

2020-05-01

Writing in Immanence

Gale, K

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/17556>

10.1525/dcqr.2020.9.2.92

Departures in Critical Qualitative Research

University of California Press

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

KEN GALE

Writing in Immanence

A Creative-Relational Doing?

ABSTRACT The writing in this essay confronts and is troubled by writing. In the ensuing encounters with writing selves and writing as doing as “creative-relationally more-than [simply] human”¹ practice, a sense of writing as immanent and in immanence is emergent in the always becoming of the essay as event. In the capaciousness of this practice, onto-methodo-genetic approaches are used to set up dis-allowances of the stable and tendentious fixities of ontology and methodology, in turn making movements away from simply human being toward always animal-becoming. **KEYWORDS** Onto-methodo-genetic; Creative-relationally; Writing; Immanence

He had sat looking at the page for hours, hours that turned into days. In intensity, his days were populated by thoughts and feelings, ideas and sensations; multiple starting points offered themselves up, all the obvious questions and concerns came to mind: write to it, write with it, write to inquire: write . . . write . . .

All around him was writing. Immersion in the writings of others, some of it his, that other Ken, the Ken that was writing then, that repetition of Ken that is different now. Books, papers, notes, his notes, Ken’s notes; annotations everywhere, scattered like dust over words, sometimes his words, sometimes those of others, underlinings, penciled, penned, page corners turned over, guilt emerging over the damage to every creased page. Was it his mother speaking? Was it a teacher? How does guilt find a space to make in these more than simply human becomings?

His laptop pages are infested with starting points, sparkling initially with florid quotations and vivid alliterative assertions and claims and then, the firework begins to fizzle, the lively crackling squib begins to gutter, its flame begins to dim. This happens time after time. Nothing gives him coherence, continuity, or sense of purpose. The deadline is upon him. He thinks of Luce Irigaray or was it Hélène Cixous, telling in the asking, what else is there to do but write?

Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, Vol. 9, Number 2, pp. 92–102. ISSN 2333-9489, electronic ISSN 2333-9497. © 2020 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Request permission to photocopy or reproduce article content at the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2020.9.2.92>.

Then he remembered writing elsewhere, quoting Lauren Berlant, bringing to bear in his frustrations about the inability to write, her notion of “cruel optimism,” where an unseen force bears itself like a weight upon an unsuspecting body, animating an affective becoming in which the energy of friction seems to slow that body movement, creating a paradox of apparent non becoming, itself appearing to cruelly impede that movement forward that was desired. She argued that a “relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. . . . These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.”² With Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism playing upon him and his writing/not writing self, he began to think again with Gilles Deleuze and his conceptualization of desire.³ He had thought with Deleuze of desire acting as a productive force, an intensity, a force not focused upon and directed toward the satisfaction of a particular object or need but more as a force capable of energizing transmutation and flow. He had thought previously that not being able to write seemed to be object related; writing to a particular topic was not happening and therefore, in Berlant’s terms, the “object” of writing was cruelly and actively impeding the aim that initially brought him to it in the first place. However, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari point out, “desire is a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it.”⁴ And so he began to question Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism and to think of it less as arising from a lack of individually achieving a particular goal and more in an affectively inflected relational sense in terms of an assemblage of emergence and becoming. As Brian Massumi argues, desire “plays upon unpredictable relational effects. It is the improvisation of these deformational, relational effects that constitutes the new.”⁵ Ken reads Massumi’s words and senses the potential of writing as gestural action. He begins to think of his writing less and less in terms of Ken as writer, (unsuccessfully) writing to an (as yet unattainable) deadline and more in terms of forces and energies impressing themselves upon him in these “affective presencings.”⁶ Looking back, over and over, at so many past writings, the cruelty of optimisms produces a recurring image of thought of a writer who is now dead.

He relishes living with a knowing that, as Elizabeth Grosz says of these writers who have populated his life in multiple ways for nearly twenty years, the body is “a discontinuous, nontotalised series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities and durations.”⁷ Yes, of course!

Equally, he has a processual knowing, a moving in sensing, perhaps, that writing simply *is*, it is what it is, it is what it has to be, and is therefore nothing more than what it is in emergence, in becoming: writing.

