

Performative Writing as a Method of Inquiry With the Material World: The Art of the Imperative

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Abstract

Understanding writing as a performative material practice, this paper highlights the “imperative” as a strategy to enhance writing practices in our classrooms and academic workshops. Drawing on posthuman theories and intra-active relationships, it describes how performative arts-based writing can provide a way to engage with the human and nonhuman, the embodied, sensory elements of our writerly worlds. Employing a critical collaborative autoethnographic methodology, the two authors provide a narrative account of a year as two research Fellows in a university exploring writing as a method of inquiry through designing and implementing a series of performative arts-based writing activities.

Writing as a Method of Inquiry: Background

This article explores writing as a method of inquiry across the disciplines, understanding writing as performative material practice deeply embedded in environments and experiences of embodiment. It argues higher education must take pedagogical environments into account when imagining and implementing academic practices if we are to achieve generative, inventive, and politically attuned writing pedagogies. If, as Richardson and St Pierre (2005) argue, writing is a method of inquiry, how can teachers engage students in writing activities that enhance students’ potential?

Our work intersects with other work in this Special Issue in its specific focus on the *performance* of writing, as bodies in intra-action through embodied, felt, sensory pedagogies—how we attend to, write with, and include the vitality of spaces and objects in classroom spaces. *Performative writing* is a method of “writing as doing” where “writing becomes meaningful in the material, dis/continuous act of writing” (Pollock, 1998, p. 75). Five characteristics of performative writing suggested by Pollock are first that the writing should be *evocative*—evoking worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and insight; *metonymic*—self-consciously partial, a material signifying process that invites laughter and transformation; *nervous*—an ongoing process of transmission and transferal; *citational*—informed by discourses of textuality; and last, *consequential*—writing that is meant to make things happen (pp. 80–95).

Performative writing provides a critically, aesthetically appropriate and generative method for analyzing and representing stories. The nature of *performative* writing as a method of inquiry allows for the complexity of human beings and recognizes the sensory elements of the phenomena as significant in the investigative process. Ellis (2015) discusses the creative process as a confluence between forces and materials, to “[soften] distinctions between organism and artifact” (p. 98). If material and teacher “in their reciprocal, intra-active entanglement, are not fixed conditions but rather emerging possibilities”

(Battista, 2012, p. 72), what species of documentation might manifest from such entanglement. How might the affective forces of ecologies, spaces, and creative processes morph together?

In this work, we present a series of four narratives which exemplify the imperative as a strategy to engage students in performative writing through a creative, new materialist focus. As colleagues, we were immersed for a year as research Fellows in a University project to explore strategies to enhance writing practices of our students and colleagues. Following Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) "writing as a method of inquiry," we explored a variety of creative, arts-based, writing practices in our classrooms, workshops, and own writing practices. What follows is our increasing recognition of the imperative as a useful strategy when employing creative arts-based writing practices. We begin by further elaborating on the methodological approach employed and the context of our work. We then define our own understandings of the posthuman theoretical approach and new materialist pedagogy, and the imperative as a strategy of instruction. The following four imperatives are narratives from our writing project.

In essence, this paper is a critical collaborative autoethnography. As friends and colleagues, we have been "hanging out deeply" (Geertz, 1998), interrogating and experimenting with writing, generating data through surveys, writing samples, anecdotal notes, and personal journaling. Our collaborative autoethnography is best described as researchers who worked together to generate data, reflect on experiences, acknowledge and respect difference, and check with each other as to what should be included in the final narrative (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008). There are roughly two of us writing (Alys and Esther), yet we can't do this writing alone. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose, "each of us is multiple." We rest into and depend on other bodies, tools, and objects, and liquids and solids. Our practice is influenced by theorists including Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St Pierre (2005), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), Jane Bennett (2010), and Kathleen Stewart (2007). In our pedagogical practice, where we reconnect intra-active pedagogies of qualitative inquiry, we propose pedagogues consider the work of the imperative. Our positions as lecturers afforded us with opportunity to implement creative writing practices into our undergraduate classrooms and to generate data from several workshops we held for colleagues and postgraduate students. In our conversations and writing we were also attendant to the criticality of our work where, as Holman Jones (2015) reminds us, *critical* autoethnography is where "theory and story work together in a dance of collaborative engagement" (p. 229).

