Doing Academia Differently: Loosening the Boundaries of Our Disciplining Writing Practices

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Abstract
In this article, I explore questions of pedagogy and knowledge-writing practices in their relation to knowledge production. Starting from the observation that different styles of writing are present in our work, but many of them are systematically pushed back and mis-read as non-academic, the article brings to the fore a discussion on the direct relationship between practices of knowledge-writing and those modes of knowing that escape the linear and propositional academic style while still being part of how knowledge comes into being. Following a tradition of intersectional feminist epistemologies, I engage with questions of epistemologies and critical pedagogies, speaking to and with several generations of scholars who address and work with questions of diversity and knowledge production that are seminal within International Relations (IR), yet underexplored from the perspective of knowledge-writing practices.

Keywords
pedagogies, epistemology, diversity, creativity, writing, practice

Ecrire le savoir autrement: Repousser les frontières de nos pratiques disciplinantes d’écriture.

Résumé
Dans cet article, j’explore les questions de la pédagogie et des pratiques d’écriture académiques et leur relation avec la production du savoir. En partant du constat que différents styles d’écriture sont présents dans nos travaux, mais que nombre d’entre eux sont systématiquement rejetés et considérés à tort comme non-académiques, l’article met en avant une discussion sur la relation...
directe entre les pratiques d’écriture du savoir et les modes de connaissance qui échappent au style académique linéaire et propositionnel tout en faisant partie intégrante de la production du savoir. M’appuyant sur une tradition d’épistémologies intersectionnelles féministes, je m’intéresse à des questions d’épistémologies et de pédagogies critiques, en dialoguant avec plusieurs générations de chercheurs qui étudient les questions de diversité et de production du savoir. Ces questions sont fondamentales au sein de la discipline des relations internationales et pourtant peu explorées du point de vue des pratiques d’écriture du savoir.

**Mots-clés**
pédagogies, épistémologies, diversité

**Liberar las fronteras de nuestras prácticas académicas de escritura:**
**Otras formas de compartir conocimiento**

**Resumen**
En este artículo, exploro cuestiones relacionadas con la pedagogía y con la escritura de conocimientos en su relación con la producción de conocimiento. Partiendo de la constatación de la existencia de diferentes estilos de escritura en nuestro trabajo, muchos de los cuales se descartan sistemáticamente o se entienden incorrectamente como no académicos, el artículo busca cuestionar la discusión sobre la relación directa entre las prácticas de escritura de conocimientos y esos modos de conocer que no se encajan con el estilo lineal y proposicional académico, aunque se relaciona con el proceso de creación del conocimiento. Siguiendo la tradición de las epistemologías feministas interseccionales, abordo cuestiones de epistemologías y pedagogías críticas, mientras dialogo con diferentes generaciones de académicos que abordan cuestiones relacionadas con la diversidad y la producción de conocimientos que si bien son seminales en las relaciones internacionales, aún no se han explorado lo suficiente desde la perspectiva de las prácticas de escritura de conocimientos.

**Palabras clave**
pedagogías, epistemologías, diversidad

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1. Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988), 575. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

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*Like “poems”, which are sites of literary production where language too is an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes.*

– Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’

#Storytelling line
#0 Before We Start:

The protagonist of this article is writing, the act of writing within an academic context. The plot structure is somewhat echoing *a Pride and Prejudice* structure: ‘Two seemingly incompatible practices of writing are brought into a single space, where they dance, flirt, and argue passionately before eventually marrying and living happily ever after’.2 (I’m not fond of marriage, but I’m fond of the seemingly incompatible become kin).

#1 Starting Point of Normality:

In the context of academic writing, elements such as storytelling, characterisation, and focalisation are not part of our writing trainings. As Helen Sword has noted, ‘relatively few scientists and social scientists have been trained in the art of crafting a compelling narrative, while humanities scholars who work in textually rich fields such as literature, history, or law often bury their own best stories under layers of abstraction and critical theory’.3

#2 The problem with academic texts is not the critical theories that inform them, nor is it the nuances that they succeed to bring through. Instead, the problem with academic texts is that too often, they have become alienated from the stories that propelled their writing in the first place. These can be historical stories, personal stories, obsessions, subversions, encounters, surprises, disgusts, desires, silences, intuitions, and everything in between. Even in fields where stories are used as a method of writing, such as in ethnographies and research trying (with best intentions) to give voice to marginalised groups, researchers are rarely ‘truthful about the distance [they] travel from research questions to finished manuscript, with all its doubts, epiphanies and improvisations’, or why they embarked on a particular project in the first place.4

The loss, here, is that those untold stories contain knowledge in their own right. They belong to the constellations of factors that have moved researchers and writers into certain directions during their research and writing practices. Consciously or unconsciously, those stories have informed the coming into being of the scientific argument. For that matter, the knowledge presented in an academic text always exceeds the confinement of academic formats.

