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Speculations on force and form: resisting the neurotypical in the neoliberal university

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**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**

Speculations on force and form: resisting the neurotypical in
the neoliberal university

by

Helen Bowstead

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Society and Culture

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Signed

Date 31st August 2023

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“Much tweaking is necessary to find the right balance between the static and the chaotic”
(Manning, 2016, p. 93).

Abstract

Speculations on force and form: resisting the neurotypical in the neoliberal university

Helen Bowstead

Can reframing a thesis in terms of what it can *do* rather than what it *is* generate a joyful-artful engagement with the PhD process and engender a more *response-able* relationship with the world? In this tentative exemplification of the speculative potential of force and form, the very act of writing emerges as a powerful antidote to constraints of the neoliberal university. Exploring writing as *immanent doing*, Erin Manning's philosophical projects of *research-creation*, *artfulness* and *thought in motion* find expression through the ordinary, the everyday and the mundane. By refusing to engage in the *dis-abling* constraints prescribed by institutional expectations of doctoral study, the writing process takes on a liveliness, a *jouissance*, that has the potential to transcend and transform. In a process of reimagining who and what is valued beyond the normative and the neurotypical, the thesis works to trouble and challenge the colonial structures that continue to exclude and silence.

Key words: research-creation, artfulness, thought in motion, exemplification, immanence

Where it all begins and ends

“I am the awkward sorceress of the invisible: my sorcery is powerless to evoke, without the help of your sorcery. Everything I evoke depends on you, depends on your trust, your faith”
(Cixous, 1991, p. 185).

Have you ever run in a thunderstorm? I have. The rain was so heavy, I could hardly see.
Thunder crashed. Lightning flashed.

Red-faced and sodden, I ran along the deserted Hoe.

I am a changed person.

I have stretched out my legs. I have uncurled my heart. I have let the words flow ⁱ.

Beginnings and endings. Endings and beginnings. Of course, there is no such thing. The end of the thesis is where it begins. The beginning is where it ends.

This is a thesis that begins and ends with a reckoning. A realisation. A shift.

She is driven by a conviction that what she is doing is of some use. And, like Foucault, she knows there are a thousand things to be attended to. Not least her own transformation ⁱⁱ.

But she is not Foucault.

Audacity or arrogance? It's a fine line.

It's all about the writing. The act of writing.

The writing that refused to comply. The writing that took, takes, is taking on, a life of its own. The writing that doesn't care what the thesis is about. Or what it means. The art-ful, care-ful, force-ful writing, the writing that doesn't give a fig. Or a flying fuck, what the institution thinks.

In the gloaming, she finds the courage to submit a thesis that refused to know in advance.

She finds the writers that tell her that refusal is generative, affirmative, and creative. That

refusal is needed, necessary, and political. That refusal breathes life, A LIFE ⁱⁱⁱ, into writing, thinking and research.

Refusal is a mode of existence. A mode of resistance.

This is a thesis that began with refuse and ends with refusal. Or the other way around.



Figure 1: Disposable Bodies

But let us start where this started. Whatever this is.

Twenty thirteen, a year before some and a year after others, a year when something began.
An ontological breach. A seismic shift. A no-going back.

Who were these women ^{iv}?

The witches you did not burn ^v.

Twenty thirteen. The start of the long preparation ^{vi} for this grey and cloudy day in August.
The day I will submit this this leaky, porous body of work.

Episodic.

Epigrammatic.

Aphoristic.

An experiment.

An exposition.

An exemplification.

A refusal.

Of sorts.

Well, she was never certain.

Except of the paths she did not want to follow.

Like H el ene Cixous, she is afraid ^{vii}. Haunted by a ghostly imperative to explain. To justify. To prove herself worthy. Has she read enough? Has she thought enough? Are her words enough?

Is she a charlatan? A fraud? An imposter?

Of course, she is all of these. And more. And less.

The reader must be satisfied if she is to creep away from the cave unseen. The cyclops stirs.
She is hungry for flesh ^{viii}.

Chronicles of a thesis not foretold

01 October 2022

Kalo mina

It is the first of October. Kalo mina. As they say in Greece. Have a good month.

It is exactly seven years since I officially started my doctoral studies. So, today will mark the end. This will be the finish line. The last line.

I haven't been sleeping well. The new term is upon me. Teaching has started. And I have a new role. I am now a line manager. I must line manage my team. Keep them in line.

I wake in the early hours, thinking about performance development reviews and workload allocations. I am not sure this is for me.

I try to go back to sleep. But I am restless. I need to breathe in the sea air. I need to run. To move.

The tide is high. The waves throw spray up onto the walkway around the old harbour. A group of fishermen are gathered near the Antony Gormley statue. There are women in the sea. Swimming and laughing.

As I run, I think about lines. And linearity. About chronicles and chronology. And force and form.

In the distance the breakwater is almost fully submerged. It forms an invisible line in the ocean. Separating the turbulence of the open water from the relative calm of the harbour.

I have rowed beyond the breakwater. The sea feels different there. Smells different there. The air is thick with ozone. And the sound of water.

The sound of water. The smell of water. The shape of water.

Water takes the shape of whichever container it is poured into. A bucket. A bottle. A bay.

Into what shall I pour these words? What will contain them? Constrain them? Hold them?

This leaky, porous body of work.

This formless, shapeless, oozy, boozy, PhD. This sac of fluid. Of fluidity. Of fluidifying (Massumi, 2002, p.6). Of flux.

This thing which cannot be contained. But must.

The shape of a thesis. The work of a thesis. Form and force. Force and form.

Time is running out. I have two hundred and forty-four days remaining.

Two hundred and forty-four days.

And, then what?

I drive home.

I need a bath.

I floss and brush my teeth. My gums are receding. Ever so slightly. I remember my dad's teeth growing longer by the year as the soft pink retreated and the yellow roots were revealed. In the end, he lost them. I'd like to hang on to mine.

The bathroom is looking grubby. The grouting is blackening again. The toilet bowl is smeared with shit.

I rub at the grouting so hard that the toothbrush snaps. I squirt bathroom cleaner at the tiles. I bleach the toilet.

Seven years I have been writing this thesis. Seven years. And here I am. A naked, middle-aged, post-menopausal woman, still trying to scrub the bathroom clean.

Everything is the same. And everything is changed. I am changed. And I am glad.

From Monday, the university will fund twelve hours of free English classes each week. A tiny act, a tiny intervention, a tiny offering for those who seek sanctuary. For those in need of a safe harbour. For those who have been displaced and dispersed by forces beyond their control.

A happy ending. Of sorts.

But the work is never done.

26 September 2022

The gloaming

I am in the gloaming. The twilight of the thesis. Of the thesising.

It is the witching hour. Light and dark meet and mingle. The dying sun. The rising moon. The greyness, tinged with light. All is shadow. All is aglow.

September is nearly done. Autumn is in the air. My hands feel the chill of the cooling sea as I swim. The wind whips across the grey waters of the Sound when I run. The lido has been drained for the winter.

The writing has changed. I can feel it. It senses and ending. A finishing up.

What happens after the story ends? It goes on, of course.

What happens before the story starts? Everything, of course.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jeanette Winterson (2014) tells the stories of the twelve dancing princesses. Of what came to pass in the happy ever afters. Murder and mermaids. Rape and regret. Passion and poison.

I wonder about the befores. Did the princesses always sleep in the long white room? What lured them to the window? Was it the silvery moon that taught them to fly? That taught them to dance?

Fairy tales always begin in the middle. And end in the middle. Everything happens in the middling.

Befores and afters. Force and form.

The force of the writing. The form of the written.

The anarchix^{ix} bubbles and brews. Stews and sweats. It is a witch's cauldron of spells and sorcery.

The force of the anarchix. Billowing and voluminous. The form of the thesis. Laced up and fully boned.

19 September 2022

The funeral

The commanding officer of the Grenadier Guards strides down The Mall. The iconic bearskin. The golden chin strap. The scarlet jacket, adorned with medals.

It is a National Day of Mourning. I don't know how I feel. How to reconcile the mix of emotions. The Queen is dead.

Images flash across the screen. There she is in India, riding a bejewelled elephant. Receiving the Haka in New Zealand. Being carried through the streets in a flower-adorned canoe in Papua New Guinea. Shaking Nelson Mandela's hand in South Africa. These technicolour reminders of the British Empire. I am proud and appalled.

The commentator tells us that the queen awarded the entire NHS the George Cross. For their work during the Covid pandemic. Who knew?

All the uniforms. All the medals. Pomp and pageantry. It feels like the end of an era. I suppose it is. A necessary end, perhaps.

Pipes and drummers. Naval ratings. The Royal Marines. A tri-service Guard of Honour. All that marching. Feet stamping. Arms swinging.

The white-feathered plumes of the Gentleman at Arms. The Royal Company of Archers. The Yeoman of the Guard.

This is an equalising occasion, we are told. There are dignitaries from every corner of the globe. The first female president of Tanzania enters the abbey ahead of the president of the United States.

But I can only spot one black face amongst the 142 naval ratings.

Big Ben will toll once for every year of the Queen's life. Ninety-six chimes in all. Then there will be silence.

A minute. At 11.55.

18 September 2022

The Queen is Dead

The Queen is dead.

Today is the last day that members of the public can pay their respects. Thousands upon thousands of people have queued for hours to file past her casket. To nod. Or bow. Or weep.

Tomorrow, the coffin will be transported on the State Gun Carriage, escorted by 142 naval ratings to Westminster Abbey for the state funeral.

Seventy years on the throne. That's a long time.

Beginnings. Endings. Life. Death.

The chronicles of life.

Mundane. Magic. Triumphant. Traumatic. Blessed. Cursed.

Ordinary affects ^x. Extraordinary effects.

Big Ben is silenced at 8.00pm.

Stop the clocks.

25 August 2022

There's a woman in all of us

I keep thinking about the tail end of an interview I caught on Women's Hour a week or so ago. Dr. Jenny Mathers is being interviewed. She explains how economic crises have particular impacts on women. When [male] leaders feel like they are losing their grip, she tells us, their paranoia gets played out on women's bodies (Mathers, 2022); pregnancy is encouraged or discouraged, abortion is imposed or withheld.

Wade v Roe has been overturned in the United States.

China has banned 'not-medically necessary' abortions after years of the state-imposed one-child policy.

Vladimir Putin has resurrected the Russia's Mother Heroine Award. Mothers will receive a one-off payment of a million roubles and a gold medal when their tenth child turns one.

Their *tenth*.

24 August 2022

Great Aunty Edie

It's my great Aunty Edie's birthday. Or would have been. She is long gone.

Edie worked at the Bear Brand factory in Liverpool and sent us bundles of navy-blue knickers every birthday and Christmas. That's all I ever wore, well into my teens.

My Aunty Edie had an ample bosom. I wonder sometimes if that's where my heavy, post-menopausal breasts have come from. Perhaps they have been waiting for their moment. A fleshy tribute to a body now departed.

I have taken the day off work to row. A day off from the PhD. What is the lure? Not the weather, for sure. The sky is ominous and darkening. A low mist hangs over the river and surrounding countryside.

We take three boats up the river Tamar. Four women in each. The oldest in her eighties. The youngest in her forties. The rest of us, somewhere in between.

The Tamar is a working river. Not pretty until you put Plymouth far behind you. We row past the dockyards. There are two submarines. One undergoing a refit. One being decommissioned. There are thirteen out-of-service nuclear submarines stored at the Devonport Dockyard. Thirteen.

The immense grey bulk of the American warship dwarfs us. The funnel has been painted with a yellow and a blue stripe. It is Ukraine's Independence Day today. There is not much to celebrate.

We negotiate the wake from a speeding tug. And weave past buoys and boats. At Torpoint, we race the chain ferries that carry cars and lorries and buses across the river to Cornwall.

From here you can see the rolling curves of the Royal Albert Bridge, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It is dwarfed by the towering pylons of the Tamar Bridge, the longest suspension bridge in the UK.

We stop and rest beneath the two great structures. There is something inherently male about the Tamar.

22 August 2022

Bioluminescence

I wake damp with perspiration. I have only slept in fits and starts. It is grey and drizzly outside. I optimistically don my trainers. It will be good to shake of the heaviness. Clear my head. I drop my daughter at work and drive down to the Hoe. The rain is lashing down by the time I park up. I sit for a while contemplating the weather. I don't have any dry clothes with me, and I can't face the thought of driving home wet. Perhaps it's the head cold. Perhaps not. I restart the engine. On the radio, Annie Mac is interviewing deep-sea ecologist, Nikolai Roterman. Somewhere near the Antarctic, scientists have discovered a small but numerous species of crustacean that cluster around hydrothermal vents, thriving in an ecosystem generated by chemoautotrophic symbiosis. In the dark, depths of the ocean, microbes convert inorganic chemical compounds into energy. The tiny crabs have hairy chests that provide a home to the microbes. In turn, the microbes provide the crabs with a rich source of food. It's a bit like eating cornflakes out of your beard, jokes Nikolai. The crustaceans feed sea anemones and seven-armed sea stars (Roterman, 2022).

Donna Haraway is suddenly on my mind ^{xi}.

Haraway describes sympoiesis as "a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it" (Haraway, 2016, p. 58). For Haraway, there is no self-contained individual subject. No living or non-living body that does not leak. That is not permeable. That does not affect and is not affected ^{xii}.

This is not *my* thesis. It is not of *my* making. And though it will be examined as such, a process of writing with, of making with, has emerged that seems, even if only fleetingly, to allow me to escape the I. She is there of course. She writes. She cannot help herself. Sometimes her shadow falls across the page. And the shrimp scatter. But, occasionally, on moonlit nights, and August days, a luminescent array of glittering symbionts charge her words with energy, with electricity, and create a sky full of stars.

20 August 2022

The flood

Before I put the wash on, I soak the menstrual blood out of my daughter's knickers. I don't mind. Her periods comfort me, a monthly reassurance that a baby isn't on the way.

I fill a plastic bowl with water and drop the underwear in. So many pairs of her beautiful knickers bear a russet stain. I will try and rescue these two.

She doesn't seem to suffer too much. Light bleeds. No cramps. My elder daughter has a harder time. Like me. At fifteen, I spent at least one day a month at home on the sofa. Wracked with pain. Paralysed by the fear of leaving a bloody smudge on a classroom chair.

Even on cold days, at that time of the month, girls would tie jumpers around their waists. Just in case.

My mother could bleed for England. On car journeys, she would often sit on a thick wedge of towels. I wonder if that's why she gave up work? She was only fifty-five. My age.

Have you ever experienced the *flood*? You'll know if you have. You know it's coming. But there is not enough time to act. No hope of stemming the flow. Who knew a womb could hold so much blood?

I open the notebook I found by my bed. It is not the one I thought. It is a journal I wrote during our travels in Laos.

There we are, breakfasting on creamy scrambled eggs and good French coffee. Swimming in the monsoon rain. Visiting the centre where amputees are fitted with prosthetic limbs.

Laos is the most-bombed country in the world. For nine years the Americans dropped cluster bombs. Day after day. Night after night. I have written in capitals: THIS WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED TO ANY WESTERN COUNTRY. An echo back to *The English Patient* ^{xiii}.



Figure 2: Legs

Another August. Another time. Five years ago. A year after my father died. I was so sad. So drained. So desperate. Still grieving. For my dad. Still furious at my body's betrayals.

After the last journal entry, there is a page I have scrawled over in large unruly letters:

The lady doth protest too much.

Last night on TV, Dina-Asher Smith tells the world that her chances of 100 metre gold in the European Championships were scuppered because of 'girl stuff' ^{xiv}.

Periods have an impact.

I run a hot bath to ease my aching bones. I lie with my head submerged. It feels good. I contemplate my body. Is this the body that the current society needs ^{xv}? Big feet. Check. Legs. Okay. Getting stronger. Patchy pubic area. Not good. Midriff. Definitely not. Breasts. Large. Heavy. Arms. So-so. A mix of soft and hard. The rowing helps a bit.

The menopause has not been kind to me, I often say after one too many glasses of wine. I am not alone ^{xvi}.

I'd like to go for a swim. To change the feel of the day. But this summer cold has sapped all my energy, and everything makes me feel tired. Reading the paper makes me feel tired. Washing up makes me feel tired. Hanging out the washing makes me feel tired. But the poisonous powder has done its job. The tiny gussets have been restored.

The mundanity of the everyday. The creativity of the everyday ^{xvii}. I keep promising I will stop with all this everyday writing. But I can't. It is how I think.

The repetitions and returns. The washing that is never done. The toilet that is never clean ^{xviii}.

It is 14.14. Almost time to pick my daughter up.

19 August 2022

The bloody years

I have a summer cold. My head feels woolly. I have not slept well these past two nights. Aches and sweats and vivid dreams. I have also been writing. In my mind. Sometimes I remember the words. Sometimes I don't. I used to keep a notebook by my bed. But I tended to scrawl in the dark and most of what I have written is illegible. What I can decipher, disturbs me. Murderous rage permeates the ink.

The bloody years.

Yesterday, I wrote nothing. Meetings and emails and restructures and the gnawing pain in my lower back put paid to that.

So much has changed in the university. Perhaps it is in ruins.

In the sweat-drenched dawn I thought about the massification of education. Is that it? The exclusive neighbourhood got overran by undesirables? The opposite of gentrification. Everyone was suddenly granted access to the ivory towers. Except they weren't really, were they? The desirable destinations remain as exclusive as ever.

The neoliberal logics of higher education hits some institutions harder than others. Some students harder than others. The latest report from the Office for Students (2021) insists that standards must be upheld^{xix}. Those that transgress the bounds of grammatically correct representations of knowledge must not be allowed to pass, not because they are lacking in some way but, like Manning's failing student in *Me Lo Dijo Pajarito*, because

we won't know how to recognize her difference, we won't have created a space where it can be sequestered. She will not have given us the tools to do so, to space her as one of the few who should receive an exception, as one of those who need to populate our otherwise white, neurotypical environment in order for it to have been inclusive.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 217).

The OfS report makes depressing reading. It is full of perverse logics and taken-for-granted assumptions:

We take the view that, for a course to be well designed and provide a high-quality academic experience, it should ensure that students are required to develop and demonstrate subject-specific and general skills. These will include technical proficiency in written English in most cases. For students to demonstrate such skills, they need to be assessed and such assessment must be reliable. It is unlikely to be possible to reliably assess student achievement if proficiency in written English is not included in intended learning outcomes.

(Office for Students, 2021, p. 11)

Language reduced to its most impoverished form. Proficiency equated to technical ability. Correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. The ability to use “use paragraph structure, syntax, and other features of language” (Office for Students, 2021, p. 3).

No place for the poetic. No place for creativity. No place for stammers and tics and stims. No place for non-standard English. No place for my students. No place for me. No place to be *cluelessly la dee da* (Manning, 2020a, p. 227).

Inclusivity is a chimera in the neoliberal, neurotypical university^{xx}.

17 August 2022

The heat has passed

The rains came. A deluge. The air has cleared. It is cooler. The heat has passed.

I feel lighter. Empty, almost. I need something to spark the writing. I should have gone for a run. But a restructure has been announced and I suddenly feel the need to be more present. To check my emails.

I don't know how I feel. I will be part of a new directorate – Academic Development – a “*one stop shop*” for a wider range of development and support.

A one stop shop. What a phrase. Do they learn these things at Senior Manager Bootcamp?

I flick through *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. Again. I come across a quote from Jayne Cortez. I don't know her work. It reads:

How do we transcend bitterness and cynicism and embrace love, hope, and all-encompassing dream of freedom, especially in these rough times? ... Without new visions we don't know what to build, only what to knock down.

(Cortez cited in Manning 2020a, p. 236).

The university is in ruins, Manning says. What will I find in the rubble? What can we build?

I go back to some of the sections I skipped yesterday. My head throbs. The words blur. Schizoeconomic finance. Self-Organizing Propositions. Processual Operator Thingies. SOPs and POTs. Cryptocurrencies ^{xxi}.

The 3E Process Seed Bank ^{xxii}.

16 August 2022

The day hangs heavy

The air is thick. Oppressive. The thunderstorms have not materialised. The day hangs heavy. A bad night's sleep. A 9.00am Zoom meeting. A morning spent writing emails. I feel drained. I try to read the penultimate chapter of *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. I find it hard going. I skip sections.

Manning says, "capitalism breaks bodies, its devaluation of qualitative difference at the level of aesthetic sociality so complete that bodies barely hold up. Exhaustion, anxiety, depression, and all their offshoots are everywhere palpable" (Manning, 2020a, p. 292). Capitalism is mad. And maddening ^{xxiii} .

There are daily reports on the cost-of-living crisis. Inflation is sucking the value out of workers' wages. Food costs are escalating. Many of us won't be able to afford to heat our homes this winter, whilst energy companies continue to raise prices. BP's profits have doubled, as has the cost of petrol at the pumps. Nothing makes sense.

I have to open the patio doors. I feel like I cannot breathe.

I want to run through a storm. Super-charged by the electricity in the air. I want to see lightning split the sky. And feel the thundery vibrations in my chest.

Instead, I sit. Waiting for words. Sticky. And stuck.

15 August 2022

The air is warm and thick

The heatwave has come to an end. Thunderstorms are predicted. The air is warm and thick. The tide is high. Unusually so. A lone fisherman sits by the Gormley statue. It will be a good day for mackerel.

There is litter everywhere. Coke cans. Plastic yoghurt pots. A pile of fresh human vomit. A puddle of dog diarrhoea. I salute a scrawny magpie. His head feathers missing in clumps. The world feels out of kilter. I need all the luck I can get.

There are the familiar sights of the Sound. Three tugs escorting a warship. The Cawsand ferry. The black arm of a swimmer, ploughing through the grey water. The dog-walkers. The coffee-drinkers. They are all there. But, nothing feels right.

I run and walk. I lack energy. Strength. The heavy air makes it hard to breathe. Sweat trickles down my chest. I climb the Hoe steps half-heartedly. There are no sprints. I could swim, I suppose. Cool off. But the sea swells against the rocks with latent menace.

As I round the pathway lined with models of naval vessels. I note the black-pen graffiti artist has been at work again. On the low, white wall, I see the now familiar slogan: Protect our borders. This time, it has been spelled correctly. They must have been practising.

I drive home, stopping off on the way to pick up my daughter's prescription. The happy-go-lucky fifteen-year-old is now a nineteen-year-old on anti-depressants. I worry about her. The hacking cough there never really goes. A legacy from long Covid. The silence where there used to be singing. The fatigue. The flatness.

It is hard to find joy in the world. In this world. There is much to feel sad about ^{xxiv}.

Perhaps the air is heavy with that the same sense of loss. The sense of carefree days drawing to a close.

The new term looms.

I have two weeks left to write. To bone the corset. I can feel the laces tightening.

12 August 2022

Ticcingflapping: or honing uncontainment (Manning, 2020a)

It is a year ago today that a gunman took to the streets of Plymouth and killed five people. Including his own mother.

There are memorials being held across the city. The day will be marked. The dead remembered (Minchin, 2022).

I don't feel able to write to this.

I retreat into Manning.

I read the chapter called *Ticcingflapping*. There is much to underline. I try to write. But I can't. I am trying too hard. And in the process of trying to say something, there is nothing to say.

I like the word nonvoluntary^{xxv}. It is softer than involuntary, a word used so often to dismiss or denigrate the language of the autistic. As Manning points out, in the realms of the neurotypical: "[t]o have something to say, one must be able to say it "voluntarily", speaking as a preconstituted subject exised from the tumult of experience in the making" (Manning, 2020a, p. 275).

I can only write when the writing writes itself. When it writes me. Not when I write it. When the "[l]anguage moves at the pace of the world, not the preconstituted subject" (Manning, 2020a, p. 279).

This (almost) daily act of writing. This writing with August writing. This writing with Manning writing. This thesis that knows its work is write and in the writing to refuse *the strictures of whiteness*:

whiteness in its colonial imperative is always about hierarchies of meaning and categories of sense. Whiteness is the executive, the deep-seated belief in time charted. Whiteness must live here lest it come face-to-face with the vastness of what else moves beyond its impoverished account of the human as the purveyor of the solitary I that speaks in his name.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 287).

Tito Mukhopadhyay's (2015) book *Plankton Dreams* is only eighty-seven pages long. Each section only a few paragraphs. It is an experiment in "holding back what might otherwise pour out" (Manning, 2020a, p. 283). How many pages is an eighty-thousand-word thesis, I wonder? How long is a chapter?

I google, PhD. According to the Harvard University webpages, most dissertations are 100 to 300 pages in length. All dissertations should be divided into appropriate sections, and long dissertations may need chapters, main divisions, and subdivisions (Harvard University, 2020).

I have noticed I often produce around six-hundred words in a sitting. The Six Hundreds. Not enough for a chapter. Not enough for a section. I should pad them out. Insert more material. Sew in some bones.

But I like the sparseness of this writing. I like the way it refuses to explain. Elaborate. Extrapolate. I like the digressions. I like the way it moves. Looping. Zigzagging. Stammering. Flapping. Ticking. Stimming. I like the rhythms. The repetitions.

Honing uncontainment. This push and pull within the writing. Voluntary, involuntary^{xxvi}. At times full of volition. At others, slow, sticky, subdued.

A thesis as a tickingflapping pocket practice. A cry to connect^{xxvii}.

In the realms of the neurotypical, everything needs to make sense; "full control over language is the condition through which a contribution to knowledge is confirmed" (Manning, 2020a, p. 279). The autistic voicing is, by contrast, "awake to the synesthetic force of (non)sense" (Manning, 2020a, p. 288).

The cat miaows. I let him out. We have learned each other's languages. It's not so hard.

I hang out the washing. It is a perfect day. The sun is warm on my back. A light breeze rustles the palm leaves above me. I make myself lunch. Brunch. Guacamole. The avocado is perfect. I add a chopped green chilli for spice and tomatoes and spring onions from the garden. I toast sourdough bread and pour myself a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. I make a pot of good, strong coffee and go outside to eat.

My daughter says we are *so* middle class. When she goes to her friends' houses for tea, they eat oven chips and frozen pizza.

I take tuna steaks out for later. I will make a cannellini bean stew. There is a bottle of Italian white wine in the fridge. We don't have much cash, but we have lots of capital. The cultural kind ^{xxviii}. All that reading, I suppose. All those books in the house. A vegetable garden. Home-cooked food. Conversations over dinner. Politics. Socialism Activism.

In their song, *Health is Wealth*, Bob Vylan accuse the government of killing poor kids with £2.00 chicken and chips ^{xxix}.

I think about Jake Davison. The young man who went on a murderous spree last August. Armed with a pump-action shotgun.

That's the trouble shit food. And guns. They kill you.

Though it is cool in shade and the garden is quiet, I cannot sit. I need to write.

Out of the shadow and into the light. Thought is moving. In this in/non/voluntary, I.

I think of the shadowy self who haunts so many of the photographs I have taken over the past seven years. A shape on the water. A shadow on the bathroom tiles. A reflection in the glass of a bus shelter. At first, she was there involuntarily. Intent on the shot. Her back to the sun, the shadow was cast. Later, I invited her in. Pleased that the taker was also taken. That the shooter was also shot.

There I am, at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in July. Reflected in a glass case. A shadowy haunting ^{xxx}. A stuffed dodo.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica tells me that the dodo was first seen by Portuguese sailors in about 1507 and was extinct by 1681. Exterminated by humans and their animals (Britannica, 2022). One hundred and seventy-four years to wipe out a species. Twelve minutes to extinguish five lives.

We had the Children's Encyclopaedia Britannica on the bookshelves in our dining room. Bought from a travelling salesman. All twenty red-bound volumes. They must have cost a fortune. My mother hid ten-pound notes in the inside covers. Her escape money.

The set has been boxed up and sent to the charity shop. There is no room in the new retirement flat. Who will buy them, I wonder? In the age of Google, what value do they have?

My mother has given me her entire collection of Virago Classics. There must be over a hundred books. They are still in the spare room. I have nowhere to put them.



Figure 3. Dodo and I

11 August 2022

The order of things

A brand new copy of *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 2002) has arrived. I am sat in the garden trying to keep cool, when I hear it thunk onto the doormat. An email tells me that Barkskins is on its way to Germany.

I hope my daughter hasn't read it.

I have read *The Order of Things* before. At least I think I have. I must have read some of it. Perhaps all of it. I have an entire folder entitled Foucault. Perhaps I should take a look inside.

It's nice to have my own copy though. I have overcome my dislike for marking books. I can't wait to get to work with my pencil.

I flick through the pages. In the chapter called *Speaking*, I read the following passage:

The language of action is spoken by the body; and yet, it is not something given from the very first. All that nature permits is that man, in the various situations he finds himself, should be able to make gestures; his face agitated by movements; he emits inarticulate cries – in other words, cries that are 'coined neither by the tongue nor by the lips'. All this is not yet language or even sign, but the effect and consequence of our animality. This manifest agitation nevertheless has the virtue of being universal, since it depends solely upon the conformation of our organs. Hence the possibility for man to observe it is identical in himself and his companions. He is therefore able to associate the cry he hears from another's mouth, the grimace he sees upon that other's face, with the same representations that have, on several occasions, accompanied his own cries and movements. He is able to accept this mimesis as the mark and substitute of the other's thought. As a sign. Comprehension is beginning. He can also, in return, employ this mimesis that has become a sign in order to excite in his companions the idea that he himself is experiencing, the sensations, the needs, the difficulties that are ordinarily associated with certain gestures and certain sounds: a cry expressly directed in another's presence and towards an object, a pure interjection. With this concerted use of the sign (which is already expression), something like a language is in the process of being born.

(Foucault, 2002, pp. 115-116)

Language is born of mimesis.

But what if the gestures and inarticulate cries do not align with your own? What do the autistic's tics and stims represent? Not all languages are universal. Not all organs conform.

As Manning writes:

[i]n the neurotypical model of interpersonal, the measure is always that of communication as direct exchange. I speak; you look and listen. Then you speak, connecting your thoughts to mine. When this doesn't happen, when the encounter doesn't read for the neurotypical as communicational, the response is depersonification, dehumanization... Cluelessly la dee da"

(Manning, 2020a, p. 227).

Manning describes autistic people as a *peopleless people*. She says that theirs is a *minor sociality* in which the relation is not me to you or you to me but to "a listening with the array of potential socialities in our surrounds. Lively with the forces of the outside, it asks that sociality be invented anew each time, that the world, and worlding become the occasion for study" (Manning, 2020a, p. 227).

Stop talking^{xxxi}. Listen. Listen otherwise. Listen to the "more-than that echoes across the threshold of the sensory" (Manning, 2020a, p. 227).

What can you hear?

The frontal modes of attention that define the neurotypical are "all eyeballs and flapping ears" (Clark cited in Manning, 2020a, p. 245). They work at a distance, serving only to "block out the scintillations of the world" (Manning, 2020a, p. 227). They are predicated on *distantism*; that is "the presupposition that all that is valued in existence can be mapped out point to point, that space is preconstituted, that standing apart is a value in itself, and that sightlines are the ideal choreography for movement" (Manning, 2020a, p. 246).

The Gantt chart. The objective researcher. The chapter sequence. The bedrocks of the 'good' thesis. Taken for granted. Untroubled. Immutable.

How to create a mutable thesis? A bodying thesis? A worlding thesis? A thesis that is born of the thick of living. The thick of experience. In the intra-thick-infra-thin of experience.

A voluminous thesis^{xxxii}.

10 August 2022

Mercury Rising

We are heading for another heatwave. An amber weather warning has been put in place. Hosepipe bans have come into force. We are warned to avoid exercise between 11.00am and 3.00pm. To stay inside during the hottest part of the day.

I go for an early run. My temperature gauge doesn't work so well these days. Even on cool days, I quickly overheat. Like an old banger. Sometimes I feel like a Loony Toons cartoon character, fire-engine red, with steam coming out of my ears.

The sun shimmers across the water. It is a beautiful day. The Hoe is still, quiet, calm. It won't stay like this for long.

I run across the top esplanade, greedily devouring the view. I run past workmen busily converting a large empty glass building into yet another restaurant. Fish and chips, no doubt.

I pass police cars and ambulances, their occupants enjoying coffees and bacon butties in the sunshine. I run around the old harbour where the Gormley statue stands. The arms of the harbour are littered with last night's debris. Plastic bottles, polystyrene cartons, sandwich wrappers, uneaten chips. The chips will soon disappear, unless the gulls have already had their fill. The plastic will end up in the sea I suppose. I need to run with a bin bag.

I have no desire to photograph the mess. That urge has gone. The detritus has done its work. I have moved on.

Still sticky, still sweaty, I sit down to write. The run has worked its magic. I am ready to sew in a bone.

For a Pragmatics of the Useless is wedged open on the desk. Chapter 6, *Me Lo Dijo un Pajarito*.

Every page of the book is marked and starred and annotated. Writing with Manning *is* the defence of the thesis. The thesis that wrote itself over seven years. The thesis that didn't know what it was or wanted to be. The thesis that has moved with and through me. And

always will. The writing process that has emerged through the act of writing. The art of writing. The craft of writing.

Too much Manning. Or maybe not enough.

I cannot resist writing with her. In the same way I cannot resist the sweet, sticky flesh of the mango. Or the purple-black of summer cherries.

I am fascinated by this process. This looping, this circling, this spinning. I think back to another August. Writing with Manning and Winterson. Set ablaze by minor gestures and spinning dancers (see Bowstead, 2022).

The Earth is turning faster, someone says on the radio. We are losing time. The moon, tides, and winds, all have an effect. All affect. Hurricanes slow things down. Earthquakes speed things up. On the 29th June, midnight arrived 1.59 milliseconds sooner than expected (Sample, 2022). The International Telecommunications Union has decided to stop the clocks. Just for a second. A “negative leap second” to let us to catch up.

August is my negative leap month. Time to catch up. The final deadline is approaching. Time cannot be extended. Or stretched any further.

Deadline.

What a word.

Throw me a lifeline.

Manning is the lifeline. *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* is the lifeline. Research-creation is the lifeline ^{xxxiii}. Offering up a myriad of ways to make sense of this voluminous mass of words.

My thesis voluming into expression ^{xxxiv} as I write. It is knowing in-formation. Not the “knowledge of forms captured” (Manning, 2020a, p. 224) but a tentative knowing that whilst “deeply entwined with neurotypicality and the valuations that accompany it, might have the capacity for doing work differently” (Manning, 2020a, p. 225).

A little bit of difference is okay. Acceptable. Approvable. As Manning says, “[d]ifference will always be accepted to a degree. As long as the norm is upheld, it will always be good to

have a few exceptions, especially when those who enter that space clearly mark themselves as different” (Manning, 2020a, p. 217). In the margin, I have scribbled: *be careful*^{xxxv}.

I think I have too much power already^{xxxvi}.

There are voluminous elements to this work that feel important. That seem to heed Manning’s (2020a, p.213) call to attend to *the undercommons ways of cawing*^{xxxvii}. As my sentences shorten and the repetitions increase, as the play of words creates its beat, its cadence, its rhythm, I feel my work syncopate. No longer starved of oxygen, the words have found their own liveliness. Their own vitality. And yes, it is exhilarating to work in this way. Joyful. Thrilling.

08 August 2022

The smell of book

I have chopped fruit. Made breakfast. Packed a lunch.

I have taken my daughter to work. Bought cat food. Hung out the washing.

I go online looking for a copy of *The Perfect Mango*. It is out of stock. Instead, I buy *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 2002) and a paperback copy of *Barkskins* (Proux, 2017) to send to my elder daughter for her birthday.

I sit down to write. But there are no words today. Just lists of things I have done. Everyday things. Ordinary things. Mundane things.

For a Pragmatics of the Useless is open on the desk. I have underlined the title, “*In My Language*”. Manning describes Mel Baggs’ eight-minute video as “the most chilling account of how nonspeaking autistics are excluded from the realm of human” (Manning, 2020a, p. 219). I decide to watch it.

In the video, the ordinary become extraordinary as Baggs interacts with the objects that surround her. The drawer knob. The water running from a tap. She holds a pen in her mouth. She breathes in a book (Baggs, 2007).

What does a pen taste like? What does a book smell like? I know. But I don’t know. Not really. I pick up *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* and inhale.

As I sit in my ergonomic office chair, at my large melamine desk, tapping on the keyboard. I watch text appear on the monitor, and I am struck by the impoverished ways in which I, we, most of us, interact with the world. I cannot hear, smell, taste, touch except in ways that are constrained and preordained. As Manning writes, we “neurotypical folks have a much too limited idea of what constitutes experience, a perceptual dearth that doesn’t allow for the vividness of the infrathin infra-perceptually at work” (Manning, 2020a, p. 219)

I remember the fields of wheat and barley when I was a child. The long stalks brushing against legs and arms. The stubble left by the combine harvester, pricking my skin. The

sweet, musty smell of the straw bales. The sour taste of the crab apples in my mouth. Those long, sunny, carefree days. When life was sensory.

We are trained in neurotypicality. Disciplined to conform. As Foucault says, the power is everywhere and we are complicit in its workings^{xxxviii}.

We need more noses in books. More pens in mouths. More bodies moving otherwise. More “living in the register of the more-than, a living beyond the dichotomy of the human and the nonhuman and all categories that maintain the whiteness of neurotypicality as the baseline of existence” (Manning, 2020a, p. 219).

But the bodies that populate “unassimilable categories” can find themselves obliterated (Manning, 2020a). The autistic body, the black body, the indigenous body, the menopausal body. The student who can’t sit still. The student who doesn’t pay attention. The student who forgets to cite. The students whose ‘native’ language is not the one the university recognises. Or values. Universities continue to exclude bodies that “don’t pass as easily as the [English] speaking white body inevitably does” (Manning, 2020a, p. 147).

Baggs (2007) says that it is only when she types in “our” language, the language of the neurotypical, that she is recognised as a thinking being. As human. Yet, as she sings to the world and the world sings back, the profundity and richness of a language beyond words is palpable. The rhythm of *hir* tics and stims, the repetition of *hir* movements, the keening of *hir* voice speak of intimate and animate conversations beyond words.

05 August 2022

The Perfect Mango

I cut a bowl of fruit for my daughter. Pineapple. Kiwi. Mango. It's like old times. She has a holiday job and we are back in the morning routine of the school run. Boil the kettle. Dry up. Cut fruit. Make breakfast. Cook pasta for lunch. Wait at the bottom of the stairs. Drive across town one eye on the clock. Make it in time. Just.

The mango is perfect. Luscious. Sweet. Ripe. I carefully cut away the orange flesh. The stone remains. The best bit. By the time I am finished sucking away the flesh, my face and hands are sticky. No one is up yet. I have time to hide the evidence.

The Perfect Mango. I have yet to read it. I am scared it will subsume me. Consume me.

04 August 2022

Protect our boarders

Three tugs. Two to guide. One to steady. On the horizon, I can see the shimmering grey bulk of a naval ship. The tugs will bring her in. Negotiating the treachery of the Sound.

I watch the tugs head out to sea. It is a beautiful day. There is a cool breeze and some clouds. But the late summer sun is warm. Light catches the water. There are swimmers and paddleboarders and families in boats. I run back towards my car. The last stretch is around narrow path called the Rusty Anchor. Grey metal models of ships and submarines adorn the low wall that skirts the walkway.

I feel faster, stronger these days. I try to sprint the last few metres. At the end of the path, I stop. Out of breath. On a metal door words have been scrawled in black felt tip:

Protect our Boaders Now or Civil WAR

Protect our boarders? I guess they mean borders. Or perhaps they mean boarders? Maybe the local guesthouses are under threat.

Who is breaching our borders? Who do we need protecting from? Desperate people in dinghies? Polish lorry drivers? Romanian fruit pickers? Spanish waiters? Italian baristas? Ukrainian nationals? Anyone? Everyone?

The university has welcomed the Ukrainians who have arrived in Plymouth. There are host families and support groups. My Community English Classes suddenly garner attention. Funding is made available. There are pats on the back from the Senior Management Team.

There was a lot less interest before.

Perhaps it is brown women that we need protecting from? Women with bright eyes and beautiful children. Women learning to read and write and speak a new language. To negotiate an unfamiliar city. An alien culture. To thrive instead of just survive.

Back at home, I pick up *Border Crossings* (Giroux, 2005). It has been a long time since I have read Giroux. I flick through the chapters. In *Challenging Neoliberalism's New World Order*, I read:

Neoliberalism has become one of the most pervasive and dangerous ideologies of the twenty-first century. Its pervasiveness is evident not only by its unparalleled influence of the global economy, but also by its power to redefine the very nature of politics and sociality. Free market fundamentalism rather than democratic idealism is now the driving force of economies and politics in most of the world. Its logic, moreover, has insinuated itself into every social relationship, such that the specificity of relations between parents and children, doctors and patients, teachers and students has been reduced to that of supplier and customer. It is a market ideology driven not just by profits but by an ability to reproduce itself with such success, that to paraphrase Fred Jameson, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of neoliberal capitalism.

(Giroux, 2005, p. 210)

It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of neoliberal capitalism.

And it gets easier by the day.

The world feels ever more precarious.

It's not just our borders that need protecting^{xxxix}.

01 August 2022

Boning the corset

It's August again. Time to write. To assemble. To summon the golden glue ^{xi} that will hold the fragments together.

I need to put things in order. Order the words. Create a structure. Check my citations.

It is an impossible task. Easier to push a boulder up a hill.

How did I end up here? Writing a thesis as an act of refusal. Of resistance? This as yet untitled thesis.

How to tie this thing together. What are the threads that will bind it?

Perhaps I need a rope to anchor it. Make it secure. A bowline. A clove hitch. A stopper knot.

I have the words. But they don't want to be ordered. They don't want to be stitched up tightly or rendered seamless and smooth. They don't want to become a fixed, hard surface. Immovable. Static. Watertight. They like the fizz, the schizz. They like the holes, the gaps, the spaces they leave. They like the rhythms and repetitions. They like *agitating at the limit*. Rubbing up against each other. Producing the spark. A different kind of static is at play. The kind that makes your hair frizz up and sends little pricking shocks through your skin ^{xli}.

Manning asks:

what happens to knowledge when it begins to resist the very idea of form as the final mode of knowing? How is its force-of-form altered by conditions of study that don't hold onto the human as pivot of experience, that heed indigenous and black and queer forms of knowing? What does knowledge look like when it has become unmoored from its capture as form?

(Manning, 2020a, p. 222).

Can a thesis be a jumble of words? Jumbling. Mumbling. Murmuring. A seething mass. A mass that seethes.

Or does it need support and structure. Like a corset. Or a straightjacket? Whalebone and ribbons. Duck cloth and buckles. Bodies that move too much have always needed disciplining. Sit still. Keep quiet. Pay attention ^{xlii}.

What form can a formless thesis take? How can its sense of being always *in-formation* be preserved? How can the agitating properties of the words be contained and yet not constrained? What form can the container take that does not reduce “the circulation of forces” to knowledge (Manning, 2020a, p. 223). How can a thesis be written, submitted, examined that inhabits *the outside*, “the share of experience that resists scripting yet nonetheless affects what the script can do” (Manning, 2020a, p. 224). The knowledges we have been taught to recognize and value are not that which “whisper to us that the world is lively and living beyond the space a human takes” (Manning, 2020a, p. 224).

I have thirty-one days to pull this string bag of a thesis together. This amorphous, shifting mass of words.

Perhaps the thesis will write itself once more. Perhaps a form will emerge. The material will shape itself. Rei Kawakubo insists that clothing is not a predetermined category. “Break the idea of clothes”, she says (cited in Manning, 2016). How to break the idea of thesis? How to create what Arakawa and Gins would call a *procedural architecture* (cited in Manning, 2016)? How to defy structure? Refuse linearity? How to create a textual architecture that has both an external structure and an internal fluidity? A structure that is both form-full and form-less, that resists stasis and remains *in-formation*?

Corsets were designed to fit an individual body. To provide the right kind of shape and form. The art of the stay-maker was to place and sew in each individual bone. One hundred and eighty pieces were needed.

I like the idea of boning the corset. I feel that is what I am doing. Taking the voluminous writings of the past seven years and stitching in the baleen.

How strong are my stays?

I come across an image. *King death on the stage*, reads the headline. Poor Kittie Tyrell is tied up so tight she can no longer breathe. In the end her heart gives out.

Who hasn't felt so tied up that they cannot breathe? Cite more. Cite less. Cite better.

Who doesn't want to cut themselves loose from the academic straitjacket?

Stifled. Suffocated. Silenced. It's no wonder our students' hearts give out.

01 August 2022

The Lionesses

Last night the England women's football team won the European Championships for the first time. They played for glory in front of a capacity crowd. Eighty-seven thousand spectators. Millions more at home. Watching women play football.

I weep when they win. Are you crying, my daughter asks? Yes, I say, yes.

How to put into words what it means? What it says? What it does?