Intra-Active Pedagogy

It is becoming well recognized that qualitative research needs to reflect the importance of environmental and ecological conditions entwined in human narratives (Bennett, 2010; Revelles-Benavente & Cielemecka, 2016; Kershaw, 2012). The notion of an intra-active pedagogy is described by Roder (2011) where learning is seen to take place in an ongoing material-discursive flow of agency (p. 61). Our "writing, writing everywhere" project drew on the relationship between the textual and the material, allowing matter and meaning to spill into each other. In saying this, we realize that the textual is always already material (paper, ink, screen, pixels, electrical current). Following Barad, we understand our becomings as forever engaged in processes of intra-action (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997).

So too, our actions are intra-actions: not the result of our individual sovereign agency, but the outcome of our actions and the actions of others—human and nonhuman beings and materials.

We employ a posthuman theoretical approach as we consider the intra-active relationship between thinker, writer, and the material world, in order to engage the transformative power of higher education. This article focuses on how a new materialist approach to writing pedagogy brings our focus back to understanding how our writing implements—whatever they may be (digital devices, pens, pencils, paintbrush)—guide what we write. We argue that the imperative, as a language of instruction (Longley, 2011), is useful when attending carefully to the materiality of the writing process. If, as suggested by Barad (2007) and later Jones and Hoskins (2016), it is difficult for ordinary researchers to put to work the complex idea of intra-connection or intra-action in our research, how much more difficult is it to work pedagogically with such ideas? Dancer Paula Kramer's (2015a) work provides clear examples of how new materialist ontologies can translate into creative practice. Kramer draws on the work of philosophers Ingold and Bryant to emphasize that in most more-than-human research, material agency, rather than having a single locus, comes into effect through relationship between the human and nonhuman (Kramer, 2015b). Each of our narratives provide specific examples of new materialist scholarship through creative practice, developed through particular instances, locations, fields of collaboration, and methods of research.

The Imperative: Moving Abstract Theory Into Ecologies of Practice

The imperative, we suggest, is linked to Hattie and Marzano's work on the effectiveness of "overt" and "explicit" instructions as a pedagogy (Killian, 2015). Further, especially significant for this paper, is Hattie and Marzano's description of how those instructions are used to scaffold learners through multistep tasks to engage with the material world (Killian, 2015). Clear imperatives in teaching can disentangle the knotty and potentially confusing premises of posthuman thought, creating spaces where students might develop understanding of the more-than-human in everyday life through (seemingly) simple classroom tasks. The art of engaging learners is linked with the teacher's ability to create productive, inclusive, and inventive instructions. We provide specific examples of such tasks, through narratives grounded in the contexts of our teaching in the fields of education and dance.

Pedagogical logic is often communicated through tasks that set activities into motion—defined rhetorically as imperatives. These are core to both teaching and creative practice. The following introduction from Matthew Goulish's (2000) *39 MicroLectures in Pursuit of Performance* provides a clear example of *imperative* writing:

A series of accidents has brought you to this book.

You may not think of it as a book, but as a library, an elevator, an amateur.

Open it to the table of contents.

Turn it to the page that sounds the most interesting to you.

Read a sentence or two.

Repeat this process.

Read this book as a creative act, and feel encouraged. (p. ii)

In her PhD, Alys explored modes of writing that enable the kinaesthetic logics of movement and creative practice to translate to pages. Scores for performance provide starting points for dancers in visual or linguistic forms, enabling a movement from conceptual to material planes. Imperatives work in the same way to direct participants or readers to action:

Choreographically, one of the ways that processual logic communicates is through studio tasks. Rhetorically, the imperative is perhaps the clearest and most used form of speech act in choreographic (and possibly dance) practice. The Collins Paperback Dictionary (2004) defines the word imperative thus: “1. extremely urgent; essential. 2. commanding or authoritative. 3. Grammar denoting the mood of a verb used in commands” (p. 400). The language of instruction (regardless of how sensible or impossible/ ridiculous that instruction may be) is a form of language that allows dance practice to come into being.