He has taken and is perhaps taking and making writing self in immanence. In so much of his writing, writing simply is, is self making, it worlds and in these always becomings it is immanent unto its self. In this he realizes that writing is therefore, perhaps, gestural, nothing more than that. He remembers Erin Manning's words that work to bring to life her conceptualization of the "minor gesture," which "is defined by its capacity to vary, not to hold, not to contain. It acts on, moves through, its gesturing always toward a futurity present in the act, but as yet unexpressed. This is its force, this is its call for freedom."⁸

In becoming he is unhinged. He senses his body. He is writing. Writing. His table lamp shines over his words. He thinks, he asks himself, in the writing, in what sense can he say "He is writing"? He is unsure of this "he who is writing." *He?* The sensing of multiplicities lives in the palpability of immanence: For these movements, these moments, writing has to be "is." The glow of the lamp on the table, the litter of books all around, a mug full of cold, strong, sweet tea neglected at his side on the tabletop, pens, a glass of fresh water, . . . looking up, the sun breaking through the clouds, the chance of swimming in the sea, attraction turning to distraction, that force, that energy, that unavoidable question, that insistent inducement. . . write, write, write . . . and then moving with the fresh peacefulness of the quiet that permeates: this this-ness; this is all around. The blissful sound of a robin singing from its favorite perch hidden in the tangled branches of the olive bush below the bedroom window; the song lives in a reminding of early-morning wakings, when pale, limp light slices into the room through the gap between the curtain and the wall, when waking is not welcome, when thoughts of having to write ring the noisiest alarm call. The affective force of robin-song-waking-light burns into a simple (non)writing body. In-act, all is movement. He finds himself again with Deleuze, overhearing his conversation with Claire Parnet. The words are so clear to him, they echo, he has heard them before, he has used them before; hearing them again, does something to him now, the force of Baruch Spinoza's question, as it is mouthed by Deleuze, "*What can a body do?*, of what affects is it capable?"⁹ In immanence he is with this body writing: this body writing is body-in-action, writing here now, in affect, struggling with capabilities, fighting sadness, reaching for joy, body-assembling, dis-assembling, body-always in flow, always in thrall of those forces that presence, that pull this way, there, then, that . . . Deleuze says that "Spinoza never ceases to be amazed by the body. He is not amazed at having a body, but by what a

body can do.”¹⁰ As he listens in to this conversation between Spinoza, Deleuze, and Parnet, he is writing; in this writing he has a *sense* of writing, he remains unaware, unsure of what this body writing can do, he writes, not knowing what “he” is, knowing that writing is part of this “affective presencing” that forcefully gives him a sense of him-ness, nothing more, nothing less.

He writes, wondering, not knowing, what this writing can do. Writing. What it can do to him? What it can do to others? Wondering if it matters. Still he keeps writing. Words from the books around him merge into his own word makings, the postman delivers a package that clunks heavily on the doormat, his mobile phone pings message alerts to him, his stomach hungers for breakfast, and the words writing themselves keep moving him on, gesturing to some future alive in the act of writing. He finds frictional energies holding him back, then allowing him to ease forward, sensing with Jane Bennett’s evocation of affective forces impelling her writing self; he knows he has brought this passage into the light before and the resonating pulse of the echo animates his writing now: “The sentences of this book . . . emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro and microactants: from ‘my’ memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or the particulates in the room.”¹¹ “The sentences of this book,” the writing here . . . in these assembling/disassembling movements, these body-ings, he is taken beyond self and in this he has a fragile, momentary knowing of becoming-self. Self/body always emergent, always in play with multiple forces, never able to pin down, always working to make real the necessity, “after finitude,”¹² always contingency, aware that as the writing writes, some kind of pinning down comes to life, comes to life in the reassurance that as the writing words flow, in duration, the reading words also flow. Processually knowing, as he glances, in his own writing-reading-doing, and reads in a casually opened book beside him on his cluttered table, that “the heterogeneity of the noncontinuous nature of experience is certainly not easy to articulate, but it is rich, infinitely so. To hear it, it is necessary to refrain from setting experience apart from the in-act.”¹³

In asserting an animated relegation of the substantive representational iconography of the noun and the challenge to the fetishizing of the Cartesian subject, the individual existent as enlightened, inviolate human, bounded by the certainties of a priori reasoning and the intuitive fragility of the cogito, in becoming, he sees clearly that “writer” is simply artifice. “Writer” names the body and in so doing freezes it in metastasis. He knows that is not good enough.