I remember the frustrated seven-year-old. Standing in the playground while the boys kicked a ball around the muddy pitch. Bored of hopscotch and handstands. Too hot in the coat she has been forbidden to remove. Why are the boys allowed to take off their jackets and jumpers? Why can they run, and tackle and fall? Why can they return to their desks red-faced and shiny-eyed? With grass stains on their trouser knees?

I watch the England footballers. They are determined. Skilful. Aggressive. I wonder how they discipline their bodies to keep those shorts so white. No periods on the pitch. No place for stomach cramps or heavy bleeds. We gain so much and gain so little.

Stuff period poverty, I say over dinner, I want period reality. Women menstruate. Full stop. Period.

What do you want to change, my husband asks?

Everything, I say. Everything needs to change. Of course, sanitary products should be free. Available to all. All the time. Of course. But it is more than that. So much more.

I cannot not see it everywhere. Neurotypicality. Colonialism. A human-centric world constructed to benefit a very specific human. Whiteness at work. Male, whiteness.

Erin Manning says all black life is neurodiverse.

I say all female life is neurodiverse.

20 July 2022

The last breakfast

It started with a conference. Nothing starts. It ended with a conference. Nothing ends.
Another city. Another hotel. A head full of words.

I am at my first face to face conference since lockdown. But many have opted to join online.
It is a hybrid mess of lost connections. Why won't the video play? Why won't the video
stop? YouTube continues photobombing presentations long after it has been closed down.

It is the International Conference of Autoethnography. Ironic really. After so many years of
trying to escape the I.

At the hotel, I eat my breakfast and I look out across the street. There is a man in a
wheelchair. Young. Perhaps in his twenties. His skin has the colour of someone who spends
all of his time outside. Not weather beaten or leathery, but a very particular shade of
brown. He watches the people around him intently. Like he wants something. Or like there
is something he doesn't want. He is naked from the waist up. He is overweight. Obese. As he
surveys the street, he plays absent-mindedly with his left nipple.

The previous evening, he had determinedly pushed himself up and down the just not wide-
enough gap between the outside seating area and the hotel's balustrade. As he wheeled his
way along the length of the terrace, he repeatedly bumped into chairs and tables of the
hotel residents sipping their evening drinks. His intent to disrupt and disturb was palpable.

I am distracted by two herring gulls that have landed on a table outside. They pick at the
plates. Enjoying their own buffet breakfast.

I glance back over to the young man. He has his hands down the front of his baggy tracksuit
shorts. He is masturbating. I quickly look away.

I look back across the street. I wonder if he can see me. Eating my vegetarian sausage.
Sipping my juice. A woman of many privileges.

He yawns.

14 June 2022

The appeal failed

The appeal failed. Eight asylum seekers will be flown to Rwanda today. From an anonymous airfield. On an unnamed flight. Why all the secrecy? So, we can turn our eyes away.

In The Guardian, I read: “The archbishops of Canterbury and York and the other 23 bishops that make up the entire senior leadership of the Church of England have criticised the “immoral policy”, saying it “shames Britain”” (Syal and Taylor, 2022).

Our shame, our failure to look and to see will taint us all. Harm us all. Make us less.

As Fred Moten says, “this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly” (Harney and Moten, 2013, pp. 140-141). White, colonial structures are not only bad for some of us, they are bad for all of us (Harney and Moten, 2013).

With whose blood do your eyes see ^{xliii}?

6 June 2022

Seaweeding

I sit on a concrete slab on the shore after my run. The tide is high. The step is low enough for me to immerse my hot feet in the water. It is cool and clear. The rocks are covered in barnacles. The seaweed moves with the ebb and flow of the tide. I watch the rhythmic swirl of the water, pushing the fronds back and forth. The brown bladder wrack is tipped with a deep gold. Its muted colours set off by the electric green of the gutweed.

A woman walks behind me and settles herself on a nearby rock. She takes off her shoes. We sit. Two middle aged ladies. Two metres apart. Dangling our feet in the sea. I think of Tamara and Viv. I think of seaweeding. I think of women. I think of Emebet.

Driving home I listen to the news. There will be a vote of confidence this evening. I wonder when they dropped the 'no'. Will Boris Johnson ^{xliv} be ousted? I doubt it. We have all become numb to the lying and the arrogance. The lack of care. The lack of values. The lack of morals or remorse. Why do we tolerate, condone, support, celebrate such leaders? And such selfish, heartless, vindictive politics.

This afternoon, I will meet Emebet. I am trying to help her through her GCSE English. Her ticket to a university education. She is disheartened. The first paper was hard. She doesn't think she will pass. Emebet wants to study Occupational Therapy. But she cannot access any university course without a GCSE in English and Maths.

We look through the practice exam papers. Paper 2 focusses on writers' viewpoints and perspectives. There are two sources, George Orwell's 1936 essay, *'Shooting an Elephant'*, and an extract from a book by Abraham Bartlett, published in 1898 (AQA, 2019). Abraham Bartlett, we discover, was the Head Keeper at the Zoological Society Gardens, which is now London Zoo.

The extract from Bartlett's book, describes how he and the keeper, Matthew Scott, dealt with the first African elephant to come under their care. Restored to health after arriving in a "filthy and miserable condition" the elephant began to play some "very lively tricks" which the two men quickly put a stop to: "Scott and myself, holding him by each ear, gave him a

good thrashing. He quickly recognised that he was mastered by lying down and uttering a cry of submission”^{xlv}.

It is a text of its time. Written from a particular perspective. It reeks of whiteness. Of maleness. And of asserting power over others.

Emebet gets lost in the vocabulary. The stylistic flourishes. The cultural touchstones. It is not an exam written for her.

Emebet has been given a list of things she should include in her article. Rhetorical questions. Repetition. Exaggeration. It’s like painting with numbers. But Emebet doesn’t know what the picture should look like. So it all gets muddled. It all goes wrong. Not everyone comes from a place where books and art are steeped in the white, male, knowings of the British Empire.

I am ashamed at how easy it is for me to see what the examiners want. To answer the questions. To conjure up opinion pieces for fictional audiences, for newspapers and magazines.

I don’t know how to help her. I don’t know. I just don’t know.

In the Brook House immigration removal centre near Gatwick airport, seventeen asylum seekers have gone on hunger strike. They are protesting at the government’s plans to deport them to Rwanda. The government has responded by informing them they will face faster deportation if they continue to refuse food. For some, suicide feels like the only option.

It is the ultimate cry of submission.

21 May 2022

Twenty-three Ukrainians

There are twenty-three Ukrainians in the room. Mostly women, but not all. There is a man in his thirties and a quiet teenage boy of perhaps sixteen or seventeen. Two young children sit at the desk at the back of the room. They are wide-eyed, disorientated. They have the look of sleepwalkers who have woken up to find themselves in a strange room, in a strange city, surrounded by strangers.

There is a slightly older girl at the same table. Her eyes follow my every move. She listens intently to everything I say. When I approach, she smiles up at me and shyly shows me what she has written.

We talk about cafes. And the food they serve. The Ukrainians tell me of food from home – fresh fish and salads. Meat and soup. Wine grown in the southern states. And Crimea. I pull the focus back to the UK. We read café menus and look at pictures of milkshakes and fizzy drinks. Pizza. Sandwiches. Chicken nuggets. Sausages and chips.

18 May 2022

A dead gull

It felt like war on the Hoe today. Three frigates anchored in the sound. A catamaran painted in a patchwork of camouflage greens and browns. Three police cars and a police van.

And yet, all is quiet.

A low mist hangs over Mount Edgcumbe. A raincloud sits over Bovisand. But the Sound is bathed in pools of sunlight. The tide is high. Very high. Water washes over the walls of the lido, filling the pool with foam. In the small harbour near to the Antony Gormley statue, a dead gull is suspended in a mass of flotsam. Its pink feet are uppermost. Perhaps in the murky depths it has spotted an empty burger carton. Or a discarded bucket of KFC.

The police have gathered for their morning coffee. Sea air and caffeine to lift the spirits before the day ahead. Or perhaps to soothe after the night before. The frigates sit peacefully. Grey shapes on a grey sea. Only the growl of the catamaran disturbs the calm.

I haven't written for a while. My usual April window did not open. A wedding. A birthday. A minor operation. The stuff of life.

I wait for August. My books piled neatly on the desk.

23 April 2022

And the world shifts

And the world shifts. To a better place. Buoyed on the energy of good people. Kind people. People who care. My spirits lift.

We spoke of the Writing Café ^{xlvi}. It was painful. Like remembering someone who has died. An old friend who has been lost to you. And left a hole. A café-shaped hole.

Why didn't I take something from the space? Something to remember it by. A wonky chair. The rusty typewriter. The slate globe. The treasures liberated from dusty basements. The objects that called to us and others. *"It looks like my gran's house"*, someone once said.

A space to write. To write together. A collaborative, collective space. A space where everyone was welcomed.

The Babbage Building is being renovated. It is encased in plastic and scaffolding. Cranes tower over it. Windows and walls have been laid bare. My heart aches when I see it. They tell me the Writing Café will survive. Albeit in a different home.

22 April 2022

It's easy to lose hope

The corner space is empty today. No one works on Fridays anymore. Well, not on campus, anyway. I photograph the furniture and the walls.

This toilet has been twinned, reads a sign on the door. There are photographs. A wooden structure in Indonesia. A bamboo hut in Malawi. A graffitied shed in Afghanistan. These latrines, reads the text, were built *“through the kind donations of the academic, technical and administrative staff of the Faculty of Science and Engineering”*.

Latrine.

I am not sure how I feel.

A toilet twinned with a latrine.

A severed string.

It is easy to lose hope.



Figure 4: Latrine.

21 April 2022

The Writing Retreat

I am among people I like. Respect. Admire. There is a calm. A gentleness. There is no sense of the frenetic energy of the Thesis Bootcamp^{xlvii}. There is talking. Laughter. Good, strong coffee. We sit at a shared desk. Some read. Some write. Laptop or notepad? Keyboard or pen? Perhaps a nicely sharpened HB pencil.

What brings us here, to this space, on a sunny April morning? A shared commitment. But to what?

The importance of writing. The importance of reading. The importance of education. Social justice. Whatever that means.

Erin Manning says that the university is in ruins. I can't get the phrase out of my head. The university devours you, she says. Eats you up. And spits you out.

To survive we seek out spaces of nourishment, sustenance, regeneration.

I head for the corner I occupied three years ago. Maybe four? Covid has stolen time. Disorientated us. Everyone has lost something, or someone.

There is a desk. I can see the top of someone's head above the partition. Behind them is a whiteboard, words have been scrawled upon it in green marker.

What is learning? What is being exchanged?

I bid a hasty retreat.

Whose corner is it now, I wonder? The partitioned desk has a sense of permanence. Or, at least, semi-permanence. The beautiful photographs have been obscured. There is a severed red string leading nowhere. And an anonymous map in a wonky frame.

The stories of courage and heartbreak and hope have been rendered invisible. They are there. But they are not. The monstrous algae has choked up the space. It gets everywhere in the end^{xlviii}.

The desk. The partition. The whiteboard.

Neurotypicality. Neoliberalism. Colonialism.

Manning says that neurotypicality is whiteness at work. And that all education is predicated on colonialism.

We should do this more often, someone says. I can't help but feel we should do it all the time. That this should be the work we do for and with the university. To be in but not of ^{xlix}.

15 March 2022

My words are all choked up

My words are all choked up. Like the Venetian canals. Before Covid.

The Three Ecologies. I pick up the slim volume and search for Trump. There he is. The monstrous algae. Choking the life out of cities. Buying up properties, raising rents. Driving out poor families. Making them homeless.

Trump. Brexit. Covid. Putin. As Guattari says, contemporary history “is more nightmarish than ever” (Guattari, 2000, p. 29).

The Three Ecologies was first published in 1989. The nightmare continues. Dark. Violent. Insatiable. The monstrous algae proliferates.

We are all choking.

We are all stifled !.

How to shake off the inertia? The numbness? The paralysis?

Keep writing. Keep writing. Keep writing. I don't know what else to do.

14 March 2022

Still I write

January spilled into February. February has bled into March. And still I write.

I have spent the morning reading the weekend newspapers. And the last hour re-reading the introduction and first chapter of Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*^{li}.

On the front page of the newspaper is a photograph of a woman and her newborn daughter. Two days earlier, she was photographed escaping the bombing of a maternity hospital in Mariupol. Today, she is a mother. She looks shellshocked. She probably is.

In the Journal section of *The Guardian*, Jonathan Freedland reminds us that, unlike the aeroplanes on that fateful day in September 2001, Putin's invasion "did not come out of a clear blue sky" (Freedland, 2022, p.1). Western governments have done little but look away as Putin has advanced towards this current moment. Averting our gaze as he slowly choked Russia's infant democracy at home and performed a series of violent aggressions abroad: Georgia, Crimea, Syria, Chechnya, they have all suffered at the hands of the Putin regime. In the article, Freedland says that the west "must avoid the same mistakes it made after 9/11" (Freedland, 2022, p. 1). Mistakes, according to Freedland, that caused the US and the UK to misidentify the enemy and, instead of waging war on "a narrowly defined group of violent jihadists" (Freedland, 2022, p. 2). Political leaders have lashed out at Islam, creating dangerous and potent narratives that have served to exclude and demonise.

Russian vodka has been taken off the supermarket shelves. Dostoevsky banned from the curriculum. Will we ever grieve the young men of Russia who are also dying as we speak? Or will they, like so many others, be more lost lives that cannot be mourned?

The same mistakes.

Reading Butler, I cannot help but think about the hundreds of refugees who have drowned crossing the Channel. Of the thousands of asylum seekers who made it only to find themselves languishing in the cruellest of limbos. My heart breaks for them all. Ukrainian. Syrian. Iranian. Egyptian. Ethiopian. Refugee is black. But not all refugees are black. Some deaths matter. Some do not^{lii}.

This writing feels burdened. Blocked. There is no lightness. No flow. Perhaps that is as it should be. There is a heaviness in the world.

I have found my way back to Butler. But there is no solace in her essays. The same stories. The same mistakes. As Massumi (2015) says, it can be paralysing.

Who said, writing is activism? Kimmerer? Manning? Haraway? Something happens in the writing. Does the writing make something happen?

I need it to. It needs to.

Butler says we need to hear beyond what we are able to hear. Mercurieff and Roderick tell us to stop talking and listen. Haraway says we need to story the world differently. Manning says we need to think beyond thinkings outside. Kimmerer calls words are our gift and our responsibility.

I think of Cixous, writing her way out of the fear and darkness. Of Manning writing *The Perfect Mango* to stay alive.

I am writing in light and warmth. The garden is bathed in sunshine. There is a radiator behind my desk. My stomach is full of good food and strong coffee.

Are these words enough?

08 March 2022

International Women's Day

“Wild leeks and wild ideas are in jeopardy” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 75).

It's International Women's Day. IWD.

It's 2022. You'd have hoped by now such things would no longer be necessary.

On the radio, Lauren Laverne says that it will take an estimated 135 years to close the gender pay gap. It was ninety nine years, but Covid has set things back a bit. *A bit?*

One hundred and thirty five years. Not in my lifetime. Or my daughters'. Or their daughters'. Should they choose to have any.

I am not sure whether we are supposed to be celebrating. Or commemorating. Or commiserating.

I sit on the sofa and read *The Democracy of Species*. It takes me less than an hour. A sixty-minute shift ^{liii}.

Kimmerer's book celebrates the language of listening ^{liv}. And the language of reciprocity. And of gratitude. These are stories to nurture our becoming.

Native languages are filled with verbs. Filled with possibility. As Kimmerer points out, “A bay is a noun only if the water is dead ...To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 15). In contrast, she says, the *arrogance of English* insists that “the only way to be animate, to be worthy of respect and moral concern, is to be human” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 20). The loss of native languages is more than cultural. What is at stake is the ability to communicate in a language of animacy ^{lv}.

Did the first great pine that was axed to the ground give herself? Was she asked? Was she thanked? Plants give. Humans take ^{lvi}.

07 March 2022

Clean Monday

It's Clean Monday. Kathari deftera. The first day of the Orthodox Lenten fast. In Greece, it is a national holiday. On the islands, families go out and fly kites. There will be picnics of unleavened bread, olives and creamy taramasalata. Or a meal at one of the seaside tavernas. On this day, no one eats meat. Or fish. It is a day of seafood and crustaceans. Octopus tentacles are tenderised on the rocks and then roasted on charcoal. Huge prawns sizzle on the barbecue, their shells and heads still on. Cuttlefish is baked with spinach. Spiny sea urchins are served, raw and cooked.

I have spent the morning writing. I am working on a collaborative piece. I am not finding it easy. We are writing to Manning. With Manning. We are responding to a paper she presented at our Adventures in Posthumanism reading group. Beamed in from the freezing cold of northern Canada by the magic of Zoom.

I was struck by Manning's vulnerability. Her fragility. She talked of the challenges she and her community of artists, scholars, thinkers, writers, activists are facing ^{lvii}. The harsh climate. The need for warmth. For electricity. Their lives dependent on the generator. She tells us of the lack of sunlight. The cold showers. The financial strain. She is no stranger to depression, she says. Her talk was entrancing. I was lost to it. I scribbled words. Some jarred. Some enticed. Some filled me with sadness. Some with hope.

I take a break to hang out the washing. To cook. To eat. To wash up. I text an octopus to my older daughter. She sends me back an emoji of a kite.

It is a windy day here. Perfect for kite-flying. The washing flaps on the line. The sun comes out sporadically and lights up the garden. I write for a time. The words do not come easily. They get stuck. It is hard to write when you know you have to. Have to what? I don't have to. I want to. But I am unused to writing with others. Still, I send some pieces to my fellow collaborators. There is a poem, of sorts. A longer piece. And a shorter one. Words strung together. Fragments of thought.

In Manning's talk, she spoke of the Residential Homes that littered Canada in the 1920s and 1930s and beyond. These were places of immeasurable cruelty. Schools where you were taught that everything you were, knew, loved, was of no value. Didn't matter. Didn't count. Thousands of native children died in these places. Of malnutrition. Of disease. Of 'accidents'. Those that survived, remember only the hunger and the humiliations. Forced to speak English. To learn folk dances. To call their own family heathens ^{lviii}.

The residential schools were an experiment. An attempt to '*educate, assimilate and civilise*' peoples that understood, deeply and profoundly the reciprocal relationship all beings have with each other and the worlds in which they live. Peoples who understood the consequences of taking too much and who followed the ancient rule of the *Honorable Harvest*; "not just to take only what you need, but to take only that which is given" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 43). The languages of native peoples reflect this spirit of generosity:

while there are several words for thank you, there is no word for please. Food was meant to be shared, no added politeness needed; it was simply a cultural given that one was asking respectfully. The missionaries took this absence as further evidence of crude manners.

(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 9)

Kimmerer's grandfather was taken from his family when he was only nine years old. At the government boarding school, his native language was stolen from him, "washed out with soap, or worse" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 6).

Decolonisation is the latest buzzword in the academy. But as Max Liboiron says,

the verb decolonize is frequently invoked as something that you do to university courses, syllabi, panels, and other academic nouns. Yet in the face of all this "decolonization", colonial Land relations remain securely in place. Appropriating terms of Indigenous survivance and resurgence, like decolonization, is colonial ... the relationship of such a promiscuous use of decolonization with the definitions of colonialism above: it means settler and colonial access to Indigenous Land, concepts (like decolonization and indigenization), and lifeworlds to advance settler and colonial goals, even if they are benevolent ones. Especially benevolent ones.

(Liboiron, 2021, p. 26)

01 March 2022

My husband's birthday

Kalo mina, as we used to say in Greece. Have a good month.

It is my husband's birthday. I don't mention him much, do I? I don't bear his name. Or wear his ring. In Greece you keep your family name when you marry. And you wear the ring on your right hand. I don't know why.

In the library, I come across *Elemental Passions*. Luce Irigaray's (1992) lyrical meditations on love ^{lix}.

Fifteen chapters. Each a numeral. This is not a book to read in fragments. Although it is fragmented. The Perfect Mango is the same. It is a book to be devoured whole.

Nineteen ^{lx}. Nineteen days. To save a life. Writing as though your life depends on it. Because your life depends on it ^{lxi}.

There is a letting go in these works. A surrendering to the words. To the rhythms of language. Liling. Lyrical. Terrible. Wonderful. The writing has broken free of itself.

I am swept up in the writing. The reading. Themes, threads, imaginaries twist and tangle, crash and collide, erupt and ebb.

I am unscathed ^{lxii}.

28 February 2022

A fat and graceful mammal

Why are we not afraid? Are we so convinced of our immortality? Our invincibility? Who are we? Who are we?

I listen to the radio. Today, nuclear war is the top search term on Google. Do you remember how frightened we were in the 1970s? Do you remember Greenham Common? CND marches? Where the Wind Blows (Briggs, 1981) ^{lxiii}?

It is 2022 and we are at the mercy of a standoff between Russia's nuclear capability and NATO. Whose finger is on the button?

Where are our stories? What would raven carve out of mud to help us see the error of our ways? We need more than a bear and a walrus ^{lxiv}.

The earth will never recover. Ask the people of Hiroshima. Of Nagasaki. Of Chernobyl.

When we imagined ourselves as created in the image of God. As divine beings as opposed to earthly beings, carved from mud. The die was cast ^{lxv}.

Stop talking. Listen ^{lxvi}. Breathe ^{lxvii}.

The sea. The seaweed. The jellyfish. The octopus. The cat. The rat. The raven. The dog.

The human being. The undrowned. The undrowning. Breathing in unbreathable circumstances.

I read about *Hydrodamalis Gigas*. Hunted to extinction within twenty-seven years ^{lxviii}. A creature who quickly learned what we all know: "it is dangerous to be discovered" (Gumbs, 2020, p. 20).

Oh, to be that huge and quiet swimmer, a plant-based rough-skinned listener, a fat and graceful mammal. Oh, to say my name as a verb (Gumbs, 2020, p. 24).

Post-menopausal orkas lead their communities? It is they who are the village elders. They are the holders of the deep ecological knowledges they enable the pod to survive. (New Scientist, 2022). Into the spaceship, granny ^{lxix}.

25 February 2022

It's enough to make you weep

Putin has invaded the Ukraine.

The former head of MI6 says we have woken up in a new world.

New.

Not better.

Infinitely worse.

The grinding predictability. The soul-destroying inevitability. We are bent on our own destruction ^{lxx}.

Worse even than Massumi's never-materialised future threats ^{lxxi}. This is the next pandemic. Just swap the chicken for a bat. This is the next world war. Trump. Putin. Johnson. Interchangeable threats.

White, male, arrogance. Delusions of superiority. Lethal paranoia.

It's enough to make you weep.

And weep I do.

22 February 2022

Lots of twos

22.02.22. I like the symmetry.

'It is the stillest words which bring the storm, thoughts that come on doves' feet guide the world' (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 5).

After the storm.

I left the library yesterday with a bundle of books. Nietzsche. Foucault and Derrida. I have trouble spelling Nietzsche.

I have plumped for *Ecce Homo*. Nietzsche's final book. The notes tell me it was written between the 15th October and 4th November 1988. That's less than three weeks. The blurb calls it *the strangest 'autobiography' ever written ...* I am intrigued. On the cover, Nietzsche seems to be looking simultaneously at the reader and away. His pen is poised. His brow furrowed. He has the most fabulous moustache.

In the introduction, Michael Tanner tells us of Nietzsche's distaste for the idea of modelling one's life on anyone else, and how this book is his attempt to "achieve an independence of spirit in the face of a series of strong temptations to capitulate to powerful influences" (Tanner cited in Nietzsche, 1979, p. x).

Behold the man: How to become what one is ^{lxxii}.

The books I have taken from the library, reflect the fear I feel, as I move inexorably towards submission. The fear of being found out as a flimsy, feckless, lazy scholar. I love Foucault. I like Deleuze. I am not so keen on Derrida. Nietzsche is growing on me. But how not to become subsumed by their *greatness*? The *weightiness* of their words? The *brilliance* of their ideas? Even Nietzsche struggled ^{lxxiii} not to lose himself.

Nietzsche did not share the world-views and aspirations of his peers. He refused to read what should be read. And instead he advertised his ignorance and relied on "his extraordinarily developed sensitivity to phenomena which none of his contemporaries was able to notice, partly because they knew too much and esteemed the wrong kinds of

knowing” (Tanner cited in Nietzsche, 1979, p. xvi). Nietzsche’s work puts “stress on ‘the little things’ as being of an importance that philosophers have never given them – climate, diet, digestion, when to read and so on” (Tanner cited in Nietzsche, 1979, p. xv). Ordinary Affects. The mundane. What we come to know through the everyday. A kind of domesto-onto-ethico-epistemology

I am reeling from Nietzsche. There are fish-hooks and upside downs and storms. There is the valuelessness of all values. And Zarathustra (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 77).

I could quote and quote and quote. Cite and cite and cite. Expound. Explain. Eulogise. But I don’t want to. I prefer Betty’s plugging in ^{lxxiv}.

21 February 2022

My washing might dry today

Storm Eunice has swept across the country, leaving devastation in her wake. Franklin followed her. When did we start naming storms and hurricanes? Alphabetically. By gender. Female. Male. Female. Male. English is the language of nouns (Little Bear, 2016).

I remember the storms that would batter the Cyclades. In the summer, the Meltemi would whip up red sand from Africa that left both skin and land red raw. In the winter, the freezing Easterly winds would howl for days. The ferries stopped running. Supermarket shelves emptied.

Once, there was a storm so severe, that it turned the harbour upside down. We woke to find the cars in the sea and the boats on dry land.

The wind is dropping. The garden is bathed in sunlight. The washing machine has come to the end of its spin cycle. The house is quiet, save for the radio playing in the kitchen.

I go out for a walk in the blustery sunshine. The storm is abating. The tide is out. I take photographs as I walk along the Hoe. The Gormley statue. The lido. I decide to walk around Sutton Harbour. The old university building is being converted into something. I wonder what? The swans are there. And a traffic cone. A coffee cup from KFC. Some plastic bags. An orange. A man is sitting on a piece of cardboard at the corner of the quay as I walk into the Barbican. I don't meet his eye, but he wishes me a good afternoon, anyway.

What is wrong with me?

I stop and turn. We exchange a few words. I empty my purse of change. I drop a couple of pound coins into his cardboard box and walk on. Ashamed that I did not give him a five-pound note. Or ask him if he was hungry.

What is wrong with me?

On the top of the esplanade, there are families and dog-walkers and skaters. I see a face I recognise, but I can't place her. I walk on. And then remember. She used to come to the free English classes. I wrack my brains for a name. A country of origin. Nepal, I think. Her son is

with her. Wearing knee pads and a helmet, he skates awkwardly. And smiles shyly. I try to catch his mother's eye. But she doesn't look my way again. I watch her cycle away.

What is wrong with me?

I need to be back in the world. The pre-Covid world. The post-Covid world. Being and worlding. The hiatus is over. Boris Johnson wants to put an end to legally imposed isolation. He is all for personal responsibility. What a joke.

14 February 2022

Turning the world upside down

Lying on my back in The Box. Stars and raindrops and footprints. My body is bathed in light. I wonder what I look like from the balcony above. Always looking down. So rarely up.

Foucault says we used to see our faces reflected in the stars. Deleuze and Guattari say there is no heaven for concepts. Earth. Matter. Earth matters. Lives matter. Life matters. Black life matters.

Erin Manning says the earth is black. Neurodiverse is black. Or is black neurodiverse? From where do you see the world? From a spaceship? An ivory tower? From the shadows? The periphery. *The Undercommons?*

The Seven Sisters traverse the night sky. Shining points of light. The Pleiades ^{lxxv}.

Star women. Tree women. Wise and wily. Water hole by water hole, they map the desert. Cartographies of survival. Of earthly knowledge. Telling stories for earthly survival (Terranova, 2017).

Greek myths. Indigenous knowledge. All mixed up together. The prose of the world (Foucault, 2002).

05 February 2022

Responding to Manning ^{lxxvi}

“To make way for life you must first clear” (Manning, 2022)

Cat tail.

Corrugated roof.

Green cardigan.

Pale skin.

Auburn hair.

Enter the thinking.

Through the rhythm of language.

You have to clear the land to see the land.

The settler logic. The colonial eye.

Clear the clutter. Tidy up the mess.

Whiteness polices a job half done.

Blackness is the force of nature

Wild is black

The earth is black

The university is in ruins.

A dead end.

Imbricated in neoliberal capital.

We keep the machine well-oiled and running.

Imaginations have to change.

Leaving one institution

doesn't mean you won't create another.

Neurodiversity puts all our practices into question.

All black life is neurodiverse.

Black life matters.

Life matters.

Whose life matters?

02 February 2022

Running in the dark

I am running in the dark. Not something I usually do. I have been awake since 5.00, thinking about, thinking with, the readings I have immersed myself in this week. Trying to tease out the threads. Trying to articulate what it is that this work is doing.

The tide is in. The water is dark. Sucking at the edges of the small harbour. In this light, the Gormley statue looks different. The hard edges smoothed into softer contours. I lay my hand on an iron block. I feel no comfort. Just cold, hard, metal.

It is a liminal space. This time between dark and light. There are people. Not many. Some for whom the day is just beginning. Others for whom this is the end of a long night. I feel slightly nervous in the narrow backstreets of the Barbican. Women get killed at any time of day. Two sisters in a park. A young girl at a bus stop. The mother of an autistic son^{lxxvii}. I run back along the Hoe. There are three swimmers heading out towards the green buoy. Women. Swimming side by side. In the grey dawn. The lido is closed for the winter. The blue and white stripes are streaked with green. I pass coffee drinkers. Dog walkers. A bin lorry.

As I run, I think. So many thoughts. An exorbitant kaleidoscope^{lxxviii}.

Yesterday, I read the prelude to *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. I am hooked. Somewhere in there, I sense it. The essence. The essentialising force of this work. The workings that have compelled me to write. I do not want to write *about* the readings, I do not want to extract quotations and provide explanations. I do not want to parse.

It is 13.53. Erin Manning is due to talk to our Adventures in Posthumanism reading group at 14.00. I put on another layer of mascara. Check my teeth for food. I feel like I am going on a date.

13.54

Time to go.

31 January 2022

Word count

I have condensed my working week into four days. Four long days. A desperate bid to claw back some time to write. And read. I have spent the morning reading. My supervisors think (I think they think) there is a theoretical hole in my work. Not one. Many. All this writing. All these words. Tentative. Speculative. Oblique. Flimsy.

I spend the day counting words. Printing texts. Trying to make this strange string bag of a thesis feel more tangible. More concrete. I have fifty thousand flimsy words.

In a green folder are the theoretical pieces that sometimes find their way into the writing. That always haunt the writing. Permeating. Infusing. Inspiring.

This morning I have read: *Mucous Bodies, Messy Affects, and Leaky-Writing in Academia*, (Rantala *et al.* 2020) ^{lxxix}; *Writing in Immanence; Encounters with Writing*, (Gale, 2020) ^{lxxx}; *Becoming—With Posthumanist Ethics*, (Zapata, *et al.* 2018) ^{lxxxi}; and bel hooks' essay, *Writing Without Labels* (hooks, 2015) ^{lxxxii}.

There is much to read about writing. There is much to write about writing. There is much to write about writing about writing.

But I would rather just write.

29 January 2022

Fear of drowning

The tame and the wild.

Juxtaposed.

The walls of the lido, an enabling constraint.

Don't swim safe, the wild waves whisper.

Strike out.

With bold strokes.

There are many ways to drown ^{lxxxiii}.

In a darkened office on a Friday evening, by the magic of Zoom technology, I am transported to South Africa and into the homes of Tamara Shefer and Vivienne Bozalek. They greet me warmly. I am the only participant in the final workshop of a three-day conference.

Viv and Tammy are tired. I can feel it. Viv has poured a glass of wine. Shall we shortcut to the writing, they suggest. Find a photo. Write something. Come back and we will share.

Where are my hundreds of photographs when I need them? The flotsam. The jetsam. The crab shell. The traffic cone. The dead gull. The burger carton. I find a photograph of the lido. A place I like to swim. As I look at the image, taken through a window etched with the shape of a diving woman, I am struck by the juxtaposition of tame sea and wild sea. What draws me there, to the walled pool?

Fear of drowning?

No, not that.

When I share my writing, sparse, spare, I am struck, they are struck, by what isn't there. The spaces that speak.

We are trained to explain. What does this *mean*? What does that *mean*? What do *you* mean? I am compelled and repelled by such academic imperatives.

I try to imagine spaces, places, acts and thinkings that are not scarred with “fraught political contexts of privilege and subjugation” (Shefer and Bozalek, 2021, p. 3). In the watery depths, an archaeology of existence lies buried in the seabeds. And suspended in the currents. The Atlantic slave trade. The refugee crisis. The impacts of environmental degradation^{lxxxiv}.

How to open up spaces to re-story the world, to hear and acknowledge silenced narratives, to explore alternative ways of being and becoming? It is the work that is never done. The justice-to-come^{lxxxv}.

Refuse. Refuse. Re-fuse.

Viv and Tammy ask me about my doctoral work. I panic. My face flushes. There is nowhere to hide. I speak of detritus. And ebbs and flows. Of eco-degradation and matter that has ceased to matter. The pull of the ocean. The lure of the sea. The need for a politics-to-come, for a justice-to-come.

I spend the next morning thinking about wild swimming. And wild scholarship. I run along the Hoe in the grey light and drizzle. I soak my body in bath water. I scrub at tiles with a toothbrush. I sit down to write.

I have pushed back my deadline. Again. Viv and Tammy advocate *slow scholarship* as an antidote to neoliberal imperatives. They say that slow scholarship is a means of invoking an anti-corporate agenda done by,

engaging in alternative and ethical ways of being/becoming, doing and knowing, emphasising qualities such as discernment, depth, pleasure, longing, yearning, desire, curiosity, maintaining meaningful connections with others – be they human or more-than-human – and with the environment.

(Shefer and Bozalek, 2021, pp. 6-7).

It is scholarship that requires us to accept that social justice can never be attained. It is an ongoing and deeply ethical practice, the work of which is to create “new imaginaries of scholarship that make a difference” (Shefer and Bozalek, 2021, p. 4). And it takes time.

Their words resonate. Comfort.

But I worry I am just slow.

26 January 2022

Down by the sea

It's another windy day on the Hoe, but the sun is shining. As I run, I spy a girl. Maybe, seven, maybe eight. She is emerging from a café. Under one arm, she has a pink tube of Pringles. Grasped in her other hand, a bottle of orange Fanta. It is 9.00am.

I think back to last evening and my induction into the seaweed reading group. The seaweed reading group. The searead weeding group.

In the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, there is a seaweed archive. Collected by women. Seaweeding was a respectable nineteenth century hobby for a lady of a certain standing. For a lady who needed an excuse to get out of the house.

Down by the sea. The draw. The lure. Salty hair. Briny fingers. Only collect what comes in on the tide. Only take what the sea offers you

The members of the reading group read aloud. Together. Each takes a piece of text. I stay silent. Camera off. Lurking. Listening.

The texts talk of colonialism. Categorisation. Classification. Extraction. Exploitation. Seaweed's life-giving properties inextricably bound up with the forced dispersal of rural Scottish communities to clear land for sheep-farming. I hear about potash and explosives. Botanical gardens based on extractive logic and the ordering of nature. Carl Linnaeus' categorisation by colour. Skin classified into red, white, yellow and black. Skin colour doing the work of the discriminator. Making it justifiable to steal resources. Take land. Perform genocides.

Slave ships reached places others did not. Training enslaved people as collectors became a practice in some parts. "Brutes are botanists by instinct," the British planter Edward Long wrote in 1774 ^{lxxxvi}.

We read an extract from Max Liboiron's (2021) *Pollution is Colonialism*. She says:

While there are different types of colonialism — settler colonialism, extractive colonialism, internal colonialism, external colonialism, neoimperialism — they have some things in common. Colonialism is a way to describe relationships characterized

by conquest and genocide that grant colonialists and settlers “ongoing state access to land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other.” Colonialism is more than the intent, identities, heritages, and values of settlers and their ancestors. It’s about genocide and access.

(Liboiron, 2021, p. 9)

Colonialism is pollution. We have polluted our lands and seas and hearts and psyches. We *are* hell bent on our own destruction.

Other ways of knowing, doing and being are deemed illegitimate or are erased. Or are stolen. Co-opted. Swallowed up and excreted in a steaming pile of colonial/capitalist shit.

22 January 2022

The girl with green eyes

Today is my younger daughter's birthday. She is nineteen. The last year of teenagerhood. If there's such a word. She was born in my parents long-abandoned double bed. The room wasn't warm enough. Not that I noticed. I was too busy with a birth that felt too quick. Too rushed.

My daughter was born with the birth membrane over her face. The midwife snipped at it with sharp scissors so she could breathe. By the time I was able to hold her she was shivering, blue with cold. I had been so sure I was having a boy. I was relieved I had not.

They say babies born with the caul are lucky. They watch over fishermen. Protect them from drowning at sea. She has some powers this one. This green-eyed girl, this determined young woman, with her crystals and her spells.

Where was my mother at nineteen? In the unmarried mothers' home. Holding her 10-day old daughter who was soon to become someone else's child.

Please don't change her name my mother scribbled on a piece of paper, which she pressed into the hand of a woman she didn't know.

Joanna has my mother's hands. The same almond-shaped nails. She does handstands and cartwheels like my mum used to. When she was young.

And me? At nineteen I had a job and a bad boyfriend. I worked in a small copy and print shop on a small street in a small town. Some days, I would stare wistfully out of the window, elbows on the large photocopier, wondering where my life had gone. At fifteen I had

thought I had it all. Dancing to New Order in my hand-knitted, rainbow-striped jumper. Not caring what anybody thought.

I used to spend hours flicking through the Letraset catalogue. I loved the different fonts. I loved setting the letters. I applied each one with care, using an ancient steel burnisher I had found in a drawer. You had to make sure you rubbed over every bit of each letter. Else, when you lifted the transparent sheet, you would find you had peeled away a serif or a scroll. The fancier the font, the fiddlier it got.

I haven't written for months. But this auspicious day demanded something of me. Called me to write. I find myself writing things I have written before. The same, but different. A refrain, of sorts.

I don't even know what I am writing about. Or if I am writing about anything. The writing is the thing. The writing is the process. But the writing falters when it remembers it is there to be read. To be judged. Evaluated. Critiqued. Of course it does. Elspeth Probyn says that most academics do not aspire to be writers (Probyn, 2010, p. 73). To have such ambitions in the academy is considered dubious. Suspect. Perhaps this is my shame. I am ashamed that what I want to do is write. And write. And write. Is that enough ^{lxxxvii}?

What has led to the recent impasse? The inability to write. The detachment. The de-attunement. Is it shame? Or, as Probyn suggests, "the terror of not being equal to the interest of my subject" (Probyn, 2010). I have been paralysed by the looming deadline. The deadline which has flatlined my writing.

The thing that bothers me. Worries me. Gnaws at me. Side lines me. Flat lines me. Dead lines me, is this: Is it enough to be good at writing? To write well? To write texts that are pleasing? Profound? Poetic? Is my writing any of these things? Is it all? Is it none?

About this, I do care. Deeply. Intensely.

01 September 2021

The bus stop diaries

I like photographing the bus stops. I like the way my reflection appears in the shots. I am there. And I am not. A shadowy presence. The taker and the taken. One day I will put these photographs on display. I will call them the Bus-stop Diaries. Or something. This shadowy subject. This silhouette. This reflection in the glass of a bus shelter. This shadow on the bathroom tiles. She is there. And she is not.

Amid the advertisements for food, there is the poster for a missing girl. There is an image of the trainers she was last seen wearing. They are pink.

I remember another girl. Sat in a filthy doorway in Athens. Head bowed. Eyes fixed on her own bright pink trainers.

The mundane. The everyday. The things we notice and don't. They tell us everything, whilst saying nothing. Bloom spaces ^{lxxxviii}.

Bloom spaces. I like the term. All the world is a bloom space to persons attuned. I am attuned.

Well, sometimes I am.



Figure 5. Pink trainers

31 August 2021

Geronimo the alpaca

The house is empty. It feels empty. I feel empty.

It's the last day of August. My self-imposed deadline. Thirty days and thirty nights. An experiment. An exemplification.

Jane Bennett's latest book is on my desk. Influx & Efflux^{lxxxix}. I haven't read it. I pick it up. What do you do when you cannot write?

Read.

What is, or isn't feeding my thinking on this cool and cloudy August day?

I haven't eaten yet. My body is still digesting the late night bowl of pasta, eaten for comfort after the disastrous rail journey. Is the red wine still coursing through my blood stream? Are my sugar levels too high? Too low? My tongue is woolly. My feet are cold.

I sense the loneliness of the house. No teenagers sleeping upstairs. Or messing up the kitchen downstairs.

The radio is playing in another room. Only the beat is discernible. The washing machine goes into its spin cycle.

Breaking news: Geronimo the alpaca has had to be put down.

You couldn't make it up.

The ritual. The return. The refrain. The writing loops and circles. Expands and contracts. Its rhythms are those of the here and now. The world in its unfolding. Infolding. Influx. Efflux. Efflux. Influx.

The sun has come out. Perhaps the washing will dry, after all.

Is this writing autoethnography or something else? An assemblage ethnography^{xc}? An ecology of practices^{xcii}?

It's a fine line. But a crucial one. You need to keep an eye on your I^{xcii}.

It is 17.01 on Tuesday 31st August.

This is the last day I will write. Well, this is the last day I will write this way. Tomorrow I will start to fill in the holes. I will miss this lightness. This openness. This more-than-ness. It has been terrifying and joyful.

Just as it should be.

30 August 2021

At the botanic garden

I decide to visit the botanic garden before I catch the train back to Plymouth. I should add trains to my list of things I think with. Or write with. And wine. I went to sleep thinking of wine. And Manning barefoot in a pile of grapes ^{xciii}.

I feel a bit leaky. Tearful. I drink strong coffee outside the café. I walk the paths of the botanic garden photographing plants. In the glass house there are cacti. And tropical plants. I don't go in but look through the panes from the outside. Looking in from the outside.

There are information boards everywhere. Some I read, some I photograph. There are two interactive installations near the raised pathway: Ways of sorting. Ways of looking.

Taxonomy. Ontology.

Under the title, *Re-writing the book*, the sign reads:

For thousands of years, humans have grouped plants into families based on observations made using the naked eye. Today, scientists also study the genetic composition of plants to determine relationships...Changes in scientific understanding pose interesting challenges for a Garden that seeks to be both guardian of a historic landscape and relevant to contemporary research.

The design and science of the Systematic Beds are so closely intertwined that they cannot be unpicked and the landscape still retain heritage significance. However, while the organising, structural hedges still respect the original de Candolle groupings, some entries within these chapters have been re-worked to reflect modern understanding of evolutionary relationships.

The botanic garden is laid out in Systematic Beds. They were designed by Andrew Murray, the Garden's first curator. The beds are a physical translation of a book by Augustin de Candolle, *Théorie élémentaire de la botanique*, the most comprehensive botany textbook of its time. The plants are the words. The words are the plants. Text translated into foliage, flowers, and fronds. How wonderful.

The Systematic Beds are organised around plant families. One plant family per bed. Calyciflorae. Corolliflorae. Monochlamydeae. Thalamiflorae. The first bed is page one, and it hosts the buttercup. The last, is de Candolle's final entry: The American pokeweed.

29 August 2021

I can hardly see the keys in the darkened room

She is still sleeping. I can hear a Hoover. A room is being cleaned for the next arrivals.

Imagine if every class you taught was a writing workshop? Just a space for writing. A collaborative space for writing. There would have to be some reading too. Reading and writing. Writing and reading. The heart of any intellectual endeavour. The heart of thinking. The heart of a dog ^{x^{civ}}. Well, not exactly, but listen to Laurie Anderson's poetic narration. Writing is meant to be shared. To be read aloud.

Who wants to be the lone scholar? Who wants to learn alone? Who wants their writings to remain unread. Unheard? Most students, I think.

Lonely students, writing in lonely spaces. Writing into the void. Writing in an unfamiliar bed, in an unknown city. Propped up on pillows. The heat of the laptop warming their thighs. Perhaps they have a cup of tea beside them. Biscuits. Or toast. To fuel them. They write because they have to. To demonstrate what they have learned. One eye on the word count. Another on the reference list. Is it enough? Is there enough?

Where is the joy?

I wonder what kind of educational experience my daughter will have at Cambridge. Will it be all *Educating Rita*? *The History Boys*? *The Dead Poets Society*? I hope she finds that space where everything changes. Perhaps she already has.

I am struggling today. Lots to say, but the words don't come easily. I am not a morning person. I am not yet ready to write.

Perhaps coffee will help.