I am fascinated by the rhetoric of choreographic tasks. I love the way that they at once command dancers to do something in a no-nonsense bossy way, while at the same time they often create space for an endless diversity of invention and play. The art of creating productive, unexpected and inventive material for performance research using choreographic tasks lies in devising imperatives that are at once highly specific, and open to a wide range of interpretations. (Longley, 2011)

Teaching is an art form that has much in common with choreography. The art of engaging learners to experience new paradigms of sense and logic is entangled with the ability to create productive, inclusive, and inventive instructions that might be highly specific, and/or open to a wide range of interpretations. The imperative, we argue here, is linked to Hattie and Marzano’s work on the effectiveness of “overt” and “explicit” instructions as a pedagogy (Killian, 2015). Further, especially significant for this paper, is Hattie and Marzano’s description of the ways those instructions are used to scaffold the learner through multi-step tasks to engage with the material world (Killian, 2015).

Imperatives invite each reader, in all their singularity, to reinvent how the material of the book is ordered, experienced, and organized. According to Bogue (2007), “[c]ollective assemblages of enunciation induce ‘incorporeal transformations’ of bodies in that they transform elements and configurations of the world through speech acts” (p. 20). We might consider Goulish’s list of imperatives as a kind of collective assemblage, as each one involves potential readers transforming their sense of the given terms in order to allow creativity, inventiveness, and chance to enter into the process of reading. “Enunciation” is referred to by Felix Guattari (1996) in his essay *Ritornellos and Existential Effects*:

For too long, linguists have refused to face up to enunciation, having only wanted to take it into account as a breaking and entering into the structural woof of semantic-syntactic processes. In fact, enunciation is in no way a faraway suburb of language. It constitutes the active kernel of linguistic and semiotic creativity. (p. 164)

Guattari discusses enunciation in relation to the concept of the “ritornello,” a term that refers to the highly specific sensory affects triggered by particular experiences to create a “lay-out of sense productions beyond common sense” (p. 164). Attending to the ritornellos triggered by the enunciation of language allows explicit recognition of the role of affect, tone, cadence, and context in the movement of ideas.

As you read the following choreographic imperative written by Deborah Hay (2000)—which Alys frequently draws on in teaching dance improvisation and choreography—you might imagine how the tone of Hay’s voice would shift your responses to the instruction, or how she might read her notes for the process before addressing the dancers, but change the instructions slightly at the moment of their enunciation, as she responds to the quality of attention the dancers bring:

Every performer is responsible for moving her two articles: the blanket and the candle. You move each article forward, in increments of space and time, in any combination, order, frequency, duration. You choose when, how, and where to move, while staying within the parameters of the group and the overall spatial pattern, more or less.

Work related activity with the blanket can be opening it, folding it, spreading it out, holding it up, wrapping it around, carrying it forward, or piling it up.

Work related activity with the candle can be carrying it forward, lifting it, lowering it, or moving it along the floor. (p. 18)

Although these instructions are specific, they also leave room for each group of dancers to riff on the movement theme that Hay has outlined. As Irigaray (2002) argues, “[s]peech thus escapes the calculation that dominates our time” (p. 23) as does the language we bring to creative/pedagogical practices, as it invites contingency and intuitive response. Imperatives can both open and limit the field of a learning process. In the narratives that form the next part of this article, we present a series of pedagogical stories through the form of imperatives, addressing you, the reader, directly. In this way, we call upon our readers to cohabitate these stories with us. We consider the style of the imperative as forming a point of praxis between the abstraction of theory and the multi-sensorial complexity of concrete experience—allowing conceptual things to make sense in material contexts and material agency to lead the formation of knowledge. The instructional style of these narratives aims to engage you beyond the print, to sense, feel, and navigate these worlds with a sense of immediacy—to have a relationship with knowing, being, and doing in specific pedagogical contexts. Using the imperative may raise the stakes for readers, enhancing both the sense of the need to *participate* in the worlds of these narratives, and their direct implication in the research. The first of these narratives is drawn from an activity Esther led, which drew on her research into landmarks on the university of Auckland campus (Fitzpatrick & Bell, 2016). This research examined sites where our lines of history and moments in time converged to form knots in the ghost-filled landscape of the campus.