By way of necessary contrast, his reading moved him toward Manning's conceptualization of "a paradoxical body," positing body as "paradoxical" because "it has never existed as such. It comes to form, it breeds figures, but it never 'is.'"¹⁴ Body is always a verb, an activity of bodying, a becoming-active of the paradoxical tendencies—the disequilibriums, the multiple balances—that incite it to co-compose, dynamically, relationally, with the world.¹⁵ In this reading his attention is drawn away from *the* body, the thing in itself of Kantian thought and phenomenological theorizing, toward movement, where "bodying" can be understood in terms of event/ful/ness, of what Alfred North Whitehead referred to as "actual occasions"¹⁶ where, quite simply and in Manning's terms, "body is event." It is in this that he sees all inquiry taking place, momentary, in movement, always on the move; it will be, as Manning refers to in a concept that derives from the thinking of Gilbert Simondon, "in-formation."¹⁷ His knowing is that this constant processualism shifts attention away from the substantive fixity of established, individualized bodies toward movement, toward paying attention to always shifting co-constituting, compositional processes, where each new knowing is a becoming, is "in-formation," is and as event.

He thinks . . . this is good; in space making this takes him to where his own work has also previously led, to his own conceptualization of inquiry where, similar to Manning's proposal for "research-creation,"¹⁸ there is no prescribed method to follow, no written-in-stone techniques, no pre-set research questions to follow.

He thinks of the way his concept making of a (non)methodological "methodogenesis"¹⁹ emerged as an event through reading Manning's use of Simondon's concept of "ontogenesis"²⁰ where, in the latter, "the always becoming of bodies in movement, [is] in contrast to ontology, which tends to work with bodies as established categories of difference"²¹ and in which "all radical engagements are inventions in some sense, unthought, untried, extraordinary."²²

He thinks of his recent rediscovery of a quotation from a book by Paul Auster that he had used in a paper published in a journal some while ago.²³ Unsure of how or why, it reappears, it is reappropriated, it is tentatively placed here, in use: it seems to fit; it seems to feel right in becoming here. So he senses with Auster that "there is something nice about being in the dark, . . . , something thrilling about not knowing what is going to happen next. It keeps you alert, he thinks, and there's no harm in that, is there? Wide awake and on your toes, taking it all in, ready for anything."²⁴ In this writing unfolding here, troubled as clouds by huge then irritating gusts, as Manning has pointed out, "the

tendency remains . . . to give precedence to a stagnant humanist vocabulary that can be disciplined, controlled. It is difficult not to fall prey to this tendency.”²⁵ To write *with it* is suggestive of what Donna Haraway describes as a sympoiesis, a form of collaborative “making kin”²⁶; to write *against it* is likely to promote the agonistics of conflictual binarism; to write *to it* tends to problematize and to offer up the possibilities of creative futurity and potential; to write *to inquire*, hitherto, has seemed to offer enhanced possibilities for practices of speculation, experimentation, fabulation, and of *delire*, of going off the rails.

So, as his writing seemed to reach perhaps a temporary ending point, he began to sense a space opening up for animating-becoming-writing-in-act that, while prompted by the lively provocations provided by Laurel Richardson’s “writing as a method of inquiry,” needs in becoming, to do something more.²⁷ His first necessary step, in working to avoid falling prey to what Manning describes as tendencies of “discipline and control,” was to take the formalism of “method” out of Richardson’s practice and to work simply and directly with *writing as inquiry* as a means of always bringing to life “the activation of the as-yet-unthought.”²⁸ He senses that the not-yet-ness and potential for spacetime making in this will work to further the “creative-relationally *more-than human*” practices that are central to Massumi’s projected inquiries by briefly attempting to exemplify that, as he also says, “animal-becoming is *most* human. It is in becoming animal that the human recurs to what is nonhuman at the heart of what moves it. This makes its surpassingly human.”²⁹ In working to move the reader forward in this “project,” Massumi follows this, on the same page, with the explicit prescriptive direction “Put that in writing” . . .