28 August 2021

On the train to Cambridge

On the train to Cambridge, I start reading Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's *The Hundreds*. The writings are dense and evocative. Brim-full of affect. I read it in small sips. At the back of the book, instead of the usual list of references, is a section entitled: Some Things We Thought With. I scan down the list of names, Adorno, Agamben, Ahmed, Anderson. But it is the things that are interspersed that intrigue me: *A few pansies stuck in a window box, a fuck-you shrug, an egg-cooking machine, animatronic sparkle. And, after Foucault, freckles...*

In my bag is a notebook. I always carry it with me, but rarely write in it. As I flick through, there are lists of some of my *things*. There are nine boxes, drawn in pencil. Within them are written:

Hair

Food

Feet

Water

Rubbish

Stone

Tree

Art

Shit

I have made such lists before and elsewhere. *Things I Think With*. The human and the nonhuman.

We walk to the guesthouse. It is slightly odd. Old school. The man on reception asks what brings us to Cambridge. My daughter is going to study here, I say, feeling both proud and

flustered. Where, he asks. At the university, I say. Which one, he returns. Cambridge, I say, confused. He laughs, fair enough, he says.

Gonville and Caius, my daughter adds. I feel like a prat.

At the college, the porters sense our nervousness and welcome us in. Have a look around, they say. But keep off the grass.

What is it with the grass? Surely it is there to be walked on? But like the fiercely reprimanded Woolf (2004), we dutifully stick to the gravel.

She is napping beside me as I write. I am still trying to get some words down every day. Berlant and Stewart have worked within the hundred-word constraint. I am working within the thirty-day constraint. Time is running out...

I underline sentences that call out to me. But what to do with work like this? These are not texts to be parsed apart and served up in neat quotations. Berlant and Stewart argue ... As Berlant and Stewart point out ... According to Berlant and Stewart ...

I'll steal a paragraph, instead.

Writing lessons

Ten years ago all my classes became writing workshops. The price of admission is 500 words. The writing can't be an exegesis of the reading: it has to have something to describe. You have to start somewhere, you light on something, you lean into a realism of slippages and swells. Worlds are already so compositionally full that the question is not how to choose what to stay with but how to feel your way in.

(Berlant and Stewart, 2019, p. 58)

I have written 441 words. I wonder if that would get me through the door?

Laurie Anderson's (2016) beautiful film *Heart of a Dog* has been on my mind. She describes a day when she is out walking with her dog. Out of nowhere, a bird of prey swoops down, terrifying the dog that had never expected to be ambushed from above. From the clear, blue sky.

That's how we all feel post 9/11, Laurie says. Always looking back over our shoulders. Never knowing from where the next attack will come (Anderson, 2016).

I feel it again now. Travelling by train. Crossing London. Our own recent history is scarred with such violence. And will be again.

The British forces will pull out of Afghanistan in a few hours. The US troops will stay a day or two more. There has been a suicide bomb attack on the people trying to flee. The Americans have retaliated. It is bloody and painful to watch. I can't watch. I am appalled and I am ashamed. And, I am afraid too. Afraid of what worlds are being made. Of what is being brought to bear.

27 August 2021

My eldest daughter's birthday

It is my eldest daughter's birthday. I send her a WhatsApp message and decide to drive down to the beach for an early swim. It is a beach of many memories. It is not pretty or dramatic, but it is where we spent our summers and weekends in an aging caravan when the girls were young. We so desperately missed the sea when we left Greece that we needed something to ease the pain. To keep us sane.

The beach is still quiet. Except for a yapping dog. There are men in serious wetsuits, preparing to swim. They adjust their goggles. Check their watches. I wait for them to disappear. The beach is strewn with seaweed. There are sand flies and an odd smell in the air. I sit near the rocks on the far side. I like it here. It's my favourite spot.

The tide is in. That's good. It makes the swim to the furthest buoy that bit more of a challenge. The water is cold, but clear. I swim out with my eyes on the horizon. To the right is the Rame Peninsula. Cornwall. Ahead, open water.

One summer as I was swimming out towards the edges of the bay, I sensed a presence behind me. The laboured breathing made me turn. There, only a few inches away, was a seal. The liquid brown eyes stared into mine. He's been following you, called a man from a boat. Will it bite, I shouted back? The man shrugged his shoulders. I eyed her warily, treading water slowly until she grew bored and disappeared.

I heard that the same seal often tailed the woman from the caravan next door. I wondered if she was lured by our aging hormones, leeching into the sea.

I swim back.

I have brought Hélène Cixous and my battered copy of *To the Lighthouse* to read. I can't settle on either. I read the blurb on the back of Woolf (2004), "I am making up "To the Lighthouse" – the sea is to be heard all through it". And felt, I think. The pages are stiff with salt.

26 August 2021

Always More than One

The lido is busy this evening. People enjoying the unexpected rise in temperature. The evening sun on my face is warm.

Bodies of every shape and size. Skin of every colour. Deep ebony. Pallid pale. A woman walks by, rocking her huge behind. Another undresses. Thin and white as a pipe cleaner. All the world is here.

Perhaps it is the swimming, but I feel lighter today. The writing is flowing. Yesterday, I felt heavy. Leaden. Like I was battling against the tide. Instead of drifting. Drowning instead of floating. Anchored down instead of buoyed up.

Cixous (1991) talks of *automatic writing*^{xcvxcvi}. Writing that emerges, unplanned, unbidden. This is the best kind. The only kind that moves.

It's like surfing a wave. At times, you just feel it. You are at one with the force of the water. And then it's gone. And you are left tumbling, gasping for breath, not sure whether to swim up down.

I'd rather swim than surf. I'd rather be immersed rather than riding on top of the waves. Submerged in watery worlds, the edges of the body become undone^{xcvii}.

I am a singular, dynamic whorl dissolving in a complex, fluid circulation (Neimanis, 2012).

That's how I feel when I write.

25 August 2021

When there were books

In the sleepless hours, when the wine has worn off and the insomnia kicks in, I think about reading. Hélène Cixous describes it as “making love to the text” (Cixous, 1991, p. 24).

Jeanette Winterson describes it as an oxygen mask (Winterson, 2014, p. vii). For Elizabeth St. Pierre it is the only *how* of post-qualitative inquiry^{xcviii}. To her students she says: “read hard, write hard, and think hard and invent new forms of inquiry that might create a new world and a people yet to come” (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 7). Reading. The book, the text, is a country of words. The landscapes may be familiar or not. People see and speak and know and experience worlds and worldings in an infinite kaleidoscope of shapes and colours. Words allow us to think differently. Or not. Reading helps us think differently. Or not^{xcix}.

Through reading we can discover philosophical concepts re-orientate thought. Haraway’s tentacular thinking. Barad’s diffractive ontologies. Bennett’s vibrant matter. Manning’s research-creation. These are concepts that have brought my thinking alive. Pushed me hard and irrevocably into other ways of writing and being. There is no going back. Writing is world-making.

I think of the word compost^c. What does it afford?

Think of the word Chtulucene^{ci}. What does it afford?

Perhaps, like me, you prefer spiders to worms. It doesn’t really matter. And it really does matter^{cii}.

Who will I throw my lot in with?

Tentacular critters. Artists. Philosophers. Thinkers. Writers. Readers. Activists. Old school feminists.

Washing in. Washing out. Tumble dry the boyfriend’s work clothes. Food. Coffee. Wash up. Take the leftover beetroot curry out of the freezer for tea. More pink pee.

The dying bunch of sunflowers are gone. The cards of congratulation remain. Mine is a postcard from a photographic exhibition I visited recently^{ciii}. I have written on the back:

Like all great women, you have an inner strength and resilience combined with a sharp mind and a big heart. I have nothing but admiration for you and all you have achieved. Go forward and make your life wonderful. Mum.

God, is that really the best you could come up with?

But, look at that woman's face. Just look. Into the spaceship granny!



Figure 6. *Ban the Bomb* march, Aldermaston. Don McCullin.

24 August 2021

Lentils

I think I just have time to make a brown lentil sauce before my meeting at 9.30. All those years on a tiny Greek island taught you to cook. Simple, nutritious, cheap, food. Not that any Greek would be eating lentils in August. This is winter food. Beans, legumes and pulses for when there is no fresh produce available. For when the winds howl and the ferries stop running.

I fry the onions and garlic. Add carrot, pepper and mushroom. Lentils. Tinned tomatoes. A splash of wine. A stock cube. Fresh bay leaves from the garden.

Most asylum seekers in the UK are placed in accommodation where there are no cooking facilities. They are forced to eat only cold food. Ready-cooked. Or raw. What can you eat on £5.66 a day? Food is right, not a privilege. Except, it is not, is it? Good food is definitely a privilege.

Lentils, *fakes*, in Greek. Lens. Lentils are lenses in many languages. I suppose it's the shape. I think of Spinoza, grinding his lenses ^{civ}.

"At a certain moment for the person who has lost everything, whether that means a being or a country, language becomes the country. One enters the country of words" (Cixous, 1991, p. xx).

Are we safe in the country of words, or is it another site of exile? Of exclusion? Or is a place of captivity? Of capture ^{cv}?

Writing matters. Words matter. Thinking-writing, writing-thinking is an urgent responsibility ^{cvi}.

23 August 2021

It is easy to feel paralysed ^{cvii}

I have spent some time this morning signing petitions, making donations, writing to my local MP. It doesn't feel like very much. Nowhere near enough. But better than nothing I suppose.

- Call on the government to resettle 20,000 Afghan refugees
- Call on the government to #CommitToResettlement
- Oppose the anti-refugee bill
- Save the lives of Afghan Chevening Scholars

I saw Ahmed yesterday, after I dropped my daughter off at the railway station. I haven't seen him since the free English classes stuttered to an end two years ago. They were good times. Eating banana bread and chocolate and Turkish Delight. Always talking, talking, talking. History, politics, philosophy. Thomas loved to read. Ahmed was illiterate.

The women came to a separate class. We focussed on food and clothes and shopping. Week after week we sounded out names of the food items. Burger. Fries. Sausages. The UK's staple diet. One week everyone brought home-cooked food and we feasted on bright, fresh salads, earthy dips, flaky pies and pastries.

The classes were a small act. A tiny intervention. But like Brian Massumi's butterfly effect ^{cviii}. Important. Crucial. Vital.

In Virginia Woolfe's (2004) famous, fictionalised visit to 'Oxbridge', she is barred from entering the college library on account of her gender: "Ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (Woolf, 2004, p. 8). Forced to dine on thin gravy soup instead of feasting on sole and partridge, Woolf laments: "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well. The lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes" (Woolf, 2004, p. 21).

I search for my copy of *A Room of One's Own*. It's not where I thought it would be. Eventually I find it. It is nestled among a number of books. It is an interesting shelf. Lemn

Sissay, *Something Dark*. Bidisha, *Asylum and Exile*. Braidotti's *Posthuman Glossary*. *Ordinary Effects*, by Kathleen Stewart. Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory*. I don't know where that one came from, but Betty St. Pierre will be pleased. Interesting that it was written by a man, I think. I look at the blurb. Chris is not a man. That'll teach me.

Michel Foucault *Power/Knowledge*. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's *The Hundreds*. I don't think I have actually read it. I should. I will. I like these works that flourish under constraint. Because of constraint. Like Jane Speedy writing her life in fifty words ^{cx}. Braidotti, again, *The Posthuman*. *Evocative Autoethnography* by Art Bochner and Carolyn Ellis. A gift from my younger sister. And, finally, a brochure from an exhibition: *Refugees Mapping Memories*. That takes me back to time of the Thesis Bootcamp. A neurotypical affordance ^{cx}, if ever there was one. My heart quickens slightly as I spy *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*. Hélène Cixous. A book that is in my bones.

What does it take to write? A room of one's own? That would be nice. Since Covid, I have taken over the living room. It's not ideal, but I can manage. Someone to wash up, clean up and feed you? That also would be nice. But when would I think? How would I find an excuse to tear my eyes from the screen? The mundane, the repetitive, the domestic, they are the stuff of life. I need them to write.

Cixous comes back to my desk with me. It is piled high with books. There is clearly an academic at work. I open the book on page 54 and smile. There it is.

My favourite word: Pissertation ^{cx}.

My pee was pink this morning. I blame it on the beetroot curry I had for tea.

I read part of the quotation I have picked out again: "You wind things up, you pull the strings, you tighten the thread, you execute the dream work in a state of vigilance, you cheat, condense, compile, you distill. And now what will you name it?" (Cixous 1991, p.54).

I will name it: *How to write a thesis in 30 days*.

Or: *How not to write a thesis in 30 days*.

In *Coming to Writing*, Cixous asks:

Who is the Superuncle who hasn't prevented a girl from flying, the flight of the thief, who has not bound her, not bandaged the feet of his little darling, so they might be exquisitely petite, who hasn't mummified her into prettiness?

(Cixous, 1991, p. 8)

Ask the girls and women who now live in fear of the Taliban. Or Boko Haram. Or any other repressive regime. Or violent partner. Or overbearing father. The work that is never done is that of "[s]tubbornly clinging to what matters to us, repeated returning to the same subject, which turns out to be inexhaustible, upon inspection never exactly the same" (Suleiman cited in Cixous, 1991, p. viii).

Post structuralism. Postqualitative research. Posthumanism. The problem with all these posts is it makes us feel we have moved on. Moved beyond. And yet, we are as stuck as ever. Mired in old stories. Trapped in violent, violating discourses. Posthumanism felt like a way out, an opening up of possibilities for new stories and new ways of knowing. But when I listen to canny academics presenting *a Posthuman approach to CPD*, I feel aghast.

Posthumanism is definitely *dans le vent*^{cxii}.

Naming things is tricky. Dangerous. Words are sticky things (Bennett, 2011). They trap you. Box you off. Cut out your tongue^{cxiii}.

Posthuman. Posthumanism. New materialism. New Feminist Materialisms. I have my reservations, but like Haraway, I am not ready to abandon the rich ontological spaces they have opened up^{cxiv}.

I am starting to run out of steam. I go for a pee. Take my cod liver oil and magnesium supplement. Do my stretches. Ice my elbow. With a pack of frozen peas.

There is a knock at the door. A parcel for my daughter. An Afghan coat. The bitter irony is unbearable.

22 August 2021

We don't give a fork

I woke up thinking about food. I am going to make sandwiches and catch the small ferry that leaves from the Barbican landing stage and heads out across the Sound to Cornwall. I have a rare family-free day, and I intend to swim.

I park my car at the university and walk down towards the sea. On the way I pass bus stops, advertising food and wild swimming. KFC mini fillets, a bucket of 10 for £4.99. Sue and her friends. Tucking into crispy pork noodles after a 'wild' swim. Everything gets co-opted. Commodified. Codified.

I photograph the posters. Sometimes I am reflected in the glass. Sometimes not. Another middle-aged woman who likes to swim. And eat.

On the ferry, I watch the Mayflower Steps recede. I take another photograph. I am not sure why.

Donald Trump used to order in fast food to the Whitehouse. He is a great supporter of the right to eat junk. No, not the right. The patriotic duty.

The situation in Afghanistan is worsening. People have been crushed to death at the airport, trying to escape. Tony Blair has criticised Biden's withdrawal. Someone else criticises Blair's intervention. Blame, blame, blame. While babies are passed over fences and men fall from aircraft.

We are all implicated.

21 August 2021

Last night's dishes

Last night's dishes are on the kitchen work surface. Still unwashed. They can wait. I am going for a run.

It has been raining heavily throughout the night. But the sun is starting to edge through the clouds. I do my usual circuit, past the Gormley statue and up along the Hoe. Round the Barbican. Back towards the lido. There are large groups of (mainly) middle aged (mainly) women swimming off the shore. There are a few men too. But they tend to swim alone or in pairs. Women swimming ^{cxv}.

I start to overheat. My cheeks grow red. I sweat. The sea starts to look more than inviting. I need to cool down. I run back towards the statue. I think I might at least put my feet in the water. But the tide is out and lethal green algae covers the lower steps of the harbour wall. I run on. There is a small shingle inlet. I clamber gingerly down the rocks. I really don't want to slip and fall. Things are bad enough already with my cricketty knees and tennis elbow.

I take off my trainers and paddle in the shallows. I want to strip off and dive in. But I don't. I splash sea water on my hot face. Who would care if I went in? No one. Naked or not.

On my way home, I stop at the garage and pick up a newspaper. The headline reads: *We should hang our heads in shame*. There is a picture a baby being passed over a wire fence at Kabul airport. In an act of desperation.

Who will be human and who will not?

Women are everywhere in my work. In my bones. In my blood. Feminism. Feminist. These thorny terms prick and scratch. Be bold. Nail your colours to the mast. And then what?

Last night I went to see Marvel movie, *Black Widow* with my daughter. There was a line in the film that made me shudder. The evil Mastermind has been 'recycling' abandoned children, turning them into elite killing machines. "*There is only one resource the world has too much of*", he says, "*girls*" (Shortland, 2021).

20 August 2021

The house is a mess

Today, the kitchen is a mess. Well, not really, but I sense a certain lack of order. Last night's washing up is still on the draining board. I dry up and put the dishes away and put out the recycling. The kitchen bin is full. I empty the bathroom bin and press the contents down on top of the kitchen waste. I take the bin bag out and throw it in the brown plastic wheelie bin outside. It needs a clean, but I am not going to do it. I half-heartedly pull out some large weeds and dandelions as I head back inside. I should put them on the compost heap. But I don't. I shower and wash the mud from my hands. My pot of expensive face cream is almost empty, and I need to change my toothbrush. I squeeze the last remnants of moisturiser into my palm and rub it into my aging legs and arms. All this plastic. I regret emptying the bathroom bin, at this rate, it'll soon be full again. I bleach the toilet bowl. I am an environmental nightmare. I start to get dressed, but I can't find a clean black vest. The airing cupboard is full of washing that needs to be sorted.

The work that's never done. Clearing up the mess. Apologising for the mess. I'm sorry the house is a mess. Why don't I like the word messy? What makes a house messy? Life. Living in it. Being present. Nothing to be sorry for. Is this a messy text ^{cxvi}? I don't think so. I think it is something else.

Hélène Cixous calls women's words *white writing*, "*writing in milk, in mother's milk*" (cited in Le Guin, 1989, p. 228). But not all women are mothers. Or lovers. But all women bleed. I like the idea of red writing. Writing in blood. Menstrual blood. Not that there is much of that anymore, here in Menopause Manor (Le Guin, 1989). The furies had receded, but in recent weeks, I can feel the anger beginning to bubble up again. It simmers there, close to the surface of my skin. Bile-soaked words choke in my throat. I press my teeth together to stop them tumbling out. Perhaps it is all this writing about women. All these reminders of what it is and what it is not to belong to this particular species of human.

We are not binary beings. I know that. I have spent my life resisting the categories assigned to me. Troubling the labels that are used to define and constrain human/nonhuman potential. When I speak of men, I don't mean all men. When I speak of women, I don't mean

all women. Men, women, and everyone and everything in between and above and below and beyond, are implicated in world-making. And, as Haraway (2016) says, we need to story new worlds.

Le Guin calls prose “an artefact of the technology of writing” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 182). She says, that unlike a musical score, “[W]ritten text can be read as pure sign, as meaning alone” (ibid). No one reads music in silence. I write texts that are meant to be read. Aloud. So I can hear the words, the rhythms and pauses. Short sentences. Repetition. I like to hear the words’ musicality. The refrain.

There is a purposefulness in the writing of these texts. If there is a sense of a lack, of there not being a coherent whole, then you are looking in the wrong place.

I search my PhD folder for the word ‘messy’ and find a collection of writings in a document called ‘Messy Methodologies’. It is a random collection of quotes and writings.

There are long sections copied from Rosi Braidotti’s 2013 article, *Posthuman Humanities*^{cxvii}. There are short pieces written in response to women I have heard talk. Like Lulu Allison, who came to the university to speak to us about her writing project, *Twice the Speed of Dark*^{cxviii}. And the lady from the V & A^{cxix}. Lady. Why am I using that word? I like the way it sounds. That’s all. Lady parts. Lady boy. Lay lady lay. Ladies and gentlemen. You are not supposed to say that anymore. Gendered binaries need to be resisted.

I come across some musings on Kathleen Stewart and her book, *Ordinary Affects*^{cxx}.

These quotes and snippets and writings are all part of the compost. Or composition. I have forgotten many of them. Once written, they are filed away in poorly labelled Word files. Some shame. Some surprise. Some delight.

A mulch of words, full of vibrant energy.

Like Haraway, “I compost my soul in this hot pile” (2016, p. 34).

But everything is such a mess.

19 August 2021

August is a wicked month

This is not the first time I have used August as an *enabling constraint*^{cxxi}.

How to write a thesis in thirty days?

Well, you can't, of course.

But, as Donna Haraway says, it is impossible to write when you are teaching (Terranova, 2017). And August is the month when I don't teach. So, there you go. It's now or never.

There is something generative about working in these windows of opportunity. These tiny pockets of time and space.

This tension, this tightrope, intrigues me. Stealing time, is the biggest challenge. The riskiest heist. It is not easy to resist the siren's call of the email inbox. To extricate yourself from the office politics. To ignore the droning, draining, draw of neglected domestic chores. They encroach even when I am not the one performing them. *Why are* hoovers so noisy?

Each moment of writing is like that slightly rushed walk to work, when you surf the crowd as the crowd surfs you^{cxxii}. I am writing with, thinking with, lost in the *dance of attention* (Manning and Massumi, 2014). In the moment of writing, the thesis as object disappears, replaced by an experience that is "all movement-texture, complexly patterned, full of change and transition, teemingly differentiated" (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 10).

We need more joy. More dancing. More cartwheels in the classroom (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 11).

And more poetry^{cxxiii}.

18 August 2021

String

String is a wonderful thing. String bags. String figures. Narrative string. Strings of words and ideas. Stringing you along. How long is piece of string?

String, like fishnet, holds the holes together. The spaces that matter. Jeanette Winterson (2014) says the Barbara Hepworth sculpture is more about the hole than the rock. The stone allows us to see the space. The only bit that matters. Space, silence, stillness all open up the imagination. The imaginary. The speculative.

I have been reading the Research Degrees Handbook (2022). Oh, joy. It says that my thesis must “*must be framed as a single coherent research project*”. *Must*. I have failed at the first hurdle. I read on:

the thesis should include an introduction (outlining research aims, enquiry, methodology and defining key terms as well as positioning within one or more fields of study) and conclusion (including a clear statement of the contribution to knowledge, in the case of a doctorate)

(Research Degrees Handbook, 2022, p.32)

Should. Perhaps there is a little room for manoeuvre there. But, what is my *contribution to knowledge*?

My spelling is atrocious. It used to be exceptional. The Microsoft spell check thinks I am trying to spell manure, not manoeuvre. Horseshit. Ha, ha. The spellcheck offers me some less profane synonyms: Dung, fertilise, compost.

Compost. That’s reassuring, I feel Donna Haraway is back by my side.

Composting. Felting. Folding. Embroidering. How to describe the entangled processes at the heart of research-creation? I am drawn to the earthy mulch. But, unlike Haraway, I am terrified of worms. Crafty pursuits are beyond my limited skills. I can cook, but I can’t bake. Embroidery? Oh god. Is it okay just to be good at writing? A wordsmith? What can writing *do*?

Le Guin says the secret to good writing is hard work ^{cxxiv}. I have been at work for over six years now. Writing and worlding. Worlding and writing. Channelling the universe. Shaping texts from strings of words. Stringing words into the shape of texts. It feels like important work. Necessary. Vital. But, as Erin Manning asks: how do we evaluate process? (Manning, 2016, p. 42), especially when the writing process is almost impossible to pin down ^{cxxv}.

We can't describe the process, or explain the process. But a process it is, and this is the work of the writer. To agitate language. (Manning, 2016). To tell new stories. To make matter matter. To make the more-than count. And be accountable.

The Minor Gesture is on my desk:

I flick through the pages. The chapter entitled *Against Method* is heavily annotated.

"Against method is not simply an academic stance" (Manning, 2016, p.44).

Ethics, rigour, validity, value. Words that lie at the heart of academic study. Words that go unchallenged. Unquestioned. Words that close down. Describe. Define. Words that gobble up the spaces where the *subversive intellectual* can thrive.

Rigour. Rigor mortis, more like ^{cxxvi}.

17 August 2021

What we display and what we hide away

Text, silence, performance or rummaging through the (an)archives ^{cxxvii}.

I have been thinking about this writing process that I am engaged in. This (almost) daily offering. Not really knowing what my senses will be *compelled to attend to* (Mukhopadhyay cited in Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 13). Not really knowing where the writing will take me. What the writing will do.

I have toyed with the concept of curation. As writing as a process of curating. These texts feel like a performance. A display. But behind, beneath, around, other texts are swirling, hidden, unbidden, but not lost. Which will I bring to light, and how? Fragments of older writings push through. Erupt or creep into the writings of the here and now. There are ghostly echoes, hauntings, shadows of texts that I have written and re-written and continue to write. Circling. Circling. Words, ideas, thinkings pulsate below the surface. Like lava soup. Lively words. Vibrant language. Ideas that can only be articulated in the act of thinking them anew.

I stare at the keyboard. My fingers hover. I wait. What will come? What will come?

Fingertips tingle. And then, and then.

Nothing.

I trawl through the hundreds of word files have been date-stamped and stored in folders in a cloud. A digital palimpsest. Tracings of ideas and imaginaries overlap, intertwine and entangle. The same and different. Over and over. Don't detangle, says St. Pierre. Live with it. In it. Of it. I pull at threads. The matted hair of my PhD. A carrier bag. A medicine bundle. A recipient. Of what? Of everything and nothing. Holes and string. What is hidden is as important as what is not. What is not said is as important as what is. We are but empty space and light. The same minerals that make up our bodies, make up the stars. Matter matters. Stories matter.

I can not explain what I am doing. I can only do it. Not-knowing-in-advance (Manning, 2016) is just that. Immanent writing practices are just that (St. Pierre, 2021). They never exist.

They never are. They are the not yet. And, as such, they must emerge afresh and anew each and every time.

16 August 2021

Kabul has fallen

For twenty years, the American and British forces kept the Taliban at bay. In a matter of days, they have gained control of almost the whole country.

It is the women and girls my heart breaks for.

My eldest daughter sent me a link to a news story this morning. Things do not bode well.

Women in Kabul are busy erasing their identities. Burning IDs and academic achievements. They must become invisible to survive. Girls are being imprisoned and raped. Women traded for taxi rides. The burka is the first line of defence. Without it, women are easy prey.

It makes me weep.

Until the women of this world are safe, there will never be equality for anyone. Race, class, religion. There is no hope for a unified world whilst fifty percent of its population exist on a knife-edge.

I think of my daughters. What does the future hold for them?

This wasn't what I wanted to write about today. I wanted to write about the trip to the museum. Of figureheads and ships and an octopus in a jar. But I can't get women out of my mind.

I think of the woman thrown down a well by her brothers. And the woman arrested for being *too covered up* on a beach in France. Of the ongoing rape, and murder, kidnap and mutilation of girls around the world. Ursula Le Guin is right. We Crones must take up the fight. We are safe by comparison. No longer virgins, no longer fertile, there is not much that can be taken away. Or forced upon us: "Faced with the fulfilled Crone, all but the bravest men wilt and retreat, crestfallen and cockadrop" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 4).

Menopausal women of the world, unite and take over.

Well, at least that has cheered me up. A bit.

In the city's new museum, there is a cabinet dedicated to Gertrude Benham who, once she had been relieved of the responsibility of caring for her sick and elderly parents, took her inheritance and skipped off around the world. What freedom, to be a middle-aged, childless, and of independent means. She didn't end her days embroidering handkerchiefs in an ornate parlour room. Oh no. The sign says that after her parents died, Gertrude "*travelled eight times around the world, climbed more than 300 mountains and visited over 60 countries*". A small collection of some of the artefacts she collected is on display. There are socks from Japan, slippers from Malaysia and, from China, tiny lotus shoes. A chilling reminder that women have been tortured forever.

Feet, hands, hair. Such sites of violence and oppression. Gender politics is fought out on women's bodies.

I wonder who chose to put the lotus shoes on display. A stark juxtaposition against the freedom that Gertrude experienced. You wouldn't climb a mountain in a lotus shoe. Or traverse Africa on foot.

What we put on display, what we hide away.

I am fascinated by the jars full of sea creatures. Grotesque and beautiful. The woolly mammoth is the star attraction, but he doesn't do much for me. My brother has a fossilised tooth in his garage. Given to him by a pair of old ladies who lived in the small village where we grew up. I think they had found it on Charmouth beach.

The mammoth makes me think of Le Guin and her '*Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*'^{cxxviii}.

I re-watch a video of Donna Haraway, James Clifford and Ursula Le Guin in conversation. (Le Guin, 2014). Haraway and Clifford have made a pact to kick each other if either of them go on too long. Clifford tells her that her time is up, but Haraway has one more important thing to say. She describes the end of Le Guin's novella, '*The Word for World is Forest*'. The vast exterminationist, genocidal, mining war is over, and the invading forces, the brutal *Yumen*, promise they will never return, saying: '*Everything will be fine, you can go back to the way you were*'. But as Haraway says, "the colonised cannot go back inside the dream". They can never pretend that they do not know how to murder each other (Le Guin, n.d.).

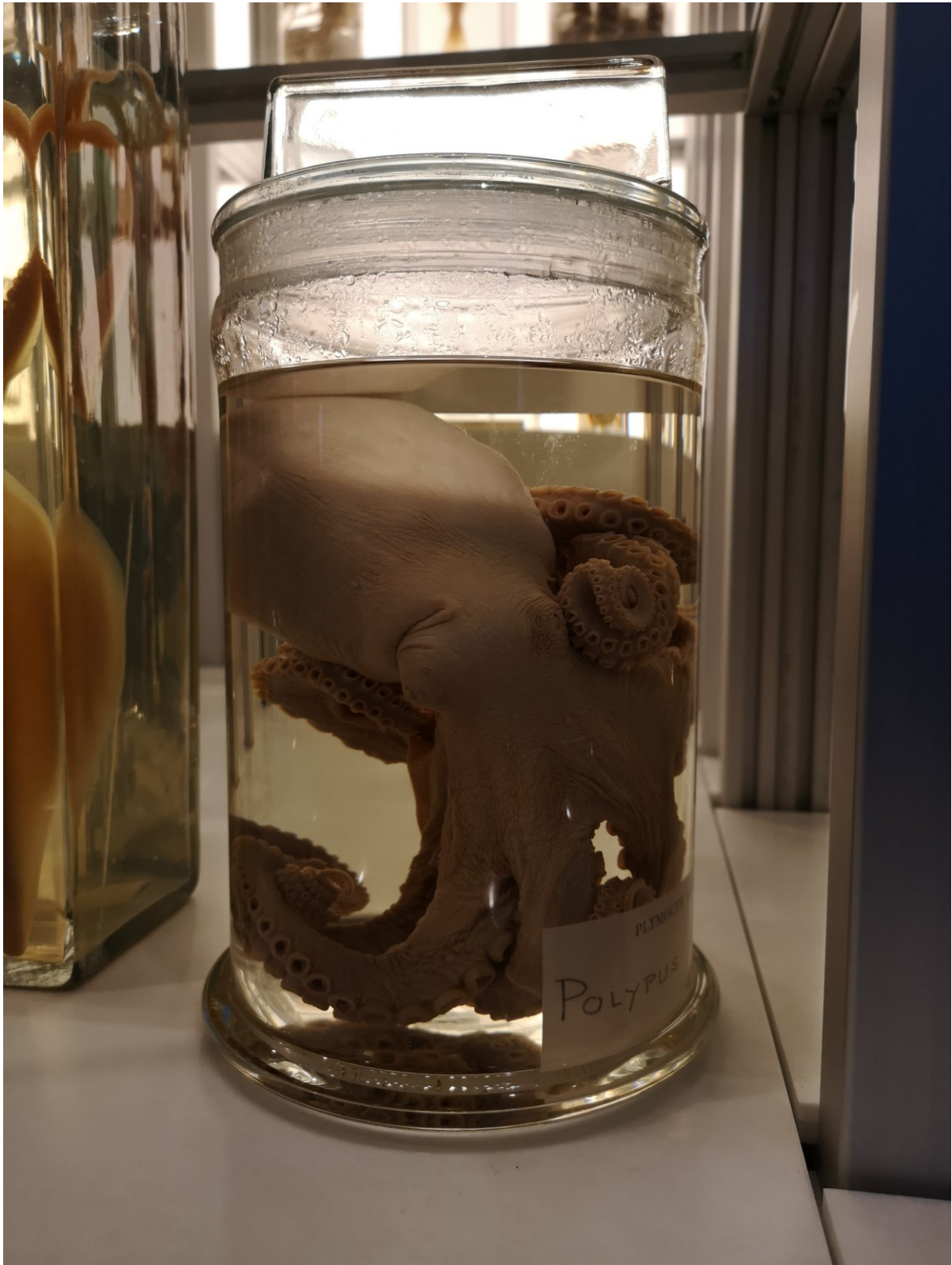


Figure 7: Polypus

13 August 2021

Meat and bread

It is Friday the thirteenth of August. There has been a terrible mass shooting in Plymouth. People are shocked. This doesn't happen here. They have released a photograph of the gunman. I wonder what made him flip. And how many others are teetering on the edge of an atrocity.

Naval gazing. Sky gazing. Neglecting to look down into the dark earth. And there we have it. The trouble with humanism. Social justice has not been achieved. Cannot be achieved. Not when our efforts are framed by white, male, Eurocentric knowledge practices.

I could do with a new fucking story. Excuse my language. I am so tired of trying to do it all. Teach. Write. Think. And wash up. Strip beds. Make beds. Hang out the washing. Sort laundry. Empty the bathroom bin.

My brother is arriving at 7.00. He is bringing his family down for a visit. I see a weekend of PhD work slipping out of reach. I have been to the shops. What do boys eat? Meat and bread, I decide.



Figure 8: Ladies

12 August 2021

Clearing out the office

I have been asked to clear out the office. We are being moved. Again. Before lockdown, this room was going to be my PhD space. It is large and light and so far along the corridor that there is no passing traffic. I had taken in notes and texts and optimistically organised them into themes: space, food, education. I never got to write here. And now I never will.

I gather up the papers and dump them in a box. No time to sort through them now. But something catches my eye. A sheaf of lined pages, covered in handwritten notes. Page one has the name Elizabeth St. Pierre written at the top. This looks promising.

I sift through the papers, they smell slightly musty. SIQR 2015. The list of names resonates. Suryia Nayak. Gosh, I remember her. She invited us to dinner with a group of imaginary theorists. Audre Lorde was there. And bell hooks. Lorde's famous words are writ large: *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. I imagine it was the first time I had heard them. I have also written *Black feminism is not white feminism in a black face*. Lorde is right. We *must* do better. And we must acknowledge our differences ^{cxxix}.

I look back at my notes. I have written a question: is it possible to think outside of 'I'?

On the next line down, there is a (mis) quote from Foucault: "we need to refuse what we are, not discover what we are". I wonder where the citation is from. I don't want to be a sloppy scholar. I google it to check. Among the images of PowerPoint slides bearing the correct version, are posters encouraging us to refuse single-use plastic. Refuse. Refuse. It's all in the vowel sound. It's all in the 'e'.

"Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are"
(Foucault, 1983, p. 212)

How to refuse what we are and to think outside the 'I'? It is hard, but crucial work.

I google Suryia and find a journal article ^{cxxx}. In the introduction, there is a quote from Donna Haraway:

“What becomes evident is that, ‘struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see’ “(Haraway, 1988, p.289 cited in Nayak 2020, p.179).

Perhaps it was Suryaia that also introduced me to Haraway. I check my notes. Yes, there she is. Insisting that we acknowledge the ways in which we are implicated.

“Vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps violence implicit in visualizing practices. **With whose blood were my eyes crafted?**” (Haraway, 1991, p. 192). [My emphasis].

There is the SIQR handbook from 2017. I flick through the pages. Did I really go three times? As I glance through the programme, I see my own name. I don’t remember presenting.

I find my abstract, and there it is. Framed by the Jane Bennett’s (2010) storm drain:

One large plastic work glove

One dense mat of oak pollen

One unblemished dead rat

One white plastic bottle cap

One smooth stick of wood

(Bennett, 2010, p. 4)

Refuse. Re-fuse. Refuse. The refuse floating in Sutton Harbour created the ontological breach. The refuse has helped me refuse.

And acknowledge.

And act.

11 August 2021

The world's largest sailing ship

The world's largest sailing ship is anchored in the Sound. From a distance, it has a sheen of elegance, but up close, she is no beauty. A modern replica of the historic *France II*, this vessel's cargo is not nickel ore, but wealthy tourists.

I keep my eye on it as I run. It evokes something unpleasant, distasteful. A ghostly presence that speaks to a past that is riddled with acts of extraction and exploitation.

Cargo. Cargoes. Human and non-human bodies traded across oceans.

No New Worlds ^{cxix}.

As I drive home, I listen to the radio. Lauren Laverne is talking to Felix White about his new book, *It is always summer somewhere*. He is talking about making peace with grief. How the loss of a parent at a young age colours everything. Making peace with grief. How do you make peace with the loss of a history, a culture and identity? Hearts, minds, bodies, souls have been marked, scarred, diminished by colonialism. The world's loss is immeasurable.

Sister Outsider is sitting on the desk. I have never read it. I know I should. I turn it over and read the quotation on the back cover: "The woman's place of power within each of us is nether white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep" (Lorde, 2019).

There is a photo of Lorde. She looks pissed off. I am not surprised.

I turn to her famous paper, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. It is short, angry, important. As she addresses the (white?) audience, her righteous fury is clear:

And what does it mean when in personal and political terms when even the two Black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.

(Lorde, 2019, p. 103)

Only two black women presented at the Second Sex conference in 1979. Would it be different today? I am not convinced. Lorde accuses (white) feminist academics of failing to

reach beyond the “*first patriarchal lesson*” by continuing to buy into dominant white male narratives of divide and conquer. Lorde argues that in the same way that all women are called upon “to stretch across the gap of male ignorance”, women of colour are being tasked with educating white women as to their existence and their differences. Lorde names this diversion of energies, this bid to keep the oppressed “occupied with the master’s concerns” (Lorde, 2019, p. 106) as the “old and primary tool of all oppressors” (Lorde, 2019, p. 106).

Diversion of energies. No wonder we all feel exhausted all of the time. I can’t write and cite, inserting citations takes up so much time. When did referencing become such a *thing* ^{cxxxii}?

Citation as violence. As extraction.

Where is my copy of *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* (Yusoff, 2018)?

I flick through the pages. There is much underlining, in pencil. Audrey Lorde’s name catches my eye. Yusoff has included a poem of hers. It is called Coal:

I
Is the total black, being spoke
From the earth’s inside.
There are many kinds of open.
How a diamond comes into a knot of flame
How a sound comes into a word, coloured
By who pays what for speaking.

(Lorde, 1996 cited in Yusoff, 2018, p. 84)

In the poem, ‘I’ is an “inhuman designation...spoken from the earth’s insides”. Resisting, rather than replicating “the confinements of colonial grammar” the line “I/Is the total black” resists the “autonomous and individualized subjectification of Whiteness and refuses the inhuman codified as property to embrace the collective subject of Blackness that has been gathered into categories of earth” (Yusoff, 2018, p. 84).

Human/inhuman. Humane/inhumane. Colonial logics are hard to escape ^{cxxxiii}.

10 August 2021

I have barely slept all night.

I am terrified either way. Whether she gets in or not.

The University of Cambridge. The epitome of Ivory Towers and Hallowed Halls.

She chose her college because it looked like Hogwarts.

Kids are funny.

I have cut her fruit and put it in a bowl. Watermelon, kiwi and strawberries today. No pineapple.

Not every story starts with a pineapple ^{cxxxiv}.

I feel like my heart is being sliced in two. Thirty years of what might have been, about to be played out all over again. Only this time, the story may unfurl differently. Better. Worse. Who knows? But definitely differently.

On the bookshelf is an ancient prospectus. The University of Cambridge Admissions, 1985-6. My mother kept it all these years. In her box of regrets.

I could never have gone.

Not bright enough. Or determined enough. No confidence. And a great big chip on my shoulder.

No.

We will know in less than an hour.

Two minutes to go.

It's time.

Okay. Three A stars. That'll do ...

09 August 2021

In memory of my mother

Le Guin, quoting Virginia Woolf, says: “We think back through our mothers” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 234). What kind of thinking does mine invoke? Her short, hennaed hair. Rabbit skin fur coats picked up for next to nothing at a jumble sale. She always had an eye for what others consigned to the bin. Feather mattresses and Victorian dressing gowns. Crystal necklaces, jet beads. Clarisse Cliff tea sets.

She took me to London to march against nuclear weapons. She grew vegetables in our garden. Made her own yoghurt and ginger beer. And soup from a single pig’s trotter. I remember it lying grey-pink and flabby in the bottom of the pan.

She filled the house and my head with books. From my early teens she fed me on a diet of women writers. Edna O’Brien. Fay Weldon. Beryl Bainbridge. Iris Murdoch. I look along my own bookshelf. A.S. Byatt. Bernice Reubens. Anais Nin. Bessie Head. Zora Neale Hurston. Margaret Atwood. Angela Carter. Arundhati Roy. A few male authors sit alongside the women. Nick Cave, Ian McEwan, Bernard Schlink. Roddy Doyle. I like Roddy Doyle. He is a man who stands alongside. Have you read *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*? You should.

I have had *To the Lighthouse* in my swimming bag for almost three years. It is my lido book. Its pages are stiffened with salt. I still haven’t finished it. I find its aching slowness suits this mode of reading. I dip in and out. Months pass. Nothing happens. And everything happens. Le Guin (1989) says it is a book that should be read aloud. Perhaps all books should be. I might give that a try.

My mother's hair is no longer short. Or auburn. It is long and wavy, a beautiful light and lustrous grey. My own hair, once a short, straight, orange crop, has also changed. I call them my lockdown curls. Friends blame the menopause. A colleague says, "that's what happens when you do a PhD'. All that writing makes your hair go funny. It has definitely *sprouted deviant* (Massumi, 2002, p.18).

Everything is tangled up. In the sleepless hours I have been writing in my head. I trawl through my mind, fishing for something that will take me into the next day's writing. *In memory of my mother*. Except, she's not dead. But, we don't only remember those who have passed. We are constantly constructing and re-constructing our lives and experiences. I can re-member my mother in a myriad of ways.

The first Christmas after my father died, I didn't even to raise a toast. Perhaps it was still too soon to properly acknowledge he had gone. I think it was that year that I collected stories of Christmas. I like this one very much:

On 21 December every year, my mother went out in her hat and coat while my father and I strung up the paper chains, made by me, from the corners of the parlour cornice to the centre light fitting.

Eventually my mother returned, in what seemed to be a hailstorm, though maybe that was her personal weather. She carried a goose, half-in, half-out of her shopping bag, its slack head hung sideways like a dream nobody can remember. She passed it to me – goose and dream – and I plucked the feathers into a bucket. We kept the feathers to restuff whatever needed restuffing, and we saved the thick goose fat drained from the bird for roasting potatoes through the winter. Apart from Mrs W, who had a thyroid problem, everyone we knew was as thin as a ferret. We needed goose fat.

As you get older you remember the dead at Christmas. The Celts, during their festival of Samhain, expected the dead to join the living. Many cultures would understand that; not ours.

That is a pity. And a loss. If time is a boomerang and not an arrow, then the past is always returning and repeating. Memory, as a creative act, allows us to reawaken the dead, or sometimes to lay them to rest, as at last we understand our past.

(Winterson, 2016).

07 August 2021

Jane! You are moving your lips! (Le Guin, 1989, p. 184)

I have been re-reading the introduction to Angela Carter's (2005) *Book of Fairy Tales* in bed. In the foreword, Carter talks of the oral tradition of story-telling. The spoken form, she says, encourages fabrication, embellishment, invention. The fairy tale, is not about the individual artist, the "godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs" (Carter, 2005, p. xii), they are stories without originator, stories that "can be remade again and again by every person who tells them" (Carter, 2005, p. xi). Like potato soup, or meatballs, these stories are not the work of a single, identifiable individual. They are creative collaborations, ways of storying the world that have no definitive version. No single truth. No authoritative voice. Do you remember your mother, standing, stirring something on the stove? Can you still taste your grandmother's stew, served in a bowl and eaten in front of the gas fire? Take a pinch of this a dash of that: "This is how *I* make potato soup" (Carter, 2005, p. xii).