Not only do academic guidelines erase invaluable sources of knowledge, they also tend to repress the vital expertise of scholars whose work goes against our habitual canon – infamous for being predominantly white, predominantly male, predominantly quantitative. Following the history of power relations that have formed the institution of the academy in the past centuries, the habitual canon represents but a fraction of the knowledge available, keeping the rest silenced, be it consciously or unconsciously. Far from

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2. Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), e-book.
3. Ibid., chap. 8. e-book.
4. Wanda Vrasti, ‘Dr Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying about Methodology and Love Writing’, 79 quoted in Jenny Edkins, ‘Novel Writing in International Relations’, *Security Dialogue* 44, no 4 (2013), 290.
being from the past, those power struggles are still visible today in every single faculty of the academy. They are visible on the walls of institutional places. Portraits of white men decorating symbolic spaces where degrees and titles are awarded. Degrees and titles that, the higher they are on the academic hierarchy, the whiter men they see. They are also visible in student’s bags and on the papers they write. Most syllabi retrace the habitual canon again and again, teaching students to cite accordingly, perpetuating the wall.

The questions, obsessions, and desires that propelled the writing of this article are questions of pedagogies and knowledge-writing practices. They are geared towards finding ways to retain and include those subterranean and marginalised flows of knowledge. They have incited me to pause and address the gap between the varieties of knowledge that inhabit us, human beings working in the academy, and the uniformity of academic writing formats that we use when writing knowledge. Although the varieties of knowledge-writing far exceed the written word – visual arts, sound, dance, film, documentary, and performance art are alternative ways of knowledge-writing that immediately come to mind5 – I am here particularly interested in the space available in the medium of writing. I am interested in following what happens when we loosen the frame of our habitual academic practice in order to make space for unrecorded stories to bubble up, becoming undeniably present. Not only do the choices we make when we write alter the reality that we observe; depending on the realities we observe, giving an account of our observations may require divergent styles of writing for achieving the greatest accuracy; the most accurate style of writing might not be a seemingly neutral one, but at times, a style that embraces a plurality of voices, such as dialogue or poetry.

So, the aim here is to investigate and rethink ways of writing knowledge to account for the diversity of forms of knowledge that inform our research and teaching practices. In the spirit of philosophers of science Ian Hacking’s *Styles of Thinking*, Chunglin Kwa’s *Styles of Knowing*, and Donna Haraway’s injunction that ‘we need different kinds of stories’,6 I contend that different *styles of writing* inhabit our scientific practices, yet many of them are systematically pushed back and mis-read as being non-scientific. The

5. For e.g. Catherine Charrett, ‘Diplomacy in Drag and Queer IR Art: Reflections on the Performance. “Sipping Toffee with Hamas in Brussels”’, *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2019): 280–99, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210518000451; Yoav Galai, ‘The Victory Image: Imaging Israeli Warfighting from Lebanon to Gaza’, *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 4 (2019): 295–313, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619835365; ‘Gail Ritchie Art’, Gail Ritchie Contemporary Art. Available at: http://www.gailritchie.com/. Last accessed 17 August 2020; Sophie Harman, *Seeing Politics: Film, Visual Method, and International Relations* (London, McGill-Queen University Press. Kobo, 2019); Lela Mosemghvdlishvili, ‘Experiential Dance’. Available at: https://experiential-dance.com/. Last accessed 17 August 2020; Audrey Reeves, ‘Mobilising Bodies, Narrating Security: Tourist Choreographies at Jerusalem’s Holocaust History Museum’, *Mobilities* 13, no. 2 (2018): 216–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2017.1406688; Vicki Squire et al., *Reclaiming Migration: Voices from Europe’s Migrant Crisis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021); Raz Weiner, ‘Out of Line: Performing Drag and Archive in Settler Culture’ (doctoral dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2019). Available at: https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/out-of-line(8baca83a-dc3e-494e-b954-13455063d73d)/export.html

