himself and Fingal represented in the book as:

[...]knowingly amped up... I think of the form of exchange between Jim and me [continued D'Agata] as an exaggerated farce... we were trying to find a way to make a serious but rather dry issue (veracity) feel relevant and entertaining (dick jokes)'. (Cutter 2012)

It is hard to imagine how someone could read the dialogue between D'Agata and Fingal as anything other than a stylised performance, a crafted restaging of a conflict for rhetorical purposes: it reads as an impossible hybrid between an email exchange and a verbal conversation, extended texts interspersed with to-and-fro jibes. But here again it is the wilful ambiguity of the text that discombobulates these readers. The performance is merely enacted without, as it were, program notes as an explicit guide for interpretation.

There is something shrill, almost hysterical, in the reaction to D'Agata. Dan Kois (2012), writing a review for Slate.com, intentionally inserts 32 falsehoods in his review, to make a version of the 'slippery slope' argument: what if we started making up things in reviews too? Somewhat absurdly, he was forced to add a correction note later because originally he claimed to have made 30 falsehoods – it turned out that the other two were unintentional! And Jennifer McDonald, for the *New York Times*, writes with almost adolescent sarcasm:

This book review would be so much easier to write were we to play by John D'Agata's rules. So let's try it. (1) This is not a book review; it's an essay. (2) I'm not a critic; I'm an artist. (3) Nothing I say can be used against me by the subjects of this essay, nor may anyone hold me to account re facts, truth or any contract I have supposedly entered into with you, the reader. There are to be no objections. There are to be no letters of complaint. For you are about to have – are you ready? – a 'genuine experience with art'. This is so liberating! (McDonald 2012)

Has D'Agata really implied 'there are to be no objections'? Has he not rather, through publishing *The lifespan of a fact*, dramatised at length the negotiation of countless objections?

Ned Stuckey-French, the respected writer of several anthologies of nonfiction, wrote a blog post entitled 'Dear John, I'm afraid it is over' (Stuckey-French 2012), in which he accuses D'Agata of '[going] so Continental, so postmodern, so highbrow, so, dare I say, lyrical because you're running away from journalism. I think you've changed. I still love lyric essays. But I don't love you any more.' Stuckey-French's bio at the bottom of the page is tagged with the following statement: 'the two previous sentences [in the bio] are true, but he [Stuckey-French] does not always tell the truth' (Stuckey-French 2012). What is the reader to make of this statement? It is as if every writer responding to D'Agata feels impelled to indulge fantasies of lying, or else to confess to doing so. The force of the reaction, and its hysterical symptoms, suggest that D'Agata has opened up a raw nerve indeed in a time when, more than ever, even if there are no longer gods we can believe in, we like to think that there are simple and unproblematic – unawkward – facts that we can cling to.

Coda (a brief encounter)

Perhaps, in considering the awkwardness of nonfiction, and aiming to move beyond being placed in one of two polar positions, we can derive useful insights from the studies of science undertaken by Bruno Latour in developing his Actor Network Theory (ANT). Latour discovered through observing the practices of the natural sciences in laboratories that:

Facts were facts – meaning exact – *because* they were fabricated – meaning that they emerged out of artificial situations. Every scientist we studied was proud of this connection between the quality of its construction and the quality of its data. (Latour 2005, 90)

Latour goes on to say that, in the sciences, to consider that ‘a fact is [either] real *or* its fabricated...is absurd. The question instead should be: ‘is a given fact of science *well* or *badly* constructed’ (Latour 2005, 91).

Is a given fact of ‘nonfiction’ well or badly constructed? Although there is not space to expand on them here, Latour’s theories hint intriguingly towards further lines of possible research into nonfiction as an art of composition (construction) insisting on an awkward engagement with the real.

The encounters with nonfiction here are of very different registers and resist integration. At stake in the conversation in Addis Ababa was a clash of world views nothing like the conflicts in veracity D’Agata dramatises. What links them is their movement away from fantasies of certainty, towards the awkward pleasures of reality.

Works cited

- Benjamin, W 1968 *Illuminations*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- Bock, C 2010 ‘American wasteland’, *New York Times*, 26 February, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/books/review/Bock-t.html> (accessed 12 August 2012)
- Carlin D 2011 ‘After Barthes: the preparation of the memoir’, *The ethical imagination: writing worlds papers – the refereed proceedings of the 16th conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, 2011*, at <http://aawp.org.au/ethical-imaginations-writing-worlds-papers-refereed-proceedings-16th-conference-australasian-associa> (accessed 12 July 2012)
- Cutter, W 2012 ‘Doubling down: an interview with John D’Agata and Jim Fingal’, *Kenyon Review* blog, 23 February 2012, at <http://www.kenyonreview.org/2012/02/doubling-down-an-interview-with-john-dagata-and-jim-fingal/> (accessed 12 August 2012)
- D’Agata, J & Tall, D 1997 ‘The lyric essay’, *Seneca Review* Fall, at <http://www.hws.edu/academics/senecareview/lyricessay.aspx> (accessed 18 August 2012)
- D’Agata, J 2003 *The next American essay*, Minneapolis: Graywolf Press
- 2010a ‘What happens there’, *Believer*, at <http://www.believermag.com/issues/201001/a> (accessed 12 August 2012)
- 2010b *About a mountain*, New York: Norton
- & Fingal, J 2012 *The lifespan of a fact*, New York: Norton
- Genette, G 1993 *Fiction & diction*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

- Gifford, B 2010 “About a mountain” by John D’Agata’, *Washington Post*, March 28, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/26/AR2010032602899.html> (accessed 12 August 2012)
- Hamburger, K & Rose, MJ 1973 *The logic of literature*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Heyne, E 1987 ‘Toward a theory of literary nonfiction in narrative theory’, *Modern fiction studies* 33: 3, 479-90
- Kois, D 2012 ‘Facts are stupid’, *Slate.com*, 15 February, at http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2012/02/the_lifespan_of_a_fact_essayist_john_d_agata_defends_his_right_to_fudge_the_truth_single.html (accessed 12 August 2012)
- Latour, B 2005 *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Lejeune, P 1989 ‘The autobiographical pact’, in PJ Eakin (ed) *On autobiography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 3-30
- McDonald, J 2012 ‘The lifespan of a fact, by John D’Agata and Jim Fingal’, *New York Times*, 21 February, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/26/books/review/the-lifespan-of-a-fact-by-john-dagata-and-jim-fingal.html> (accessed 12 August 2012)
- Monson, A 2010 *Vanishing point: not a memoir*, Minneapolis: Graywolf Press
- Moore, D 2012 ‘D’Agata’s trickery and manipulations: Dinty W Moore speaks out’, *Brevity* blog, 27 February, at <http://brevity.wordpress.com/2012/02/27/dagatas-trickery/> (accessed 13 August 2012)
- Paige, ND 2011 *Before fiction: the ancien regime of the novel*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Searle, JR 1969 *Speech acts: an essay in the philosophy of language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Shields, D 2010 *Reality hunger: a manifesto*, New York: Alfred A Knopf
- Stuckey-French, N 2012 ‘AWP 2012 – Dear John, I’m afraid it is over’, *Brevity* blog, 8 March, at <http://brevity.wordpress.com/2012/03/08/dear-john-im-afraid-it-is-over/> (accessed 13 August 2012)
- Ulin, D 2010 “About a mountain” by John D’Agata’, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 February at <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/14/entertainment/la-ca-john-dagata14-2010feb14/2> (accessed 12 August 2012)
- Williams, R 1985 *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press