The collection of stories, which hail from every corner of the world, have been grouped under headings. In *'Clever Women, Resourceful Girls and Desperate Stratagems'*, I read the story of *'The Wise Little Girl'*. It is a Russian folk tale, and a favourite of Carter's. In the story, the tsar is asked to decide to which brother a foal belongs. The poor brother, who owns the mare, claims it is his. But the rich brother says the foal belongs to him as it was found under his cart. The tsar sets the brothers a series of challenges at which they fail, but the wisdom of the poor brother's seven-year-old daughter prevails:

'Very well' said the tsar, 'you have done as I ordered you to do. Now tell me - since your father is so poor, what do you live on?' 'My father catches fish on the shore, and he never puts bait in the water; and I make fish soup in my skirt.' *'You are stupid! Fish never live on the shore, fish live in the water.'* *'And you - are you wise? Whoever saw a cart bear foals? Not a cart but a mare bears foals.'*

(Carter, 2005, p.33)

When she grows up, she is married to the tsar. A desperate stratagem to silence clever women and resourceful girls. I wonder what happens next?

These are stories that are not meant to be read silently in your head. But told. Yet, somewhere along the way the oral text got superseded by the written ^{cxxxv}.

I like listening to writers speak. I like reading words that were first spoken. There is a different energy, a dynamism ^{cxxxvi}. I am drawn to presentations and interview transcripts. I like to hear the voice. I watch and re-watch *'The Heart of a Dog'*. I could listen to Laurie Anderson talk forever. And, dare I admit that I prefer reading Claire Parinet's interviews with Gilles Deleuze to *'A Thousand Plateaus'*? Or that Donna Haraway talking to Thyrsa Nichols Goodeve in *'How like a leaf'* makes me smile? An interview with Karen Barad conducted on a balcony, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, transports me to the Greek islands. And, thanks to Covid-19, I am able to watch Alecia Youngblood Jackson battling with a curtain in her sunny hallway. And see Sarah E. Truman for the first time in six years.

Le Guin says that writing words silences them. For her, "[t]he written word is a shadow. Shadows are silent" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 180). I am not sure I agree. The shadows are not silent. Shadows have something to say. Just don't get stuck in the shadows.

I like speaking my writing. I like to read what I write out loud. I need to hear its rhythms. Its cadence. It's the only way I can tell if what I have written is any good.

06 August 2021

On the shore, by the sea, outdoors, is that where women write? (Le Guin, 1989, p. 213)

It is windy today. Blustery clouds. Sunshine on the water. I run down to the small, disused harbour, where the Antony Gormley statue stands. I like to say hello and check out the view. Unless the fishermen have got there first. I run along the Hoe, and around the Barbican, trying not to skid and fall on the cobbles. Back across the esplanade and down towards the lido. A man and his son are the only people waiting outside for it to open. It feels like the summer is over. No queues at the Coffee Shack. No one sat on the metal benches looking out to sea. When I reach the narrow path they call the Rusty Anchor, I stop to look out towards Mount Edgcumbe. The grassy hill that leads down to the folly is as iridescent as ever. There are a few boats, not many. A tug. A frigate. The low wall is studded with grey models of ships and submarines. To my left is HMS Invincible.

Running. Swimming. Rowing. They all make me feel invincible. Strong. Alive. As I drive home, the rain pours down.

That's okay. I am ready to write.

In *The Fisherwoman's Daughter*, Le Guin (1989) asks: Where do women write? Like Le Guin, I think women's writing happens mostly in the home. At a desk perhaps, or the kitchen table. A child may have grown up and gone leaving a spare bedroom. Or maybe there is a space in the garden, a converted shed, or an outhouse.

Or perhaps, if the woman is a *mother up against the wall* (Le Guin, 1989, p. 235), she might live in a tiny one-bedroomed flat, with a cramped balcony where the clothes have to be put to dry. Perhaps there is no kitchen table and meals are eaten on laps. Or standing up. Or not very often at all.

I like reading writers' writing about writing. In *The Fisherwoman's Daughter*, Le Guin (1989) describes how giving up the burden of domesticity is rare among women who write. We cannot (or do not want to) surrender ourselves fully to our art, instead we manage the "double-tightrope trick" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 233) of the *artist-housewife* (Le Guin, 1989). What a terrible, wonderful, term. The *artist-housewife*. The hyphen hooking up and binding

these somehow incongruous words together ^{cxxxvii}. My instinct is to pull them apart. Rip them asunder. And to cast away the housewife, leaving the artist in all [his] self-indulgent, self-serving, self-made glory. But who wants to stand alone, the glorious master? The heroic infant? The writer/artist who has consigned life to the margins?

Margaret Oliphant said that “she profited, that her writing profited, from the difficult, obscure, chancy connection between the artwork and the emotional/manual/managerial complex of skills and tasks called “housework” and to sever that connection would put the writing itself at risk” (cited in Le Guin, 1989, p. 223).

What really puts writing at risk? Is it the lack of time, space, opportunity? Or are these enabling constraints, these limitations, impositions and obstacles generative and productive? Isn't it being immersed in life that, as Alice Ostriker argues, puts a writer “in immediate and inescapable contact with the sources of life, death, beauty, growth, corruption” (cited in Le Guin, 1989, p.229)?

“To have and bring up kids is to be about as immersed in life as one can be, but it does not always follow that one drowns. A lot of us can swim” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 235).

05 August 2021

Let us talk about writing

Let us talk about writing. But can you wait until tomorrow? My husband is home from work. My daughter is tired and hungry. It is time to make their tea.

I was reading *The Fisherwoman's Daughter* as the front door opened. The signal to stop. Finish the chapter. Put the book away. The spin cycle is almost finished. The clothes will need to be hung out.

While it may be lost on you, the irony was not lost on me ^{cxxxviii}.

03 August 2021

The least glamorous topic imaginable

Ursula Le Guin says the menopause is “the least glamorous topic imaginable” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 3). Half the world’s population (should they live that long) will experience “the change”, and yet, and yet, as Le Guin notes, its mention is still mostly met with either uneasy silence or relieved sniggers (Le Guin, 1989, p. 3).

The Change. Women’s worlds are defined by words that trivialise, devalue, deny. On the jam. Pop her cherry. Up the duff.

For thirteen years of my life I did not bleed. At sixteen I lost my virginity. At twenty-seven, I became a mother. At forty-five I entered the menopause. At fifty-four, I don’t know what I am, except older. But I am aiming to become a crone. A Space Crone (Le Guin, 1989).

All those years, defined by my reproductive viability. From the sacred to the profane.

Well, let’s not dwell on that, shall we? Or shall we? Shall we sit right down here and now and refuse to budge until every single one of us has spoken, written, sang, screamed, it out? What it means to experience so much change. To fuck and be fucked. To give birth. Or not. To feed babies with our breasts. To nurture teenagers with our patience. To bleed. To stop.

Le Guin argues that only women accept, experience and enact the entire human condition, “the essential quality of which is Change” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 6).

The Change. The changes. The constant necessity to move and keep moving. Movement is at the heart of this writing. Its work is to resist, to refuse.

Refuse.

Let me introduce you to Sutton Harbour. It is a small marina, packed with boats, mostly yachts. There are two large, old, stone warehouses. From the car park, a narrow path snakes around the harbour. For five years, I walked this path almost every day. Some days, when my body seemed to contain more blood than flesh, I would only make it halfway around. I kept a towel in the car to sit on, so I could drive back home to change without staining the seats.

Sutton Harbour. The flagship university building is up for sale and the pub has been taken over by a restaurant chain that peddles steak dinners for greedy carnivores. The swans are still there, but not so many. For five years, I photographed the flotsam and jetsam that arrived and left with the tide. Never the same. Always changing. These entanglings of matter called out to me and invited me in (McLure, 2013b).

What is all this? Blood and crones and detritus? Where is the thesis? What is the thesis?

This is the thesis. The anti-thesis.

I look up antithesis in my battered dictionary. I read:

1. The exact opposite.
2. Contrast or opposition.
3. Rhetoric. The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas or words so as to produce an effect of balance, such as *my words fly up, my thoughts remain below*.

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.

Women's worlds, words, ideas remain below ^{cxix}.

Our roots are in the dark; the earth is our country. Why did we look up for blessing – instead of around, and down? What hope we have lies there. Not in the sky full of orbiting spy-eyes and weaponry, but in the earth we have looked down upon. Not from above, but from below. Not in the light that blinds, but in the dark that nourishes, where human beings grow human souls.

(Le Guin, 1989, p. 117)

Down in the dark, damp, compost.

Composting. What a wonderful way to think about writing. About worlding. Think of the worms (I'd rather not, thank you). Think of the microbes. The stuff of life. Look around. And down. What do you see? What lures you in? What glows ^{cxl}.

Matter that matters. Matter that has ceased to matter. Disposable bodies. Human and not.

17 April 2021

A nun who smokes and plays canasta ^{cxli}

I am out for a run. It is a beautiful day. The light shimmers on the water. People are out, enjoying the sunshine. Enjoying being outside. Enjoying the easing of lockdown. Waterfront cafes are open. People are drinking coffees. Eating breakfast. Talking in loud groups. There is a buzz, a hum in the air.

On the Hoe, a small service is taking place near the cenotaph. Old men stand to attention. Their berets are Commando green. People are taking photographs. I don't stop.

The Duke of Edinburgh's funeral is today. At 3.00 pm we will observe a minute's silence. A mark of respect. He lived for ninety-nine years. A long, long, life.

On the day his death is announced, the BBC broadcasted nothing but tributes across all its channels. I am surprised that the story of his early life moves me to tears. Born in 1921 on Crete. Smuggled out of the country in an orange box. A nomadic existence. A refugee.

There is footage of his mother, Princess Andrew of Greece and Denmark, at the Queen's coronation. She is wearing a plain grey dress and a wimple. She looks old beyond her years.

I look her up on Wikipedia. It says that in 1930, she was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and committed to a well-respected Swiss sanatorium, an institution which had housed a number of 'celebrity' patients, including the ballet dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky.

The princess was treated by the famous Swiss psychologist, Ludwig Binswanger, who consulted his friend Sigmund Freud as to the cause of her delusions. Freud attributed her mental illness to sexual frustration and recommended x-raying her ovaries to "kill off her libido". She was forty five (Wikipedia, 2021a).

Shhhhhh, it's almost 3.00 ...

I spend my minute thinking about the menopause. A few months ago, I came across some notebooks from that time. The pages scrawled with writing. Words overwriting words. Most of it is illegible. A manic palimpsest. The blue and black ink unsettles me. I can no longer remember how it felt.

Desperate. Diminishing. Dehumanising. Bloody, visceral, frenzied. The shrivelling ovaries. The leeching hormones. The fury. The murderous fury. The overwhelming, murderous, fury. No, glamorous it is not.

Someone is playing a trumpet. It is 15.45. The last post, perhaps? Or the lost past.

I look up Binswanger, and a quote catches my eye:

It says: Humans have the choice of existing as, "being a hunter, of being romantic, of being in business, and thus (we are) free to design (ourselves) toward the most different potentialities of being" (Wikipedia, 2021b).

Being hunter, being romantic or being in business. What a choice. What about being a gatherer? A bag carrier. A collector of things.

15 April 2021

Spinning

There's a sense of optimism in the air. Lockdown is easing. We have progressed to 'Step Two' of Boris Johnson's roadmap. People can meet outside. Pub gardens are open. Shopkeepers are busy brushing, dusting and polishing. The air temperature is chilly, but bar terraces and balconies and impromptu pavement eateries are packed.

I feel elated one minute. Deflated the next. A rollercoaster of emotions. Who sang that, Life is a Rollercoaster? Mine feels more like a Waltzer. Spinning frantically one minute. Stuck on the rails the next. I loved the fairground as a kid. The sense of danger, excitement. The boys who worked the rides eyeing us up and down. Scream if you want to go faster. Sometimes one would hover, riding the rolling boards of the Waltzer. Leaning back slightly. Smelling of tobacco and engine oil and sex. Holding the back of the car, they would wait until it was just about to tip into the descent. And then spin us. Hard and fast. The best times were when the car didn't stop for the whole ride. But span and span and span. Forced back in the seat, we would scream and scream, our hair in our eyes and mouths.

I have paper under review. I have been asked to make some amendments. In the piece, I am writing with Manning. Of trying to think and see as if not doing a PhD. And of a speculative process of 'not-knowing-in-advance'. The first reviewer has asked for a roadmap. Not a Boris-type one, I hope. S/he wants something to hold on to. An introduction and conclusion to orient the journey for the reader S/he has written:

I write this comment only after getting to the bottom of page three: So far, I love the entangled style, the wonderings and process. However, I think the manuscript would benefit from a road map in the instruction [sic] so that the reader knows they're about to go on an adventure. It's whimsy, it's fun, but I think the manuscript would benefit from a bit of a reader's guide.

The second reviewer is more positive:

The article is theoretically sound, fruitful, but also beautifully inviting. The direct quotes and Manning's concepts are moving both the article and the reader further. The article really

does differently in writing, brakes [sic] the rules of the common sense and lets the writing flow with the thought in motion. It also takes the provocation of the expressive potential of accepting the risk of sprouting deviant – the writer is truly letting that 'thinking and seeing (or writing) as if not doing a PhD' happen. That is not (intendedly or not, I hope intendedly) assigned as a title – yes, it can not be a title, as a title often is some kind of conclusion of the article, which comes after that. Here 'the title' is only reaching-towards. I love that. That's the way I also write – but sad to say, also still stay in some common sense spaces, e.g. always feel the pressure to describe what my research is about. Writing towards does not easily feel enough, it is difficult to stay in the nothing-ness, more-than-ness. But this author does it. In that way it also takes up and materializes Manning's philosophy in writing. S/he stays faithful for the thought in motion.

Deflated. Elated. Elated. Deflated.

I am struck by the second reviewer's sadness as s/he admits to the pressure s/he feels to compromise in her/his own writing. To describe what her/his research is about.

The first reviewer's comments rattle me. Do I really need to explain? Opening up spaces is so much harder than closing them down.

Reviewer one says my writing reads like a stream of consciousness. Is that a good thing, I wonder? I think, for her/him, it is not.

How to stay true to thought in motion over 80,000 words? The pressure to produce the thesis is looming. It casts a shadow over my writing, my thinking. Don't you dare compromise, say my supervisors, don't you dare. But even they can't agree on what I write.

Elated. Deflated. Deflated. Elated.

I wander into town. It is strange to see so many people. The shops are open. Except the ones that have closed down. I forget to follow the one-way system as I double back to Boots to buy more face masks. I join the stream of people heading out into the sunshine. I sit on a bench for a while. Watching people. I am jealous of women with short sharp haircuts. My appointment is two weeks away. Too slow off the mark. My hair is unruly and unkempt. The longest it has been for years. It has gone curly. I quite like it. But not today.

I walk back to the campus for a lateral flow test. I put the stick in the wrong way around and we have to start again. I don't gag, this time. I must be getting used to it.

On the way back to my office, I photograph three bus shelters in a row. KFC. Kellogs. COVID. The new normal. In the third shot, I can see my silhouette. Straggles of hair blowing in the breeze. I really need a haircut.

27 March 2021

Free food

I have been picking wild garlic. There are banks of it. Free food. The first flowers have appeared. It will go over soon.

On the Greek islands, the locals gather horta, wild greens. And after a rainstorm, they would collect snails. They would leave them in a jar of flour to 'clean' them. Then boil them in water.

I used to collect snails in the rain when I was a child. Plucking them from the grass verges in my wellies and plastic mac. I used to put them in an old biscuit tin, with holes punctured in its lid and feed them grass and leaves.

Somehow, they always escaped. I would go into the front garden and find the lid off and the tin empty.

I fill my plastic bag with the smallest, greenest leaves. I only pick those from high up the bank, where the dogs can't pee. A feral cat startles me. I jump when a bird flies from a bush. I don't enjoy the walk. I feel uneasy. I am not sure why.

There is an image in today's newspaper. A school gate covered in placards. It is a protest against the 'rape culture' at an exclusive private school. *My clothes are not my consent*, one reads. I should be safe enough, I think. Tracksuit bottoms, muddy trainers and a fleece.

There are primroses and celandines. Speedwells and wild roses. Broken tiles and bricks. The track is littered with fly-tippings. A broken plastic laundry basket. A car wheel. In a small field, there is a mattress and a shopping basket. I step over stained rags and part of a boiler. I think of the Anthropocene^{cxlii} and the Now Stone^{cxliii}.

23 March 2021

Happy Anniversary

Today is the 23rd March 2021. It is exactly a year since the UK went into lockdown. At midday we have been asked to observe a minute's silence. To take time to reflect on the past twelve months. And to remember those who have died.

Who would think we would look back with such nostalgia? Empty roads. Birdsong. Time to clean out cupboards. Plant flowers and vegetables in our neglected gardens. Doing pub quizzes on Zoom. Clapping the NHS on our doorsteps on a Thursday night.

I have been for a run along the Hoe. One of the benefits of lockdown. I taught myself to run. From couch to 5 km. It was torturous at first. Now I can't stop. I loop around the Antony Gormley statue. I sometimes stop and give him a little hug. I like the companionship he brings. From a distance, the contours of his body change. The iron blocks soften. He appears to scan the horizon. There is a strange fluidity. Movement. Motion.

When I get home, I chat to the cleaner. She has fallen off her bike and has two black eyes. I hope you are not a battered wife, I joke. She laughs, but it's not funny, is it? The number of domestic abuse cases have rocketed during lockdown. According to police figures, there was one domestic abuse call every 30 seconds in the first seven weeks.

More people are struggling to feed their families. From October to December 2020, the Trussell Trust (2020) saw a 61% increase in food parcels needed across its UK network. That is six food parcels being given out every minute

Not everyone has had it easy.



Figure 9: Lookout II, Antony Gormley.

21 March 2021

Mothers' Day

I am lying in the bath, listening to Laurie Anderson on the radio. I am in my perfect place. Laurie is talking about music. How her and her siblings all played instruments. At home, there was no music sheets so they played without. Imagining the music a violin should make.

She talks about the inspiration for '*O Superman*'. She tells us about Charles Holland, a black tenor who fled the racial prejudice of the US to become a successful opera singer in the Netherlands. She had heard him sing "*O Souverain*" from Massenet's "*Le Cid*" and it moved her to write her own "prayer of desperation" (Anderson, 2021).

11 March 2021

Black lives matter ... Or Black life matters

“When you say Black life matters, you are saying life matters, and when you say life matters you are saying black life matters” (Moten, 2015 cited in Manning, 2016, p. 5)

It’s Tuesday. I should be writing my PhD. Instead, I make food. Expensive Spanish tuna on brown bread. I drink French coffee, strong and black. And I read the Sunday newspapers. There is an interview with Clara Amfo. I like Clara ^{cxliv}.

There is a picture of her holding a Barbie™ doll. A mini her. Black and beautiful. Tiny trainers. A microphone. A little undercut. The interviewer asks why this piece of plastic means so much, she replies; “It makes me feel valued. It makes me feel seen” (Anfo cited in Heawood, 2021, p.13).

The Barbie™ doll has been commissioned in honour of International Women’s Day. I am beginning to tire of these tokenistic days, weeks, months. The black footballers still take to the knee on match days. Sometimes they are booed by their own supporters. As Clara says, *“You want my talent, but you don’t want me.”*

The nominations for the Grammys have been announced. There is an impressive list of women of various colours and backgrounds: Beyoncé. Doja Cat. Dua Lipa.

Does their presence on this list signal some kind of shift? Some opening up of the blinkered, colonial eye? I am not convinced ^{cxlv}.

On Wednesday, human remains are found in woodland. A serving Metropolitan Police Officer has been detained. Boris Johnson is ‘shocked and saddened’. Women are interviewed on the radio. They speak out against male violence. Only men can end male violence, someone says.

On Saturday, women are handcuffed and arrested during a vigil for the murdered woman.

Black people who want to be seen not targeted. Women wanting to feel safe in their homes and on the streets. Refugees wanting sanctuary from violence and war.

I am watching University Challenge. The teams are presented with a photograph of Audrey Lorde. Not a single contestant recognises her. And neither do I ^{cxlvi}.

13 February 2021

Banana

In *Sexing the Cherry*, the Dog-Woman takes her adopted son, Jordan, to see a strange and exotic fruit. The like of which had never been seen. A banana from the Island of Bermuda. The Dog Woman is repulsed, believing the strange specimen to be the “private parts of an Oriental” (Winterson, 2014, p.5). But Jordan is transfixed and, despite being tethered to a hound-lead, he manages to give the Dog-Woman the slip.

I saw Jordan standing stock still. He was standing with both arms upraised and staring at the banana above Johnson’s head. I put my head next to his head and looked where he looked and I saw deep blue waters against a pale shore and trees whose branches sang with green and birds in fairground colours and an old man in a loin-cloth.

This was the first time Jordan set sail.

(Winterson, 2014, p. 6)

13 February 2021

Grief is the thing with feathers (Porter, 2015)

I have only just read it. Though my husband gave the book to me the Christmas after my dad died. It is the story of loss. Of grief. Of a husband in mourning. And his two motherless boys. A big, black crow arrives one cold night, in a stinking whirlwind of profanity and feathers, “One shiny jet-black eye as big as my face, blinking slowly, in a leathery-wrinkled socket, bulging out from a foot-ball-sized testicle” (Porter, 2015, p. 7).

Grief for me did not feel like crow. It didn't mock me. Provoke or harangue me. It sat quietly. Somewhere near my heart. Sometimes lower. A cold space. Of sadness. Of yearning. Of absence.

I choked up at the funeral, trying to read the eulogy I had written, that wasn't quite good enough. But had to do. Tears rolled down my cheeks as we poured his ashes into the hole dug at the foot of the oak tree. But that was because the wind had blown some of the coarse, grey, grit into my eyes. I didn't really cry until a year later. Or was it two? Kneeling in a small temple after a sweaty climb, somewhere in a city in a devastated country. I wept. And wept.

Perhaps I was moved by the shaking torso of the woman in front of me. Or perhaps it was the space. It was a place to remember. A shrine to those lost to us.

My dad's passing is marked by a tree and a plaque. There was an obituary in *The Guardian*, and printed service sheet. His death, like his birth, and his marriage, will forever exist in the records. He has been counted. He is countable.

My mum tells me my dad had terrible diarrhoea before he died. *He exploded*, she says. The violence of her words knocks the breath out of my lungs. They had given him strong laxatives. They said he was constipated. But the truth was he was dying. His heart was failing. His body was shutting down.

I remember dad bringing us ice-cream. Mum was away. I am not sure where. My brother says she was in Tone Vale. The local mental institution. But no matter who I ask, no one seems to know. My dad never said. And now he is gone.

I remember the ice-cream melting on the kitchen counter. Vanilla liquid oozing out of the edges of the cardboard box. No one had thought to put it in the freezer. We had to eat it all. Our stomachs ached.

I know I have written this before. Round and round I go.

My dad's not landfill, he's ashes.

Or compost?

There is something strangely comforting in compost ^{cxlvii}.

12 February 2021

Joy

It's the 12th February 2021. Chinese New Year. Spring Festival. It's the year of the Ox. I'm not sure what that means. If anything. I have a tutorial with Joy. Joy is just that, a joy.

Joy keeps chickens in her garden. The chickens from a rescue centre. She paid £40 for each one. She tells me about a trip to the vet. And how much it cost her. I've never heard of a constipated chicken. Ours used to shit everywhere. All over the run and the nesting boxes. The beams of the old Wendy house they occupied were caked in it. I used to hate going in to collect the eggs. Couldn't bear the stench. The iridescent plumage of our Bantams had been replaced by the dirty white of the Leghorns. Proper chickens. Egg-layers. The Bantams were an indulgence. The tiny blue-hued eggs offered little sustenance. Oh, but they were beautiful! Becky, Velvet, and Quantock. One for each of the girls. And Hercules, the cock for my brother. Bright orange tail feathers. Beady yellow eyes. Always watching. Ruling the roost.

Today Joy is wearing a woolly hat. The wind outside is bitterly cold. But she looks well. Much better than last time I saw her. Still shell-shocked from her time in A&E. A placement she'll never forget. Watching people die. Watching people left to die.

Joy went to Hong Kong in the summer. The two weeks in quarantine were worth it. To see her mum.

Next is Ethel. She is also from Hong Kong. She has woolly scarf wrapped around her neck. She is cold. She has just spoken to her parents. It's 20 degrees in Hong Kong, she tells me.

Ethel is struggling. She is re-taking her first year, but I am not sure she'll make it, even second time around. Ethel gets distracted by details. She spends hour pondering the meaning of a word she doesn't recognise. Or a single sentence in a two-hour lecture that confused her. She obsesses over a fascinating fact she doesn't need. I try and pull her back into focus. Nothing makes sense to Ethel. I think her brain works differently. Perhaps she could be labelled in some way that would help her. Dyslexia. Dyspraxia. Perhaps she is on some Spectrum. But Ethel wouldn't qualify for any support. Only UK citizens need apply.

05 February 2021

Brown baby

Love. Grief. Food. Joy. What else is there?

I have radio 6 on. I listen every morning as I cut fruit for my daughter. Pineapple, mango, banana. So exotic. A mother's wish to fill her child's body with goodness. I dry up the pots and plates from last night's dinner. We have been dabbling in veganism. My daughter won't eat meat. Or dairy. She is right, of course. We have to do something.

Lauren Laverne is interviewing Nikesh Shukla about his latest book^{cxlviii}. I stop and listen. He is speaking about his daughter. His dead mother. Of the need to find joy in a world that is full of racism and sexism. A world teetering on the edge of a cataclysmic climatic disaster. The writer has a voice that Compels. Captivates. Caresses. It is soft and warm. Like melted chocolate. He says he wants to bear witness to our terrible, turbulent times. But, as a father, he knows he cannot allow himself to be consumed by the darkness.

He asks Lauren to play Brown Baby^{cxlix}. It is the song he first sang to his newborn daughter. To let her know how much he loved her. How he would always have her back.

Brown baby. Mine are white. As am I. My very skin, a site of privilege. Of protection. Of validation. What is it to have a child marked at birth as other? Made vulnerable, exploitable, disposable by virtue of their skin colour?

31 January 2021

Rhinoceros

It's 7.52 on Sunday 31st January 2021. I have been awake for hours. Writing in my head. In my bed. The house is chilly. The heating hasn't kicked in yet. I come downstairs to write. There are muddy footprints on my desk. The cat.

I woke from a nightmare. A rhinoceros is attacking a man in a glass-walled room. I don't have a phone. I try to call for help. Attract attention. But my voice won't come. It is croaky. Weak. A small crowd gather. Alerted by my agitated state. When I dare to look again, the man and rhinoceros are both badly injured. The man has lost an eye. The rhinoceros has been beaten with tools, metal claws and hammers. It is dying. The room has filled with water. Only the head of the beast can be seen. Its mouth moves silently. The man is being tended to, but his eye socket is a blackened with congealed blood.

I can't shake a feeling of unease.

18 October 2020

Nineteen nineteen

Nineteen nineteen. One year after the end of the First World War. The Great War. The war to end all wars. Twenty years before the start of the Second World War. Twenty-six years before that war came to its shameful end with the dropping of atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Elizabeth St.Pierre (2021) says, how can you talk about 'new' materialism when you haven't read about the 'old'. I had wanted my thesis to reference only women. But when you move back through time the world gets increasingly male. I read Alfred North Whitehead. A series of lectures, delivered in 1919 at Trinity College. In his work I see the origins of hauntings and tracings that imbue my own. They have travelled through time and through minds and matter. I like working in reverse.

Whitehead talks of matter. And multiplicities. And events. There is substance and speculation. I look up the quote he attributes to Hamlet and find in fact it was uttered by Macbeth. I read both. Long ago. When I was seventeen. I loved Hamlet. Despised Macbeth. What a fool. Such folly. Sent on his path of murder and madness by three midnight hags.

My daughter says she is embracing her inner witch. She has green eyes. A steely determination. A stout heart. Would she have been burned alive in a cage of black cats? Or strapped to a ducking stool and systematically drowned? Would she have been clamped into a scold's bridle so she could no longer speak? Or thrown down a well?

We are the witches you didn't burn.

04 October 2020

Making Oddkin

I have had to clean my own bathroom this week. The cleaner has caught a bug. It's a beautiful sunny day. I bet she is out on her bike. Riding in the sunshine.

I always clean on Sundays. Well, the bathroom, anyway. I find myself back in a familiar routine. I run the bath while I bleach the toilet and rinse the basin. I pull out the plug and poke around. The sink fills with black debris. I swill it back down and have a go at the plastic insert with an old toothbrush. I scrub the metal hinges of the toilet seat and greenish water oozes forth. I am not sure if it is rust or pee that collects there. I wipe down the mirror and catch sight of myself pleasingly blurred by condensation. My daughter has forgotten to put her face mask back in the fridge. It has the texture of semi-dried vomit but smells of Play-do. I think my skin could do with a boost, but I find it hard to keep it on my face. The bathroom floor ends up covered with clumps of yellow stodge.

I lie in the bath surveying the tiles. The grouting is darkening again. The weird red seepage is making a comeback. What is it? Someone told me it was fat. I wish it was mine. Seeping away. I let the plug out and stand under the shower, scrubbing at the tiles. Naked. I like cleaning without my clothes on. It makes me feel liberated. Sometimes I wear my yellow rubber gloves. Sometimes I don't.

What did Donna Haraway say about cleaning the toilet? It's the work that is never done.

Slippages

Housework makes you hot,

When you hit 'a certain age'.

I clean the bath naked,

Crouched down in the tub.

In yellow Marigolds,

I scrub at the mould.

With my husband's toothbrush.

04 October 2020

Nineteen ninety one

Another time. A time before. Before the birth of my daughter. Before New Labour swept to power. Before the Iraq war. Before 9/11. Before Grenfell. Before Brexit. Before Trump. Before Covid-19.

Simians and Cyborgs and Women. Even thirty years ago, Haraway's writings are filled with the concerns of now. Science, informatics, surveillance, the dismantling of the welfare state, the feminization of poverty and the workplace, biopolitics and the food scarcity caused by the high-tech commodification of food crops. Her work is tentacular. It reaches out into the cracks and crevices that need a good poke.

Thirty years ago. And still we leave migrants who think they have been saved to die. Hungry, thirsty, crowded onto vessels that are refused a place to dock and allow their terrified, traumatised, vilified cargo to step ashore. To be saved all over again. Or not.

Staying with the trouble. It does not go away. It shifts and intensifies. Morphs and mutates. But the shit still smells the same.

25 September 2020

Cleaning up after the cleaner

I have employed a cleaner. There. I have said it.

I clean before she comes. And I clean after. She doesn't do mould. Why should she? I am eternally grateful that she does anything at all. Steam cleaning my sticky kitchen floor each week and polishing my bathtub. That's enough.

She has had her long hair shaved off into a buzz cut. More practical than the decorative locks she wore when she worked at the big department store in town. She arrives every Thursday, armed with her box of environmentally friendly chemicals and her high-end Hoover. She tells me what she has cooked for her husband that week. Pasties and apple pies. And about their latest bike rides.

I scrub at the blackened grouting and hope she'll notice next time she comes. I use my husband's old toothbrushes to scrape at the darkening cracks and crevices. I never use my own. I am not sure why.

10 September 2020

Leaking in Laos

You're crying brown tears again. My daughter is exasperated with me. I fan myself harder. Dabbing vainly at the sweat that runs in muddy rivulets down my face and neck, washing away the foundation optimistically applied that morning to temper my red and aging face. The paper tissue disintegrates in my hand. The mahout mocks me as I try to scramble up the vertical jungle pathways. I feel lightheaded and breathless. He says, "*you are only used to climbing up aeroplane steps.*"

My face burns. Tear prick. I keep climbing.

09 September 2020

Miles for refugees

I have signed up for 108. Calais to London. I have 24 days to complete my challenge. That's 4.5 miles a day. Not much. I ran almost four today. Dodging dogs. Avoiding the two shaven-headed men in matching grey uniforms. A sharp nail cutting into my middle toe. It is the furthest I have run. Spurred on by the thought of razor wire, leaking dinghies and border guards.

Later, I walk to the Co-op to boost my daily tally. On the way home, the shopping bag cuts into my fingers. Imagine carrying what's left of your world on your back. Or your child in your arms. Mile after mile after mile. Seeking safety. Seeking sanctuary.

04 July 2020

Independence Day

It is Independence Day. Trump has made a speech beneath the gargantuan heads of past presidents on Mount Rushmore. The faces that shaped American history. World history. I wonder if Trump is planning to add his own gigantic head to the line-up. I am sure he is.

I have been cleaning my daughter's room. I use a dusting glove to clean the wooden Venetian blinds. My husband bought it. I think I was genuinely excited, for a moment. We had Venetian blinds in the house I grew up in. But they were metal. Sharp edges that could slice a finger.

My daughter is away for a few days. At her boyfriend's. As I dust and clean, I ponder how asynchronous are lives are. Her, embarking on her first sexual relationship, my own in terminal decline. Crushed under the weight of age, and menopause and middle-aged spread.

The face of Margaret Thatcher stares up at me from a history textbook. *The Making of Modern Britain*. Post-Covid, we are unravelling. Fast. But the stitches were unpicked decades ago. It has been a slow but sure disintegration.

Edward Colston has been chucked in Bristol Harbour. Winston Churchill daubed with graffiti. These colossi of white supremacy are under attack. Black lives matter.

The historian and broadcaster, David Starkey has resigned from his honorary fellowship at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. "Slavery was not genocide, otherwise there wouldn't be so many damn blacks in Africa or in Britain would there? You know, an awful lot of them survived," he said.

Nine million women burned were burned as witches in the middle-ages^{cl}.

But an awful lot of them survived.

We are the witches you didn't burn, says Donna Haraway. But the persecution continues. We are scorched and scolded and singed every day. The things women know. The covering up. The suppression. The denial.

I try to put my daughter's possessions back exactly where they have come from. My own mild OCD kicks in as I try to straighten folders and replace the small ornaments in neat patterns. Equidistant on the white melamine shelves. What are her things? Hair products. A few cosmetics. Empty perfume bottles. I straighten out her sock drawer. Fold her tiny knickers. Slips of lace. She doesn't seem to own much, my daughter. There is a row of trainers. A child's sewing machine which she uses to create and customise her clothes. Cacti. Candles. Some crystals. A few books on a shelf. Some she has bought or been given. Others that I have left in her room, hoping she might one day pick up and read. *Oranges aren't the Only Fruit. Off the rails. The Buddha of Suburbia.*

The world of objects can tell us something about ourselves, says Leonie Hampton. So does hoarding ^{cli}. Leonie's mother moved house and never unpacked the boxes. I shift slightly in my chair as she talks. My own loft is full of the stuff I couldn't bear to be parted from when we left our lives in Greece. My glitter ball. Paintings created from ground up rocks. A mannequin I found in a dark street late one night. There were torsos, arms and legs piled up waiting to be taken away to the dump. I would have taken them all if I could. And kept them in my home, dressed in impossibly beautiful dresses. Or perhaps just naked. Their glorious, glamorous limbs twisted into unnatural positions, their impossible breasts, tiny waists and hairless crotches.

A horde of plastic women.

What labelling falls upon us?

It's 15.28.

I feel this may be the last piece I write. For a while.

15.36

I'm done.

27 May 2020

Business as usual

Lockdown is being eased. I listen to the news on the radio. The FSI states more women have lost their jobs and taken on the lion's share of childcare and the housework. An unarmed black man has been killed by a police officer in Minneapolis.

20 March 2020

Coronavirus

Clarisse tells me what the acronym Covid-19 means. We spend the Conversation Class describing the act of washing your hands. Turn on the tap. Wet hands. Add soap. Rub hands. Dry on a towel. Mussa says Muslims wash five times a day. Before prayer. Not just hands. Forearms. Feet, face and neck. I see something in her eyes. It's you that needs educating, they seem to say. All that *we think we know*, is already known.

By the end of the session, we are all feeling a little jittery. Only four women come the following week. And then there were none.

I hang the sheets and duvet cover on the line. The first wash to go out this year. It is windy. Wild. I have been told to work at home, the university has closed its doors and gone online. I stop on my way back to pick up wine and vegetables. The shelves are bare, bald spots where rice and bread should be. Milk is being rationed. I am allowed to buy two bags of sweet potatoes. They're not proving very popular.

I keep wondering if Corona Virus will end or save the world. My daughter says the canals in Venice are clearing. The algae is gone. Tiny fish swim in the lagoon.

Flights have been cancelled. Carbon emissions have dropped. The roads are quiet. Imagine how quickly the world would recover if humans disappeared?

08 March 2020

Utopia

It's International Women's Day.

I think about the young woman I walked past yesterday. Wringing out her clothes on the dog shit strewn walkway that runs above the slipway from where we launch our boats and row. She is clearly unwell. Her movements are jerky. Manic. Her face is covered in red spots and blotches. I catch her eye, but she doesn't speak. Only steps back. I don't stop. I don't ask if she needs some help. Or money. I don't know why. I am wary. Afraid, perhaps. I walk on, but I can't get her out of my head.

We stop at a pub and drink cold beer. Mine is called Utopia. It costs £4.50. I have another pint. And a packet of crisps. Money so easily and enjoyably spent.

While a young woman, surrounded by plastic bags and spilt milk, wrings out her clothes on a dog-shit strewn walkway.

14 February 2020

The schizophrenic logic of late capitalism (Braidotti, 2013a) ^{cli}

We are to write from 9.30 today. A break at 11.00. Tea and biscuits. Carbs and sugar. The fuel for tired writers. There is less energy in the room today. I retreat to my space. I am finding it hard to get going. I skim read some texts I printed of months ago. Dr. Rinaldi's Horror Cabinet. (Hickman, 2015). I glance at a few random sections. It is dark and difficult reading. I feel frivolous. Lightweight. Lacking. Where does this confidence come from? This ability to write such dense and thorny prose? I haven't read enough. There are glaring gaps. Read. Read. Read. The formidable face and force that is Betty St. Pierre haunts me. She is right of course. I need to read.

But today is about writing. Stacking up the word count. Measuring productivity. How many did you write today? Nearly 3000! I am absurdly proud. It is time to get down to work. The hard work of reading-thinking-writing-thinking-reading.

A paragraph in Hickman's text catches my eye:

Sometimes I look around me and see the pain in peoples eyes, the emptiness and fear; the desperation. Each of us watches the spectacle of the world in our own way, alone or together. Some try to understand it by walking away from it through distraction and forgetting, alcohol or music; others, gaze endlessly into the fantasy worlds of Television trying to numb themselves against the truth of their lives. Others will sit down and play video-games for hours on end: the endless repetition of aggression and death, carnage and dominion that our commercialized systems throw at us as entertainment – in the various MMO's or First-Person Shooters, etc.. Young and old people acting our fantasies, trying to become masters of universe in secret realms of make-believe that they could become in reality.

Others will spend years struggling through the archives of literature, philosophy, history, politics, art – all the cultural objects that the human animal has invented for itself to explain the meaningless of existence to itself, to stay the hand against the terrible truth – that there is no answer, none to be found in books, painting, cinema; nor, for that matter in the vein scribbling's of one's own hands upon the screen. Yet, we continue, each of us in her own way seeking answers. Academics, writers, journalists... etc. each believing that the cultural worlds will give us what we need...

(Hickman, 2015)

The scribbles of one's own hand upon the screen ...

I spent Tuesday sorting through my notes. I have a new office space that invites me to write. It is large and light, and I think once the summer comes, it will be very, very quiet. I have moved my PhD in, sorting the mass of papers into themes. Elizabeth St. Pierre is there, *Circling the Text*. Such an influence on me. My notes and quotes are written in blue ballpoint pen. A labour of love. I rarely write that way anymore. I tap, tap, tap. It takes me back to my master's degree. All the handwritten pages come from that time. A time when the physical, embodied act of writing seemed so important. So fundamental to the powerful process of inquiring through writing. And yet, and yet. I type. The keyboard distances me from my words. From the physical formation of the words. Tap, tap, tap. They appear. I am losing the ability to spell. I think it is the disconnection. Words were learned by the act of writing them. Forming of each letter with a pen held in my hand. At first a pencil, later an ink pen. Words were inscribed on paper. Again, and again, and again. Ingrained in my muscle memory. Hélène Cixous and her pen. Seamus Heaney and his pen. Holding the pen. Waleed's words are in front of me. Inscribed in fine black ink. I tap, tap, tap, below them.

There is talk of back-ups and lost files. There is a general mistrust of the cloud. It's just somebody else's computer. Put your work on a pen drive. How ironic. The schizophrenic logic of late capitalism.

Inertia. Paralysis. The stranglehold of the neoliberal agenda.

Writing a thesis as if you don't know you are writing a thesis. Resisting linearity and conformity. Refusing to name and categorise. It's not easy.

Tea break. Photos in the toilet. Free tampons. Signs proclaiming how much water is being saved. I dash to the library. Michel de Certeau and Saskia Sassen. I can't find the self-issue machines. Does anyone borrow books anymore? I head back. People chat and make hot drinks.

Is it autoethnographic, Christie asks me? There are elements, I say. But when you are troubling the notion of the humanistic subject, the I is rather troublesome. What do you

write about, then? Being in the world, I say. Christie says it sounds like a tornado. It is I say. But even tornadoes have boundaries. Or do they? Sucking in and spewing out as they spin.

My writing is becoming horribly fragmented.

Christie suggests I try to write 1000 coherent words before the end of the day. I sit staring at Waleed. His poignant smile. His patchwork cap. The faraway look in his eyes. The photograph is a construct. It has been staged and chosen and framed with care. We are drawn to the composition, the colours, the message. We focus on the product, the art-e-fact, but it is in the process of its production where affect resides. How to capture the processual nature of the PhD? A doctorate is all about the thesis. And yet, we know that it is not. And if it is, it should not be. The neoliberal agenda is all about learning outcomes. And that which can be measured. Evaluated. Judged.

What is the value of this becoming-phd?



Figure 10: Waleed

13 February 2020

Thesis Boot Camp

It's a terrible name. Though very symbolic of the neoliberal university. Where no one has time to write. Or think. There is a palpable air of stressed silence in the room. Itchy fingers. We are to start at 9.45, not before. But we can't help ourselves. Guiltily tapping away. This urge to write is strong, Irresistible. Beyond the main room, I find an empty desk. The small space is light. Quiet. On the walls are photographs from an exhibition I visited several months ago: Refugees Mapping Memories. I sit down. In front of me is Waleed. A Sudanese human rights activist. Behind me is Maria from Honduras. In the corridor, Mahmoud from Syria next to Arzu from Azerbaijan. The artworks are beautiful. Each accompanied by a photograph, a map and a piece of writing. A red cord shows the distance each has travelled to find sanctuary.

9.45. You may begin

Why am I here? It is time to 'write up' my thesis. The thesis that has been writing itself for almost five years now. The thesis that started with my encounters with detritus, with Jane Bennett's (2016) *vibrant matter* and the movements and troublings have continued to weave in and out around my doctoral doings^{cliii}.

I am supposed to have set a goal for my time at Boot Camp. If I'm pushed to, I'll say it is to write my methodology chapter. How dull. And yet, the methodology is my thesis. It is the tangled, thorny, beating heart of it. I can't name it. But I am certainly doing it. My second supervisor refers to her work as *Speculative Inquiry*. I like that. But I am not sure I have any inquiry in mind. Speculative or not.

I flick through some notes I picked up to bring with me. There she is, Maggie MacLure. Researching without representation^{cliv}. I love how she writes. Blowing away the dogma of academia with gleeful exuberance. The wonder of data. The wonder of method. Research as exciting. Wild. Vibrant.

My writings are imbued with Maggie's. I listen to the sound of someone peeing in the adjacent toilet. The troublesome "manifestation of the body in the cerebral work of

research" (MacLure, 2013a, p. 664). There is a small black arrow on the notes, pointing to *humour, mockery, disgust, fascination, unease or resistance*.

The toilet flushes. Again. We have been writing for 45 minutes. The body calls out for comfort. Release.

Blood. Bleeding. Weeping. Seeping. Stain. Stench. Staunch the flow. Plug the hole. Wash away the smears and smudges. Change your knickers. Carry on. When did I write those words? It must be some time ago. I bleed no more.

I come across Manning's article, *What if it Didn't All Begin and End with Containment? Towards a Leaky Sense of Self*^{clv}. In the margins, I have written in italics: *Leaky. I like leaky. I leak. I am not self-contained. I spill out and fall to bits. My eyes well up. In laughter. Sadness. My nose runs. My bladder fills and empties. I lie awake at night, drenched in my own sweat. Are the young watertight? Not the young, the youthful?*

I have a leaky sense of self. But I leak less these days.

What else is there in my plastic folder of treasures? Sarah E. Truman and Patricia Clough doing their perambulatory research. Brian Massumi on movements, borders, and checkpoints. Elizabeth Grosz on bodies. Barad's diffraction. Deleuze on Spinoza. Claire Colebrook. Braidotti. Haraway. A transcript of Elizabeth Palmer's *The Now Stone*. P.J. Harvey's lyrics to *The Ministry of Defence*^{clvi} and a reference to Laurie Anderson's album, *Big Science*. I find a piece of handwritten text. O Superman. Moving me to tears. There are other chunks of writings. Word-processed. Some have titles, Some do not. Manchester. Detritus. Ballet. Tutankhamun. The woman thrown in the well. Where are women equal? Wielding words, I answer.