6. Fabricio Terranova, *Donna Haraway: Storytelling for Earthly Survival*, Documentary (Donna Haraway, 2016).
more creative a style of writing, the less likely it is to be allowed on the academic discussion table. With this push back of creative expressions, the creative energy that inhabits any kind of research and writing practice becomes relegated to the margins of what we do. Worse, although always present, creativity is treated as ‘less serious’ and ‘not academic enough’: it is diminished, ignored, sometimes repulsed even (‘this is a university!’). In this repetitive misreading and misrecognition of creativity’s essential place in scientific work, the creative voices come to stand short of breath. Many of them stop singing altogether. And yet, it is these voices *par excellence* that lead to innovations, regenerative renewals, and the most profound existential care.

As Laura Shepherd acknowledges while referring to Judith Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself*, ‘my self is constituted through . . . “schemes of intelligibility”, always already in relation to many others with whom I interact. . . . It is in these affective connections that I find solace, even purpose; they enable me in ways that I cannot fully comprehend. Being a feminist, being an academic: these are relational identities for me, subject-positions that cannot exist – not only philosophically but also in a material, embodied sense – without others’. Finding solace and purpose in what we do is a good start for putting in words the existential care that I envision when practicing the different styles of writing that inhabit our scientific practice. A space of existential care where affective relations become allowed to speak alongside cognitive and propositional arguments; where affective relations stand in contact with the source of our creativity; where the un-known makes itself known through the ways in which we let ourselves enter in dialogue with our material and what surrounds it. Not only does such dialogue allows for an account of oneself and for the schemes of intelligibility that makes us heard and seen, it also produces a reparative frame of encounter where surprises and hopes participate in the researcher’s task to organise the fragments they encounter and create. Reparative, here, refers to the ways in which that which has been repressed is allowed to speak.

Finding solace and purpose in what we do also goes hand in hand with the possibility to write with our whole selves, unconstrained by the disciplinary practice of traditional academic guidelines. To that end, creative writing techniques are powerful instruments. For instance, a poem I wrote while reflecting on my archival work helped me give name to existential questions that drive my research. Here, creativity, regenerative renewals, and existential care stand hand in hand.

Archival Landscapes

You take in
the tables
the light
damped atmosphere

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7. Laura Shepherd, ‘Research as Gendered Intervention: Feminist Research Ethics and the Self in the Research Encounter’, *Critica Contemporanea: Revista de Teoria Politica* 6 (2016): 11.
8. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), chap. 3. e-book.
9. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), chap. 4. e-book.
no voices
but whispers
the boxes
rust and dust
the smell of
old paper
ancient times
coming back
after long years of
just staying
un-allowed to
speak.

Most people come
to find traces
of family members,
genealogy of blood
ties is a popular
activity, spicing the
banality of
existence with
ancient roots, hoping to
find traces of
nobility, salvaging
a life almost
passed with the
graciousness
of a name
to be added to
the tree of relatives
– loneliness
has many ways to
make us move.

You are here
to uncover
but all you feel
is burden
the piles of
history
do not ease
they confuse
it’s a fuss
your hands moist
at the beginning
dry and itchy
when you leave.

A train passes
outside and you look
at traces
of someone
who made
the ministry of justice
become
the ministry of fools
*Bureau du Sceau*
changed into
– *Bureau des Sots*
the sounds stay
but the orthography
becomes
critique.

You take notes
your pencil
sharpened
and you think of
the language
making up
the people – Albert
leaving again
and again,
his urge
to travel
and come back
trapped in
the language
of medical
science, labels of
multiple
personality
disorder in
the order of
things.

And you start
to understand why
genealogy
does not lead to
graciousness
but to the existential
quest
to reconnect
what has been
disconnected.
The poem is not only an expression of creative storytelling that typically stands in conversation with the more traditional form of academic writing we are accustomed to reading; it also introduces a multiplicity of voices proper to poetry. Although I am here the author of the poem, the poem also speaks through a second person narrator, who is at the same time me, the author, and a speaker separated from me. The poem is as much addressed to me the writer, as to you the reader. It is both addressed to a second person singular, and to a second person plural. What interested me in the process of writing was to enter a pallet of emotions encountered when doing archival work in the context of my work on citizenship deprivation. Writing the poem helped me understand those emotions better, and how they have informed the aims of my research – ancient times / coming back / after long years of / just staying / un-allowed to / speak. But as a poet, I am especially aware that the meaning of the poem is in part yet to be discovered. This radical openness is at the heart of poetry. And so, the point here is not to present a thorough analysis of the poem. This would be an interesting exercise of literary analysis that would certainly generate insights, but it is an exercise that takes the poem as object of study, rather than viewing it as a writing technique that, as Audre Lorde has most poetically expressed, ‘[helps] give name to the nameless so it can be thought’. Taking the poem seriously in its function to bring in the poetic voice in conversation with the academic voice hence requires letting go. It requires letting go of learned reflexes to approach a poem solely as an object of study, and welcoming poetry’s radical openness as a process of writing.