Writing Tasks for Intra-Active Pedagogies

An integral part of our work as Fellows on the “writing, writing everywhere” project involved organizing and meeting each week, taking turns leading and reporting on different writing experiments, and running two intensive full-day workshops with colleagues and postgraduate students. Esther, in a set of tutorials for a Bachelor of Education course on “diversity,” developed a set of performative writing tasks that required students to engage with the “sensory” knowledge of their communities. Alys developed writing tasks for undergraduate dance students to encourage engagement with the idea of a body as fluid, porous and intra-active, rather than fixed and bounded by the skin. Both intended to bring to attention embodied knowledge and the relationship between knowing, being, and doing with “matter.” Consequently, several of our writing explorations involved engaging and performing with “matter.” The ontology underpinning our practice could broadly be defined as “new-materialist,” which is a growing field of scholarship that addresses and questions the anthropocentric assumptions underlying much academic research to consider all matter as carrying force, agency, and vibrancy in enabling human action (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010). Working through a new materialist ontology allows us to consider how pedagogical elements bound with the sensory, tactile, tonal, relational, and atmospheric can be seen to actively shape processes of knowledge creation.

The four narratives we provide are specific, direct examples of how new materialist scholarship might translate to performative pedagogical practice—challenging anthropocentric research conventions by highlighting the agency of materialities and atmospheres. In this way, we enable a radical destabilization of core principles of western philosophy such as relations between subject and object, matter and meaning, inanimate and animate things. We aim to disrupt and problematize the assumption that human activity is at the centre of the world and its ethics (Battista, 2012, p. 62).

1. Narrating Pedagogies of Qualitative Inquiry: The University of Auckland

Esther led us on a walk through the campus, focussing on intra-actions between materials and bodies. In this directed walk through the space, Esther’s stories peeled the decades away, allowing us to sense a time when the land was owned in patchwork pieces and boundary walls were yet to be built. This walk brought into focus our lives as entwined with the actual place and materials of the university. We were drawing on the work of Tim Ingold (2009):

[L]ives are led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places else where ... wayfaring ... describe[s] the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement. It is as wayfarers, then, that human beings inhabit the earth. ... [H]uman existence is ... place-binding. It unfolds not in places but along paths. Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants, meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that life-lines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot. (p. 33).

Esther beckons us to walk—and we follow.

Imperative one: Walking and writing

Let us walk, first down to the solitary lamppost, standing at the top of a hill guarding a tree-lined, winding path. The lamppost looks like something from Narnia—otherworldly on the edge of this city park. An old park bench stands close by, resting, as the autumn leaves dance widely around and through the wrought iron legs.

Look behind the park bench, at the sign that reads “Beach,” directing our gaze down the winding path. Many years ago, my great-great-grandmother wrote a letter about her childhood, and the story of the Māori fishermen singing while fixing their nets and loudly at times doing the haka when going out fishing. When you look down the winding path to the city below, there is no longer any sign of a beach, and the Māori fisherman’s songs have been replaced by the sound of cars on the motorway.

Let us walk up the road to the old Choral Hall, a large cold stone neo-classical building built in 1872. Now the Faculty of Arts. This was where my colonial ancestors, both Jewish and Christian, gathered for concerts, for important council meetings, for dances and religious meetings. Imagine the different voices, the changing fashions, the arguments, the footfall of generations, and whispers of ghosts.

Take a turn around the corner and down the path towards the centre of the campus. Students are lined up waiting by the food truck, an assortment of bags slung over shoulders, enjoying the brief pool of sunshine. The food truck is parked beside an old barracks wall that crosses through the campus. Avril’s ancestor was responsible for the design and building of the wall.¹ If you look up, you can see the holes where the cannons would poke through to deter any attack from Māori. An attack that never happened. Come touch the wall. Feel its rough scoria surface, an artefact of a long-ago volcano. We are standing here, on this hill, on this university campus, once a barracks for colonial soldiers, once a Pa for the local Māori, once upon a time a volcano.

Walk up the path and over the road to the Old Merchant houses, and at the end of the row you will see the Jewish synagogue. Houses, places where my family lived and worshiped. Buildings with echoes of another age that now belong to the University. Imagine the bride and groom standing under the canopy exchanging oaths in the synagogue on the corner, and later the wedding party out on the summer lawn, the women with their long lace dresses and parasols.