And I think of Virginia Woolf.

Articulate. How to? Exemplify? Is it enough to? Let me try. Though I feel I am running out of steam ...

I think I'll eat a banana.

Elizabeth St. Pierre says what is important is what we resist.

Am I resisting methodology?

Or is this a methodology of resistance?

Joy as an act of resistance ^{clvii}.

I have been moved by matter. And this has come to matter. The wonder. The wonderful (Manning, 2014). I don't know what or how to name this methodology. It is mine and every one's. Every thing's. It is the method of being in the world. Of the world. With the world. Opening up to murmurings and attending to whisperings. Flattening ontologies and troubling epistemologies, it is a processual, creative process of walking, wondering and writing.

I look at Waleed's map. The red, cotton thread traces his journey from Khartoum to the UK. He has travelled the length of Egypt. Crossed the sea to Greece. Negotiated multiple European borders. To find sanctuary here. In this hostile land.

The ebbing and flowing of the detritus in Sutton Harbour called to me. It spoke of movements and of matter. Of displaced bodies. Human and not. It has been a catalyst. A provocation. An agentic encounter that has generated art and action and activism. A gallery of images. A series of small interventions. A doctoral thesis. Putting theory to work. Putting posthumanism to work. Working with theory. Working against method. So troublesome. So infuriating. So vital. Destabilising notions of 'good' research, questioning deeply held values and ethics, no wonder people get hot under the collar ^{clviii}.

The desk at which I sit is bathed in sunlight. I can see clouds moving quickly across a blue-grey sky. It is windy outside. The tail end of Hurricane Ciara. But I am warm. Well-fed. Comfortable. My lower back presses against the soft material of the cushioned chair. The space is quiet. I am privileged. I am white. I am not Waleed. Or Azur. I have not escaped war like Mahmoud. I am not Maria, dreaming of a day when her country is no longer riddled with violence and corruption. This desk, this space, is a striated site of privilege. It is white and it is Western.

The walls speak to me of lives that have somehow been deemed to matter less than mine. Maria's red, cotton thread crosses a vast expanse of ocean. Honduras to Spain. Over 5000 miles. I look Honduras up on Wikipedia. It has the highest murder rate in the world. It is one of the poorest nations in the Western hemisphere (Wikipedia, 2020). Its history is a litany of exploitation. A country of exploitable, expendable, disposable bodies ^{clix}.

The toilet flushes. Again.

Writing up. Writing up. Writing up. Up, up and away. The impossibility of writing the not yet known. The not yet articulated. And of writing in a way that is “non-representational, non-interpretive, a-signifying, a-subjective, paradoxical and embroiled with matter” (MacLure, 2013a, p.663). A challenge indeed. But, as MacLure says, one that we must not flee from, but embrace because of the “event that it inaugurates” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 664).

Can the very thesis itself act as a challenge to the powerful discourses that circle and encircle the doctoral thesis?

I have become attached to my corner of the Sustainability Hub. I think I may come and write here again. There are plants growing on an indoor wall. They look healthy and happy.

I have missed the Conversation Class to be here. The lovely, laughing ladies who bring so much life and vitality into the room. We spend a lot of time learning the words for different foodstuffs. And clothes. We scroll through our phones looking up the names of herbs and spices, some known to me, some not. The word ‘bra’ makes us laugh. Baa, baa, says Fatima. Sudan. Iraq. Nepal. Syria. Myanmar. Bulgaria. Yemen.

I love these human bodies, these displaced bodies. These women of the world.

And yet I am here.

Writing in a corner.

Writing myself into a corner.

14 October 2019

The shag

It's almost over. I am going to change my car park permit to somewhere more central. I will miss my walk to work around Sutton Harbour. I park my car and walk over to where the fishing boats are moored. A cormorant on a plastic barrel. Motionless. A father and his daughter catching crabs. She is squealing with delight as he drops the creatures into a Tupperware box. It is almost full. I don't think these crabs are going back into the sea. Free food. Why not? They talk and laugh over their catch. They are not English speakers. Polish? Romanian, perhaps. I leave them to their fishing and walk on. A skein of plastic lies twisted in the water. It moves and pulsates like shiny intestines in the breeze. I film it for sixty seconds. A minute. There is a cuttlefish bone. Bringing back memories of the budgies and canaries my dad kept in the back room. And later, the porch. The budgies were noisy and colourful. Each one named Tuppence. The canaries sang as caged birds do. My mother hated them.

The sleek black head of the diving bird emerges in the midst of the detritus. I have never managed to capture her. I begin to film. She dives and is gone. I wonder where she'll resurface. I wonder what she eats? Fish and molluscs and crustacea.

I keep filming. Perhaps for the last time. She resurfaces. I press pause.

21 September 2019

Dead birds

The cat is miaowing loudly at the front door. I am trying to write so I ignore him. His miaows get louder, more insistent. I get up and open the door. He has killed a bird. A tiny body lies on the grey paving slab. Some pink innards spew forth. Bad cat, I say. He always kills when my husband is away. I think it's purposeful. I hate touching the tiny creatures he brings to the door. Some are still warm. Some not even dead. Just stunned.

I photograph the bird. What is it? A young sparrow? The beak is too narrow, an insect eater. A dunnoek, perhaps? My dad would have known. He loved birds. Big and small.

The world is coalescing. Everything is more intense, more present, more ... just more. It is the end of September, but the weather has been glorious. The sun catches the water as I walk around Sutton Harbour. The detritus is there to greet me. A welcome party of the key players. A plastic bag. A polystyrene burger carton. A dead gull. The traffic cone stands proudly in the low tide. Swans circle it. There is a submerged blanket. The universe can sense that I am drawing to a close. A closing.



Figure 11: Dead Bird

31 August 2019

Last swim at the lido

It's the 31st of August. I go for my last swim at the lido. It's empty. Well not quite. There are three of us. A woman, my age, maybe older. And a man. I swim across the pool ten times. It's about 50 metres at the widest point. I have swum 500 metres. Not far. Perhaps just enough to save your life. If you are lucky. I float on my back, looking at the clouds. Such a joy to be weightless when so much is bearing down.

Seventy refugees have been saved off the coast of Spain. Another fifty detained in Kent. The calm weather increases the numbers prepared to risk everything to find sanctuary.

Rescued, intercepted, detained.



Figure 12. The lido

30 August 2019

Home

I am sitting in my parents' double bed. It is many years since they slept in it. My mother moved into my youngest sister's room as soon as we had all left home. My dad eventually moved into the one I used to share with my older sister. The same room that I gave birth to my first daughter in, almost exactly 25 years ago.

My dad died on August 2nd 2016. Three years have passed. There is little of him left in the house. Drawers have been emptied, his gnarled leather working shoes consigned to a bin. I open the wardrobe to hang a shirt. There are a few coats and jackets. And a tie. It is the tie that makes my heart contract for a second. I think I'd like to take it home with me. Before that too disappears.

I want to go into the garage and look over his carpentry tools once more. My sister thinks we should donate everything to charity. I don't mind. But I'd like a memento. One of the old planes or chisels. One of the ones that bear my grandfather's initials. HB. The same as mine.

Staying with the Trouble is on the bedside table. Next to the lamp. Its thick glass base filled with bubbles. There is only one left of what was once a pair. I open the book: "How to matter and not just want to matter?" is underlined in black biro. Well, isn't that the question? On page forty five, there is a photograph of burning forests in Alberta, Canada. That is where my tree-loving daughter is headed next. She studies the impacts of such 'disturbances'. She has shown me photos of acres and acres of dead trees. All killed by a single pathogen.

"Mourning is about dwelling with the loss and so coming to appreciate what it means, how the world has changed, and how we must ourselves change and renew our relationships if we are to move forward from here. In this context, genuine mourning should open us into awareness of our dependence on and the relationships with those countless others being driven over the edge of extinction ... The reality, however, is that there is no avoiding the necessity of the difficult cultural work of reflection and mourning. This work is not opposed to practical action, rather it is the foundation of any sustainable and informed response."

(cited in Haraway, 2016, p.38).

I still miss my dad.

29 August 2019

Listening to the radio

I haven't been able to write for days. I have felt physically and mentally drained. No energy. No spark. I have started dreaming about work. The usual. Arriving late for a class. Mix ups and messes. Everything I can't stand. September is fast approaching. Teaching will start and I will be consumed once again. Perhaps I am depressed. Just worn out, I think. Like an old nag. Fit only for the knackers' yard and the glue pot.

I am listening to the radio. Lauren Laverne. I like Lauren Laverne. I see a text from my daughter. Sent at 12.30 am. Read this it says. I click on the link to the Guardian website. Boris Johnson has suspended parliament. I get that sinking, sick, Brexit feeling all over again. Tears well up in my eyes.

24 August 2019

Hair

My eldest daughter is home for the summer. The plughole in the bathroom is blocked with hair. Her hair. She has a mass of blonde curls, which she sheds all over the house. Carpets become matted with fair strands. I stick an old toothbrush into the drain and give it a half-hearted wiggle. A clump of hair attaches itself to the bristles. I pull it out along with the black and brown matter congealed around it. I rinse the bathtub, but the water still refuses to drain away. I run downstairs and search through the jumbled drawer of kitchen utensils. The dough mixer? Chopsticks? An ice-cream scoop? I take a bamboo skewer from its plastic sheath. I have another go at the plughole. It feels like I am poking a small furry animal. I rinse again. The water sits determinedly in the tub. I run a bath anyway, knowing that the water will sit there for hours.

I lie in the bath, contemplating my feet and my middle-aged spread. I shave my legs and armpits. My bikini line is a mess. I haven't got the strength to wax. Hair where I don't want it. Not enough where I do. I notice there is black mould around the rim of a tub of vegan hair food that sits on the side of the bath. I rub it off with my thumb. My younger daughter tells me boys don't like short hair. Or fringes. She is not sure how she feels about her hair. It is poker straight and streaked with gold and vanilla. I tell her we all cut ours off when we were young. In an act of defiance. Mine has been short ever since. Not quite a 'Queer Fade'. More a scrubby crop.

I get out of the bath and release the plug. Miraculously the water begins to disappear. Perhaps the small animal, tired of my prodding, has decided to vacate its nest.

23 August 2019

Friday

I sit looking at the screen. I am done. My head feels heavy. Woolly. Donna Haraway is right, you can't teach and write. I am handing the refugee class over today, just for a few weeks. The numbers have dwindled. Perhaps it's the school holidays. Or the weather. Some don't come if it rains. Some don't come if it doesn't. There is Turkish delight today. It is delicious. Tiny cubes of sweetness. I try not to eat too many. A isn't feeling well, Davide leaves early. I feel the energy of the early days slipping away. It is probably me. My resources are low. Pulled in so many directions, I am losing the ability to write. Or teach. Or mother. Or wife.

I need to swim.

22 August 2019

GCSE results day

It's GCSE results day. She nailed. She totally nailed it. 8s and 9s in all her sciences. And maths. I am so proud of her.

The other one is just as astonishing. A double Master's in Spatial and Ecological Modelling. I'm not even sure I know what that means. But she's going to save the world's trees. If she can.

Where have they come from? These women of the future. My kin.

We watch a documentary about a man who kept an octopus in a tank in his home. Donna Haraway has a plastic one on her desk. Erin Manning dreams of cephalopods ^{clx}. They know who the real creatures of the future will be. Are. Were. The present is always slipping away.

21 August 2019

Foucault, kith, language, mould

I have been thinking a lot this morning as I complete a few domestic chores before work. I wash up the bits and pieces left over from the previous evening's meal. I prise the seal from a plastic container and rub at the mould. Remnants of food that have been trapped for weeks. Maybe months. I look at my yellow Marigolds. I am a sloppy housewife.

I am thinking about Luce Irigaray, whose book I retreated into yesterday when I lost the ability to write. Her words seem strangely antiquated, couched in the language of a bygone era. But still, I like them. They are a transcription. I can hear her voice in them. She says women experience the world differently to men because their bodies have an "irreducible relationship to the universe" (Irigaray, 1994, p.25). I wonder if that's what draws women of a certain age back to the water? When I am out on the sea, battling with the swell and rowing hard against the currents of the Plymouth Sound, I like the fact that at fifty two, I am often the youngest woman in the quad.

I am thinking of kith and kin and how it is so crucial to keep challenging patriarchal structures and hierarchies. As Haraway tells us, new stories and connections will only emerge through different familial and filial relationships (Haraway, 2016).

And I am thinking about language and how it still conveys and constructs hierarchies of power and privilege: "If language does not give both sexes equivalent opportunities to speak and increase their self-esteem, it functions as a means of enabling one sex to subjugate the other" (Irigaray, 1994, p.xv). Language's power moves in many insidious ways.

How to escape the I, I, I of the humanist subject? As Foucault (1980b) so rightly said, we are complicit in our own bondage.

I drive to work quickly. Racing amber lights. Chanting 'Foucault, kith, language, mould'. I want to write before I teach, before I forget, but already I can feel the thoughts I had as I stood at the sink beginning to slide across my mind. Like eels.

19 August 2019

August

I have a week. A slim and precious window of opportunity. Time to think. To read. To write. The things I like to do best in the world. Apart from swim. And I plan to squeeze a bit of that in too. I watch *Story Telling for Earthly Survival* (Terranova, 2017). Donna Haraway talks of the impossibility of writing when you are teaching. Teaching is all-consuming she says. She talks straight to the camera. She is mesmerising. Sounds can be heard in other rooms in her house. There are trees swaying through the window behind her. They are not always as they seem. The backdrop shifts and mutates. A jelly fish floats by. Donna talks in her neat shirt with its two breast pockets. We need to tell new stories, she says. Don't we just?

I have parked my car at Sutton Harbour, outside one of the university's flagship buildings. It is an old warehouse that looks out across the water. I walk towards the boats and wonder what the universe will offer up today. The swans are there. Seven. The tide is in and the water has a stillness about it, despite the wind rippling its surface. The air is cool, the summer is turning to autumn. The sky is clear and the sun is shining. I walk along the path, scanning the water. There is a traffic cone, fully submerged. Not the old algae-coated one, that is long gone. This one's stripes are still bright and clean.

A tangled mass of seaweed and debris floats on the water. I photograph it. Today it is mainly feathers. There is a plastic cup and an empty bottle of cider. The usual entanglements of the man-made and the not so man-made. I photograph the elephant sculpture. There are 40 dotted across the city, each one bearing its own unique design. This one is called 'Zhou'. It has been decorated with Chinese motives and fish. The FAB bin cleaning van is parked in the narrow street that leads to the university. I say hello to the driver. I turn to photograph the van, but I see him watching me in the rearview mirror, so I walk on. There is a tree stump filled with dog-ends. Roadworks. Cars and buses. I look at people's faces as they slide by. The Business School is quiet. Desolate. I count eight empty offices before I find one that is still be occupied. The university is in the process of stream-lining its offer. Hundreds of staff have left. The focus will be on premium courses, Marine and Maritime. After all, we are Britain's Ocean City.

In the free English class on Friday, Janet told us that the Pilgrim Fathers didn't set off from Plymouth after all. They had sailed around the coast from East Anglia and took refuge here when one of the ships sprang a leak. She tells us that the only reason they survived that first year in the Americas was because the indigenous population showed them what they needed to do to feed themselves and to keep warm.

Sailing across the ocean to build a new life. The men sat around the table know all about that. Eritrea, Uganda, Mali, Syria. They have all crossed the sea to find sanctuary. And now they are here with me, in a room, learning English, while the rain beats down outside. Mostly, they are well-educated. They cite books on history, philosophy and religion. I feel clumsy and ignorant in their company, but the conversations are fascinating. Thomas always brings food. Bread sticks and marshmallows. Banana and gingerbread. Ahmed doesn't eat any. He is watching his weight. Last week he showed us a photo of himself a few months after he was rescued from the basement of a building in Aleppo. His arms and torso are covered in wounds. His face is turned away from the camera, but I can still see the deadened look in his eyes. Shock. I think. He doesn't join in the conversations about Darwin and the Descent of Man. But he listens. And listens. His eyes bright.

I stop writing. The office is cool. The weather has changed. More rain. I need a coffee to warm me up.

I skim through Gillian Rose (2007). I need to find a way to articulate my process. If I have one. I circle and circle. Like the ribbons on a maypole, the bands weave and tighten. Methodology is the heart of the resistance. It is the site of the conflict. Where the battle is being waged. I am stifled and strangled. The words won't come, but the instinct to refuse is strong.

How do I move beyond this constant circling?

I feel weary. Worn out. What is the word? Diminished. Depleted. Is it the hormones leeching out of my middle-aged, post-menopausal body? When I pee in the sea am I poisoning the fish? Joanna says I seem very determined. I suppose I am. The PhD means little to me. As a thing. But the potential to affect, the impact this engagement with matter, worlding, affect and vital materialisms has been huge.

It started with thing power. It has no end. I met the universe halfway and can never go back. Matter calls to me and insists I act. Walking with my eyes open. Walking with my ears open. Walking open. Open walking. Opening up. Pushing back. Making the stuff that matters matter more. Pushing myself to reach out to the world. To do more. Small things. Things packed with potential. Things that make a difference in the world.

This is a thesis all about movement. I am moving through and with the world. Together with all its space-time-matterings, the thesis is emerging. I embody it. No wonder I can not write it. And I can not not write it. It is the writing itself. Materialising within and without. I am it. It is me.

The thoughts have started their swirling. I wake in the night and forget in the morning. I get as far as the coffee shop and have to scribble. Back in front of the computer, I feel less articulate. It's like catching clouds. I have been thinking about hierarchies of scholarship. Always cite the primary source, the mantra goes. I have Rowena Murray's (2011) book, *'How to write a thesis'* in my bedroom. I love and loathe it all at once. It describes every research and writing process I am trying to resist, and yet I turn to it frequently when preparing a class on postgraduate writing skills. What does it mean to research and write? These questions are so fundamental. So thorny. A wicked problem in a wicked month.

12 April 2019

Red trainers

I see her. But I have already walked past. It is the blanket girl. I walk on. Then double back. I remember her. From before. She is the girl in the pink trainers. The girl with the gashed cheek. It has healed. Not well. Her new trainers are red. Her head is turned away. "*Ela*", I say. She turns, and silently thanks me, tapping her open hand to her chest.

Should I sit down beside her. Talk to her in my rusty Greek? I don't, of course. What would I say?

"Na eiste kala", I mumble. *"Be well"*.

Last night I saw a woman walking across Omonia square. Her feet were on back to front.

Not her shoes. Her feet.

09 April 2019

Something is breaking my heart

I look out over Omonia Square. It used to be the heart of Athens. A place where people came to meet. I have been told not to leave my hotel. If I can help it. Eat there. Be safe. Athens is not the same anymore. It isn't. The square is full of life on the brink. The limping. The lost. The dangerous. The destitute. There is security. And police. I watch the pedestrian crossing from the safety of the hotel restaurant. Everything and nothing happens. The red and green men alternate. Cars stop. And don't. People stream across. And don't. All the world. All crossing. All crossing.

I remember when Athens was different. Mostly white with a sprinkling of very black. The Africans moved fast when the police were around. Quickly scooping up the large, coloured blankets they used to carry and display their wares.

Now there is not much selling. But there are blankets. Sometimes occupied. Sometimes not. On Ermou Street, from a bundle of filthy material, only a hand emerges. The cup it is grasping is empty. I notice the swirls of inky tattoos on the fingers. The tuft of greasy yellow hair.

There is a woman. She eyes me from beneath a blanket. Just an eye. I don't know what she is saying. Reproach. I think her eye says reproach.

This carelessness is creeping. Insidious. I am tired of being made to make choices.

Donna Haraway says we need to make new stories.

The world doesn't have to be this way.

Who fucked Greece? Well, you could say they fucked themselves. But that is just one version of the story ^{clxi}.

I am at a conference. In Edinburgh. I meet a girl. What are you presenting on, she asks? I recognise her accent. I feel uncomfortable. It's sort of to do with movement, I say.

I am from Chios, she says. How do you bear it, I ask? There was a child, she says. A small child. Washed up on the beach. His body. Rolling in the surf. She begins to cry.

09 April 2019

I'm so tired

I'm so tired. [personal pronoun]. So, so tired. Aren't [contraction] you? Aren't you?
[repetition]. Here's my bloodyfucking paper [inappropriacy]. My bloodyfucking paper
[repetition].

I just can't do it anymore. I just can't.

Donna Haraway says tell a different story.

We have to tell it differently.

Othewise it is just more of the same. The same. The same. It's killing us. Literally.

l.l.l.l.l.l.l.

The humanist subject. Don't get distracted by that one.

Who am I? What am I? Where am I?

I am everything and nothing. Here and there. Here and gone. Her and him. Him and her. It's
just a name game. Forget it.

What? Where? When? How? So what? What if? The critical thinking model that takes us
nowhere. Everywhere. Anywhere.

Bloodyfucking paper.

Listen.

18 January 2019

Cauliflower Soup

I am working from home. It is the January exam period and so there is no teaching to go in for. I am making cauliflower soup. Cooking helps me think. I am remembering a time, perhaps 20 or 25 years ago, when I made soup from just the stalk and leaves. Cooking up what is usually thrown away in a battered aluminium pan that had travelled with us in a rucksack for almost two years. I stir the leeks. Living in a freezing cold apartment with a new baby, money was tight. But vegetables were cheap then. And the soup tasted fine. I filled an ice-cube tray with tiny portions for my tiny daughter,

I add stock and milk to the pan. You couldn't get fresh milk on the Greek islands. Unless you bought it from a farm and boiled it yourself. Perhaps that's why the soup tasted so good. The sweet, creaminess of the UHT, poured from a paper carton, turning the stalks and leaves into something velvety and luxurious.

The poor and disenfranchised in this country, people without homes, people waiting for decisions, are stuck in run down B & Bs with nowhere to cook. Asylum seekers live on half the benefits given to others. Foodbanks offer little that can be eaten cold. Or raw. How would you live on £5 a day?

Once a fortnight, the refugee centre offers a hot meal for £1. It is always packed. People drink tea, eat biscuits. The volunteers sort through the supermarket donations. Wilting vegetables. Bruised fruit. Dried out loaves. They salvage what they can. The surplus is bagged up and given to away.

Many of the people who attend the centre are Syrians. I always want to say, I remember your country from before the war. The labyrinthine streets of old Damascus. The huge citadel at Aleppo. Palmyra. I remember arriving there by bus, after bouncing through the desert for hours on its soft suspension. Lightning split the sky as we stopped in a dusty lot, in front of the only hotel. The ancient city rose up out of the sand. No fence. No ticket office. You could trace streets, press your hands against the ancient stones. Gaze up at the towering columns. Sit in the amphitheatre. But I don't speak of this. Or of anything. It is not my loss.

05 January 2019

Rescued. Intercepted. Detained.

Rescued. Intercepted. Detained.

Rescued. Intercepted. Detained.

Rescued. Intercepted. Detained.

Crossing the channel in a rowing boat. Can you imagine? No can you really imagine? I look over the Plymouth Sound. A cold grey expanse. I am wearing a warm jacket, but the air is cold against my cheeks. Icy cold.

No, I cannot imagine.

Thoughts crowd my mind. Tumbling. Colliding. Synapses pop and crackle. Multiple connections are made. And lost. And remade. Thinking is never linear. Ideas do not progress smoothly. Steadily. POW. The fireworks go off in my head. Phhsst. Thoughts peter out like a damp squib.

I am a PhD student. How many years I longed to say those words. Out loud. At a conference. I am doing a PhD.

I say it proudly. And then I tremble. Fuck. Now they are going to ask me. What are you doing? What's your research? Go on. Tell me what it is about. In a sentence. Go on!

Stammer. Stutter. Stumble.

What the fuck am I doing? At times it feels so clear. Important. Urgent. And at others, so weak and vague and pointless.

It is so much easier to say what I am not doing. No Gantt Chart. No thesis. No recognisable. methodology. No hard data. No participants. No interviews. Or focus groups. A questionnaire perhaps? God no. SPSS? NVivo? No No No.

So what is your contribution to knowledge???

Contribution?

Something? Anything?

I have a new supervisor. I am amassing, I tell her. And when I have amassed, I will shape.

Create. Curate. Articulate.

I will. I am. I have been.

Here's how it works. I walk. I notice. I write.

I walk. I notice. I write.

I walk. I notice. I write.

I have been doing this for a long time. But now I am more focussed. More attuned. More able to make connections.

I am sure this is good work. Important work. It is not an easy time to be a student. Of any kind. Education is under attack. What's new in that? Not much. Except it feels to me that everything is at stake. We are so constrained, oppressed, complicit, we are almost lost. Ask your students how they feel.

Pessimism. Cynicism. Apathy. Burdened with debt. Weighed down with assessments and deadlines. Bewildered by criteria and rubrics and expectations.

What we need is a little magic. A little fire. Some sparks. To pull our wellies out of the sucking mud. Leave them there if need be and run off lightly in stockings feet.

Let us draw on our defences. Intelligence. Creativity. Passion. Delight. Let us put our energies into the wonder box ^{clxii}.

At the Utrecht Summer School, Rosi Braidotti says "*wait until you have your PhD, and then go do your work*". The young ones nod. There is too much at stake to take risks. I don't want to wait. I can't wait. I want to make my PhD an act of resistance. A thing of joy. A gift of hope. I want to create something to inspire and embolden. Something that pushes back against the straitjackets, the restraints and constraints. I have work to do. It has work to do. Small steps. A dance. A burst of energy and exuberance.

05 January 2019

Ironing

It's the last day of the Christmas holidays. I have been ironing for an hour. My mum used to iron on Sunday evenings. She would iron and weep. Sobbing in the steam. A pile of my father's shirts and hankies. Jeans, stiff and crumpled. Pillowcases. Four school uniforms. She ironed with such venom and vitriol, the creases didn't come out until the next wash. As I grew older, I would sneak my clothes out of the pile before she could get to them.

I don't cry when I iron. I am ambivalent. I am faster than my husband. More efficient. Less particular. I don't bother with the sleeves. Especially in the winter months. I do the collars, smooth out the front of school shirts. All I am aiming for is a semblance of respectability. I listen to the radio. A father has been murdered on a train in Surrey. A woman raped in Bangladesh for voting the wrong way.

It is enough to make you weep.

16 December 2018

Buried alive in a well

It's Sunday. I am taking a break from cleaning the bathroom.

The radio is on.

The 1.30 news.

A family burned to death in their home.

A woman buried alive in a well in India. By her brothers.

How far we haven't come.

Followed by the Sugarbabes.

How far we haven't come.

Where are women equal? Wielding words.

The female DJ says: It's a film about a writer. But I can't remember her name.

Colette.

How far we haven't come

I decide to clean the malodorous washing machine. The detergent drawer is caked with brown gunk. The rubber seal is black with mould.

I add some terrible chemical solution to the drum.

How far we haven't come.

The Coward of the County (Rogers, 1979) comes on.

Becky is raped by three men.

But it's still all about Tommy.

How far we haven't come.

The 14.30 news.

The woman in the well doesn't feature.

How far we haven't come.

21 October 2018

Three backpackers

They are walking ahead of me. In single file. Three backpackers. Except they are not. I imagine they have spent the night in the underpass near the aquarium. Each of them is wearing a new pair of trainers. One of them stops to cough up a ball of phlegm which is spat into the harbour water. He doesn't move. I walk past as he coughs and spits again.

I scuttle past, take a right and head to work.

13 October 2018

Two lost souls

Its National Album Day. They are playing tracks from Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. I think of my brother. They play *Wish you Were Here*. I am not even sure why I am crying. Nostalgia? The pain of remembering.

The terrible scar on his side where his kidney was removed. His huge ribcage. Black curly hair. High forehead like my dad's. Peanut they used to call him. And worse. The nearest our tiny white village had to a person of colour. The eldest boy by default. Never able to take the place of the blue-eyed boy who had come first and been lost. Sickly as a baby. Uncoordinated. Bad at sport. Terrible teeth dragged into line by monstrous braces. Nose bleeds so bad there would be blood up the walls. Lonely. Bullied. Lying in the dark listening to Pink Floyd.



Figure 13: Two lost souls

11 October 2018

Potatoes

I am ashamed of myself. I missed the first session of the Cultural Café after the summer break. I force myself to go to the second. I have no more excuses.

Jamelia greets me with a kiss. I feel welcomed. Relieved. She has a glamorous new hair-do . Susie is there. Her hair looks amazing too. I sign in and put £5 in the pot. Susie asks me if I want change. No, no, I say.

Jamelia sends Susie and me into a storeroom next to the kitchen. We sit on small purple, plastic chairs and sort potatoes into bags. They are muddy. The real thing. Susie puts a plastic bag on her hand. I am not so practical. My fingernails are soon encrusted with brown earth. We talk. Susie wants to update her computer skills. She has seen an online Pitman course but it costs £700. So she is trying to teach herself. If I had a computer at home, it would be easier, she says.

We start to bag up the bread. Bright pink iced donuts. Croissants. Slightly squashed Danish pastries. Susie says the rolls are really fresh. She puts some aside for herself, with a bag of the organic potatoes.

In the English class the women introduce themselves and where they are from in turn. Pakistan. Iraq. Syria. Sudan. The silent Iranian is wearing sparkling, gold leggings today. I wonder what she did back in Iran. There is a different air about her this week. Resignation.

What kind of car would you buy, Susie asks? A red Ferrari someone says. High five. Susie goes around the group, writing up the colours and makes as we go. A black BMW. A white Mercedes. A silver Rolls Royce. Volkswagen. Toyota. Hyundi. Susie has her work cut out.

We call out the different parts of the car. Susie has a photocopy, but her car is labelled in American English. Windshield. Antenna. Hood. Tires. We laugh.

I leave early to attend a lecture. I half run through the precinct. Sleeping bags and blankets are piled in the doorways of the empty British Home Store. I haven't got time to stop to

photograph them. I arrive at the Civic Centre a few minutes late. I sit down, sweating slightly.

The lights are dimmed. Two screens glow gently in the dark. Retrograde Futurism. Black Atlantis ^{clxiii}. The speaker begins her performance. Words flow. I scribble them down in my scrappy notebook. Illegalised immigration. Dialectical image. The Anthropocene. She speaks of a Ghost Ship. A Coffin Ship. Floating across the seas that once transported African slaves towards the Caribbean. Its cargo the desiccated bodies of Senegalese refugees who had sailed out from Cape Verde one day, hoping for a better life. Disposable bodies. Matter that has ceased to matter.

Oh, but it does matter. It all matters.

The boat. The weather. Force. Neglect. State power. Human and machine gone retrograde. Photographs of migrants washed up on a beach. Juxtaposed with the everyday. The ordinary.

04 October 2018

A short walk to work

I walk along the harbour edge. I have been taking photographs. Intermittently. For three years. Depending on the weather, my mood, how late I am. Some days there is much to capture. Ad hoc collections of matter that call out to me. I like the unplanned nature of the images. I don't set out to 'take' anything. I see what is on offer. My phone is smart, but not very. I have an i-pad, but struggle to frame the image without obscuring corners with the peeling purple plastic case. I also have a fancy camera. A present for my 50th birthday. Very, very occasionally I am brave enough to take it out.

The new semester has just begun. It is one of those rare times I have my camera with me. The world is calling to me. Asking me to take note. To attend to its matter and murmurings. I remove the lens cap and start to walk. The harbour is clear of debris, well almost. The sun is shining and the buildings are reflected in the water. The swans are gathered near the small slipway. I have so many photographs of them, I don't know why. Something about them calls to me. I am fascinated by their feet. Black webs that they sometimes carry behind them. Awkwardly crooked against a wing. Their necks are pure muscle. Flexible. Strong. Some evenings when they are all asleep, with heads tucked away, they resemble white meringues on the grubby shore. Other times they swim in single file. Gliding silently. Heads held still and proud. Why are they all standing in the slipway today? I don't know, but I snap, snap, snap.

Litter pickers. Empty bins. The world is a cleaner place this morning. A single plastic bottle bobs in the far corner of the harbour. There have been days when I could count scores of them. Twenty-four or more. Like the swans.

As I near the university, the familiar rubbish begins to appear. Pizza boxes, broken beer bottles. Burger cartons. Coffee cups. I photograph it all. I am grateful to it. Of how it helps me think about the world. Consumption, degradation. Matter and matterings. I walk up North Hill. The gardens are full of rotting waste. The litter pickers haven't made it this far. Perhaps they never do.

In the doorway is a sleeping bag. A blanket. A rucksack. It's someone's bed for the night. The human occupant is gone. Perhaps to the supermarket next door for a cup of Costa coffee. I feel nervous as I photograph the space. Am I taking something I shouldn't? I am not sure. I hear a breath behind me. I don't turn around. But I hurriedly replace the lens cap and walk on.

04 October 2018

The glamorous Big Issue seller

She stands outside the Coop. Beautifully turned out. Heeled ankle boots. Sunglasses pushed back over her bobbed hair. Red lipstick. I am disconcerted by her presence. The young man who plays guitar and spends his spoils in the slot machines across the road has gone.

How do you get your pitch? This is a good spot, I imagine. People have time to chat. A little conversation might be worth a whole lot more than £2.50. I force myself to stop and buy a copy. What is it that is holding me back? I have bought hundreds of copies over the years. Is it her gender? Her appearance? The fact she doesn't quite look desperate enough?

It's a fine line. What a choice to have to make. Who is deserving and who is not?

30 September 2018

Ballet

I go to the ballet for the first time in my life. I am 51. My daughter is 15. 15 and 51.

It is Swan Lake. The best known of all the ballets. Famous for the quintessential female corps-de-ballet. But this is Mathew Bourne's Swan Lake, with its menacing male ensemble, who "shattered conventions, turned tradition upside down and took the dance world by storm." Or so the theatre website says (Theatre Royal, 2018).

I am fascinated by the female lead. I watch her feet. Encased in long, white ballet shoes, her moves are careful, disciplined, precise. She wears a heavy dress. Long sleeves. Full skirt. Such contradictions. She is at once strong and powerful. And somehow restrained, constrained. Her feet are turned outwards as she steps across the stage. The exaggerated movements perfected over years and years of gruelling practice. Painfully graceful. Excruciatingly controlled.

The men are barefoot. Bare chested. They wear only their feathered shorts. Strong backed. Muscular. The leap and land. Their breath is audible. They sweat. And stamp. It is exhilarating to watch.

11 September 2018

The living dead

Everyone acts like there's nothing going on. Everyone ignores the limping, zombified, critters shuffling towards them. The living dead. Weaving and wavering in the poorly-lit side streets. Oblivious to the taxis and scooters and cars that swerve around them. Like a dog or a stray cat.

How long does it take before the body begins to break down? It's very organism mouldering from the inside out. Outside in. Teeth first? Decaying in the mouth. Ulcerating. Gums receding. Teeth loosening. Until they are gone. What of other bone matter? Deprived of nutrients. Subjected to heat and cold. Hard pavements. Hour upon hour of sitting, standing, squatting. How long before that takes its toll?

I feel overwhelmed. Oh, poor me. White, privileged, healthy, slightly overweight, female. My bulging bag strapped across my body. Just in case. In case of what? I lose my credit card. Or my crisp Euros? The receipts I am carefully collecting to claim back on expenses?

I don't know how to choose who to bestow a few coins upon. The old man who approaches me, cup extended, as I sit enjoying a beer? The bone-thin woman, angry and arrogant. Tired of asking, demanding instead. The silent girl, head bowed over her bright pink trainers? The limbless man with the disfiguring burns, marooned on a cardboard mat in the middle of a busy square?

I don't know who or what matters any more. The dirty, rubbish-strewn streets are littered with disposable bodies. Human and not.

10 July 2018

Dead rabbits

The teenagers stand around the table. In the middle is a large box. Inside are 40 dead rabbits. Shot by the gamekeeper. Their task is to gut and skin the rabbits.

I walk past a little later. Some of the young people, mainly boys, are gutting and skinning with gusto. In the communal kitchen, others, mainly girls, are quietly peeling apples.

Death hangs in the air.

We stand in a circle of gratitude. The students and staff are invited to express their thanks to someone or something. I am grateful for real butter. Thank you for the hot tea and biscuits.

I am grateful I am not a bunny, a girl says.

10 July 2018

Tutankhamun

I catch sight of him out of the corner of my eye. Tall, thin, hood up. His face is obscured but his body language is slightly off. Skewed. He bends to pick something up. A white feather. In his other hand, he holds a coffee cup. He walks in front of me and turns. I think he is going to ask me for some money. He spreads his arms. The coffee cup in one hand. The feather in the other. Tut-an-ka-mun, he chants. Tut-an-ka-mun. Tut-an-ka-mun. I am Tut-an-ka-mun! He fixes me with a defiant glare. I smile, so you are, I say. My heart beats a little faster. I scuttle away and take refuge in Marks & Spencers.

21 May 2018

Swimming in Champaign

Swimming in Champaign. Technically I'm in Urbana. But it doesn't have quite the same ring.

I am in the United States for the very first time. Attending the ICQI conference at the University of Illinois. Somehow I have booked myself into a hotel way over on the wrong side of town. But it has a swimming pool. Heaven.

I am awake at 6.30, and in the water by 6.45. There are three other swimmers. Two large, laughing, black women, and a white man. He is also loud. But in a different way. He commands the space. Talking, talking, voice booming.

People I don't know. Places I have never heard of. One of the women calls over to me, 'you're doing a good job of keeping your hair dry'. I smile. My hair is a scrubby, orange crop. It makes no difference if it gets wet or not. It is many years since I had hair to care about.

I swim forty lengths. Thirty the next day. Twenty five the next. Ever decreasing circuits. On the third day, there is another swimmer. A white female. The loud man is there as usual, but today he doesn't speak to the black women. They talk quietly between themselves. Still he holds court, the white lady politely listens. The black women make themselves disappear.

On the fourth day, Sunday, I have a free day and I plan to swim for longer. My heart leaps when I see the pool is empty. Bliss. I swipe my card. Nothing. I swipe again. The door stays locked. I see a man hovering in the laundry room across the hall. He doesn't speak much English, but he points to a sign. Closed for refurbishment. Tears well up in my eyes.

Middle-aged women like to swim. Well not all of them, of course. But the lure definitely grows stronger for some of us. What is it? A desire for weightlessness? An escape from flabby girths and heavy breasts? A return to the embryonic fluid we left so many, many years earlier? I like to swim in the sea. Away from the shore, not towards it. I like to swim under the water, not above it. I like to fill my ears with sea sounds. Floating on my back, head submerged. Hair wet.

21 May 2018

Paper. Scissors. Stone. Gun

At the conference, two black performers hold us rapt as we swallow our white shame. They are playing a game. Paper, scissors, stone. They take it in turns to reveal their hand. Paper covers stone. Stone crushes scissors. Scissors cut paper. The game continues. The boy reveals his hand. His fingers in the unmistakable shape of the gun. The girl steps back. No. She shakes her head. No. They play again. The boy's hand points his gun at the girl. She falls to her knees. She knows she has nothing that can protect her.

What keeps us safe? Family? Passport? Education? My whiteness keeps me safe. Blackness makes people walking targets. Skin colour. Pigmentation. Nothing to be done about that. You just have to wear it. Like a body bag.

21 May 2018

A gentle cut

I mishear. I think she is saying, 'a gentle cut'^{clxiv}. Even when I realise my mistake, the phrase sticks. A gentle cut. It is somehow fitting. Cut is such a harsh word. I like the idea of it being gentle. Softly, softly. Less trauma. Less blood.

21 May 2018

A day with Donna Haraway

I spend the day with Donna Haraway. A whole day to walk and read in the Illinois sun. I read each different chapter at a different location. A sun-drenched bench. The garden of the Japan House. The Paradise Café. The Illini Union quad. The penultimate chapter is read waiting for a ride back to the hotel. A tiny rabbit appears in the greenery beside me. What a joy. To immerse myself in words. Wonderful words. Strange words. Words I don't know. Words I have never heard or seen. Funny words. Sad, words. Shameful words.

I don't have a pencil, only a pen. A black biro. I am loathe to mark the pages, even though the book is mine. I start tentatively with a discreet mark in the margins when I see something I like. But it is not long before I am underlining small paragraphs, making scribbled notes, words mainly, it is strangely liberating. There is a lot I like. I feel surer and less sure at the same time. More sure that I am trying to do something heeds the call. Less sure that it isn't just a chimera. Smoke and mirrors. Fool's gold. But, the call has seduced me, I cannot plug my ears from its sirens draw. Strap me to the masts. No don't. Let me swim helter skelter into those salty arms.

25 April 2018

Hostile environments

Everything is rushing towards and around me. The flotsam in Sutton Harbour. The young man in a checked shirt, begging outside the car park. The thin young woman who spoke about her experiences at the Refugee Awareness workshop.

Interpreters who misrepresent your words. Immigration officers who are trained to be hostile. Unbelieving. Suspicious.

A system designed against the outsider. Punishing. Capricious. Nonsensical. Cruel. Landlords who don't maintain their properties. Benefits that are too meagre to live on. Job seekers allowance given. And taken away. And still no hope of a job. Vacancies replaced by agencies. Must have own car. No bank account, no payment. No ID. No nothing.

The waste facility. The lorry labouring to expel its pregnant load.

What's left? Metal and ash. Ash and metal.

23 April 2018

Its back today

It feels like months. The gatherings of matter. Empty beer cans. Crisp packets. Even a motorcycle glove and an upturned boot. Here it is. The familiar matterings of matter. Calling to me. It's time to start again.

On my way home. A man sits on the narrow pathway. A blue sleeping bag over his feet. I am ready to give him a quid or two. He doesn't ask. I half smile, mumble a greeting. The swans are there I counted nineteen the other day.

What haven't I written about in the days of static?

A man shivering in a bin bag.

A woman with a deep scar on her cheek, begging alone.

05 April 2018

Hoovering the house

I decide I have time to Hoover the house before the Adventures in Posthumanism reading group. It is the Easter holidays. I am on leave but am finding hard to fill my days. I should be writing, or reading, but instead I engage half-heartedly with domestic tasks. The bathroom is clean. There is a dish of food in the oven, ready to be reheated for tonight's tea. I take the washing out of the tumble dryer.

I hang my daughter's bra and pants on the clothes horse in the sunlight. The tiny knickers are pink and lacy. The gauze-like material is almost see-through. The bra, that nearly matches, has lace straps. Whorls of embroidery on the cups. I have never owned underwear so beautiful.

I want to photograph them. I go outside and take a shot through the patio doors, as if that makes it okay. What would my daughter think? I am sure she would be outraged. She is not a fan of my photographs. The dead bird. The burger carton. The artificial legs, lined up in rows. I take a couple more pictures anyway.

I drag the vacuum cleaner out from the upstairs cupboard. I hate Hoovering. It gives me backache. And the sweats. I am clumsy and impractical. The wires tangle at my feet. The tube wraps itself around me. I stand at the top of the stairs. A domestic tragedy waiting to happen. In more ways than one. I instruct myself sternly to untangle the lead. To step over it with care. To think about what I am doing. It wouldn't be the first time I have fallen.

I start on the kitchen. I am thinking about Maggie MacLure's (2013a) *Researching without representation*. I kneel on the kitchen floor and scrape the dust and fluff from the underside of the chair legs. I stand up and give the table a quick blast. Don't go near the place mats, I tell myself. You don't want to suck them up.

The cooker sits in a gap that is too big. Food routinely falls down either side. And other items. A wine stopper. A wooden spoon. I stick the Hoover nozzle into the gap. I try not to look. It is mainly soft stuff today. Pieces of carrot and spinach leaves.

I am getting bored now. I half-heartedly suck dust and crumbs from corners. Dried flakes of tuna fish from around the cat's dish. The living room gets even shorter shrift.

That'll do, I think.

15 March 2018

All the detritus has gone today

All the detritus has gone today. The wellie boot. The boxer shorts. The empty sack of bark chippings. The traffic cone is still there. Its conical tip is still defiantly orange and white, but the green slime creeps ever upward. The swans are there too. No cygnets. They have probably grown up and gone.

The wellie boot will return. Floating upside down in the murky water. Treading the air not the ground. The garden sack has left and returned several times already. Ornamental chippings. The more you think about these things, the stranger they become. Bark that once decorated trees is now sold in bags.

The motley entangling of matter. The dead gull. The Starbucks cup. A plastic glove. The curled finger calls to something dark and desperate. Human body parts sold in exchange for safe passage out of Africa. A trade in human misery.

Humans are made of the very same matter that makes up everything in the world. Carbon, hydrogen, oxygen. But not everything humans make is of this world. The earth can't digest it.