If we accept that the diversity of styles of writing allows for different layers of knowledge, then we must also accept that by relegating creative styles of writing to the sole domain of literature and non-academic publications, we deprive academic discussions of a more accurate picture of the reality we seek to understand. So, by setting out this proposal for allowing a more diverse and creative pallet of writing styles in the academic writing landscape, this article aims to recuperate the reparative in both research and writing by allowing the creative to be present, visibly present.

#3 This is Important Because...

Recuperating the reparative in research and writing is important because it acknowledges that research and writing do not happen in a vacuum: in many cases and regardless of disciplines, research and writing connect to our most intimate longings and obsessions; they are an expression of an existential quest to (re)connect what has been disconnected. Making space for a more creative expression makes room for addressing the complexity of those feelings and intuitions that accompany us while reading, interpreting, coding, analysing, and synthesising in writing. By also voicing those modes of knowing that exceed the rational realm of linear and propositional argumentation, reparative research and writing make room for telling the profound stories of why scientists undertake research projects and why they matter, beyond the flatness of news values and societal relevance.

Aside: Given the content of this article, its mimicry of the academic format may come as a surprise, a question, a desire to see it otherwise. After multiple experiments in various forms

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10. Audre Lorde, ‘Poetry Is Not a Luxury’, in Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984).
11. Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’, October 28 (1984): 125–33.
and genres, I set out to write it while playing with the boundaries of academic formats to allow it to reach the academic audience it addresses. I’m thankful to the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their engagement in staying with the troubles; for their invitation to include more of my creative writing and personal stories into the text. As I now stand here, I wonder whether the article had made it had I pushed the boundaries so far from the start. The question is perhaps irrelevant. What matters is that a process of recognition proved possible. But it also matters to pause on this process of mimicry and on the ways in which mimicry allows to disclose the ambivalence of authority while disrupting it. As Homi K. Bhabha expressed in the context of resisting colonial discourse, “the figure of mimicry [. . .] problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the ‘national’ is no longer naturalizable. What emerges [. . .] is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history”.12

Becoming aware of mimicry is a vital strategy to make space for repressed narratives to speak. But mimicry can only be a fraction of the story when it comes to expressing alternative forms of knowledge. It is therefore equally important to develop alternative spaces to express and release the bits and pieces of our research and writing beyond editorial boundaries, if only to be able to practice unconstrained forms of writing in a process of sense making. For me, creating a personal website was an empowering strategy.13 Forming a repository of my practice, it allows me to gather poems, short stories and essays as expressions of my work; those bits and pieces ready to be released in a free space of exchange.

#4 Until Now. . . Embracing the Trouble in Conversation with Feminist and Critical Race Theory Interventions

Philosophy does not yet know how to speak. Its thinking is active, uneasy because always in the encounter.
–Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, Thought in the Act14

Let us pause for a moment on this banal observation: in all academic trainings, we learn to dissociate creative writing from academic writing. As Sword presents it, ‘[academic] writers often strive to convey a completely neutral perspective; as merchants of truth rather than fiction, we see it as our job to inform our readers, not to play with their expectations or their minds. Yet that neutrality when examined closely, turns out to be something of a myth’15 – a naturalised, depoliticised, yet distorted rendering of things.16 This myth, indeed, has formed the ways in which we write knowledge, and has consequences for the ways in which knowledge is being offered and received. It is a myth shaped by the white malestream mainstream way of doing science; it is a myth announcing objective and neutral science without talking about the historical perspective of power relations that have formed the academy and the kinds of knowledge and epistemologies commonly practiced.