Putting that in writing . . . ?

In writing, how is it possible to world, to bring to life, movements and sensations beyond the simply human proclivities and practices that appeared to originally give them life?

In writing, how is it possible to attempt to produce, in the movements and moments of processualism, affectively sensitive becoming-writing (as inquiry) that will be-becoming-animate through onto-methodo-genetic approaches?

In writing, how is it possible to work to bring to life research-creative practices that dis-allow the stable and tendentious fixities of ontology, epistemology, and methodology?

In writing, how is it possible to make movements away from simply human being toward always animal-becoming?

In writing, how is it possible to simply write to inquire?

In writing, how is it possible to simply write?

In writing, how is it possible to put this in writing?
Writing, writing . . . ?

Then a strange imperative wells up in him: either stop writing, or write like a rat. . . . If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf etc.³⁰

Why not? How does a rat write? His puzzling over this question is only temporary; he smiles and senses that Deleuze and Guattari could also have quite easily said, “Write like a frog,” “Write like a cat,” “Write like a . . .” Equally, he has a knowing that writing is not literally and simply about “writing *like* a . . .,” in any purely interpretive, metaphorical, or representational sense; that is not what Deleuze and Guattari posit here.

In the “affective presencing” prompted by all of these writing questions, in thinking and feeling again he senses a movement toward bringing to life, in event, the assertion that writing simply is. Deleuze writes, “It is only when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can speak of a plane of immanence.”³¹ In this respect, writing toward, within, and for a minor literacy can also be of this order; “stuttering in the language is at the same time the stuttering emergence of the language, it is not an impediment that is measured against the preferences and articulacies of the dominating tendencies of a privileged or major form.”³² He remembers reading Robert Hurley’s preface to the book in which Deleuze writes about and with Spinoza and of the difficulties that reading Spinoza entailed. It occurred to him as he read those words again that much the same could be said of writing. He read the following passage substituting “write/writing” for “read/reading”: “One doesn’t have to follow every proposition, make every connection—the intuitive or affective reading may be more practical anyway. What if one accepted the invitation—come as you are—and read with a different attitude, which might be more like the way one attends to poetry?”³³ As he writes, he feels that reading Hurley’s words and bringing them into play in terms of an immanent writing, a writing that is, a writing that does, a writing that is, of itself, in event, helps to free this writing from the engagements that writing in terms of meaning and other representational tropes and forms sustains. While writing might be *with* or *as* or engaged in *to inquire*, ultimately, writing is. In immanence, in its always processual event/ful/ness, writing *does* and in these doings it can be considered,

as Massumi suggests, not as a telling of what is or what might or should be, but in activating detail, as a showing, providing an “exemplification,” in and of itself.³⁴ He had always felt that writing in and with the fluid heterogeneities and contingencies of a “body-without-organs”³⁵ offered great potential for challenging the dominating force of the prevailing image of thought. With Manning he had always thought that “there is never a body as such: what we know are edgings and contourings, forces and intensities: a body is its movement.”³⁶ And in this, he had always enjoyed and practiced in his writing, in a Deleuzian sense, a “smoothing” of space, altering, through practices of territorialization, the fixities and delineations of striations in space, because, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, “(s)mooth space is filled by events and haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic rather than optical perception . . . a Body without Organs instead of an organism and organisation.”³⁷ In writing and doing philosophy, he had always been excited by using his own writing to try to bring alive Deleuze and Guattari’s description of philosophy as a “free and wild creation of concepts.”³⁸ In this each new writing stutters in language and, in so doing, in creative relationality, makes language; each new writing is an utterance, it encounters and it is an event. He remembered writing something like this in his diary, some time ago:

There is a poetics in our madness that opens fissures in the indistinct relentlessness of relational spaces. It is a poetics of affect and it is sensitised in the aesthetics and sensualities of becomings of space. Working with the affective offers alerts to haecceity and the vibrancy of moments of “This is this.” It is the point where everything stops, perhaps only for an instant, and then in that brief instantaneous stopping that defies language and all discursive construction, becoming surfs and is the surging tide of beautiful temporary knowing that is recognised in gestural simplicity, a smile, a nod and a gentle moving on in world-making.³⁹