15 March 2018

How nice to be smiled at

I am sat at a small metal table. It is a cool evening, but the darkening sky is illuminated with spring light. I have stashed my work baggage, laptop, briefcase, lunch box and umbrella out of sight. I order a Thai beer, a Chang, and I sit, slightly self-consciously looking out across the harbour. The swans are gathered at the water's edge. I film them for a minute or two. What am I going to do with all this footage, all these photos of bins and birds and rubbish? Like Elizabeth St. Pierre, I am circling something. Circling a text, the text, my text. I am immersed, enmeshed and entangled, But in what I don't know. It feels important, worthy, justifiable. But I am scared I am wrong. Scared I am wasting my time. Wasting other people's time. Waste. Waste. What a waste. A woman, about my age, walks by and smiles at me. I smile back.



Figure 14: Detritus

15 March 2018

Making sushi

I watch Takawana intently as she spreads the sticky sesame infused rice over the black nori. Her touch is light. She lays the green strips of avocado, followed by the salmon. Breathe in she tells us. She fills her lungs and makes the first half roll. Pause. Exhale. In a flash the sushi is done. A tight, hard roll of shimmering black and green. Takawana stands back. Slightly embarrassed, a little overawed, we clap.

Takawana's children hover behind her. Eyes on the sushi. When the performance is done, they clamour for food. They are brown-skinned and bright-eyed. There is a burnished glow about them. It isn't until later that I remember where I had seen that inner radiance before. It was many years ago, on a tiny Greek island in the blue Aegean Sea. The island had just one village. You could walk the whole circumference in a day. In half a day. There was nothing there, a few scrubby fields, goats, some vines, The islanders had to live on what they could grow or catch. Women sat on the rocks by the sea rubbing the frothy tentacled mass of octopus before hanging them out to dry. Pegged on the washing line next to their husband's yellowing woollen vests and long johns.

The men fished from boats. Outside every house was a small, galvanised iron barbeque. Four low, legs supporting a shallow, metal box and grill. Every day, the families of the island ate fish. Straight from the sea. Sometimes caught, not by the men, but by their wives and bow-legged grandmothers, who simply slung a net into the blue water from the concrete jetty and hauled out whatever happened to be swimming by.

It was the baker's children that had the glow. They had a bread oven outside their home and in it their mother baked sweet potatoes. Fish and sweet potatoes. Seaweed and rice.

15 March 2018

Mary and her green balloon

I see Mary walking towards me in the sunshine, swinging a large green balloon in her hand. In her other hand, she is holding a crumpled plastic bag. She is broad and black and beautiful. She turns into a side road just ahead of me, still swinging her big, green balloon. There is a Coca Cola can sitting in the road. She stoops to pick it up and as she does so, she turns to me and smiles. What if a car comes, she says? They don't care, she says. The can hasn't been opened, the ring pull is still intact. But it leaks Coke into Mary's shopping bag. She drops her balloon and I run to catch it for her. We laugh. Are you a teacher, she asks? Yes, I reply. Mary eyes me with muted admiration. And you, what do you do, I ask? She laughs again. I am a student. I am studying grammar.

We walk together and exchange names. She says she will never forget mine. She used to live with someone called Helen. In London.

The balloon pops. Mary laughs again. I go this way, she says. I go this way, I say.

15 March 2018

What will my exhibits be?

What will my exhibits be? My curios? In the museum of the PhD, what will be on display and what will remain wrapped in dustsheets and bubble wrap in the murky basement depths?

The museum of the lost and found. Each gallery a story. A truth. A narrative. Not linear but labyrinthine. Mysterious. Magical. Baroque. A night at the circus. The story of what I have lost and found. Thought and felt. Dreamt of. Yearned for. Missed and mourned. Smoke and mirrors.

28 November 2017

Vital consumerism

I am sitting in a café, near the station. I flick the croissant crumbs from the paper I am reading. It is scrawled with notes and stars and question marks and exclamation marks. Written in black biro. A fine pointed Bic. My mouth tastes of bitter, black espresso and too much sugar. On the floor, near my chair is a bag of Christmas gifts for my daughter. She is fourteen. I have bought a lacy, black bra-let, a soft fleecy top. It has satin inserts on the shoulders. And a shiny black faux-leather skirt.

I have been seduced by the material. By the materiality.

28 November 2017

Jack and the sparrow

He is sat on the doorstep. His green eyes round with excitement. In his mouth is a small grey bird. A sparrow. The tail is twitching. It is still alive. I bang on the glass, hoping the cat will drop the bird. He doesn't. I can't bear to look. I can't bear the cat. The cat that is cat. The cat that is more than cat.

21 October 2017

Shit

I have been without a kitchen for a month. We have lived off takeaways and shop-bought sandwiches and over-priced restaurant food for four weeks. I am sick to my stomach. I shit sticky black turds that smear the porcelain bowl. They lurk heavy and dark at the bottom of the pan. Reproachful. Waiting for the second flush.

Foodbanks have to stock food that doesn't need to be cooked. Warmed even. So few of the people who use them have access to even basic cooking facilities. It is a human rights abuse.

21 September 2018

Implicated

I don't like volunteering at the refugee centre. There, I've said it. Worse, I've written it.
Etched in black and white. Tinged with red.

I have only been twice. I help out in the kitchen. Hot and humiliated, I peel fruit badly, slice bread unevenly. I get tomato soup in my hair. Crippled by inadequacy, I wonder how I got to this age so lacking. Still such a child.

At 5.30 we move upstairs. The women follow. We take turns to introduce ourselves and to say where we are from. Syria. Kenya. Iraq. Iran. I feel my cheeks redden, my neck burns. The UK, I say. The women chatter and laugh, but not in English. The Iranian woman sits silently. No English she mimes and leaves. Words are written on a smudged white board. We lay out chairs and pretend to catch a bus. At the end I am asked to read out all the new words. Because I have the best accent. I do it reluctantly, the heat creeping up behind my ears.

I leave before the communal meal is served. I kid myself it's because my daughter is at home alone, but I don't want to stay. It's been a long week. I'm tired. I want my cheeks to stop burning. I want to escape my shame.

01 May 2017

A large plastic tub with a black screw lid

His remains are in a large plastic tub with a black screw lid. It looks like something you might see at a garden centre. Full of slug pellets. Or artificial fertiliser. I listen but I can't really follow what is being said. Words materialise and are gone. A buzzard soars overhead. Large rain drops fall. Not heavy, but wet. The nondenominational preacher invites us to pour some ashes into the freshly dug hole in the earth. I don't want to, but I do. I go last. The ashes are not ashes at all. The container is surprisingly heavy, even half full. Why has my dad been reduced to grit? Is it there to weigh him down? To stop him blowing away on the fresh, strong breeze? I think he might like to be set free on the wind. Like the ospreys he would come here to watch. Into the ground he goes.

Some dusty particles get in my eyes. My eyes water. They do that a lot these days. I leak more frequently, than before. The sapling we have chosen to mark the spot is an oak. I hope it will grow into a large, majestic tree. Solid. With a trunk you want to wrap your arms around.

My dad will become tree. Is becoming tree.

My eyes get a little leakier.



Figure 15: Matteringings

28 March 2017

Athens

Athens has always been a city where rubbish collects on street corners. Piled up bags, spewing forth their contents. I remember the summers when the refuse collectors went on strike. There were mountains of waste. Black bags split open by feral cat claws. The thick August air filled with the stench of rotting food. In the spring it had smelled of oranges.

They sit on the same street corners and in doorways. Crouched. Heads bowed. In their hands a plastic cup. Usually empty. They are silent. Immobile. A different stench fills the air around them. Hopelessness. Resignation. Rejection. Loss.

Fotios says the Germans 'cherry-pick' the best and brightest refugees. The lawyers and engineers. Doctors and dentists. Who gets left behind? These people are dark-skinned and poor. Not poor. Destitute. Down and out. All they can offer up is their plastic cup ^{clxv}.

The streets are punctuated by human nests. Blankets. Cardboard. Sometimes they are occupied. Often not. I photograph the empty ones. I can't bring myself to steal the souls of these people who have taken up residence in the filthy streets. Enough has been taken already.

They move around during the day. Shuffling. Limping. Hands outstretched. Not all are 'xeni' - foreigners. Some are Greek. Their cups attract more coins. But they also usually have something to sell. A packet of tissues. A ballpoint pen. Or a song. The economy of the dispossessed.

A tall man is stopping passers-by. He has a packet of blue biros in his hand. I am serenaded by a man wearing an ill-fitting sombrero. It is too small for his head. I give him a Euro hoping he will go and sing to someone else.

Who do you help? How do you help? The man sat in the doorway scratching at his swollen ankle? The skinny young girl, crouched and alone? The family that don't ask for anything, but who are so clearly in need of something? Anything?



Figure 16: Athens

07 January 2017

Christmas Eve

It's Christmas Eve. The house is decorated and fairly clean. The turkey lies in a box in the shed, waiting for its moment of glory. We buy it every year from the same family. They wait in a freezing barn for the ever-dwindling numbers of faithful customers to collect their bird. My eldest child went to school with one of the daughters. She has left the farm to study. She has a place at Oxford. Her brother and other sister are there, though. Wrapped in woollen scarves and hats. Bright eyed and ruddy-cheeked. I wonder for how much longer their family will continue to farm turkeys. Beautiful big bronze birds that they raise by hand. And slaughter. And disembowel. And pluck. And then put in a box with a sprig of rosemary.

It is the first Christmas since my father died. I didn't even raise a glass in his honour. His absence felt but not acknowledged. I spend new year at home with my mother. We don't talk about dad either. As I prepare to leave, she points to a small black case on the table he made. It's your pa's watch. I can't bring myself to open it. It sits on the mantelpiece like a small black egg, waiting to hatch. I am afraid to unzip the case. I am afraid to open it. I am afraid to look inside

No Date

Digital ghosts

My dad exists as a digital ghost, as I knew she would, my mother has executed a brutal and sustained effort to erase every trace of my father. I visit the family home sporadically. Each time there is less of him. His clothes, his shoes, those gnarled leather pods. My sister used to put them on to remind herself of him. The rubber man. The maker of soles for Clarks shoes. He always inspected our new shoes. Tested the flexibility of the sole. Smelled the rubber. He was rarely impressed. The bedside drawers have been emptied. His penknife. A few coins. Bits and bobs. All gone. Of no use or worth, I suppose. Have they gone to a landfill. Or been incinerated? Perhaps some things made it to a charity shop. Perhaps some things have survived.

I secretly photographed it all after he died. Waiting for the moments when my mother was elsewhere. I opened drawers and envelopes. Snuck into the garage. But I miss the touch of his things. The holding of things he held. The wearing of clothes he wore. The traces are more intensely felt. The digital ghosts haunt me at arms' reach.

My camera's memory card had been corrupted. By who? By what? It has corrupted itself, it seems. The images are irretrievable. All is lost. The helpful assistant in the camera shop explains how the card stores fragments, remnants of all the images I have deleted. If you keep taking more and more photographs, the card can't cope. All the traces of images begin to choke up the memory. The traces of the past consume the data of the present. The card gets confused. Shuts itself down. Overwhelmed. Overloaded. A malfunctioning digital palimpsest.

05 December 2016

On the train again

I am sitting on a filthy train. The smell from the toilets permeates the carriage. Food litters the floor. On the table, an empty plastic sandwich box, a half full plastic Coke bottle, a take away coffee cup and a balled up piece of cling film. I try to find a bin. It is jammed full. A red plastic bag spews forth from the oblong opening. I try to force it back inside, along with my collection of waste. I get most of it in, but the coffee cup pops back out. I sit down again. A small child is making her way down the centre aisle. She can walk, but only just. She sits down and begins to crawl across the sticky carpet, picking her way through the detritus, exploring what she finds: a wooden coffee-stirrer, cake crumbs a half-sucked sweet.

15 September 2016

My dad's not landfill, he's ashes

Incinerated like the mattresses, bollards, soiled clothes and packaging. Mountains of waste. The shining claw descends and digs deep. A metal fistful of human detritus. Filthy waste to feed the furnace. It buns. Fierce and bright. Devouring our shitty, shameful waste. *We are the only polluting animal on the planet, someone says.*

My dad wouldn't have poisoned the earth. Though the plastic comb in his suit pocket might have taken a few thousand years to break down. Like the dead seagull and the crab shell, he would soon have been gone.

What do you take with you? What do you leave behind?

She took his pen. A Pierre Cardin. She said it wouldn't burn, but I knew it would. I was sure my dad would have liked it to have stayed where it was. In the inside pocket of his suit. Next to his comb.

I think I'd like to be buried at sea. Naked. Wrapped in a rough cotton cloth. Would the fish feed on my white, bloated body? Would something winkle out my eyes? Nibble at my toes?

27 July 2016

Detritus dancing

The empty Dr. Pepper bottle is perched precariously atop an overflowing bin, the. It bobs and waves in the light wind. Detritus dancing. Vibrant. Vital. I hurry to my office to get my i-pad, willing Dr. Pepper to still be there when I return. But by the time I get back, the bins have all been emptied. The refuse lorry is parked by the side of the road. Dr. Pepper is in there somewhere. Crushed and still. Where will she go next? What journey lies ahead? Perhaps she will float into Sutton harbour one grey and drizzly morning. Borne on the tide. Bobbing in the wind.

Organic matter doesn't last long. The dead seagull. The empty crab shell. The banana skin. They are there and then they are gone. Easily digested.

Where do disposable bodies go? Where do they get stuck? I watch Exodus^{clxvi} on the television with my daughters. Human flotsam and jetsam. Bodies that have travelled miles and miles. Suddenly blocked. Stuck. Immobile. At the mercy of the human and non-human: The razor wire along the Hungarian-Serbian border. Tides and waves. Visas and passports. Holding pens. Money. Refrigerated lorries parked in laybys, slowly suffocating their human cargo.

July 2015

The Queen is Dead

I am waiting anxiously in a large, bright room. It is empty, except for my fellow presenters. We have been scheduled up against the big guns, and no one has come to hear us speak ^{clxvii}. Disappointed, and perhaps a little relieved, we sit on desks and share our work. I tell them about the Writing Café and how this creative space has been enlivened and energised by great coffee, second hand furniture and a motley collection of long-forgotten university artefacts that have taken up residence there. Sarah shows us her beautiful, entangled artworks, a collaborative text/art book/philosophy project drawing on Manning and Massumi's notion of "research creation". I had never heard the term before. I am entranced. Catherine has been working with a composer and poet to tell the stories of concealed pregnancies. They have created miniature operas from the narratives, which are played for one audience member at a time in a specially constructed confession box outside Trinity College, Dublin. I am awed and moved.

I think of my mum.

The following evening Sarah leads a group of us on a 'Perambulatory Pedagogy Pop Pilgrimage' to Salford Lads Club. We hear about how it has survived multiple inner-city regenerations and the ways in which it has touched and changed people's lives. We pose for photographs outside, channelling our inner Morrissey ^{clxviii}. I meet Catherine at the Whitworth Gallery and somehow, we end up on the Curry Mile. We share food and wine and conversation with Patti Lather, Patricia Clough and Susanne Gannon. They are funny, irreverent. Names that once only existed as type on a page now sit beside me. Women in their glorious, complex, middle-aged prime. I eat quietly. And listen ^{clxix}.

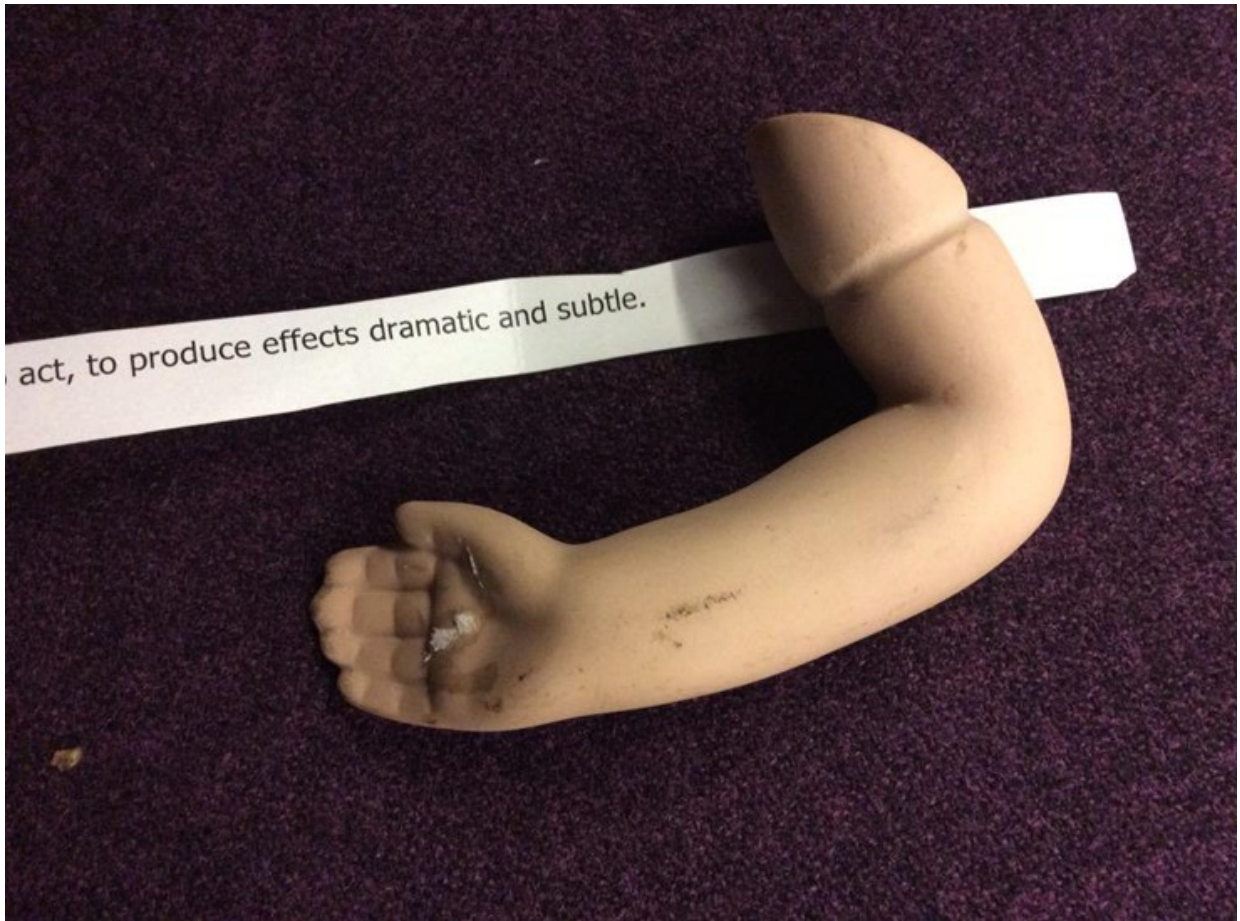


Figure 17: Thing Power

Monday 6th February 2023

The Breakwater

She sits, reading Deleuze and Parnet, down by the sea. The rock is cold against her back, but the early spring sunshine is warm on her face. The tide is out. The beach deserted. As she gazes across the Sound towards the breakwater, there is a shift ^{clxx}.

All at once she knows what is the wind behind her witches broom ^{clxxi}.

The readings are the anarchiv.

The writings are the stays.

She had to write. But now she has written. She can twiddle and tweak. Replace one word with another ^{clxxii}.

But the writing is done. And the reading goes on.

The readings *in*-form everything. Everything is still *in*-formation.

The readings volume.

The writings lace.

Ribbons stirred by wind ^{clxxiii}.

Every writing, an AND.

Every reading, an AND.

Reading and writing. Writing and reading. Intertwined.

Not read first, write later.

Nor write first. Read later.

Read AND write. Write AND read.

Read *with* ^{clxxiv}.

Write *with* ^{clxxv}.

Break the idea of thesis ^{clxxvi}!

Break the idea of study ^{clxxvii}!

Break the idea of research ^{clxxviii}!

Throw off your corset.

And do a cartwheel in the classroom ^{clxxix}!

One hundred and eighty pieces of baleen

I have wrestled with these endnotes. They are literally *end* notes. Notes made at the end.

At times they have felt like the laces of an unwanted corset, squeezing the breath from my words and my body.

At others, they have felt like ballast. Heavy. Burdensome. In need of throwing overboard.

But in the gloaming hour, I sense they are the force and form of the thesis ^{clxxx}.

They are springboards, diving off points, landing sites. Always *in-formation*. Always being read anew.

A cartwheel. A cat's cradle. A compost heap.

KING DEATH ON THE STAGE.



TIGHT LACING !

" Good God, Harry, undo me ; I'm dying," gasped poor Kittie Tyrrel, who was playing in the Elephant and Castle pantomime.

The Coroner : What did she mean ?

Harry : She was laced very tightly.

A post-mortem examination showed that death was due to syncope.

The Coroner : What caused this ?

Witness : She was very tightly laced, and I think this had brought on failure of the heart's action.

Wellcome Images

Figure 18: The figure of a skeleton in a shroud is pulling the laces on a girl's stays (n.d.).
Wellcome Collection: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mvemv2w>

What's a girl to do
When she's told to put her joy In a box
Tied up tight, kept controlled, disciplined
Who's got the paddle
Ready to keep me in line
What's a girl to do
When she wants to be seen
But can't quite get through
Shall I run interference for you
Make it harder for you to see through the line to me
Give you some things to hold on to
That make me sensible
That make me easy to
Categorize and
Count
And
Control
What's a girl to do
When she doesn't want to be controlled
Where can she be
And stretch out her legs
And uncurl her heart
And let her words flow

(Cannon, 2020, pp. 44-45)

ⁱⁱ In an interview with Stephen Biggins, Michel Foucault (1997) says of knowledge:

You see, I hate to say it, but it's true that I am not really a good academic. For me, intellectual work is related to what you could call "aestheticism", meaning transforming yourself ... You see, that's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That's the reason also why, when people say, "Well you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else," my answer is ... [Laughs] "Well do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same old thing and not to be changed?" This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?

(Foucault, 1997, pp. 130-131).

For Foucault, the work of writing is not to achieve power and status, but to enact change. Why would a writer write if she is not transformed by her own writing?

ⁱⁱⁱ Deleuze writes, “[w]e will say of pure immanence, that it is A LIFE, and nothing else” (Deleuze, 2001, p.27). I like that Deleuze uses capital letters. I sense the importance. The urgency. But I cannot explain. After Elizabeth St. Pierre, I have decided to be “comfortable in the discomfort of not knowing” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 13).

^{iv} I first attended the Summer Institute of Qualitative Research at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2013. It was here and in two subsequent visits in 2015 and 2017, that encountered many of the women whose work has shaped this thesis: Elizabeth St. Pierre; Maggie MacLure; Jessica Ringrose; Alecia Y Jackson; Patricia Clough, Patti Lather; Stephanie Springgay; Clare Colebrook; Alison Jones and Te Kawehau Hoskins; Lisa Mazzei; Sarah E. Truman. And through these encounters I learned of other women who would change the way I think and read and write forever: Rosi Braidotti; Jane Bennett; Karen Barad; Donna Haraway; Erin Manning.

^v In her acceptance speech for the Wilbur L. Cross medal for Distinguished Alumni, one of Yale’s highest honours, Donna Haraway reminds the audience of the deep veins of misogyny that run through such esteemed institutions. She says that the fight against sexism, racism, colonialism and all the other isms is like cleaning the toilet – “it’s never work that’s finished”. And she begins her talk with the pronouncement: “We are the granddaughters of the witches you didn’t burn” (Haraway 2017). Watch her here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-iEnSztKu8>

^{vi} In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze and Parnet (2002) write: “[T]o encounter is to find, to capture, to steal, but there is no method for finding other than a long preparation” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 7). Encounters are productive, generative, affecting. Encounters are the *and, and, and*, of everything that moves through, around and between people, ideas, events, and entities. Encounters designate “an effect, a zigzag, something which passes or happens between the two as though under a potential difference”. This thesis has emerged out of a long preparation and “an extremely populous solitude” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 6). It is a string bag into which I have put everything, including myself.

^{vii} In *We Who Are Free, Are We Free*, Hélène Cixous (1993) writes of the fear:

Writers are afraid. Almost all those whose instrument of work is language are journalists, critics, university teachers, almost all of them. Fear and lies govern their tastes and their activities. Fear of what? Fear of death social starvation, fear of not being invited to the dominant banquet, of not immediately receiving a pittance of compliments, fear of not published, of not winning prizes, of not being invited onto the greatest possible number of TV programs. Fear of not belonging to the powerful cliques that reign over institutions private and public, fear of not belonging to the inquisition clubs. Fear for their reputation, fear of not being cited in the maximum number of papers, fear of not always being congratulated, of never being congratulated, fear of being unmasked called inferior, fear of not getting in touch with the establishment, never getting a taste of power, fear of exile, of cold, of solitude, severe climate that follows the artist, as Joyce well knew. Fear of honest and of this old-fashioned virtue costing them very dearly indeed.

And what about you, you are about to ask: aren't you afraid? indeed, I am afraid. As a free writer? Worse still: a woman. Yes, I am afraid: afraid of solitude, of hatred and rejection, afraid of being "horribly burnt." And outside, it's cold up there, even Moses thought so and shivered, in Kafka's account, even Moses had a great urge to take to his heels, run back down and take refuge amid the warmth of his treacherous people, their sheep and their calves.

(Cixous, 1993, p. 212)

I think Cixous’ words speak of the balancing act of being both *author and astonishing producer* (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 8). It requires courage to write to the encounter and not to the desire to count.

^{viii} In Tuck and Ree’s (2013) *A Glossary of Haunting*, the story of the Cyclops story is reimagined as a tale of plunder, colonisation, and revenge:

Let me tell you the end of this story again, from my mouth. While Odysseus is happily restored at home and publicly celebrated, the Cyclops's story continues. She walks the vastness of his kingdom, slowly becoming a ghost. Her emptied socket becomes a mask. Her revenge feeds her, making her opaque, anti-gravity, a black hole. Odysseus is blind to her, no longer able to see the Cyclops as when he coveted her land and food. She hides in plain sight and crafts her haunting. She will orphan Odysseus as she has been orphaned, but not of family, land or body. She will strand Odysseus in constant unease, bereft of his cherished and clever reason. His house will leak. The walls will sag. He will dream of sheep. He and everyone around him will forget his name; he will become an unremarkable shadow of Nob'dy, the clever alibi and source of his fame.

(Tuck & Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*, 2013, p. 644).

For Tuck and Ree, the real monster is Odysseus, the abuser of the Cyclops's hospitality. The male gaze, the coloniser's eye, the neurotypical narrative, all celebrate Odysseus' cunning and wit. Who cares for the Cyclops? Blinded by her guest and robbed of her sheep, she is rendered invisible, her story subsumed by the glorious homecoming of the great Odysseus. But like all good stories the end is just the beginning. In Tuck and Ree's telling, the Cyclops has her revenge; stealing from Odysseus that which he holds most dear: his clever reason, his alibi, and his fame.

^{ix} Manning (n.d.a) defines the anarchivest thus:

The anarchivest is made of the formative movements going into and coming out of the archive, for which the objects contained in the archive serve as springboards. The anarchivest as such is made of formative tendencies; compositional forces seeking a new taking-form; lures for further process. Archives are their waystations.

(Manning, n.d.a)

^x This is a reference to Kathleen Stewart's book, *Ordinary Affects*. On the back cover, Donna Haraway writes:

Ordinary Affects sounds the depths and shallows of intimate, particular worlds crucial to finding our way in the tidal basin of contemporary culture. Here are accounts of lives in plain sight, but only if we cultivate the deceptively hard practices of slow looking and off-stage hearing. Kathleen Stewart touches the marrow of things by nurturing an oblique and unrushed sort of attention, one alert to the bio-luminescence generated in ordinary living taken seriously, without which we are in the dark in politics, philosophy and cultural theory.

(Stewart, 2007)

^{xi} In chapter three of *Staying with the Trouble*, there is an image of a painting called Endosymbiosis: Homage to Lynn Margulis, by Shoshahah Dubiner. The colours are vivid. Purple. Reds and yellows and greens. It hangs in the hallway between the departments of Geosciences and Biology at UMass Amherst (Haraway, 2016). It is beautiful. Seaworms and cephalopods. Urchins and crustacea swim together in a sea of stars. Haraway tells us of the Hawaiian Bobtail Squid, a cephalopod which relies on bacterial symbionts to construct a ventral pouch that houses luminescing bacteria. The pouch enables the squid to "look like a starry sky to its predator below, or appear not to cast a shadow on moonlit nights" (Haraway, 2016, p. 66). The bacteria help the squid hunt and regulate her circadian rhythms, the squid regulates bacterial numbers and provides "inviting surfaces for setting up vibrio homes" (Haraway, 2016, p. 66). But, these are not simply mutually beneficial relationships, these interspecies relationships are too complex and too intertwined to be categorised by the "dictates of possessive individualism and zero-sum games as the template for categorisation" (Haraway, 2016, p. 60). These are not individual life forms that live parasitically off each other, but which "interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another" (Haraway, 2016, p. 58).

^{xii} Haraway (2016) says that we are at stake to and with each other. Two hundred and fifty million human beings depend directly on the ongoing integrity of the coral reefs and taxa they support:

Both coral and lichen symbionts also bring us richly into storied tissues of the thickly present Chthulucene, where it remains possible – just barely – to play a much better SF game, in non-arrogant collaboration with all those in the muddle. We are all lichens; so we can be scraped off the rocks by the Furies, who will still erupt to avenge crimes against the earth. Alternatively, we can join in the metabolic transformations between and among rocks and critters for living and dying well.

(Haraway, 2016, pp. 56-57)

^{xiii} In *The English Patient*, Kip the Indian sapper, rips the headphones from his ears on hearing the news of the bombing of Hiroshima. He is at once appalled and incensed, knowing that this atrocity would never have been committed against a white nation (Ondaatje, 1993).

^{xiv} After failing to qualify for the 100 metres final in the European Athletics Championships, Dina Asher-Smith spoke out about the impact menstruation can have on female athletes:

Sometimes you see girls that have been so consistent and there's a random dip and behind the scenes they've been really struggling. Everybody else will go 'What's that? That's random.' So we could just do with more funding. I feel if it was a men's issue there would be a million different ways to combat things.

(Asher-Smith cited in Ingle, 2022).

^{xv} In his essay, *Body/Power*, Michel Foucault writes of the importance of asking ourselves, "what kind of body the current society needs" (Foucault, 1980a, p.58). As he argues, "Nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power" (ibid, pp. 57-58) and so what we need to consider is what "mode of investment of the body is necessary and adequate for the functioning of a capitalist society like ours?" (ibid, p.58).

Invest in the bodies of women.

^{xvi} Nine hundred thousand women in the UK have quit their jobs because of the menopause (Wellbeing of Women, 2022).

^{xvii} Manning says that "[t]ransversal operations for the creation of ways of knowing emerge from the ground up. They are singular and speculative all at once, emboldened by the creativity of the everyday" (Manning, 2020b, p. 12). The singular and the speculative. The creativity of the everyday. These are the concepts that fizz and schizz. How to explain the creative force activated by the act of hanging the washing on the line? Or the generative potential of cleaning a shit-stained toilet bowl? Or how the writing sprouts after a long, hot bath?

^{xviii} In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway says:

I am not against trials of strength; after all I love women's basketball. I just think trials of strength are the old story. Overvalued, they are a bit like the never-ending task of cleaning the toilet – necessary but radically insufficient. On the other hand, there are excellent composting toilets ... We can outsource some trials of strength to the ever-eager microbes to make more time and space for SF in other muddles.

(Haraway, 2016, pp. 179-180)

^{xix} After years spent ravaging primary, secondary and tertiary education, the government has set its sights firmly on the Higher Education sector.

The Office for Students (OfS) is an ‘independent’ body that is both ‘guided’ and (partly) funded by the Department for Education. According to their recent report on assessment practices,

[t]here is no inconsistency in a provider complying with equality legislation and making its assessments accessible, while also maintaining rigour in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Providers should ensure that students benefit from both accessibility and rigour.

(Office for Students, 2021, p. 2).

I wonder how a student really benefits from accessibility and rigour. Who is under attack here? The students whose *technical proficiency* in written language skills fall short of the OfS’s standards, or the HE providers who dare to admit students who may struggle to succeed against such benchmarks for quality. The OfS is quite clear:

Poor practice in this area of assessment could be an indicator of wider concerns about a provider’s approach; for example, whether other aspects of its courses are of sufficient quality, or whether it is admitting students who do not have a reasonable expectation of succeeding on or beyond their course.

(Office for Students, 2021, p. 3).

^{xx} Though neurodiverse bodies have made it into the institution, and though accounts of what neurodiversity brings to our understandings of knowledge and knowing, mostly what these bodies and accounts do is to remind us of “how inaccessible most of our practices of teaching are, how unaccommodated the non-docile body remains despite the many academic discourses that circulate supporting its presence” (Manning, 2020a, p. 215).

^{xxi} In an interview with Erin Manning and Brian Massumi in 2018, Uriah Todoroff asks: “WHY would two anti-capitalist philosophers create a cryptocurrency?” (Todoroff, 2018)

They explain:

MANNING.— For our cryptoeconomic work, the 3E Process Seed Bank, we don’t begin our thinking of value around financial value in that archaic definition that Brian mentioned. We begin with the question of value more broadly: What is value, what are the conditions under which value expresses itself, how does it enter into relations of power, and can it be extracted from those relations of power? Our interest in financial value is in that wider range, because we realized that if we don’t grapple with forms of money beyond money as a medium of exchange—forms like derivatives, options, and futures—we could miss potential alter-economic strategies, or find the activist work we do undermined by not taking these economic realities into account.

MASSUMI.— Basically, we want to think about value qualitatively, rather than assuming that the only viable model of value is quantitative, as it is in the case of monetary value. There are certain points in the capitalist economy where the qualitative basis of value makes itself felt. But it is telling that when it does, it is in the form of what are called “externalities”: things that affect price but aren’t themselves quantifiable. The classic example is the way that perceptions of the quality of life in different neighborhoods affect real estate prices, whether it’s green spaces and good schools or the conviviality and cultural life of a neighborhood. These quality-of-life factors are reflected in the prices, but because they aren’t things that are quantifiable as such, this typically leads to distortions in the market, as can be seen in the insanely high prices in desirable inner cities, and in the onslaughts of gentrification. The monetary expression of value is just that: a numerical expression of something else. And that something else, being qualitative, always eludes capture. It distorts the market or is distorted by it. So we wanted to ask, is there a way of putting a qualitative notion of value back at the center of economy?

(Manning and Massumi cited in Todoroff, 2018)

^{xxii} Of the 3E Process Seed Bank, Manning says:

The 3E Process Seed Bank is first and foremost a collective proposition for anarchiving ... the process of anarchiving involves moving with the more-than of the event and channeling the ecology of relations it has set forth. Less capture than bend, the aim is to reorient a set of conditions so that a spark can catch on the edges of an existing process, seeding a new one.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 300).

^{xxiii} Brian Massumi says:

The cutting edge of capitalism is in the financial markets, which have evolved forms of abstract capital so abstruse, contingent, and objectively undecidable that it is impossible to get an effective grip on them. They run according to their own process, and sometimes run away with themselves, periodically crashing and burning. The financialized economy is beyond the human pale: beyond full human comprehension and beyond effective human control. It is a self-driving machine, operating more and more abstractly, with no one in particular at the steering wheel. It was created by the human, but not in its image, emerging as a monstrous offspring that turns back to engulf its maker and drive away with it

(Massumi 2017, p. 9 cited in Manning 2020a, p.293).

^{xxiv} Of sadness, Deleuze says: "Sadness, sad affects, are all those which reduce our power to act. The established powers need our sadness to make us slaves" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p.61).

^{xxv} Manning says of the nonvoluntary;

[t]o place the voluntary and the nonvoluntary in opposition is to create a false dichotomy: what moves language is the force of rhythm, the asignifying sounds that amplify nonsonorous forces, the prearticulation beneath the words, the gestures unfolding and held back that make language stumble and sense differently, the sound of ecologies that words cannot quite capture, except in their capacity to evoke the more-than as articulated in the palimpsest of their affective enunciation.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 279).

^{xxvi} Manning says it is the nonvoluntary that moves writing. It is an opening up to the nonvoluntary that allows us to escape the I: "It is in the nonvoluntary, in the nonsuppression of the tics and flaps and taps, in the excitement of the echolalic utterance that tics us into proximity not only with its (non)sense but with the quality of its lure, that the force of movement-moving in the voicing lurks" (Manning, 2020a, p. 279).

^{xxvii} Manning describes such practices as:

a cry to connect to the queering of all movement, to the nonvolitional in all experience, so that we, too, might be able to hear this writing at the limit, this writing beyond where language knows its place, this writing towards a time where the voice that speaks in the acrossness of experience in the making is finally heard (Manning, 2020a, p. 288).

^{xxviii} In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu writes:

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations

("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16)

^{xxix} In the song *Health is Wealth* by Bob Vylan (Bob Vylan 2022), the London rappers' call to arms is to fight government oppression by eating good food.

[Intro, spoken]

The state need not kill those that killing themselves
Don't make it an easy job for 'em

[Verse]

The killing of kids with £2 chicken and chips
Is a tactic of war, waged on the poor
Can't save wages on slave wages
And you don't think fresh fruit with your face on the floor
Nah, you need money for the kids
Rent and light plus food in the fridge
But that last box can be the hardest tick
'Cause scraps will suffice but they might make you sick

[Outro, spoken sample]

*Oh by the way, remember you are a gift to yourself and a gift to your environment
Continue to be that beautiful gift
Share that gift in your food, and all your gastronomic mastery*

Watch the official video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DxMFYpZZEo>

^{xxx} Of shadows, Manning writes

The shadow queers the surface of existence. The shadow spooks the norm, turning neurotypical experience on itself. The shadow follows and haunts, but also leads and orients, inventing more-than human worlds. For that's the strange thing about shadows - theirs are as much the movements of the human as they are the movements of earth and its suns and moons.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 287).

^{xxxi} In *Stop Talking*, Ilarion Mercurieff speaks of the (white) Western traditions of scholarship and learning. He says that "It has been my experience that in Western discourse no one really listens to anyone else; everyone is too busy planning their own response." (Mercurieff and Roderick, 2013, p. 7). He talks of what it was like for him to grow up in a community where you learned by watching and listening. Not speaking.

One day when I was about five years old, I went out with my grandfather before sunrise to pray near the shore of the Bering Sea. It was an incredibly beautiful day, magical, with sunshine and no wind. As we walked home along the beach, our feet fell into a slow rhythmic pace along the dark-colored sands. Small waves crested in rapid succession. We could hear the seagulls calling and the seals bellowing in a distant rookery. The sea air smelled fresh, and everything was alive and intense. The sky and sea were expansive and a myriad of blue hues. I could see the horizon for a hundred and eighty degrees. "Oh I love this day!" I proclaimed. "It is really good!" "*Anaan eestahnaan Laikaiyax*," my grandfather said softly. "*Tututhaax*." Even as a five-year-old child I understood what he was saying. He was teaching me how to be a real human being through one of the age-old ways that Unangan (Aleut) people have used to survive and thrive along the Bering Sea for ten thousand years.

He was saying that words are unnecessary, that they diminish the fullness of meaningful human experience. He was telling me to stop talking and to experience the world around me without words.

(Mercurieff and Roderick, 2013, p. 8).

^{xxxii} According to William James the “element of voluminousness” is a way to foreground “what is felt in excess of the given ... Voluminous cannot be reduced to a geometric account of space. Voluminousness is intensive magnitude, not quantity” (1890, cited in Manning 2020a, p.246).

^{xxxiii} On Research-Creation, Manning writes:

Research creation, as SenseLab has argued over more than a decade, understood not as an academic field but as a practice, operative in the interstices of making and thinking, can, at its uncertain limit, connect to study. It can be a mode of inquiry that asks what (other) forms learning can take. It can refuse to privilege the materiality of language over other forms of expression while at the same time recognizing thinking as a creative practice in its own right. When practiced this way, research-creation creates the conditions to ask how the theory-practice split continues to give knowledge a certain linguistic overtone, understanding practice more as that what needs to be studied than study itself.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 221)

^{xxxiv} Drawing on William James and Alfred North Whitehead, Manning (2020a) says, “[v]oluming into expression does not yet mean taking a form ... It is the actualizing into itself of experience that shapes the volume, that makes the world take shape. But this shaping must not be reduced to form as though form-taking happened once and for all” (Manning, 2020a, p. 247).

^{xxxv} As Manning (2020a) states:

Creating conditions for neurodiversity in the university is not about creating a space for difference, a space where difference sequesters itself. It is about attuning to the undercommon currents of creative dissonance and asymmetrical experience always already at work in, across, and beyond the institution. It is about becoming attentive to the ways in which the production of knowledge in the register of the neurotypical has always been resisted and queered, despite the fact that neurotypical forms of knowledge are rarely addressed or defined as such.

(Manning, 2020a, p. 214).

^{xxxvi} On power in the university, Manning (2020a) writes:

To work with the circulation of power, it is necessary to move beyond body to bodying, beyond the notion that there are preexisting individuals that are powered by a hierarchy that measures their movements. The university is not a field that operates through such cut-and-dried hierarchies. The university is a diagram of power through which “we” are created and re-created as power/knowledge bodyings. “We” are the university, emboldened to become bodies under circumstances we co-compose. Or, at the very minimum, we are a field of forces that makes it possible for those tendings-toward-bodies the university promotes to keep agglomerating. It is “we” who make its thinkings possible, even if only by remaining in its midst. And it is “we” who pass or fail those for whom the qualities of bodying the university presupposes and creates are insufficient to survive and to thrive in its framework.

(Manning, 2020, p. 218).

^{xxxvii} In the chapter, *Me Lo Dijo un Pajarito*, Manning (2020a) asks:

What are these undercommons ways of cawing, the sounds lost, left behind, not only unaddressed but unregistered, in the systems of power/knowledge we call academia? What cannot be heard? What cannot be listened to? And what are the stakes of the performance of knowledge that plays out

in the name of the “norm” that upholds what is too often generalised around the concept of “quality” or “rigor”?

(Manning, 2020a, p. 213)

^{xxxviii} For Foucault (1980b), it the pleasure we take in our oppression that keeps us complicit.

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse.

(Foucault, 1980b, p. 119).

^{xxxix} The UK government's response to the influx of displaced people has been to *protect our borders* by promoting a culture of in anti-immigrant hostility. Our Border Forces have the power to decide whether a person seeking sanctuary poses a risk to UK security and yet with no legal authority, these 'civil' servants are policing our borders in sanctioned yet “lawless and unaccountable operation of power” (Butler, 2004, p. xv). They are the foot-soldiers in the war against terror. The embodiment of Home Office's obsession with securing our borders and, in the enactment of these policies, treating desperate people with suspicion and disregard has been 'normalised'.

^{xi} Kintsugi is the Japanese art of celebrating imperfections. By mixing powdered gold with the lacquer used to mend broken pottery, the breakage and repair become part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. Are these endnotes the golden glue that holds the fragments together? Or are they themselves the fragments?

^{xii} Aspiegrrl says she can feel the currents of electricity long after the TV is turned off (cited in Manning 2020, p. 251). She can feel the electrons agitating. She is electrified by the field of relation (Manning, 2020, p. 251). Aspiegrrl can “hear what moves infrasensorially through her surrounds” (Manning, 2020a, p. 251). She cannot sense less. Or differently. She cannot background the feel of electricity on her skin, but she will learn to pretend that she can. And she will be told in “a thousand ways that value resides in subtracting from the welter of experience” (Manning, 2020a, p. 251).

^{xiii} Of bodies that move too much, Manning writes:

What if we took seriously that our neurotypical belief that movement should be stilled (pay attention) undermines the very the very force of what movement is? What if we emphasized that placing meaning in the agential category of the intentional, making speech and individual will inextricable, is a *maligned to the complexities of expression*, which always move in registers incapable of being completely contained by the will of a preconstituted subject?

(Manning, 2020a, pp. 280-281)

^{xiii} In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Donna Haraway (1991) writes:

“Vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps violence implicit in visualizing practices. **With whose blood were my eyes crafted?**” [my emphasis]

(Haraway, 1991, p. 192)

^{xiv} Boris Johnson was the UK Prime Minister during the Covid pandemic. He was subjected to a vote of (no) confidence on the 6th June 2022, which he won. He resigned from the Conservative Party a year later amidst accusations that he has knowingly misled Parliament over lockdown parties.

^{xlv} In this extract, Bartlett justifies his treatment of Jumbo the elephant:

He began to destroy the doors and other parts of his house, driving his tusks through the iron plates, splintering the timbers in all directions. When in this condition, and in his home, none of the other keepers except Scott dare go near him; but, strange to say, he was perfectly quiet as soon as he was allowed to be free in the Gardens. I was perfectly aware that this restless and frantic condition could be calmed by reducing the quantity of his food, fastening his limbs by chains, and an occasional flogging; but this treatment would have called forth a multitude of protests from kind-hearted and sensitive people, and would have led to those keepers concerned appearing before the magistrates at the police court charged with cruelty. It is only those who have had experience in the management of an elephant who are aware that, unless the person in charge of him is determined to be master and overpower him, that person will lose all control over him and will be likely to fall victim to his enormous strength.