12. Ibid., 128.
13. Marie Beauchamps, ‘MarieB. Atelier’, June 23, 2021. Available at: https://marieb-atelier.org/
14. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), e-book.
15. Sword, Stylish Academic Writing, chap. 8. e-book.
16. Roland Barthes, Mythologies (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), e-book.
Revisiting the myth of neutrality in academic writing is therefore an epistemological and pedagogical project that aims at allowing and connecting the different layers of knowledge that punctuate our practice as academic writers and teachers. In such project, the epistemological stand in direct relation with the pedagogical; only if we reconsider the ways in which we pass on knowledge to new generations of scholars, can we sustain the necessary space for the multi-layered stories of knowledge to become part of our academic writing practice.

So what if, following a *Pride and Prejudice* plot structure, we were to bring the seemingly incompatible practices of creative writing and academic writing into a single space, allowing them to dance, flirt, and argue passionately before eventually marrying and living happily ever after? Working, at the time of writing, at a school of Politics and International Relations in a well-established university, I am aware that this is asking for trouble. There is trouble coming from all directions. The trouble of writing against the grain; the trouble of science’s incapacity to convey a completely neutral perspective and yet wanting to; the trouble of creative writing wanting to remain free of any kind of constricting policies; the trouble of habitual editing practices pushing the more personal and intimate voices out of the frame; the trouble of personal and intimate voices feeling vulnerable and out of place; the trouble of having learned to find personal and intimate voices out of place; the trouble of publishers no longer recognising submissions as what they were used to; the trouble of readers scanning through in search of the citable arguments; the trouble of taking risks and falling, falling hard; the trouble of bruises shutting voices down; the trouble of rescuing those voices; the trouble of surviving a hurricane; the trouble of having lost the keys; the trouble of not wanting these troubles to be here.

Here, I want to stay with the troubles for a while and for the occasion speak with Donna Haraway, if only to feel re-energised by her infectious laugh and dazzling imagination. To Haraway, staying with the trouble is a serious and lively way of responding to two dominant future-oriented attitudes: the one seeing in technology or God the promise of salvation; the other seeing no future at all, our world being about to collapse.17 Haraway invites us on a different journey. ‘In urgent times’, she tells us,

many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, or stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.18

To stay with the trouble, Haraway displays and plays with a series of what she names SF, which are: ‘science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism,

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17. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (give page refs, introduction.
18. Ibid.
science fact, so far’. The naming of SF is perhaps a silly game, and yet it carries Haraway’s realisation that all these figures are entwined with one another. ‘Science fact and speculative fabulation need each other, and both need speculative feminism’, she observes. Haraway generously and playfully gives us a tour of her discovery and sense making process in practice:

First, promiscuously plucking out fibers in clotted and dense events and practices, I try to follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times. In that sense, SF is a method of tracing, of following a thread in the dark, in a dangerously true tale of adventure, where who lives and who dies and how might become clearer for the cultivating multispecies justice. Second, the string figures is not the tracking, but rather the actual thing, the pattern and assembly that solicits response, the thing that is not oneself, but with which one must go on.

Third, string figuring is passing on and receiving, making and unmaking, picking up threads and dropping them. SF is practice and process; it is becoming with each-other in surprising relay.

There are multiple reasons why Haraway’s practice might help us stay with the troubles we are entangled to when teaching and writing, starting with the undeniable realisation that activating knowledge and knowledge-writing are intimate enterprises. Further, her text is an example of academic literature where knowledge is not presented in a dry, linear, and propositional argument, but contains instead a larger sensory process of discovery and sense making. Haraway magisterially embraces the stories of her knowledge-writing. In all its unconventional qualities, her narrative becomes a pretty accurate rendition of the ways in which many of us experience teaching, doing research and writing.

While inviting us into her process of discovery, Haraway also makes clear that there can be no binary opposition between science and fiction, although science and fiction are not the same. Her figure of SF is an agile acrobat walking on the fibers connecting the one with the other; like the wood wide web, SF is a network of communication and knowledge formation; SF is a figure that invites us to become attuned to our senses, to watch and listen to what happens when we stop and pause there where the trouble is; SF is a framework for practicing an affective pedagogy where our feelings give us cues of the ways in which we are relationally orientated towards objects and beings; the ways in which our fears, our desires, our curiosity inevitably impact what we see and the ways in which we understand what we see; the ways in which our rational mind is always already in contact with our body and with our emotional and affective mind. Each kind of knowledge, scientific knowledge included, is always situated, therefore oriented, and relational.