He reads Charles J. Stivale, who points to a practice of Deleuze that is redolent of such an approach to writing and that also offers an opening to writing in relation to becoming animal. He hears echoes of the Auster quotation he had used before when Auster talked about liking to be “in the dark,” how that works in keeping him alert, “wide awake and on your toes, taking it all in, ready for anything.” Deleuze maintains that whenever he is out in the world, at an art exhibit, or at a movie, he is ever searching for *rencontres*, for intensities

that might touch him or affect him, to “risk having an encounter with an idea.” Just as animals live constantly *aux aguets* and thereby must define their territory and existence in specifically delimited ways at every second, so too do artists and philosophers open themselves to possibilities of innovation and thought.⁴⁰ These practices of *être aux aguets* (being on the lookout) for *rencontres* (encounters) that Stivale refers to in a Deleuzian becoming animal, as Stivale points out, engage with “the crucial link between creativity, the very possibility of thinking, and animality,”⁴¹ and also have powerful resonances with what Massumi describes as the “creative-relationally more-than human,”⁴² where there is a non-humanness that prompts, animates and motivates all kinds of new, speculative and experimental practices and becomings. He senses that an immanent writing practice, a writing that is, a becoming body of writing as an event, and a writing that does, has enormous potential for engaging creative relational worldings where it is possible to “come as you are,” making real animations of alertness and an always engagement with the next encounter, possibly in the dark and perhaps only just around the corner. ■

KEN GALE is Lecturer in Education in the Plymouth Institute of Education, within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Plymouth. Correspondence to: Ken Gale, Plymouth Institute of Education, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Plymouth, Rolle Building, Devon PL4 8AA, UK. Email: k.j.gale@plymouth.ac.uk.

NOTES

1. Brian Massumi, “The Supernormal Animal,” in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 14.
2. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.
3. Deleuze Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988), 399.
4. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 154.
5. Massumi, “The Supernormal Animal,” 9.
6. Ken Gale, “Now You See Me, Now You Don’t: Living with Deleuze, Intimacy and the Dance of Movements, Moments and Sensation,” Special Issue on Deleuze and Intimacy, *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* (2020 forthcoming).
7. Elizabeth Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics,” in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (London: Routledge, 1994), 194.
8. Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 24.
9. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2002), 60.
10. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 60.

11. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 23.
12. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).
13. Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 25.
14. Erin Manning, "Wondering the World Directly—or, How Movement Outruns the Subject," *Body and Society* 20, nos. 3–4 (2014): 178.
15. Manning, "Wondering the World Directly."
16. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 46.
17. Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xvii.
18. Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 11.
19. Ken Gale, *Madness as Methodology: Bringing Concepts to Life in Contemporary Theorising and Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 2018).
20. Manning, *Politics of Touch*, 106.
21. Gale, *Madness as Methodology*, 17.
22. Manning, *Politics of Touch*, 16.
23. Ken Gale, "Moods, Tones, Flavors: Living with Intensities as Inquiry," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 8, (2014): 998–1005.
24. Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber, 1987), 152.
25. Manning, *Politics of Touch*, 161.
26. Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
27. Laurel Richardson, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 923–48. See also Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 959–79.
28. Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 12.
29. Massumi, "The Supernormal Animal," 14.
30. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240.
31. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. A. Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 27.
32. Ken Gale, "Writing Minor Literature: Working with Flows, Intensities and the Welcome of the Unknown," *Qualitative Inquiry* 22, no. 5 (2016): 304.
33. Robert Hurley, "Preface," in Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), iii.
34. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 18.
35. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
36. Manning, "Wondering the World Directly," 163.

37. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 479.
38. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Verso, 1994), 105.
39. Gale, *Madness as Methodology*, 25.
40. Charles J. Stivale, "Etre aux aguets: Deleuze, Creation and Territorialization," in *The Animal Catalyst: Towards Ahuman Theory*, ed. Patricia MacCormack (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 69.
41. Charles J. Stivale, "Hannibal aux aguets: On the Lookout for New *Rencontres*," in *Deleuze and the Animal*, ed. Colin Gardner and Patricia MacCormack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 197.
42. Massumi, "The Supernormal Animal," 14.