On our way, back to our writing room, let us pass by Old Government House, now the University Staff Common Room. The large rooms once housed Governor Grey’s collection of books. Can you see the corner where my great-great-grandmother as a child would spend hours curled up with a book? Looking into the library now you see a large empty room, no books, just large leather armchairs where academics lounge and read the news on their laptops.

Pull your jacket closer, the sun has gone. These large trees we walk under also immigrated to this place. Some of them Avril’s ancestor brought with him, a pocket full of acorns from Windsor, England. Those large ancient oaks now spread their branches wide over the University campus.

Back in our writing room we decide to spend 20 minutes just writing in response to the walk. When sharing our writing, we realized how our lives are each knotted in this place. One Research Fellow described the three generations of a family that spend a large part of their lives at the university—in various offices and a crèche. How her father had immigrated to New Zealand to work at the University, how he would take visitors for historic walks around the campus grounds. How time in childhood was spent on this campus, echoes of “crushes” in her undergraduate years, and now the university crèche holds a part of her daughters’ childhood. For this writer, endless family stories are interwoven into the life and atmospheres and spaces of the university. Alys tells the story of falling in love on this campus. How the walls, the paths, the rooms echo memories of the relationship that led to her family, her life as a mother of two daughters. She recalls rushing to the bus to get home to breastfeed babies, the kids coming to visit her office and pawing through her drawers. The stories shared highlighted Ingold’s (2009) deep, knotted entanglements of relationship between the human and nonhuman, that originated within our workplace.

We all had stories of the old tree in the park opposite. Of our children climbing and crawling over its branches, of past encounters with the same tree before the time of children, and I wondered if my great-great-grandmother, too, had encountered this same tree. When the tree, like Auckland, was still in its youth.

2. Embodied Memory and Writing: Faculty of Education and Social Work

As part of the fellowship collaboration in what we call “Creative Critical Writing,” Esther introduced several writing activities into a B.Ed. degree course on diversity to enhance students’ understanding of key content. One activity asked students to write a “Story of Our Street”—exploring diversity in our communities through sensory memory. Using key ideas from Paula Morris’s (2019) work on creative nonfiction, students were scaffolded to respond to a set of questions and provocations.

Imperative two

Diversity in our community

Imagine the main street of your community. Now write a narrative that takes us for a walk down that street. Remember all of your senses.

- *Where are we? What time of day are we walking down the street?*
- *Describe what you see, hear, smell, taste, feel. Think about:*
 - *Footpath*
 - *Road*
 - *Plants*
 - *Buildings*
 - *Signs*
 - *Language*
- *Who might we meet?*
- *What might they be doing? Saying?*
- *Who do you choose to introduce me to? How do you describe them?*

As students wrote, chatted, fiddled with their pencils, there were a few who were hesitant to start. Esther sat with each group, asking them the questions from the side, and getting them to write their answers down. These questions required particular details that were easy to respond to initially—for example “name the street,” “what time of day are you most often there?” As the students began to write, they settled into the process and were then able to respond to more sensory details. When the students had written for 20 minutes, they then shared their narratives with peers. A few chose to share their writing with the class, so for a few moments, we were all taken to the noisy street corner where young children wagging school gathered, or the leafy suburban street where families gathered with water guns and loud laughter, or we walked past the wooden bungalow with washing flapping in the wind, and smelt the curry cooking in the kitchen. Finding a place the students were familiar with, a physical street they had walked down, their intra-action with the material world enabled them to draw on sensory knowledge and to write their own stories of diversity in their communities. They were able then to link the embodied experience to the content of the lectures on ethnicity, culture, identity, language, and socioeconomic difference.

3. Embodied Memory and Writing: Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries

Leaving the Faculty of Education in suburban Epsom, with its wide streets, tuis in the trees, and the kowhais beginning to flower, Esther (magically as authors do) takes us to the Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries in the city’s downtown, amongst the skyscrapers and the tiny boutique coffee shops and the lawyers and engineers. We arrive in the dance studio, where Alys is leading the students enrolled in a Dance Writing first-year course, to entangle dance improvisation and writing practices.

Imperative three

To begin our warm-up, please begin to move around the room, soft in the ankles, soft in the knees, pliant through the soles of your feet, translating the ground through your structure, responding to surface, moved by surface. Noticing gravity, using gravity to find a momentum pathway, noticing weight and letting your weight fall forward a little, your legs soften a little, your feet responding to the surface of the floor, falling with momentum, falling a little into the space.