Sara Ahmed further illustrates the phenomenon of relational orientations by presenting the example of a child seeing a bear and running away in fear. Ahmed observes that

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’.
23. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.
the fear is not only an innate survival function (as evolutionary models would argue); it is instead also the expression of bodily knowledge that makes us see objects and beings in certain ways. As she explains it:

Why is the child afraid of the bear? The child must “already know” the bear is fearsome. This decision is not necessarily made by her, and it might not even be dependent on past experiences. This could be a “first time” encounter, and the child still runs for it. But what is she running from? What does she see when she sees the bear? We have an image of the bear as an animal to be feared, as an image that is shaped by cultural histories and memories. When we encounter the bear, we already have an impression of the risks of the encounter, as an impression that is felt on the surface of the skin. This knowledge is bodily, certainly: the child might not need time to think before she runs for it. But the “immediacy” of the reaction is not itself a sign of a lack of mediation. It is not that the bear is fearsome, “on its own”, as it were. It is fearsome to someone or somebody. So fear is not in the child, let alone in the bear, but is a matter of how child and bear come into contact. This contact is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome. The story does not, despite this, inevitably lead to the same ending. Another child, another bear, and we might even have another story.24

The beauty of Ahmed’s presentation lasts in the crack it opens where knowledge appears as a manifestation of our psycho-social and psycho-physical histories interacting with the specificities of the here and now. Knowledge, then, is indeed a story. A lost story (lost because it belongs to unknown pasts) that reveals itself when we interact with other human and non-human beings.

What might happen, then, when we pause to staying with the trouble, is that those layers of science fact, speculative feminism, string figures, and science fictions release signals of bodily knowledge ready to enter the narratives of our knowledge-writing practices. What might also happen is that we become touched by unexpected feelings, discovering layers of relational intimacy with science facts that we thought were distant from us.

Releasing the (lost) stories of our knowledge-writing practices means entering a space of dialogue with generations of scholars who have developed frameworks of feminist epistemologies and frameworks of decolonising knowledge. Both movements converge in that they offer ‘alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political practice’,25 and in their demands to reconsider what we understand as knowledge in the first place. Often, they stand as allies against the habitual constraints of academic boundaries that have formed throughout history, both demanding space to unlearn traditional academic practices to make space for kinds of knowledges that cannot be revealed in a dominant white male paradigm. Both movements explore forms and methods that allow for intimate, bodily, and affective knowledges to become visible while doing academic work. They rely on pedagogies of positionality, relationality,

24. Ibid., 7.
25. Gurminder K. Bhamra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, ‘Introduction: Decolonising the University?’, in Decolonising the University, ed. Gurminder K. Bhamra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 2.
and transition to create safe spaces of encounters and dialogues while engaging with processes of sense making. Yet when ignoring intersectional struggles, feminist literature has often fallen short of addressing the colonial foundations of knowledge institutions, as well as the structural racism that endures today. bell hooks’ discussion of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a poignant testimony. Despite the sexist language in Freire’s work, hooks recognises that she felt ‘included in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [. . .] in a way that [she] never felt herself – in [her] experience as a rural black person – included in the first feminist books [she] read. [. . .] In the United States’, she continues (and this is just as true in any other capitalist colonial society),

we do not talk enough about the way in which class shapes our perspective on reality. Since so many of the early feminist books really reflected a certain type of white bourgeois sensibility, this work did not touch many black women deeply; not because we did not recognize the common experiences women shared, but because those commonalities were mediated by profound differences in our realities created by the politics of race and class.27

Critical here is hooks’ recognition that ‘being touched’ is paramount to processes of sense making. By offering a theoretical framework addressing the need to care for students’ souls and hence take into account their most intimate struggles and grievances, Freire’s intervention in critical pedagogy made space for generations of racialised students and academics to develop a language, as well as a practice in which identities of class and race could become part of a story of knowing. Central to this practice is the recognition that learning and knowing go hand in hand with the practice of creative dialogue and care. As Freire expresses it: ‘Because dialogue is an encounter between women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another’.29 Recognising that teaching and writing is an act of creation that brings different practices of naming into a dialogical space is an act of staying with the troubles. Because who says creation says messy process. Creation comes with many silences, and with many in-betweens. Creation comes with a lot of rough edges, with unfinished sentences, with unfinished thoughts. Creation is working with raw material. It is working with sounds – noise even – instead of words; it is working with threads instead of material; it is working with muds instead of bricks. But during the creative process, words emerge from the noise and become stories; threads become materials, which become cloths, or a kite that flies the winds above the horizon. During the creative process, mud does become bricks, and bricks become shelters, and bridges. The essence of creation is to play with boundaries while finding meaning in what we do. Be it in telling the forgotten stories of unknown citizens. Be it in highlighting the affective

26. Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez, ‘Diversity or Decolonisation? Researching Diversity at the University of Amsterdam’, in *Decolonising the University*, ed. Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 108–28.
27. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, e-book (New York: Routledge, 1994), chap. 4, e-book.
28. Ibid., chap. 1. e-book.
29. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 89.
technologies of government lodged in institutional rules, showing paths where emotions flow like water, connecting the personal with the public, the rational with the affective, the juridical with the political, the poetic with the scientific. But also, the essence of creation is to embark on a journey with unknown destinations.

Working with the myriad layers of knowledge that orient us as much as we orient them, the point is to be let touched by feeling, linking affect, to pedagogy, to performativity, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* invites us to do.30 ‘A project to explore promising tools and techniques for non-dualistic thought and pedagogy’,31 Sedgwick’s writings are a rich exploration of knowledge that refuse linear arguments, embracing obsessions, frustrations, paranoia, desires, and hopes. ‘I’m fond of observing how obsession is the most durable form of intellectual capital’, she confesses between two sentences. ‘*Touching Feeling* wants to address aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside others that do. . . . I assume that the line between words and things or between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation’.32 And remarkably, Sedgwick’s work is a generous act of string figuring speculative feminism SF that makes us think with and through affect. Skillfully opening windows through which the reader can witness the writer’s thought process, weaving stories by moving in and out of theoretical meditations, anecdotes, bodily sensations, relational psycho-physical spaces, humour, fears, desires, anxieties, and hopes.

When considering those layers of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge while writing, the art of writing knowledge becomes an art of staying with the trouble, ‘learning to be truly present’,33 practicing the art to be attuned to the ways in which we are being drawn to certain things, and to paying attention to the sensorial responses that our affective orientations generate. Writing knowledge must make space for the ineffable while writing. This does not need to be a paradox, since writing can allow for spaces to come alive outside of the actual words that we write. But it does require us to embrace a loosened art of writing within the academy, and to broaden our expectations while reading, welcoming the multitude of forms in which stories can be told, be it on the lines or when needed between the lines.

#5 What Really Interests Me Is. . . Following the Threads, Disentangling the Trouble

*Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.*
–Audre Lorde, ‘Poetry Is Not a Luxury’34

Practicing storytelling is not new within the academy. Integrating storytelling elements in academic writing practices is a recognised device that equip a text with an effective

30. Sedgwick and Frank, *Touching Feeling*.
31. Ibid., e-book.
32. Ibid.
33. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, introduction. e-book.
34. Lorde, ‘Poetry Is Not a Luxury’.
argumentation line and a felicitous delivery. Researching academic writing practices across faculties and disciplines, Sword observed that ‘[researchers] vying for prestigious grants are often acutely aware that their success depends on their ability to tell a good story, and scholars in disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, education, law, management, and medicine have advocated and theorised storytelling both as research methodology and professional practice’. Sword’s remarque is first and foremost a rhetorical advice. It refers to one of the most common annotations on freshmen’s papers when trying to teach the trick of good writing: ‘take the reader by the hand’. Telling a good story is the best way to engage our readers. Storytelling has less to do with fiction than it has to do with the flow of the text, and with the text’s capacity to grab the readers’ attention at crucial moments in the recounting. This article makes use of storytelling techniques too. Its numbered structure follows Heather Dyer’s invitation to adapt the basic story arc of the hero’s journey for sketching the stories of our research.

Although such rhetorical exercise is already a welcome step into acknowledging the stories that situate our knowledge-writing practices, it remains at the level of superficial rhetorical techniques. Yet, scholars have pushed the art of storytelling and travelled fascinating territories. Elisabeth Dauphinee’s Politics of Exile is a remarkable contribution. Written by a professor in International Relations and published by an academic publisher, the book reads nonetheless as a novel (although its qualification as novel is subject of discussions), and explores ‘narrative methods to uncover those aspects of sociopolitical experience that resist depiction in traditional academic literature’. In The Politics of Exile, such sociopolitical experience ranges from the relationship between a professor and her dependency on a native speaker to check her primary material translations; to this relationship becoming a space that radically challenges what she thought she knew; to the clotted and opaque space where knowledge building becomes entangled with most intimate and existential questions; to the knots of affects and reasons fighting one another in a soldier’s act of desertion; to the question of justice and ethics when thinking through a war zone; to traversing scales from the anecdotal to the global, negotiating particular times and spaces with the space that the academy has become; to ways in which the academic culture affects the people inhabiting it.