(AQA, 2019)

^{xlvi} The Writing Café was a special place. A stolen space. Signed off by the Estates team one quiet August, when no one was looking. Christie and I had dreamed of creating a fully functioning café which would serve as a collaborative space for writing and, somehow, we had succeeded. The vending machines were removed and the kitchen re-opened. And we lovingly furnished the space with junkshop finds, second-hand books and abandoned objects. It looked and felt like nowhere else on campus.

^{xlvii} In 2019, I attended a ‘Thesis Bootcamp’ organised by the Doctoral College at my institution. It was held over two days on the main university campus. The writings that were produced formed the basis for a journal article later published in a special edition of *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* (see Bowstead 2022).

^{xlviii} In *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari (2000) likens Donald Trump to the monstrous algae that choked up the canals of Venice. In the 1980s, he bought up properties and raised rents to drive out poor families from New York and Atlantic City. Many of these people were made homeless, making them “the equivalent of the dead fish of environmental ecology” (Guattari, 2000, p. 28).

^{xlix} In *The University and the Undercommons*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2004) write of the subversive intellectual whose path it is “to sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of” (Moten and Harney, 2004, p. 101).

I In *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari (2000) writes:

It is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, phrases and gestures of human solidarity. A stifling cloak of silence has been thrown over the emancipatory struggles of women, and of the new proletariat: the unemployed, the ‘marginalized’, immigrants.

(Guattari, 2000, p. 29).

^{li} One of the central questions in Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life* (2004), is to ask us to consider what may be “made of grief besides a cry for war” (Butler, 2004, p. xii). Responding to the terrible events of September 2001, her essays explore the toxicity of the political response to the attacks on the Twin Towers and how it has “become a means by which to stifle any serious public discussion of how US foreign policy has helped create a world in which such acts of terror are possible” (Butler, 2004, p. 4).

The term “terrorist” is used, for instance, by the Israeli state to describe any and all Palestinian acts of resistance, but none of its own practices of state violence. The term is also used by Putin to describe the Chechen struggle for independence, which then casts its own acts of violence against this province as justified acts of national self-defense. The United States, by using this term, positions

itself exclusively as the sudden and indisputable victim of violence, even though there is no doubt that it did suffer violence. But it is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering.

(Butler, 2004, p. 4)

^{lii} As Butler (2004) writes:

Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject must be grieved, and what kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a liveable life and a grievable death.

(Butler, 2004, pp. xiv-xv)

^{lii} At the end of her small, important, joyful book, *The Democracy of Species*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) asks:

What is our gift? And how shall we use it? Stories like the one about the people of corn give us guidance, both to recognize the world as a gift and to think how we might respond. The people of mud and wood and light all lacked gratitude and the sense of reciprocity that flowed from it. It was only the people of corn, people transformed by awareness of their gifts and responsibilities, who were sustained on the earth. Gratitude comes first, but gratitude alone is not enough. Other beings are known to be especially gifted, with attributes that humans lack. Other beings can fly, see at night, rip open trees with their claws, make maple syrup. What can humans do? We may not have wings or leaves, but we humans do have words. Language is our gift and our responsibility. I've come to think of writing as an act of reciprocity with the living land. Words to remember old stories, words to tell new ones, stories that bring science and spirit back together to nurture our becoming people made of corn.

(Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 87-88).

^{liv} On language, Kimmerer (2013) writes:

I come here to listen, to nestle in the curve of the roots in a soft hollow of pine needles, to lean my bones against the column of white pine, to turn off the voice in my head until I can hear the voices outside it: the shhh of wind in needles, water trickling over rock, nuthatch tapping, chipmunks digging, beechnut falling, mosquito in my ear, and something more – something that is not for me, for which we have no language, the wordless being of others in which we are never alone. After the drumbeat of my mother's heart, this was my first language.

(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 1).

^{lv} In Kimmerer's native language, the list of things, its inanimates, is small. It consists mostly of objects made by people. "Table it is." (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 17).

^{lvi} Plants give and plants receive. As Kimmerer (2013) writes,

Plants were here first and have had a long time to figure things out. They live both above and below ground and hold the earth in place. Plants know how to make food from light and water. Not only do they feed themselves, but they make enough to sustain the lives of all the rest of us. Plants are providers for the rest of the community and exemplify the virtue of generosity, always offering food.

(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 86).

^{lvi} The 3ecologies project is Manning and Massumi's living experiment. Their goal is to "move beyond any notion of individual shares or exchange, to learn collectively, through practice, to value the minor sociality of the more-than through which emergent valuation makes itself felt" (Manning, 2020a, p. 301).

^{lviii} In her paper, *Out of the Clear*, Manning (2022) writes:

The pine table's ghostly outline haunts the residential school, its absence equal to the absence of education. Because what the residential school really does is unteach. Taking the place of pedagogy, what is practiced here is theft. Theft of thought, of imagination. This theft is a rape. A physical rape, a sexual aggression, but also a conceptual rape, a clearing - "to snatch, to grab, to carry off by force" - of all that lives in the abyss of what has been left behind. The rape, relation severed, breaks the transversality. It cuts the fragile interwoven threads of existence, wresting life from life-living, from the more-than that gives it its spirited and spiritual contour. If body is land, if bodying is only ever a worlding, what residential school does, in this most recent form of clearing, is sever this imbrication, leaving the body lifeless.

(Manning, 2022).

^{lix} In the foreword to *Elemental Passions*, Luce Irigaray (1992) writes:

Elemental Passions offers some fragments from a woman's voyage as she goes in search of her identity in love. It is no longer a man in quest of his Grail, his God, his path, his identity through vicissitudes of his life's journey it is a woman. Between nature and culture, between night and day, between sun and stars, between vegetable and mineral, amongst men, amongst women, amongst gods, she seeks her humanity and her transcendancy.

(Irigaray, 1992, p. 4)

^{lx} In the foreword to Alexis Gumbs (2020) book, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Adrienne Maree Brown writes of the significance of the number nineteen. It is a number that recurs throughout this work.

OF COURSE I AM WRITING this on a nineteenth day. and this is a book with nineteen parts. it's a week since I learned nineteen-year-old Black lives matter activist oluwatoyin salai was found dead, and it's quite possible that i have grieved in nineteen ways already today, although this kind of stranger-grief is a difficult thing to track. today i created a meditation of nineteen wisdoms from Black feminists, listening to the throughline between ancestors and living geniuses the way Alexis Pauline Gumbs taught me to do. and it's not the nineteenth of any month, but of June, June 19th. juneteenth. a day of liberation. given that this is a book of liberation, i wanted to push off into the waters today. with Alexis things always line up in ways that humble me. grief and magic touch, and a ripple unfolds between them that shows how they are the same thing at different moments in the nonlinear timeline of a good life. The universe is coordinated when it comes around Alexis, because she is steady enough to center any space she enters, however vast.

(Brown cited in Gumbs, 2020, p. 6)

And nineteen is the number of days it took Erin Manning to write *The Perfect Mango*.

^{lxi} In the foreword to the reissue of *The Perfect Mango*, Manning (2019c) writes:

I wrote *The Perfect Mango* over nineteen days in July 1994. Living had always been hard, but I had hit an impasse. The lure of ending it all was very strong. Suicide was always close, had always lived on the edges. Today it is more a lurker than a temptation. Then it felt more like a command, and while much of the time I could resist attempting it, there had been more than one occasion where I couldn't. The

nineteen days through which I wrote my body, the days of bringing The Perfect Mango into the world, were days I gave myself fully to the possibility of life.

(Manning, 2019c, p. 9)

^{lxii} Erin Manning (2019c) writes of the violence imposed on bodies:

What I want to know today is how to create conditions for living beyond humanism's fierce belief that we, the privileged, the neurotypicals, the as-yet-uncathed, the able-bodied, hold the key to all perspectives in the theatre of living. The conditions for living I seek are those that facilitate a more-than-human encounter with a life lived in the kind of creative activity that deeply challenges the normative standards that enable the violence I experienced as a child and continued to experience throughout my adolescence and early adulthood. This violence is lived everyday not only by those who are abused, but by all for whom the world as we know it remains out of reach – those whose subjectivities are excluded from the category of the human. I don't want to participate in that world. I want to live at the interstices where black life and indigenous life and neurodiverse life and all ways of living that invent ways of encountering the force of what living can be are celebrated. I want to live in the fierce celebration of a world invented by those modes of life which tear at the colonial, white, neurotypical fabric of life as we know it.

(Manning, 2019, pp. 14-15)

^{lxiii} Raymond Briggs' book *Where the Wind Blows* was published in 1982. It tells of the bleak and heart-breaking story of Hilda and Jim and their slow and painful demise in their home-made bomb shelter after a nuclear attack on the UK.

^{lxiv} In *Stop Talking*, Ilarion (Larry) Mercurieff and Libby Roderick are treated to a special performance of the fine art of storytelling in Alaska Native cultures by their special guest, Jack Dalton. They describe his performance:

In storytelling mode, Jack uses his whole body, acting out all the major characters, changing voice, tone, and body language to make each one come alive. As Raven, he crosses his arms behind his back, leans forward, and rocks gently from foot to foot. As the human being, he picks berries, paddles his boat, flirts with a woman. He is by turns fearsome, coy, saddened, contemplative, graceful and funny and wise. He embodies the story with a full range of life.

(Mercurieff and Roderick, 2013, p. 26)

On his approach to story telling, Jack says:

Here are a few things I've learned on my travels. A storyteller is not a story-teller if there is no one there to hear. A story is not a story if those who hear it do not tell it to someone else. A culture is not a culture if there are no stories passed from generation to generation. And a human being cannot be a human being without a culture and its stories.

(Dalton cited in Mercurieff and Roderick, 2013, p. 29)

And here is an extract from the story he told:

But soon there came a time when the human beings began to take more than they needed. Raven could see this was not good and went to talk to the human beings about this. But they would not listen, claiming they had nothing to be afraid of. With this in mind, Raven flew back to the stream, and in the mud this time made a very large lump. He went and found clam shells, and breaking these into long sharp pieces, placed them where the feet and mouth would be. Then with a heavy heart he used his magic, waving his wings over, and the lump came to life. And this creature, this Bear, went out and

killed the first human being it encountered. Now the human beings had never seen one of their own kind dead before. And they gathered around in silent awe. Soon Raven arrived and took the star and returned that star to the sky. When he came back to the human beings he said, "I have not done this because I am mad at you or because I do not like you, because I like you very much. I have done this because I was worried that you were beginning to forget to live by the way, worried because you were beginning to take more than you needed. And this is very dangerous, for it upsets the balance of all things. It is so very dangerous, it's like . . . well, it's like eating your own self up. And you can imagine, one cannot survive very long at all if all they have to eat is themselves. So you must remember: live by the way, take only what you need, and use as much of it as you can. Try not to waste. I know you have become used to your luxuries and that living by the way seems, well, rather primitive to you now. But I can assure you that living by the way you can lead very happy and fulfilling lives indeed. And when you are ready to leave, I can take your stars and return them to the sky. And there you can watch over all that you love for as long as you like. But remember. Live by the way, and take only what you need.

The human beings were so very ashamed of themselves. They were ashamed because they realized that they had been given a chance and failed. They were then given a second chance, and they failed once again. And now they were being given a third chance. What would happen if they failed this time? The human beings realized they must come up with some way to let all the human beings of the future know about the way, to know that they must not take more than they needed. So the Elders convened for a time of great discussion, and after this great discussion they let the other human beings know what must occur. And what they said was this: "We must take the story of what has happened here, and we must give this story to the next generation. And then that generation can give the story to the generation after that. And so on, and so forth, to the end time." This is how the art of storytelling was begun. It is in this way that we—as Human Beings, as Yup'ik—know who we are, where we come from, and why we live the way we live. And there are those who believe that within these stories are the answers to our questions about the future."

(Mercurieff and Roderick, 2013, pp. 31-32)

^{lxv} In the last chapter of *Ecco Homo*, Nietzsche (1979) rails against the concept of 'God', which he describes as:

Everything harmful, noxious, slanderous, the whole mortal enmity against life brought into one terrible unity! The concept 'the Beyond', 'real world' invented so as to deprive of value the only world which exists – so as to leave no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! The concept 'soul', 'spirit', finally even 'immortal soul', invented so as to despise the body, so as to make it sick – 'holy' – so as to bring all the things in life which deserve serious attention, the questions of nutriment, residence, cleanliness, weather, a horrifying frivolity!

(Nietzsche, 1979, pp. 103-104)

^{lxvi} Alexis Gumbs (2020) writes:

This is where we start our trans-species communion, opening a space to uplift the practice of listening even more than the practices of showing and proving and speaking up. Listening is not only about the normative ability to hear, it is a transformative and revolutionary resource that requires quieting down and tuning in.

(Gumbs, 2020, p. 19).

^{lxvii} Of breathing, Gumbs writes:

WHAT IS THE SCALE OF breathing? You put your hand on your individual chest as it rises and falters all day. But is that the scale of breathing? You share air and chemical exchange with everyone in the

room, everyone you pass by today. Is the scale of breathing within one species? All animals participate in this exchange of release for continued life. But not without the plants. The plants in their inverse process, release what we need, take what we give without being asked. And the planet, wrapped in ocean breathing, breathing into sky. What is the scale of breathing? You are part of it now. You are not alone. And if the scale of breathing is collective, beyond species and sentience, so is the impact of drowning. The massive drowning yet unfinished where the distance of the ocean meant that people could become property, that life could be for sale. I am talking about the middle passage and everyone who drowned and everyone who continued breathing. But I am troubling the distinction between the two. I am saying that those who survived in the underbellies of boats, under each other under unbreathable circumstances are the undrowned, and their breathing is not separate from the drowning of their kin and fellow captives, their breathing is not separate from the breathing of the ocean, their breathing is not separate from the sharp exhale of hunted whales, their kindred also. Their breathing did not make them individual survivors. It made a context. The context of undrowning. Breathing in unbreathable circumstances is what we do every day in the chokehold of racial gendered ableist capitalism. We are still undrowning.

(Gumbs, 2020, p. 4)

^{lxviii} On the demise of *Hydrodamalis gigas*, Gumbs writes:

Some say your death was only incidental; you were so conveniently located on the favorite path of sealers and fur traders between Russia and North America. Those twenty seven years were like a gold rush, fueled by the desires of fashionable Europeans for fur hats and coats. A fashion trend sparked by colonizing North America: a supposedly endless supply of fur. They were on their way to get sealskin and fur. They would kill you and eat you during the journey there. Does that make anyone feel better? Keep anyone warm? That your extinction—the first known extinction of a marine mammal caused by humans—was collateral in the pursuit of other deaths?

(Gumbs, 2020, p. 20).

^{lxix} In her essay, *The Space Crone*, Ursula Le Guin (1989) says that if she were to choose the occupant to take the last remaining seat on a passing spaceship, she would go to the local Woolworths and select a woman. Not a young woman, not a well-educated woman, but a woman who has lived: only women accept, experience and enact the entire human condition, “the essential quality of which is Change” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 6).

^{lxx} Spinoza argues that citizens are goaded and cajoled to celebrate a humanity bent on self-destruction. It is a world where politicians, political discourses and policies are “always busy running life into the ground, mutilating it, killing it outright or by degrees, overlaying it or suffocating it with laws, properties, duties, empires” (cited in Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.12). Spinoza sees this hatefulness as the ultimate betrayal of the universe and of mankind.

^{lxxi} In the *Affect Theory Reader*, Massumi (2010) describes the ways in which events that have not yet happened qualifies as front-page news: “The next pandemic,” screams a 2005 headline in Quebec’s reputedly most sober newspaper, “does not exist yet.” Beneath, in a supersize, full-color portrait, deceptively innocent-looking, peers a chicken”. (Massumi, 2010, p. 52).

^{lxxii} Tanner refers us to the famous quotation that appears in the foreword of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: ‘You had not yet sought yourselves when you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all belief is of so little account. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only *when you have all denied me* will I return to you ...’ (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 6).

^{lxxiii} According to Tanner, Nietzsche “practised a kind of systematic ingratitude towards those great figures that meant the most to him” (Tanner cited in Nietzsche, 1979, p. x). For Nietzsche this was the way he could take them seriously without being dominated by them, without abandoning himself.

^{lxxiv} Elizabeth St. Pierre (2004) introduced me to Deleuze's concept of 'plugging in' her essay, *Deleuzian Concepts for Education: The subject undone*. The essay begins with a quote from Deleuze in which he describes reading a book as "like plugging in to an electric circuit" (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p. 7-9 cited in St. Pierre, 2004, p. 283). For St. Pierre, this mode of reading liberated her from "the pretense of signifying and 'making meaning' in the old way" (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 283). I've been plugging in ever since.

^{lxxv} *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, showcases five First Nations songlines from Australia's Western and Central Deserts. It uses over 300 paintings and photographs, objects, song, dance and multimedia to narrate the story of the Seven Sisters and their creation of the continent as they travelled from west to east. The Box Art Gallery and Museum in Plymouth was the only UK venue to host the exhibition. It is described thus:

The Seven Sisters songlines tells the saga of an endless journey made by a group of female Ancestral beings. They are pursued by a powerful mythological figure. He is, by turns, unpredictable, dangerous, driven, thwarted, desperate and tricky.

The Seven Sisters songlines are a classic narrative of male pursuit across the land – land that is itself formed by the chase. He is an Ancestral shape-shifter or sorcerer who can transform into many different guises to trick the Seven Sisters he attempts to possess. Sometimes he is the wind, a delicious fruit, a tree, or a part of him cuts loose in the form of a snake. He devises strategy after strategy to try and bring the women under his control.

(The Box, 2023).

^{lxxvi} On Wednesday 2nd February 2022, Erin Manning gave a talk to the University of Plymouth's Adventures in Posthumanism reading group entitled *Out of the Clear*. This 'poem' is made up of fragments of her words that were scribbled down as I listened.

^{lxxvii} There have been a spate of murders. Of women. Two sisters are murdered in a park. The teenage boy responsible says he had "drawn up a "contract" in his own blood with a demon to sacrifice women in return for winning the lottery." (Quinn, 2021). In Plymouth, a young girl waiting at a bus stop is abducted and murdered (Morris, 2021). No one seems to know why. And in Lincolnshire, a man pleads guilty to manslaughter after stabbing his ex-girlfriend and her autistic son to death (BBC News, 2022).

^{lxxviii} Drawing on Chandler (2014 cited in Manning 2020a, p.13) Manning describes black life as "exorbitant thought, lived beyond the shape it knows how to take, lived through a living both flexible and fugitive, in approximation of proximity" (Manning, 2020a, p. 13).

^{lxxix} Not wishing to "give more power to the dominant, historically legitimized and rationally-laden academic writing" (Rantala, Leppanen, & Koro, 2020, p. 125) Rantala, *et al.* experiment with writing practices that resist ideas in which "the autonomous subject's authorized hand writes in order to gain power to define, limit and establish the previously validated truths and knowledge" (Rantala, Leppanen, & Koro, 2020, p. 125). For them, writing is a mode of existence: "writing for living and living for writing and becoming one with our affective and embodied writing as if the writing produced our existence as much as we produced writing" (Rantala, Leppanen, & Koro, 2020, p. 121).

^{lxxx} In *Writing in Immanence*, Gale troubles the very notion of 'writer': "In asserting an animated relegation of the substantive representational iconography of the noun and the challenge of 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 cognito, in becoming, he sees clearly that "writer" is simply artifice." (Gale, 2020, p. 95). For Gale, writing just is. And writing does. And in its doings it emerges as a movement, a process that functions "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" (Gale, 2020, pp. 98-99).

^{lxxxii} At the heart of Zapata, Johnson and Kuby's article is "writing as an ethical endeavour" (Zapata, Johnson, & Kuby, 2018, p. 478). They engage with posthumanism to reframe writing as a conceptual practice. From a

posthumanist perspective, they write, “it is never simply one or the other – traditional writing or non-traditional writing – but a multiplicity and convergence of many possibilities” with the potentiality to “materialize writing as a justice-orientated construct that fashions writing and writing instruction as a practice to craft more equitable worlds” (Zapata, Johnson, & Kuby, 2018, p. 482).

^{lxxxii} In *Writing Without Labels*, hooks, transports us to the magical educational space she inhabited as a child at an all-black racially segregated school. This was a where she could dream of becoming a writer and where “no teacher had ever looked upon my love of reading and my longing to write with scorn, ridicule or contempt. No one had ever suggested that being black, female, or working class would stand in my way” (hooks, 2015, p. 12). hooks says she still struggles to articulate the shock she experience when she found herself in “white school”, “suddenly forced to study in a world of white authority figures challenging everything about the world I had known before coming into their power” (hooks, 2015, p. 13) a place where the writings of a black author would not be taken seriously.

^{lxxxiii} This was the piece of writing I produced during the workshop with Tammy Shefer and Viv Bozalek. I was struck by its sparseness. And so were they.

^{lxxxiv} In *wild methodologies for decolonial feminist justice-to come scholarship*, Shefer and Bozalek (2021) note the ways in which “Ocean/s are entangled with human past, presents and futures, which speak in particular ways to colonial, patriarchal genealogies and to the impact of humans on each other, other species and the planet” (Shefer & Bozalek, 2021, p. 2).

^{lxxxv} Shefer and Bozalek’s (2021) work recognises South African beaches as sites of privilege, infused with the hauntings of apartheid and South Africa’s colonial/settler past. In the era of Apartheid, coastal towns were cleared of people of colour. In the whites-only resorts, the black and brown-skinned folk were only permitted to sell ice-cream.

What are the spaces, places, acts and thinkings that are not scarred with “fraught political contexts of privilege and subjugation” (Shefer and Bozalek, 2021, p. 3)? In the watery depths, an archaeology of existence lies buried in the sea beds. And suspended in the currents. The Atlantic slave trade. The refugee crisis. The impacts of environmental degradation.

^{lxxxv} For Shefer and Bozalek, (2021) wild swimming offers a ‘relational ontology’ that enables them to surface and acknowledge “invisibilised everyday experiences of racist and other abuses and exclusions” (Shefer and Bozalek, 2021, p. 10). It also provides a mode of existence that refuses “everyday practices of the academy that assume or insist on disembodied, disaffect/ive/ed, speeded-up, instrumentalist, consumerist, extractive scholarship” (Shefer and Bozalek, 2021, p. 12).

^{lxxxvi} According to Sria Chatterjee,(2021) *race science* served the logic of colonialism in many ways:

The assumed superiority of Europeans legitimized the impulse to dominate. It also allowed for the dismissal of indigenous systems of cultivation and food systems as not agriculture. In other words, it justified taking over land under the assumption that indigenous communities were racially incapable of being stewards of it. This colonialist (racist) logic was the same that was used to justify slavery in the United States.

(Chatterjee, 2021, p. 6)

^{lxxxvii} On shame, Elspeth Probyn writes:

There is a shame in being highly interested in something and unable to convey it to others, to evoke the same degree of interest in them and to convince them that it is warranted. The risk of writing is always that you will fail to interest or engage readers. Disappointment in yourself looms large when you can’t quite get the words right or get the argument across. Simply put, it’s the challenge of making the writing equal to the subject being written about.

(Probyn, 2010, p. 72)

^{lxxxviii} Kathleen Stewart writes of bloom spaces.

All the world is a bloom space now. A promissory note. An allure and a threat that shows up in ordinary sensibilities of not knowing what compels, not being able to sit still, being exhausted, being left behind or being ahead of the curve, being in history, being in a predicament, being ready for something— anything— to happen, or orienting yourself to the sole goal of making sure that nothing (more) will happen. A bloom space can whisper from a half-lived sensibility that nevertheless marks whether or not you're in it. It demands collective attunement and a more adequate description of how things make sense, fall apart, become something else, and leave their marks, scoring refrains on bodies of all kinds— atmospheres, landscapes, expectations, institutions, states of acclimation or endurance or pleasure or being stuck or moving on. Affect matters in a world that is always promising and threatening to amount to something. Fractally complex, there is no telling what will come of it or where it will take persons attuned.

(Stewart, 2010)

^{lxxxix} In the prologue to *influx and efflux*, Jane Bennett (2020) says that by understating the power of things we are able to forget, ignore, deny that there is a “swarm of nonhumans are at work inside us; we are powered by a host of inner aliens, including ingested plants, animals, pharmaceuticals, and microbiomes upon which thinking itself relies (Bennett, 2020, p. xi).

^{xc} Gale and Wyatt have used the term ‘assemblage ethnography’, to describe a “mode of practice that always brings the materiality of relational space into play as a method of inquiry” (Gale and Wyatt, 2013, p. 139). This is writing that is not so much concerned with the “I” of a humanist subject but of writing in ways that can serve to “destabilise, reconstruct and deterritorialise the existing theory and practice” (Gale and Wyatt, 2013, p. 139).

^{xc} Manning (2015) says that writing needs the human to get out of the way so that its inherent *artfulness* is allowed “to do the work it can do within an ecology of practices that, while often directed by us, does not find its resting place solely in the world of the human” (Manning, 2015, p. 75).

^{xcii} In *Post-qualitative research*, Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2013) write:

And the big, risky, question is the one that enables all the rest. If we give up “human” as separate from non-human, how do we exist? Can there be there an instituting “I” left to inquire, to know? Dare we give up that “I”, that fiction – the doer before the deed? How are we anyway in entanglement? How might we become in becoming? Isn't this question affirmative? Experimental? Ethical? Insistent? Are we willing to take on this question that is so hard to think but that might enable different lives?

(Lather and St. Pierre, 2013, p.631)

^{xciii} In *The Minor Gesture*, Manning (2016) describes being in the middle of a *messy proposition* as akin to being barefoot in a pile of grapes:

In the grapes, the process is directly felt, if not quite understood in its minutiae, and, to push the image further, it will no doubt leave stains. Reading or making are as messy, as uneasy-making, as exciting as pounding the grapes, provided that we take this situatedness seriously. For it is in the midst of the field of relations, in the undercommons, that practices are at their most inventive, at their most intense. This is also, of course, the place of risk. All that work and the wine may still turn. Or just never be any good.

(Manning, 2016, p. 39)

^{xciv} This is a reference to Laurie Anderson’s incredibly moving film, *Heart of a Dog*, a cinematic journey through love, death and language (Anderson, 2016).

^{xcv} There is a yellow post-it note marking a page in *Coming to Writing*. This is the passage:

How what affects me comes into language, comes out fully worded, I don't know. I "feel" it, but it is mystery itself, which language is unlikely to let through. All that I can say is that "coming" to language is a fusion, a flowing into fusion; if there is "intervention" on my part, it's sort of "position," of activity-passive, as if I were inciting myself: "Let yourself go, let the writing flow, let yourself steep; bathe, relax, become the river, let everything go, open up, unwind, open the floodgates, let yourself roll...." A practice of greatest passivity is our way – really an active way – of getting to know things by letting ourselves be known by them. You don't seek to master. To demonstrate, explain, grasp. And then lock away in a strongbox. To pocket part of the riches of the world. But rather to transmit: to make things loved by making them known. You, in your turn, want to affect, you want to wake the dead, you want to remind people that they once wept for love, and trembled with desires, and that they were then very close to the life that they claim they've been seeking while constantly moving away ever since.

(Cixous, 1991, p. 57)

^{xcvii} As Astrida Neimanis reminds us, we are all bodies of water:

The space between our selves and our others is at once as distant as the primeval sea, yet also closer than our own skin—the traces of those same oceanic beginnings still cycling through us, pausing as this bodily thing we call "mine." Water is between bodies, but of bodies, before us and beyond us, yet also very presently this body, too. Deictics falter. Our comfortable categories of thought begin to erode. Water entangles our bodies in relations of gift, debt, theft, complicity, differentiation, relation.

(Neimanis, 2012, p. 96)

^{xcviii} Elizabeth St. Pierre insists on the need to read, especially the poststructuralists. She writes:

From reading, one also acquires those concepts that reorient thought. The concepts of poststructural scholarship can be especially useful for working in an ontology of immanence and transcendental empiricism, and it's difficult *not* to put to work, for example, Lyotard's *differend*, Foucault's *disciplinary power*, Derrida's *deconstruction*, and a blast of concepts from Deleuze and Guattari including *assemblage*, *rhizome*, *multiplicity*, *diagram*, *refrain*, *territory*, *body-without-organs*, and so on. And, of course, there are old concepts like Whitehead's *process*, Spinoza's *affect*, Nietzsche's *eternal return*, Lucretius's *atomism*, Tarde's *monadology*, Bergson's *duration*, and Hume's *external relations*. And new concepts like *vibrant matter*, *agential realism*, *actant*, *diffraction*, and *plasticity*.

(St. Pierre, 2019, p. 13)

I read the white men, but I much prefer the not-white-men.

^{xcix} At the end of *Coming to Writing* is an afterword by Deborah Jenson. She says of the essays: "The collection's coherence rests less in any one thematic than in the development of Cixous's readings of artistic sources – literature, opera, and painting – over years, and in the way her writing changes according to the nature of her readings" (Cixous, 1991, p. 184).

^c Of *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway (2016) says:

Staying with the Trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and noplaces, entangled and worldly. Alone in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and we

succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude. Neither despair nor hope is tuned to the senses, to mindful matter, to material semiotics, to mortal earthlings in thick copresence.

(Haraway, 2016, p.4)

^{ci} Haraway (2016) names the present epoch the Chutulucene after the spider, Pimoa Cthulhu. It is the name she prefers to the Anthropocene, as it is a name that does not so much describe what is as conjure up the promise of what *might yet be*: “[M]aking a small change in the biologist’s taxonomic spelling, from Cthulhu to chthulu, with renamed Pimoa chtgulu I propose a name for elsewhere and else when that was, still is, and might yet be: the Chtulucene” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31).

^{cii} As Haraway (2016) says:

It matters with which ways of living and dying we cast our lot rather than others. It matters not just to human beings, but also to those many critters across taxa which and whom we have subjected to exterminations, extinctions, genocides and prospects of futurelessness. Like it or not, we are the string figure game of caring for and with precarious worldings made terribly more precarious by fossil-burning man making new fossils as rapidly as possible in orgies of the Anthropocene Capitalocene. Diverse human and nonhuman players are necessary in every fiber of the tissues of the urgently needed Chtulucene story.

(Haraway, 2016, p. 55)

^{ciii} Don McCullin (2021) travelled all over the world documenting the horrors and harsh realities of the 20th century. His images are stark. Brutal. Poverty. Deprivation. Starvation. Violence. Torture. Genocide. A catalogue of the crimes and repercussions of colonialism. But the lady in the headscarf made me smile. The wry smile as she is carried away. A true space crone.

^{civ} In his writings on Spinoza, Deleuze includes a quote from Henry Miller:

You see, to me it seems as though the artists, the scientists, the philosophers were grinding lenses. It’s all a grand preparation for something that never comes off. Someday the lens is going to be perfect and then we’re all going to see clearly, see what a staggering, wonderful, beautiful world it is...

(Henry Miller cited in Deleuze, 1988, p.14)

^{cv} Writing on Spinoza, Deleuze (1988) asks: “Why are the people so deeply irrational? Why are they proud of their own enslavement? Why do they fight “for” their bondage as if it were their freedom?” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 10).

^{cvi} In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Haraway (1991) says of writing: “Contests for the meaning of writing are a major form of contemporary political struggle. Releasing the play of writing is deadly serious.” (Haraway, 1991, p. 174)

^{cvii} In *The Politics of Affect*, Brian Massumi writes of the paralysis many of us experience when we consider the enormity of the challenges we face:

Globally it’s a very pessimistic affair, with economic inequalities increasing year by year, with health and sanitation levels steadily decreasing in many regions, with the global effects of environmental deterioration already being felt, with conflicts among nations and peoples apparently only getting more intractable, leading to mass displacements of workers and refugees ... It seems such a mess it can be paralyzing”

(Massumi, 2015, p. 1-2)

^{cviii} Massumi’s refers to *the butterfly effect* as the tiny acts and interventions that might just have the potential to make a difference in the world (Massumi, 2015).

^{cix} Jane Speedy, who supervised Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt’s collaborative PhD, experimented with the constraint of creating life stories that were no more and no less than 50 words in length.

^{cx} Manning and Massumi (2014, p.11), describe the thesis as a *neurotypical affordance*, which lends itself “more “naturally” to the kind of cross-checking that is fact-finding, rather than for story-making in the poetic sense”.

^{cx}ⁱ In *Coming to Writing*, Cixous (1991) writes:

First of all, the song of the mother the lay of the soul, I will never grow tired of them, enter, my love, feed me, my souls thirst for your voices, now I am overflowing, now the outpouring, I flow out of myself in rivers without banks; then, later on, you emerge from your own sea, you reach a shore. You make the break. Then, if you want to write books, you equip yourself, you trim, you filter, you go back over yourself, severe test, you tread on your own flesh, you no longer fly, you no longer flow, your survey, you garden, you dig, ah, you clean and assemble, this is the hour of man. You wind things up, you pull the strings, you tighten the thread, you execute the dream work in a state of vigilance, you cheat, condense, compile, you distill. And now what will you name it?

You dream: “The table is round. I speak louder and louder to drown out the noise, I piss harder and harder, I speak louder and louder, it takes on the force of a waterfall, hide it, I speak more and more firmly, a hydrant gushing great streams, this discourse is philosophical, hide it, what excess, all eyes on me, a pissertation, what will the outcome be?” Dreamed.

(Cixous, 1991, p. 54)

^{cx}ⁱⁱ In the introduction to *Coming to Writing*, Susan Suleiman writes:

Ask any fashionable Parisian intellectual these days about feminism or feminist theory – let alone, heaven help you, “new French feminisms” – and you will be met with a pitying stare. “My dear, where have you been? Don’t you know that no one does that anymore?” Nothing is more embarrassing, to a fashionable Parisian intellectual, than to be caught quoting last season’s watchwords. Feminism, like Marxism, structuralism, poststructuralism (or like the narrow striped tie?) is definitely *passé*. No one – that is, no one fashionable, no one *dans le vent*, in the wind, knowing which way the wind blows – “does” it any more.

(Cixous, 1991, p. vii)

^{cx}ⁱⁱⁱ Of the word, mother, Cixous writes:

I write “mother”. What is the connection between mother and woman and daughter? I write “woman.” What is the difference? This is what my body teaches me: first of all, be wary of names; they are nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from being mixed up with each other, without which the Society of Cacapitalist Siphoning would collapse. But, my friend, take the time to unnamed yourself for a moment. Haven’t you been the father of your sister? Haven’t you as a wife, been the husband of your spouse, and perhaps the brother of your brother, or hasn’t your brother been your big sister? ... As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and with joy, the words diverge, you are no longer enclosed in the maps of social constructions, you no longer walk between walls, meanings flow, the world of railways explodes, the air circulates, desires shatter images, passions are no longer chained to genealogies, life is no longer nailed down to generational time, love is no longer shunted off on the course decided upon by the administration of public alliances. And you are returned to your innocences, your possibilities, the abundance of your intensities.

(Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, 1991, pp. 49-50)

^{cxiv} Clare Colebrook says that “Once a term becomes expressive, rather than creative, of identity it becomes majoritarian”. (Colebrook, 2002, p. 104). It’s how I feel about the term posthumanism, sometimes. But, like Haraway I am a fan of the rich and generative work that has been done under its banner. Haraway says it is important not to give up on things that have lost their shine, or that have got too shiny: “part of how I work is not to walk away when a term gets dirty and gets used in all these appropriate and inappropriate ways because of its celebrity” (Haraway, 2000, p.136).

^{cxv} Luce Irigaray says:

Women do not obey the same sexual economy as men ... their relationship to fluids and solids, to matter and form, to the sense of touch through skin and mucous membrane, to symmetry, to repetition, and so on, are all different... women do not have the same relationship to entropy, to homeostasis, to release. Their internal regulation is much stronger and it maintains them a constant, irreversible process of growth.

(Irigaray, 1994, p.25)

^{cxvi} Carole Taylor, Susanne Gannon, Sarah Bridges-Rhoads, Hanna Ellen Guttorm, Susan Cannon among others have written on messy nature of knowledge production. In *Objects, bodies and space: Gender and embodied practices of mattering in the classroom*, Taylor (2013) writes:

in its undoing of linearity, and in highlighting, “knowledgeing” as a messy multiplicity, always mediated through the material body of the researcher, a diffractive methodology is valuable in enabling us to notice, pinpoint and perhaps value more openly than we usually might, how that which is utterly provisional (knowledge) is smoothed, soothed and straightjacketed into a “finished” academic article which, whether in its solid paper materiality or virtual online im/materiality, offers.... a “final” count.

(Taylor, 2013, p. 697)

^{cxvii} Rosi Braidotti argues:

To be worthy of our times, we need to be pragmatic: we need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way. We already live in permanent states of transition, hybridisation and nomadic mobility, in emancipated, post-feminist, multi-ethnic societies with high degrees of technological mediation which, however, have not ensured justice for all, or resolved enduring patterns of inequality. These are neither simple nor linear events, but rather are multi-layered and internally contradictory social phenomena. They combine elements of ultra-modernity with splinters of neo-archaism: high-tech advances and neo-primitivism, which defy the logic of excluded middle. We therefore need great methodological creativity to cope with these challenges.

(Braidotti, 2013a, p. 1)

This quotation was instrumental in my early thinkings and doings and formed the basis for my project proposal and transfer document. But I kept coming back to the question, ‘*What is a methodology that is worthy of our times?*’ For Braidotti, the challenge is to resist the “humanistic arrogance of continuing to place Man at the centre of world history” because the classic ideal that ‘Man’ symbolises is still very much the white, able-bodied, handsome European male who considers himself to be “the moral guardian of the world and as the motor of human evolution” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Humanities*, 2013, p. 3).

^{cxviii} In her talk, Lulu described an art project that became a book, *Twice the Speed of Dark*. The writing ‘mugged her’ she said. She had noticed how some deaths go unnoticed, unremarked upon, and others do not. Listening

to her made me think of a question that has haunted me for almost 10 years now: *who will be human and who will not?* (Butler, 2004). Lulu's book is a collection of memorials to dead who, because they are 'other', because they are deemed not to matter, remain faceless and nameless: Her writing is a eulogy to disposable bodies; to Afghans and Syrians, to Iraqis and Kosovans, to teenage girls from children's homes and to women murdered by their husbands or partners. This is an extract:

There had been a bomb in a distant market place. One of many bombs, the deaths caused by this event barely noticeable amongst the dreadful losses that filled the news every day. But a filament snagged and slowed the story down. Somehow that detail caught her; a market place, perhaps the most domestic public space there is. People shopping for food, plastic buckets, scarves, aluminium pans. Markets all over the world selling plastic buckets and aluminium pans. A place providing easy acquisition of the humbler tools of life; domestic wares, phone parts and gaudy cases, vinyl handbags, potatoes, eggs, cabbages. Mothers buying an evening meal, teenagers shopping for the excitingly new and obligingly affordable. A man buying a bucket so that he could clean his house. These ordinary people doing ordinary things, they would be the dead.

(Unbound, 2021)

^{cxix} The lady from the Victoria and Albert came to Plymouth to talk about curation. A curator, she tells us, is a keeper, a collector, a researcher, a communicator and a collaborator. The curator decides what to display. What is seen and what is not.

^{cxx} Kathleen Stewart writes about the power of the ordinary to affect and to be affecting. Ordinary affects, are encounters that "pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds... The question they beg is not what they might mean in an order of representations, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). Drawing on Stewart, Jonathan Wyatt and Alicia Youngblood Jackson say of ordinary affects: they are life, they are breath, they animate the everyday "surging, simmering, shuddering, flowing" (Wyatt and Jackson, 2016, p. 1).

^{cxxi} On *enabling constraints*, Manning (2016) writes:

A procedure is always connected to a constraint. At its best, this constraint is enabling. It asks of habit that it activate its conditions of possibility. From here, the procedure pushes possibility to its limit, excavating at the edges where possibility and potential meet.

(Manning, 2016, p.88)

^{cxxii} Describing a rush hour commute from the subway to the office, Manning and Massumi speak of the stability of the sidewalk within the ebb and flow of temporary openings. It is not the sidewalk that gets you to the office, but its "ability to refeature in experience from moment to moment is an enabling condition for the ephemerality of the openings" (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 10). This thesis is my sidewalk. It walks by my side. It is a site of stability but not of stasis.

^{cxxiii} Of prose and poetry, Le Guin (1989) says:

The borderline between prose and poetry is one of those fog-shrouded minefields where the wary explorer gets blown to bits before ever seeing anything clearly. It is full of barbed wire and the stumps of dead opinions.

(Le Guin, 1989, p. 104).

^{cxxiv} In her essay, *Where do you get your ideas from?* Le Guin (1989) writes:

If you haven't learned how to do something, the people who have may seem to be magicians, possessors of mysterious secrets. In a fairly simple art, such as making pie crust, there are certain teachable "secrets" of method that lead almost infallibly to good results; but in any complex art, such as housekeeping, piano playing, clothes-making, or story writing, there are so many variables, so many "secrets", some teachable and some not, that you can learn them only by methodical, repeated, long-continued practice – in other words by work.

(Le Guin, 1989, p. 193)

^{cxxv} In Le Guin's attempt to describe the writing process, she says:

The process may not involve ideas in the sense of intelligible thoughts; it may well not even involve words. It may be a matter of mood, resonances, mental glimpses, voices, emotions, visions, dreams, anything. It is different for every writer, and in many of us it is different every time. It is extremely difficult to talk about, because we have very little terminology for such processes."

(Le Guin, 1989, p. 193)

^{cxxvi} As Le Guin says: [s]he lacks rigor. To which I would reply, at least [s]he isn't rigid" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 109).

^{cxxvii} On archives, Springgay, Truman and MacLean (2020) write:

Archives as repositories of culture and knowledge, are closely linked to colonial power, control, hegemony, and conquest. In recognizing the limitations and problems of conventional archives, scholars and artists offer counter-archiving as a method of interrogating what constitutes an archive and the selective practices that continuously erase particular subjects. Unlike static, stable, and linear colonial archives, counter-archives are grounded in accountability and reciprocity. Similarly, the anarchive is concerned with what it can do in the present-future. As such, anarchiving is less a thing, then a process or an action.

(Springgay, Truman, and MacLean, 2020, p. 897)

^{cxxviii} Ursula Guin explains the carrier bag theory of fiction thus:

This theory not only explains large areas of theoretical obscurity and avoids large areas of theoretical nonsense (inhabited largely by tigers, foxes, other highly territorial mammals); it also grounds me, personally, in human culture in a way I never felt grounded before. So long as culture was explained as originating from and elaborating upon the use of long, hard objects for sticking, bashing, and killing, I never thought that I had, or wanted, any particular share in it. ("What Freud mistook for her lack of civilization is woman's lack of loyalty to civilization," Lillian Smith observed.) The society, the civilization they were talking about, these theoreticians, was evidently theirs; they owned it, they liked it; they were human, fully human, bashing, sticking, thrusting, killing. Wanting to be human too, I sought for evidence that I was; but if that's what it took, to make a weapon and kill with it, then evidently I was either extremely defective as a human being, or not human at all.

That's right, they said. What you are is a woman. Possibly not human at all, certainly defective. Now be quiet while we go on telling the Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero.

Go on, say I, wandering off towards the wild oats, with Oo Oo in the sling and little Oom carrying the basket. You just go on telling how the mammoth fell on Boob and how Cain fell on Abel and how the bomb fell on Nagasaki and how the burning jelly fell on the villagers and how the missiles will fall on the Evil Empire, and all the other steps in the Ascent of Man.

If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and

then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solid container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again--if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time.

(Le Guin, 1989, pp. 167-168)

^{cxix} For Lorde, what is needed is an “interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences” for “[D]ifference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged” (Lorde, 2019, p. 104). Difference is not to be merely tolerated but celebrated as a “fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” (Lorde, 2019, p. 104).

^{cxx} In 1981, Nayak wrote an introduction to a special issue of *Critical Social Policy*. In it, she highlighted the following key areas of concern:

- Public expenditure cuts . . . wages and conditions of work of public sector workers
- The ‘Welfare State’ . . . showing signs of severe structural strain
- Mounting unemployment and further attacks on the public sector
- The promise once offered by the Welfare State – caught up in the assumption that society looks after its members ‘from the cradle to the grave’ is now in retreat
- Deepening of the recession
- The failure of social democracy either to restore growth to declining capitalism or else allay political economic unrest
- Right-wing governments embracing the virtues of unrestrained capitalism, and charity and voluntarism in social welfare as both antidote and alternative to the state social welfare apparatus.