Let’s think about what it is to be a body, let’s consider all matter in the room as a body—floor, walls, windows, bags, drink bottles, clothing, people, chairs, other furniture, empty coffee cups, all these things are cellular bodies, all coextensive and part of each other, all part of the bigger body of which the walls, ceiling, and floor form the skin. So, moving with the understanding that we are interconnected parts of one body. Every movement in the structure will impact on the structure of the whole. Moving in response to the movements around you, allowing a shift in motion or space somewhere else in the room to initiate the structure of your movement. Moving only in response, allowing the room to move you.

See a gap between two bodies, and move into that gap, as you move through the gap, find a new gap, so the choreography is a constant weaving between the many bodies of different orders in the room.

Sensing the ecology of the space, sensations of fluidity and brittleness, relationships of synchronicity and abruptness, differences in speed and vibration, the possibilities of connectedness and tension. Notice your singular patterning through the space, the repetition and sameness in your own trajectory, can you shift the movement pattern that you are currently riding? Can you allow the habits of your body to become other?

Sensing the body of the room, moving into a state of fluid responsiveness with all the cellular structures that make up our collective body. Tuning with the vibrations of the matter around you. Connecting on a plane of speed. Connecting on the plane of looseness or tension—the dynamic play of energy. Connecting on the plane of intensity. Tune with another, tune with another’s system of organization, the folds, the density, the quality.

And our body is slowing by 50%, and slowing by 50% again, and allowing your structure to soften into the floor, to find a point of rest, letting the floor take your weight, letting your weight fall through your skin, held by gravity.

And sensing your structure as a landscape. Noticing the sensation of clothing as a second skin. Notice where your skin exchanges with the air, notice the temperature and quality of the floor, noticing parts of your structure in contact with the floor and parts of your body lifting away from it. Imagine: If your body is a landscape, what kind of landscape is it? Is it more fluid or more earth? Are there flowers, trees, rocks growing? Lakes, rivers, mountains? Are surfaces rough or smooth? Is this landscape of your body inhabited by creatures? What kind of creatures? How do they move?

From here Alys led the class to freewrite, working between writing and drawing, writing from the sense of bodies of different forms being coextensive and interconnected rather than separate, writing with a sense of ecology and landscape where imagination and relationship determine the sensing and movement of a body.

Making and Writing

Our work is ongoing. The aim of our continued exploration using performative writing is to enhance our students’ learning, to deepen their understanding, and to encourage more creative forms of meaning making that realize the more-than-human relationships. We envision writing as a material practice in which atmospheres, devices, tools, spaces, relationships and objects actively enable research to form across studio and desk-based contexts.

Ingold (2013) contends that in making something, we are engaged in “transformational” rather than “documenting” learning (pp. 2–8), and proposes that there is a difference between such “knowing from the inside” and learning *about* something from text. In this workshop, we’re offering a series of provocations for artist-researchers to write with the logic of creative practices. We’re exploring methods for moving types of knowledge between sensory experiences of art making (including performance, musical composition, and other studio practices) and models for critical and reflective writing.

A post-human pedagogy supports this inquiry as we explore multi-modal translations between doing and writing.

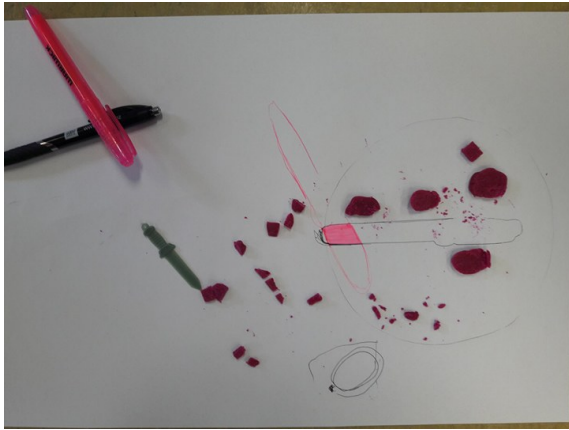


Fig. 1: Material and stuff

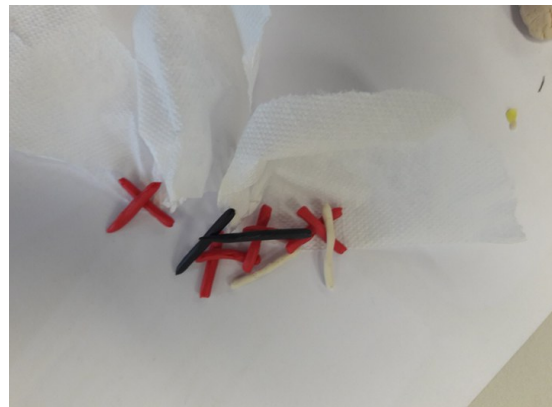


Fig. 2: Tissue with plasticine

Two students work together with coloured plasticine, and we find the plasticine has reached a ripe old age. It flakes in their hands, becoming the shards of a comet in a tactile, miniature, primary-colour, page-framed galaxy (see Figure 3). Colours of plasticine demand collaboration from artists who are led by its delicate textures to better understand the thinking of material in their different research projects. This sense-making collaboration between plasticine, artist-researchers, and words (Figure 4) leads us to consider things differently—the notion of parts and wholes, of the different qualities that make up a body of knowledge, the sense of following the texture of an idea and letting one’s experience of sensory pleasure lead the research, as new possibilities of composition/thinking arise in relational, conversational, and multi-modal spaces. As demonstrated in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4, the page became an entanglement of thought, words, shapes, lines, and plasticine. A performance of writing through “an entangled creation of knowledge that “breaks through” pre-established notions of non/human agencies in order to produce encounters in which political and material intra-act to be “part of that nature that we seek to understand” (Barad, 2007, p. 26; Revelles Benavente & Cielemecka, 2016).



Fig. 3: Flakes of plasticine

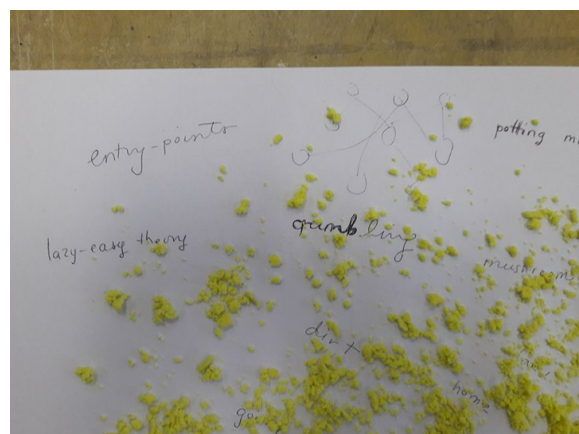


Fig. 4: Words and plasticine

The lump of plasticine
Nestles into a body
Warm hands
Press and stretch

The lump of plasticine
Resists the stretch
Crumbles
Delicately

In the tension between
Human and material agency
New and unpredictable
Possibilities occur

We wrote this poem reflecting on how students drew on sensory details to write through the workshop. Some students played with the writing tools, making prints, playing with the font and thickness of the stroke, with repetition of words, and shape on the page. Others wrote creative nonfiction. Many commented on how they began to write about the making and then their writing went off somewhere else. Playing and performing with plasticine had opened a space to imagine differently.

Where to Next?

This article narrated specific performative writing pedagogies we engaged with in one year of a research Fellowship. It highlights the importance of imperatives to engage writers in creative and post-human— intra-action pedagogies of practice. Researching post-human relations through specific performative writing practices enables a testing of abstract concepts through material and temporal means. Distinctions between theory and practice dissolve as haptic explorations generate theoretical insights and philosophical provocations extend how we make sense of our worlds. As teachers and writers, we continue to explore and hone our skills in embodied relational practices. We open the window to feel the fresh breeze, to hear the bird outside our window, to breathe in the scent of a spring rain, supping on the fresh nutty tasting coffee, as our body leans over the computer, writing, writing, writing.

Note

1. Avril Bell is a colleague and friend. She and Esther coauthored the following paper: Fitzpatrick, E., & Bell, A. (2016). Summoning up the ghost with needle and thread. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, 5(2), 1–24. doi:10.1525/dcqr.2016.5.2.6.

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