(Nayak, 2020, p. 180)

In 2020, Nayak, says that what has changed is that this old agenda focused on neoliberalism and failed to address the “diverse experiences across the globe; racism; (neo)colonialism, displacement, dislocation, migration; disabling environments; gender; sexuality; and environmentalism”. As she argues, “actions to end social injustice need to move beyond naval gazing reiterations of the problem. Instead, formulations of alternatives are required, which are not limited by prescribed horizons of imagination, because *‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’* (Lorde, 1979, p. 112; emphasis in original cited in Nayak, 2020, p. 181).

^{cxxi} The words, *No New Worlds* lit up in a random sequence as part of a site specific installation called Speedwell that was created to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the year the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth. The artwork stood as a challenge to the notion that there ever was a ‘New World’, reminding us that the people on board the Mayflower made their home in country already populated with indigenous peoples (StillMoving, 2020).

^{cxxii} Sarah E. Truman describes the *citation economy* as a hustle, where even being cited to be critiqued is better than not being cited at all (Truman, 2022, p. 61). In her citation interstice, Truman refers to Kathryn Yusoff’s book, *A billion black anthropocenes, or none*, to remind us that citations are a form of *resource extraction*.

^{cxxiii} On categorization of human/nonhuman/inhuman matter, Kathryn Yusoff writes:

The human and its subcategory, the inhuman, are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and material practices of extraction, which is to say that the categorization of matter is a spatial execution, of place, land, and person cut from relation through geographic displacement (and relocation through forced settlement and transatlantic slavery). That is, racialization belongs to a material categorization of the division of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert.

Extractable matter must be both passive (awaiting extraction and possessing of properties) and able to be activated through the mastery of white men.

(Yusoff, 2018, pp. 2-3)

^{cxxxiv} Jeanette Winterson's book, *Sexing the Cherry*, was meant to start with a pineapple. But as Winterson says, "stories have a way of changing the story" (Winterson, 2014, p. vii).

^{cxxxv} In Angela Carter's *Book of Fairy Tales*, she describes how the oral tradition of story telling, what she calls the "perennially refreshed entertainment of the poor" (Carter, 2005, p. xi), was pinned to the page and profited from by men. In their bid to "establish the cultural unity of the German people via its common traditions and language" (Carter, 2005, p. xvii), the Brothers Grimm took the fabrications of Mother Goose and turned them into a book which went on to become the most widely circulated in Germany (except, of course for the bible) for over a century. Once printed, the stories were no longer referred to as *Old Wives Tales* a term that Carter says - that "allots the art of storytelling to women at the exact same time as it takes all value from it" (Carter, 2005, p. xii).

^{cxxxvi} Le Guin says that written text enables reproducibility, but also induces a kind of 'nonsensory understanding' (Le Guin U. K., 1989, p. 183), a means to evade the ear and detour the body. The problem with written text, is that it "can be read as pure sign, as meaning alone. When we start doing that, the word stopped being an event" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 183).

^{cxxxvii} Sarah E. Truman (2022) ends her book, *Feminist Speculations and the Practice of Research-Creation*, with some thoughts on the hyphen. She writes:

a hyphen is a forced milieu. A place where two different logics or practices are brought together to create a third. In this milieu, different movements, ideals or entities become co-implicated while still maintaining their difference: affecting while also affected.

(Truman, 2022, p. 158)

^{cxxxviii} In *The Fisherwoman's Daughter*, Le Guin reminds us of Jo in *Little Women* and her struggles to be and be seen as a writer. Criticised by Professor Bhaer for "*soiling her soul*", Jo burns her work and *corks up her inkstand*. Unable not to, Jo eventually goes back to writing, which she does both well and successfully until Professor Bhaer returns and marries her; "evidently the only way to make her stop" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 216).

^{cxxxix} On women's lives, Le Guin writes:

In our society, women have lived, and have been despised for living, the whole side of life that includes and takes responsibility for helplessness, weakness, and illness, for the irrational and irreparable, for all that is obscure, passive, uncontrolled, animal, unclean – the valley of the shadow, the deep, the depths of life.

(Le Guin, 1989, pp. 116-7)

^{cxl} In *The Wonder of Data*, Maggie MacLure famously describes the 'glow' of animate data:

But there is, I suggest, another potentiality associated with data, beyond and beside their capacity for mute surrender to the colonialist administrations of social science. This potentiality can be felt on occasions where something—perhaps a comment in an interview, a fragment of a field note, an anecdote, an object, or a strange facial expression—seems to reach out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data, to grasp us. These moments confound the industrious, mechanical search for meanings, patterns, codes, or themes; but at the same time, they exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought.

(MacLure, 2013b, p. 228)

^{cxli} Princess Alice was the late Duke of Edinburgh's mother (Wikipedia, 2021a) and, although she founded a nursing order of nuns known as the Christian Sisterhood of Martha and Mary, she reputedly had a penchant for cigarettes and gambling.

^{cxlii} On the Anthropocene, Rosi Braidotti writes: "The fact that our geological era is known as the 'anthropocene' stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by anthropos and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 66).

^{cxliii} The Now Stone by Katrina Parker was exhibited as part of the Elizabeth Price Curates exhibition at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester in June 2016. The text reads:

And he wonders what type of stone now will be a few million years down the line. Contemporary society in its entirety, everything dead mashed up and petrified to form a layer of stone characterised by the entire social space currently expended. As he considers its physical specificity, our youth wipes chalk dust from his hands and thinks the now stone will be made of plastic bags, crisp packets and polystyrene, takeaway boxes collapsed and compressed together. On his mobile he browses through the accretion of Wikipedia facts and finds a list of materials made in the last 500 years; these he assumes will further comprise the now stone, including metal ore, soda-based glass, metallic zinc, crucible steel, hydraulic cement, acid battery, thermocouple, metallic aluminium, vulcanized rubber, silver-nitrate, steel selenium waffles, cellophane, Bakelite, stainless steel, pyrex, synthetic rubber, nylon, Teflon, barium titanate, polyethylene polymers with metallic catalysts and silicon solar cells. The new stone will be a fucked-up sparkly kind of form, maybe some type of crystal he reckons as he imagines stacks of fossilized liquid crystal, display units fused with optical fibers. Beyond the wiki list he's thinking of what else might be specific to now's sensuous complexity. Materials that are prominent in our time that would lend peculiar texture and pattern to its contours like curious deposits of botox and congealed seams of suntan lotion dotted with clots of sun block, lustrous globules of hair gel squeezing through fluorescent and cathode ray tubes twisted in miles of coaxial or fibre optic cables, worming into yellowcake uranium seasoned with polonium. Handwriting is dying but there could be a distinct monochrome seam comprised of qwerty keyboard lettering merged and rendered senseless alongside inky cartridges and random now things like the lycra they use in skinny jeans. He guesses there'll be traces of breast implants, tampons and nappies, ossified conglomerates of incontinence pads and debased masses of solidified condoms caked together with excreted contraceptive pills.

(Parker, 2016)

^{cxliv} I remember listening to Clara Amfo her on the radio, in the wake of George Floyd's death. As she spoke out about what it means to be black, her voice cracked:

Stuck at the news of yet another brutalised black body. Knowing how the world enjoys blackness and seeing what happened to George. We, black people, get the feeling that people want our culture but they do not want us. In other words, you want my talent but you don't want me.

(Anfo cited in Heawood, 2021, p.13).

^{cxlv} In February, Michaela Coel, the British screenwriter and actress, was not included in the Golden Globe nominations for her brilliant television series, *'I May Destroy You'*. Coel, created, wrote, co-directed, and executive produced the show. She is extraordinarily talented. She is also black. Female. And wrote about male violence. In June 2020, Lucy Mangan reviewed the series. She writes:

In light of current events I feel the need to make a small point before reviewing the new drama written by, starring and in part directed by Michaela Coel, who is a black woman, born in London to Ghanaian parents. Specifically, I mean the killing of a black man, George Floyd, at the hands of police,

and the consequent mass protests against the individual and systemic racism that enabled his and many more similar deaths across the world.

This is going to be a rave review, because *I May Destroy You* (BBC One) is an astonishing, beautiful, thrilling series – a sexual-consent drama if you want the one-line pitch, but so, so much more than that. It works on every level and succeeds by any metric you care to throw at it. As such there will be people who will insist that my (and implicitly any other) praise for it is a result of the current febrile atmosphere.

But they are racist and wrong. Up here, at the top of the piece, is my best chance of countering the pollution they will introduce to what should be an unadulterated paean of praise to the superlatively talented Coel's creation. This should, and I hope will, be a springboard to even greater artistic freedom and power in the industry for her.

(Mangan, 2020)

^{cxlvi} Haraway (1997) asks

How is visibility possible? For whom, by whom, and of whom? What remains invisible, to whom, and why? For those peoples who are excluded from the visualizing apparatuses of the disciplinary regimes of modern power-knowledge networks, the averted gaze can be as deadly as the all-seeing panopticon that surveys the subjects of the biopolitical state.

(Haraway, 1997, p.202).

Like Haraway, I am nervous of writing about blackness. My whiteness, my profession, my middle-aged, middle-class privilege, mean I write "behind a disavowal, an incantation, an alibi, a tic or symptom" (Haraway, 1997, p.214). But as Haraway (1997, p.213) argues, "[r]ace is a fracturing trauma in the body politic of the nation – and in the mortal bodies of its people. Race kills, liberally and unequally; race privileges, unspeakably and abundantly."

^{cxlvii} Of compost, Haraway says,

And in compost, we're at the table with, including those who will return us to the Earth in our dying. If you're in compost, the questions of finitude and mortality are prominent, not in some kind of depressive or tragic way, but those who will return our flesh to the Earth are in the making of compost.

(Haraway, 2017, cited in Franklin, p. 51)

^{cxlviii} In his book, *Brown Baby*, Nikesh Shukla (2021) explores themes of racism, feminism, parenting and our shifting ideas of home. His memoir is dedicated to the author's two young daughters and serves as an act of remembrance to the grandmother they never had a chance to meet. Through love, grief, food and fatherhood, Shukla shows how it's possible to believe in hope.

How do you find hope and even joy in a world that is racist, sexist and facing climate crisis? How do you prepare your children for it, but also fill them with all the boundlessness and eccentricity that they deserve and that life has to offer?

(Shukla, 2021)

^{cxlix} The song *Brown Baby* has been sung by many black artists, including Nina Simone:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBfO4-PVQwA>

cl In her talk, at the Adventures in Posthumanism reading group, Leonie Hampton described her family's attempts to clear her mother's house, which had become overwhelmed by the objects she hoarded. At the start of her presentation, she asked us to guess how many women were murdered during the European witch trials. Two million, I ventured. Nine, she says. Available here: <http://www.leoniehampton.com/mend>

^{cli} In her vimeo talk recorded at the Vera List Center, Jane Bennett describes hoarders as people preternaturally attuned to things, people who experience an increased sensitivity to their affect. Available to watch here: <https://vimeo.com/29535247>

^{clii} On the schizophrenic nature of advanced capitalism, Braidotti (2013a) writes: “This logic triggers a proliferation and a vampiric consumption of quantitative options. Many of them have to do with cultural ‘others’, from fusion cooking to ‘world music’” (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 58).

^{cliii} On writing up, Maggie MacLure (2013a) says: “in the pedestrian process of ‘writing up’ a piece of research where something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over, effecting a kind of quantum leap that moves the writing/writer to somewhere unpredictable. On those occasions agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 661).

^{cliv} MacLure says: “Representation serves the ‘dogmatic image of thought’ as that which categorises and judges the world through the administration of good sense and common sense, dispensed by the autonomous, rational and well-intentioned individual, according to truth and error” (MacLure, 2013a, p.660).

^{clv} In *What if it Didn't Begin and End with Containment*, Manning asks: “What if the skin were not a container? What if the skin were not a limit at which self begins and ends? What if the skin were a porous, topological surfacing of myriad potential strata that field the relation between different milieus, each a multiplicity of insides and outsides?” (Manning, 2009, p. 34).

Skin. Black skin. Brown skin. White skin. Not an envelope or container that holds a coherent self, a well-contained human (Manning, p. 34), but a “co-constitutive strata of matter, content, form, substance and expression. The self is not contained. It is a fold of immanent expressibility” (Manning, 2009, p. 35).

^{clvi} Harvey’s (2016) lyrics conjure up the horrors of war through the things left behind:

This is the Ministry Of Defence
Stairs and walls are all that's left

Mortar holes let through the air
Kids do the same thing everywhere

They've sprayed graffiti in Arabic
And balanced sticks in human shit

This is the Ministry Of Remains
Fizzy drinks cans and magazines

Broken glass, a white jawbone
Syringes, razors, a plastic spoon

Human hair, a kitchen knife
And a ghost of a girl who runs and hides
Scratched in the wall in biro pen
This is how the world will end

There's the bus depot to the right
Levelled like a building site

Those are the children's cries from the dark
These are the words written under the arch
Scratched in the wall in biro pen
This is how the world will end

clvii “The power we affirm through joy is the power of a life beyond our specific self” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 131)

clviii According to Braidotti (2013a), “In academic culture ... the critique of anthropocentrism has even more shattering implications than the transformative agenda of posthumanism. The post-anthropocentric turn, linked to the compounded impacts of globalisation and technology-driven forms of mediation, strikes the human at his/her heart and shifts the parameters that used to define *Anthropos*” (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 5).

clix I take this term from Braidotti (2013a), who describes *disposability* thus:

By organising differences on a hierarchical scale of decreasing worth, this humanist subject defined himself as much by what he excluded from as by what he included in his self-representation. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, all of them equating masculinity and European civilisation, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart: irrationality, immorality, femininity and non-westernness. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as the ‘others’. These are the sexualised, racialised, and naturalised others, who are reduced to the less-than-human status of disposable bodies.

(Braidotti, 2013a, p.2).

clx “Cephalopods are extraordinary creatures. Their bodies more fold than form, they are shapeshifters in all senses, their modes of appearance in defiance of the logic of representation. Cephalopods camouflage; they entertain; they do both at once, the movement of their colours adrift” (Manning, 2020a, p. 307).

clxi In her book, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Saskia Sassen (2014) demonstrates in case study after case study how advanced capitalism works to exclude. Its schizophrenic logic is not just dismantling with great speed and brutality the Keynesian notion of building a just society, but is creating the conditions for precisely the opposite to flourish. For Sassen, “there has been a strengthening of the dynamics that expel people from the economy and from society, and these dynamics are now hardwired into the normal functioning of these spheres” (Sassen, 2014, p. 76). Though the Greek economy appears to have stabilised, perhaps even begun to recover, Sassen argues that this is a ‘reality’ predicated on the millions of civil servants who lost their jobs and the thousands of small businesses that failed. As she notes, “[w]hat is left out of these measures showing a return to some growth is that a significant proportion of households, enterprises and places have been expelled from that economic space that is being measured. The expelled become invisible to formal measurements, and thereby their negative drag on growth rates is neutralized” (Sassen, 2014, p. 37).

Sassen shows how the skewed economics of the 21st century, have impacted on the refugee crisis, the Greek economic meltdown, the commodification of land, the subprime mortgage scandal, and the privatisation of the prison system What cuts across each of these sites where these new regimes of power are being played out is a single organizing proposition that has held sway since the 1980s:

Western governments, central bankers, the IMF, and kindred international institutions now speak of the need to reduce excess government debt, excess social welfare programs, excess regulation. This is the language of today’s key order-making institutions in the West and increasingly elsewhere. It carries the implicit promise that if we could reduce these excesses we would get back to normal, back to the easier days of the postwar era. But this promise disguises the extent to which that world is truly gone – and the extent to which, whatever national governments might say, too many corporate economic actors do not want it back. They want a world in which governments spend far less on social services or on the needs of neighbourhood economies or small firms, and much more on the deregulations and infrastructures that corporate economic sectors want.

(Sassen, 2014, p. 213)

clxii In *The Wonder of Data*, Maggie Maclure (2013b) writes of the materiality of wonder:

The cabinet of curiosities might seem a rather static figure for the open dynamism of becoming and the wonder of data. But the contents of the baroque cabinet are alive with the contradictions of classification and curiosity. Striving toward taxonomic rigor and completion, in the carefully labeled boxes, drawers, and arrays of natural history specimens, yet always pulled toward the contrary pole of singularity, wonders and marvels that lie on the boundaries of knowledge: the dragon's horn, the misshapen fetus, the stuffed crocodile hanging from the ceiling.

(MacLure, 2013b, p. 229)

^{clxiii} *Black Atlantis* was presented by Ayesha Hameed at the Plymouth Art Weekender on 5th October 2018. Her performance was based on the story of the 'ghost ship' found drifting on the Atlantic Ocean with its cargo of desiccated bodies:

On April 29, 2006, a twenty-foot boat was spotted off the south-eastern coast of Barbados. On board, eleven bodies were found by the coastguards, preserved and desiccated by the sun and salt water. The ghost ship was adrift for four months on the Atlantic Ocean. It set sail on Christmas day in Praia in the Cape Verde Islands, full of migrants from Senegal, Guinea Bissau, and Gambia, en route to the Canary Islands. Each of these men paid £890 for their place on the boat. Four months later the boat was found on the coast of Barbados.

This is an inadequate telling of this story that draws on the materials and tools at hand to make sense of the complicity of weather, ocean currents and state violence in the journey of this ship. Hovering between the film and the essay form is a questioning of the adequacy of the measuring of histories and affects connected to crossing, languages to make evident the materiality of the sea, and the both measurable and immeasurable horror contained in the figure of the ghost ship.

(Hameed, 2018)

^{clxiv} The speaker was talking about Barad's concept of the *agential cut*. Barad says of an agential realist account that "what is important about causal intra-actions is that "marks are left on bodies": bodies differently materialize as particular patterns of the world as a result of the specific cuts and reconfigurings that are enacted. Cause and effect emerge through intra-actions. Agential intra-actions are causal enactments" (Barad, 2007, p. 176).

^{clxv} The relentless flow of migrants and refugees coupled with the sheer indifference of other European countries to Greece's plight, has taken its toll. In Athens, the streets reek of desperation. Of resignation. Of grinding, relentless misery. This is the reality of what Sassen describes as a defacto redefinition of "the economy" whereby measurements of its health and prosperity increasingly (and purposefully) fail to include the unemployed and the poor. The economy is smaller, more presentable, aided by the expulsion of those who have lost everything and the absence of those who have the means to move on. It is also the product of 'refugee warehousing': a term used by human rights activists to describe "the multiyear impact of such restricted mobility, enforced idleness, and dependency in camps or other segregated settlements" (Sassen, 2014, p. 56).

^{clxvi} *Exodus* was shown on the BBC in 2016. The series documents the terrifying journeys undertaken by migrants fleeing their homelands. Episodes are available here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09dh6jn>

^{clxvii} At the 2015 Summer Institute of Qualitative Research at Manchester Metropolitan University, the abstracts for the three parallel sessions that no one attended read:

Catherine Conlon/Patti Lather/Tanya Long
Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

An Operatic Voice

Lather argues that the “post” move entails a shift from an epistemology of human consciousness to a focus on the limits of our knowing and asks what voice looks like under these conditions. Conlon’s research with women concealing pregnancy positions voice as one constituent in a co-constitutive intra-actionist ontology placing voice between ‘in trouble’ and ‘of use’. Engaging with Creative Arts Practice Conlon’s collaboration with composer Dr Evangelia Rigaki (Trinity College Dublin) and poet Prof Herbert (Newcastle University) to translate women’s concealing pregnancy narratives into miniature Opera’s performed in a confession box develops this critique. Tanya Long (Texas State University) as Opera practitioner considers how as narrative moves toward performance, the singer is positioned in the space between – the space where past and “post” co-exist. In this session Lather, Conlon and Long will discuss Opera as a medium through which to consider the place of ‘voice’ in qualitative research.

Helen Bowstead and Christie Pritchard
Plymouth University, UK

It looks like my gran’s house: an exploration of ‘thing power’

The political project of the Writing Café is to create a communal space where staff and students can talk and write together, thereby helping to challenge notions of ‘novice’ and ‘expert’ and to re-frame what it means to ‘write in the disciplines’. Drawing on Jane Bennett’s notion of ‘thing power’, this session will explore the potential for alternative learning spaces to “encourage a more intelligent and sustainable engagement with vibrant matter and lively things” (Bennett, 2010:viii). We will show how interacting with the ‘nostalgic’ artefacts that have (mysteriously) found their way into the Writing Café has fostered critical dialogue around the processes of knowledge production, and delegates will be asked to consider the ways in which the ‘post-human’ can encourage an engagement with collaborative writing pedagogies and reframe ‘traditional’ (academic) writing practices “in terms of change, flows, mobilities, multiplicities, assemblages materialities and processes” (Taylor and Ivinson, 2013).

Sarah E. Truman
University of Toronto Canada

Nietzschean Entanglements

Intratextual Entanglements is a collaborative text/art book/philosophy “research-creation” project I co-ordinated between 33 artists and theorists in 2014-2015 (Manning and Massumi, 2014). The ‘base text’ of the project was assembled from two of Friedrich Nietzsche’s books: *Ecce Homo*, and *The Joyful Wisdom* (*Gay Science*). The text was sent to each of the participants to entangle with using whichever manner, form, or ‘material’ they chose. The entangled texts were then sent on to other participants for further artistic and marginal entanglements. The aim of my project was to explore, from a new materialist perspective, how diffractive and material readings/writings not only affect a text’s meaning but produce new meanings and a new ‘text’ with each encounter. The texts began as words printed on pieces of paper, yet many of them have transformed into different media. My challenge currently is how not to fall back into symptomatic reading, analysis and coding of the various texts; I’m considering whether a non-representational approach is a suitable way forward with this project.

^{clxviii} The Smiths were famously photographed outside Salford Lads Cub:

<https://i.guim.co.uk/img/static/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2012/3/6/1331044471335/Recreation-of-Smiths-Salf-001.jpg?width=700&quality=85&auto=format&fit=max&s=9a9659925e5e7b74d944b45bfea49cc6>

^{clxix} “When one is thinking, one is also thanking because as one thinks one is always developing ideas from the others one has read or been influenced by” (Goodeve, cited in Haraway, 2000, p. 22).

^{clxx} “Movement always happens behind the thinker’s back, or in the moment when [s]he blinks” (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p.1)

^{clxxi} Of his own approach to study, Deleuze writes “It was on Spinoza that I worked the most seriously according to the norms of the history of philosophy – but he more than any other gave me the feeling of a gust of air

from behind each time you read him, of a witch's broom which he makes you mount" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 15).

clxxii "You can always replace one word with another. If you don't like that one, if it doesn't suit you, take another, put another in its place. If each one of us makes this effort, everyone can understand one another and there is scarcely any reason to ask questions or raise objections" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 3). We care so much for finding the 'right' word, the 'right' turn of phrase, the 'right' meaning that we forget what words can *do*.

clxxiii In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze and Parnet (2002) say of writing:

Writing has no other goal: wind, even when we do not move, 'keys in the wind to set my spirit to light and give my thought a gust of air from the backyard' – to release what can be saved from life, that which can save itself by means of power and stubbornness, to extract from the event that which is not exhausted by the happening, to release from becoming that which will not permit itself to be fixed in a term. A strange ecology, tracing a line of writing, music or painting. These are ribbons stirred by wind. A little air passes. A line is traced, the stronger for being abstract, if it is quite restrained, without figures. Writing is made of motor agitation and inertia.

(Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 75)

clxxiv In conversation with Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway describes sympoiesis as simply meaning 'making with' (Haraway and Braidotti, 2017). But, as Haraway argues in *Staying with the Trouble*, this is what also gives sympoiesis radical potentiality:

Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organising ... That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it.

(Haraway, 2016, p. 58)

clxxv Of the writer, Deleuze and Parnet (2002) say:

The author is a subject of enunciation but the writer – who is not an author – is not. The writer invents assemblages starting from assemblages which have invented him, he makes one multiplicity pass into another ... The author creates a world, but there is no world which awaits us to be created. Neither identification nor distance, neither proximity nor remoteness, for, in all these cases, one is led to speak for, in place of . . . One must, on the contrary, speak *with*, write *with*. With the world, with a part of the world, with people.

(Deleuze and Parnet 2002, p.51-52).

clxxvi "Break the idea of clothes" has been fashion designer Rei Kawakubo's call for over 40 years. For her, the only way to approach fashion design is to try to think and feel and see as if she isn't making clothes (cited in Manning 2014, p.91). Instead of seeking to create a garment that can be worn by a preexisting body, Kawakubo works with a series of enabling constraints to create a "propositional field that activates what a body can do in its co-constitution with an emergent environment" (Manning, 2016, p. 92). So, when I say, break the idea of thesis, it is in the spirit of this approach to creative practices. Thesis as process cannot be subsumed by thesis as object. The purpose of the thesis (this thesis) is not the production of the thesis itself, but the potential for transformation offered by the process of not-knowing-in advance.

clxxvii In a conversation with Stephen Shukaitis and Stephano Harney, Fred Moten says:

When I think about the way we use the term "study", I think we are committed to an idea that study is what you do with people. It's talking and walking around with people, working, dancing, suffering,

some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The notion of a rehearsal – being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory – these are various modes of activity. The point of calling it “study” is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present. These activities aren’t ennobled by the fact that we now say, “oh, if you did these things in a certain way, you could be said to have been studying.” To do these things is to be involved in a kind of common intellectual practice. What’s important is to recognize that has been the case – because that recognition allows you access to a whole, varied, alternative history of thought.

(Moten and Harney, 2013, pp 109-110, cited in Manning 2016, pp 11-12)

To break the idea of study, there needs to be a *will full* embracing of the infinite ways in which we come *to know*. The thesis is the real and symbolic representation of a very particular set of study practices that work to exclude and constrain. Like Manning, I am committed to the belief that even the doctoral thesis, a process of knowledge production so deeply entwined with neurotypicality and all the “valuations that accompany it, might have the capacity for doing the work differently” (Manning, 2020a, p. 225)

^{clxxviii} To break the idea of research, there needs to be a dismantling of method and its stranglehold on educational practices:

In working as an apparatus of capture, method gives reason its place in the sun: it diagnoses, it situates, it organizes, and ultimately it surveys and judges... Despite its best intentions, method works as the safeguard against the ineffable: if something cannot be categorized, it cannot be made to account for itself and is cast aside as irrelevant. The consequences are many: knowledge tends to be relegated to the sphere of “conscious knowledge,” backgrounding the wealth of the relational field of experience in-forming; the force of change that animates a process is deadened; the uneasiness that destabilizes thinking is backgrounded or effaced completely.

(Manning, 2016, p. 32).

^{clxxix} In *Thought in the Act*, Manning and Massumi (2014) explore the ways in which neurotypicality backgrounds expressive potential. The chair is for sitting. The sidewalk for walking. The computer for email checking. The classroom for learning.

In the neurotypical spaces, bodies must be stilled. There can be no cartwheels.

^{clxxx} Ballast is used by many forms of aquatic life, including the argonaut group of octopus (Wikipedia 2021c). Among the creatures of the sea, ballast is force. And it is form. It is balance achieved through movement.

Prologue or epilogue or an introduction of sorts

Walking to work along the narrow path that skirts a small harbour, I became fascinated by the entanglements of human and non-human matter that appeared and disappeared with the tide. The dead gull. The Starbucks cup. The burger carton dancing in the wind. The rubber glove that spoke of a world where desperate people sold body parts to fund their way into Europe. The lure of the ever-changing entanglements of detritus floating in the water worked on me in ways that were irresistibly generative. These *disposable bodies* (Braidotti, 2013a, p.2), like the tangled debris in Jane Bennett's storm drain (Bennett, 2010, p.4), seemed to embody a vital materiality that spoke to me of the world and its worldings. Images of overflowing bins, floating refuse, littered streets, and dead things amassed on my phone. These were the dregs of advanced capitalism and its human-nonhuman cost. This was the matter that no longer seemed to matter.

And I began to write. Sitting at my desk, short paragraphs would emerge. Tiny bursts of emotion, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, bubbled forth. Sometimes joy. But rarely. Not in the early days. I was haunted by bodies. Vulnerable bodies. Mobile bodies. Disposable bodies. Edible bodies. Leaky bodies. All the bodies that find themselves, exploited, excluded, or silenced. Stark inequalities made their presences felt as the detritus spoke to me of capitalism's insatiable thirst for material profit and the ever more toxic systems, policies and discourses it fuelled. Everywhere I looked the world hissed and seethed.

The refugee 'crisis' had recently come into sharp focus with the mass migration into Europe of many thousands of people fleeing, violence, persecution and war. My home city was designated a 'dispersal zone', a locality where those arriving in inflatable dinghies and refrigerated lorries would be sent while their claims for asylum were processed. Moved by the plight of these people who had found themselves at the sharp end of the UK's increasingly hostile immigration policies, I began offering free English classes at the university where I worked. Without funding or approval, the sessions were ad hoc and chaotic, but I was determined to provide a welcoming space on campus where newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers could meet and talk and learn. Sometimes we spoke of where they had come from and how, and though I felt that their experiences needed to be heard, and to needed to be acknowledged, instinctively I knew that I did not want to engage in a research process that would mine these *stories of pain* (Tuck and Yang, 2014). I did not want to take more from those who had already lost so much.

But, I had embarked on my doctoral studies, and so I continued to write. And walk. And look. And listen. Reading with Maggie MacLure, Jane Bennett, Karen Barad and Donna Haraway helped me to reimagine what could be accounted for in a piece of research. Their words emboldened me to find ways to resist the "static, hierarchical logic of representation" (MacLure, 2013a, p.658) and to embrace the *wonder of data* (MacLure, 2013b). They gave me the language to challenge to the notion that "active action or agency belongs to humans alone" (Bennett, 2010, p.290) and yet still bear witness to the West's constant and shameful 'marking' of people and things, "some as valuable life and others as without value" (Clough, 2007, p. 25-6). And though I still did not know what my thesis was going to *be* or, more

importantly, *do*, I knew I wanted to work in a way that would heed Barad's call "to be accountable to the specific materialization of which we are part" (Barad, 2007, p.92-93). I wanted to produce a text that would work to exemplify my deep "commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom" (Barad, 2007, p.90). But how to write such a thing? Barad and Haraway offered up the concept of diffraction as a way out of the dominant ontologies that impose very particular approaches to writing and research. Haraway describes diffraction as "an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world ... for making consequential meanings" (Haraway cited in Barad, 2007, p. 71) and for Barad, diffraction has the potential to "produce a new way of thinking about the nature of difference, and of space, time, matter, causality, and agency, among other important variables" (Barad, 2007, p.73). I was drawn to their work and the way it spoke of an urgent need for new thinkings and storyings and understandings, but I still struggled to write of being in the world in a way that was "non-representational, non-interpretive, a-signifying, a-subjective, paradoxical and embroiled with matter" (MacLure, 2013a, p. 663).

Despite not knowing what my writings *could do*, my strongest instinct was that conforming to the conventions of the traditional doctoral thesis just *would not do*. Whatever the objects of study were going to be, if there were to be any at all, I was determined that they would be objects imbued with their own liveliness; objecting objects, that could "not be removed nor possessed" (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 814). According to Tuck and Yang (2014), traditional approaches to educational research work to mask "the power relationships about who comes to know whom in the creation of knowledge" (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p.

811). For them, social science research that attempts to tell or represent the lives and experiences of others re-enacts settler colonialism by deciding “what stories are civilized (intellectual property) and what stories are natural, wild, and thus claimable under the doctrine of discovery” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 812). Tuck and Yang argue that the regulatory frameworks relating to ethics used by most higher education institutions are wholly inadequate mechanisms designed to protect the institution rather than “ensure that social science research is deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful for the individual or community being researched” (Tuck and Guishard, 2013 cited in Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 812). Traditional research practices are mired in “white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and the pursuit of wealth by some at the expense of others” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p.812) therefore, for Tuck and Yang, it is vital that researchers focus, not on the study of human participants, but on the study of *institutions* so as to “interrogate power and privilege and trace the legacies and enactments of settler colonialism in everyday life” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p.814). I came to Tuck and Yang’s work late into the thesis, but I had already recognised in the work of writers like Bennett, Haraway and Barad, a deep ethical imperative to enact an ontological shift that would move away from the representation of *particular* [human] bodies:

Theories that focus exclusively on the materialization of “human” bodies miss the crucial point that the very practices by which differential boundaries of the “human” and the “nonhuman” are drawn are already implicated in particular materializations. The differential constitution of the “human” (“nonhuman”) is always accompanied by particular exclusions and always open to contestation ... What is the nature of causality on this account? What possibilities exist for agency, for intervening in the world’s becoming? Where do the issues of responsibility and accountability enter in? (Barad, 2003, p. 824)

I had not anticipated that my work would illuminate the toxic power relations that underpin academic institutions, academic study and knowledge production processes, but the writings followed their own path. Reading Erin Manning reinforced the realisation that it is through the ubiquitous imperatives to pin down an “object of study” that researchers are made complicit in processes and systems that function to align their work to “disciplinary method and, by extension, to institutional power” (Manning, 2016, p. 39). Therefore, for writers like Manning and Tina Campt, researching *otherwise* becomes a necessary and powerful political act. The workings of the institution must be refused. In Campt’s glossary of terms, the entry ‘refusal’ reads:

refusal: a rejection of the status quo as liveable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise.

(Campt, 2019, p. 83)

For Campt, engaging in a “practice of refusal” demands an “urgency of rethinking the time, space, and fundamental vocabulary of what constitutes politics, activism, and theory, as well as what it means to refuse the terms given to us to name these struggles” (Campt, 2019, p. 80). Refusal is an affirmative acknowledgement that something is wrong and acknowledging this sense that there is something that should or should not be done is what can compel us to refuse in ways that both are ethical and political:

The wrong feeling is right, leading most researchers to create and practice forms of refusal in their work: refusing to share sensational interview data, refusing to search for the subjectivity of the Other, refusing the god-gaze of the objective knower, refusing to draw conclusions about communities – choosing to write instead about power in the form of institutions, policy and research itself.

(Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 815)

Tuck and Yang teach their students how to engage in a *pedagogy of refusal* as a means to resist the further acts of exploitation, extraction and plunder, which are continually re-enacted through traditional research processes:

Settler codes express the putative right of the settler to know and thus to govern all the people, land, flora, fauna, customs, cultures, sexualities in his seized territory. To refuse settler sovereignty is to refuse the settler's unquestioned right to know, and to resist the agenda to expand the knowledge territory of the settler colonial nation.

(Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 812)

A refusal to engage in dominant knowledge-making practices is essential if researchers are to avoid replicating and reinforcing the stranglehold of colonialism, but as Tuck and Yang argue, “[r]efusal is not just a no, it is a performance of that no, and thus an artistic form” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 814). Refusal must act as a *generative and creative source of disorderly power* (Campt, 2019) in order to generate the means by which we can imagine living otherwise. Resisting the normative, the neurotypical and the neoliberal is not easy work, but as Elizabeth Grosz (1995) writes, while the fight against *the relentless forces of sameness* requires much effort and struggle, there is also much joy to be found:

In refusing to seek answers, and in continuing to pose questions as aporias, as paradoxes – that is, to insist that they have no readily available solution – is to face the task, not of revolution, i.e. the overthrow of the old (whether capitalism, patriarchy, binary oppositions, or prevailing models of radicality) but, less romantically or glamorously, endless negotiation, the equation of one's life with struggle, a wearying ideal but one perhaps that can make us less invested in any one struggle and more capable of bearing up to continuous effort to go against the relentless forces of sameness, more inventive in the kinds of subversion we seek, and more joyous in the kinds of struggle we choose to be called into.

(Grosz, 1995, p. 6)

Engaging in a process of *affirmative refusal* (Tuck and Yang 2014; Truman, 2022) is an ongoing and entangled process of creative improvisation that resonates with what Manning

and others (see also Natalie Loveless, Stephanie Springgay, Sarah E. Truman) conceptualise as *research-creation*. Although research-creation has, in Canada at least, long been enshrined in the language of the academy as a funding category, Manning and others' work has been to challenge the framing of arts-based research as artistic practice with an added research component. In the hyphenation of research and creation, Manning and her co-creators have set out to challenge the theory/practice divide and the methodological straightjacketing of knowledge production processes in order to foreground research-creation's "inherent transversality" (Manning, 2016, p.27). In *Against Method* Manning writes:

research-creation does much more than what the funding agencies had in store for it: it generates new forms of experience; it tremulously stages an encounter for disparate practices, giving them a conduit for collective expression; it hesitantly acknowledges that normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing value; it generates forms of knowledge that are extralinguistic; it creates operative strategies for a mobile positioning that take these new forms of knowledge into account; it proposes concrete assemblages for rethinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation.

(Manning, 2016, p. 27)

Research-creation rejects the institutional imperatives to define the value of artistic practices by the finished object. Instead, it is interested in the creative trajectory of a practice and how the constitution of new processes creates "the conditions for new ways of encountering study – forms and forces of intellectuality that cut across normative accounts of what it means to know." (Manning, 2016, p.27). Research-creation is a mode of study that refuses to know in advance for, as Manning argues, "positing the terms of the account before the exploration of what the account can do only results in stultifying its potential and relegating it that which already fits withing preexisting schemata of knowledge" (Manning,

2016, p.29). Approaching research from a place that does not claim to already know is overtly political, deeply ethical, and “crucial to the development of new academic literacies that challenge traditional modes of knowledge in the university” (Loveless, 2015, p. 53). Research-creation requires us to engage in what William James calls a “radical empiricism” (cited in Manning, 2016) and to let go of what is capable of already being known, valued and measured. It is a process that it is concerned with what knowledge *does*, as opposed to what knowledge *is*; process over product, force over form.

In her essay, *Dress becomes body: fashioning the force of form*, Manning (2015) describes how the designer Rei Kawakubo refuses to take inspiration for her garments from what already exists or from the already known. Instead, she crafts a set of enabling constraints that will provoke new processes of experimentation. By trying to see and feel and think as if she is not making clothes at all, Kawakubo refuses to assume she already knows what fashion can do (Manning, 2016). Like Manning and Kawakubo, Brian Massumi argues that “if you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing will happen” (Massumi, 2002, p.18) and if nothing happens, then everything stays the same. For Massumi, writing is about the potential to surprise even yourself, to write things that you did not know you thought, and to “take joy in our digressions” (Massumi, 2002, p.18). But while not knowing in advance sits at the heart of any truly creative process, Truman reminds us, this is not a licence for ‘anything goes’:

To be clear, I do not think of affirmation as a cheering of whatever happens- like, ‘anything goes- weeee!’ – nor an affirmation of ‘say yes because I can’t say no. Instead, this ethic of affirmation is a promise to respond to what happens: acknowledging that we can’t *know* before an event occurs.

(Truman, 2022, p. 20)

Like Manning, Truman aligns research-creation, or the refusal of sameness, as an affirmative stance, but only when “it engages with the arts and modes of living as transformative resurgent constellations away from settler colonial capture” (Truman, 2022, p. 22). For Truman, the ethical rigour that underpins research-creation lies in creating in processes of exploration and experimentation that demand an ongoing and carefully considered response to *all* that we encounter. Ethical considerations, like the ubiquitous protocol, can never be signed off and filed away, instead researchers need to adopt an ongoing “pre-emptive or anachronistic mode of openness and responsibility to affirm, or affirmatively refuse ... what does occur” (Truman, 2022, p. 21).

Reimagining my doctoral studies as a mode of existence concerned with “the emergent quality of the experience, not with the factually cross-checked identity of the objects featuring in it” (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 11), has enabled me to open up my thinking and writing to moments defined by what my senses are “compelled to attend to” (Mukhopadhyay cited in Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 13). At its best, Manning argues, “writing is an act, alive with the rhythms of uncertainty and openings of a speculative pragmatism that engages with the forces of the milieu where transversality is most acute” (Manning, 2016, p. 42). For, Manning, writing is *out of time*, as though it “only really knows what it’s after once it has begun to make its way into the world” (Manning, 2016, p. ix). It is the ‘*what else*’ that is important not the ‘*what is*’:

Only once the work’s Appearance has been collectively composed can there be an incursion into *what else*. This *what else* is not a return to wishing the work were other than it is: it is a phase shift that activates the more-than of Appearance. Interpretation, recall, is immanent to the process of the work’s coming into Appearance. *What else* is about how else the work works, how else it comes into what it is.

(Manning, 2017, pp. 111-112)

Reframing the writing process as the research process has come to be the work that my doctorate does. Immersed in a whirling dance of matter and movements, my thesis is made up of a myriad of texts that speak of being in the world. Of invitations and becomings. Of assemblages and entanglements. Of walking with the world. Of channelling the universe. Of matter that matters, and of the agency of things. Responding to an increased sensitivity to “how the world gyrates with potential” (Mukhopadhyay cited in Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 13) has engendered a mode of writing that is concerned, not with producing the thesis as object, but with producing the thesis as movement. It has opened up a space where language can be *agitated to the limit* (Manning and Massumi, 2014) and where the “not-yet glimmers seductively and then escapes in fits and starts” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 3). This kind of writing does not exist to point out things for others to recognise (Massumi, 2015), but to create texts that can “convey the ‘too much’ of the situation – its charge – in a way that actually fosters new experiences” (Massumi, 2015, p. 13). Surrendering myself to the compulsion to write without knowing in advance what was to be written, has created a choreography of movements and minglings, shiftings and shimmerings that has infused and energised this story of an entangled, emergent, eventful thesis. It is a tentative *exemplification* (Massumi, 2002) of how writing to the not-yet-known is brim-full with events and intensities that do not just work to prompt thought, but which can also “generate sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain” (MacLure, 2010, p.282).

Elizabeth Grosz (1995) says the work that needs to be done is not to seek to produce the new, but to “but to clear the clutter, open up a space in the frenzied negotiations and compromises that constitute both thought and the academy that pays for the luxury of

thinking, so that others may at least have their chance at the new” (Grosz, 1995, p. 6). I am acutely aware that pushing back against the constraints of the traditional thesis is *not* new (see, e.g., Bridges-Rhoads, 2015; Bridges-Rhoads, 2018; Guttorm, 2012; Guttorm, 2016; Cannon, 2020; Garland, 2023). Indeed, as far back as 1995, whilst struggling with her own doctoral thesis, Elizabeth St. Pierre wrote, “I believe the persistent critique urged by poststructuralism enables a transition from traditional methodology to something different and am not too concerned at this time with what might be produced” (St. Pierre, 1995, p.209). And yet, the traditional PhD process is still loaded with “common sense” and taken for granted practices and processes. As Alecia Youngblood Jackson notes, in the academy “everybody knows what it means to conduct good fieldwork. Everybody knows the process of forming a research question, searching the literature, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up findings” (Jackson, 2017, p. 671). Doctoral students are expected to have everything pinned down and mapped out from the start. We dutifully complete our project proposals and transfer documents. We define our research questions and outline our methodologies. We collect data and produce findings. And we find ourselves crushed under the weight of university processes and policies that demand linearity, uniformity and conformity. Ground down by disciplining systems that slowly and insidiously snuff out the spark of joy to be found in just seeing what might happen.

I have no idea how this work will work, or what affects it may produce, but I hope that it will inspire others to resist and refuse conformity and sameness in order to make a difference in the world. I want this thesis to exemplify that it *is* possible to “steal from the university the quality of what moves across it without being consumed by it” (Manning, 2019a, p. 104) and

to do work that will create spaces for all bodies to have their chance at the new. For me, refusing to engage in the continued production of invasive and extractive modes of knowledge production has been both joyful and transformational and, because I am changed, my relationship to the world is changed. Beginning with a fascination with the refuse floating in a small harbour, I have found a way to “catalyse the ongoing movement-in-thought necessary for inquiry, especially inquiry that asks what else words, bodies, actions, relations, and so on, might do besides mean” (Bridges-Rhoads, 2018, p. 646). In *The Minor Gesture*, Manning (2016) asks us to consider “[w]hat techniques can we put in place to open the world to its constellations of potential?” (Manning, 2016, p. 155). This is my response; a tentative attempt to engage with “how thinking does its work, in the writing” (Manning, 2016, p. ix).

Sifting through the myriad of texts that chronicle this story of a thesis not foretold, there is a sense of always being in the middle. In the midst. In the eye of the storm. Presenting the writings in reverse chronological order speaks to me of Deleuze’s *dark precursor* (1994, p. 119); the flash of lightning, the coursing electricity, a path that somehow already is there, but not there. I like the way the thesis unfolds, starting where it ends, ending where it starts. The endnotes work as theoretical string that simultaneously hold the writings together and force them apart. They are not there to lace and tighten and they refuse to tie things down or tie things up. They are the bubbling anarchic of the readings and thinkings that *in-form* the process of thesising. The force of the writing in an ongoing interplay of affects and intensities that are never still, never static, never done. The act of writing itself is the movement that promotes other movements.

Through the work of this work, I have found ways to channel energies and intensities into tiny acts and interventions that just might have the potential to make a difference in the world (Massumi, 2015). And, instead of bringing me to my knees, my doctoral studies have enabled me to fire up my molecules and feed my soul.

This is cosmic pathfinding in the making.

This is the politics to come.

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Figure 19: My dad