Although not the first of its kind – another example that comes to mind is Carlos Castaneda’s The Teachings of Don Juan in which creative narrative methods are equally part of the book’s pedagogies – Dauphinee’s work was an opportunity for the field of International Relations to reconnect with the art of narratives, and situate them at the core

35. Sword, Stylish Academic Writing, chap. 8. e-book.
36. Heather Dyer, ‘#Take5 #34 The Best Way to Write? The Hero’s Journey’, Take 5. Available at: https://lmutake5.wordpress.com/tag/heather-dyer/. Last accessed 20 July 2020.
37. Elizabeth Dauphinee, The Politics of Exile, Interventions (New York: Routledge, 2013), Kobo. e-book.
38. Elizabeth Dauphinee, ‘Dauphinee’, personal page, York Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies. Available at: https://profiles.laps.yorku.ca/profiles/dauphine/. Last accessed 20 July 2020.
39. Carlos Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge (London: Arkana, 1968).
of political science’s subject matter. In her article ‘Novel Writing in International Relations: Openings for a creative practice’, Jenny Edkins argues for an integration of creative writing practices within academic pedagogies, so as to make room for those types of stories that create spaces to tell stories of disruption, stories of traumas, stories of distrust and silences. Edkins’ argument contributes to making room for texts that can tell politically, as opposed to merely telling about political realities. In opposition to the depoliticised myth of neutral academic writing, telling politically is ‘thinking about what type of story would disturb a particular order and produce a politics, and whether such a story is possible’. Telling politically, then, involves the conscious practice of working with aesthetic and forms while embracing the positionality of knowledges; it involves welcoming styles of writing that disrupt our habits of reading, and by disrupting it, make us aware of those areas that we tend to neglect.

In the same vein, the Journal of Narrative Politics, founded in 2014 and edited by Elisabeth Dauphinee, has by now become an institutionalised space where narratives of all sorts are welcomed onto the table of academic discussions. Prose, fiction, non-fiction, photographic essays, films, and academic narratives blend while ‘exploring the overlaps between aesthetics, politics, theory, and ethics’. As such, the journal has become a rich collection of narratives that traverse genres and styles while giving account of researchers’ research and the knowledge they share. Importantly, it also provides an institutional space within the academy where writers can celebrate the importance of narrative politics, in all its forms, while remaining attributed to academic discussions and practices of knowledge-writing. The institutional space is important, because it allows us to nurture a collective space where writers of the academy can unite and share their experience of and through narrative politics, offering stories that disturb institutional orders, stories that disturb the infamously white, male, and propositional canon. In their pedagogical gestures, these stories do not only address the academy; they also address the ways in which power relations of the academy are intimately related to broader power relations that constitute national and international political organisations. The ways in which these narratives come to stand next to one another has a force of itself. Together, they become a performance, a collective action, a string figure where each narrative stands in relation with others while celebrating those areas of knowledge-writing that are commonly repressed in academic discussions. Micro-stories that shape one’s sense of identity stand in solidarity with stories that recount the tenacity of racism invading spaces of belonging. Be it in narratives about the everyday, the past, research design, methods,

40. Edkins, ‘Novel Writing in International Relations’.
41. Ibid., 289.
42. ‘About This Journal’, Journal of Narrative Politics. Available at: https://jnp.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default. Last accessed 20 July 2020.
43. For e.g. Shiera S. el-Malik, ‘A Lebanese Hillbilly, or An Arabi-Lachian at the Big Lick Farmers’ Market’, Journal of Narrative Politics 6, no. 2 (2020): 72–3; Susan Forde, ‘From Lion’s Head to Muizenberg’, Journal of Narrative Politics 6, no. 2 (2020): 74–78; Kersha Smith, ‘Hidden Heirlooms: Black Families and Their Stories of Continuity’, Journal of Narrative Politics 6, no. 2 (2020): 79–88.
44. For e.g. Manu Samnottara, ‘Pedaling from Courage’, Journal of Narrative Politics 6, no. 2 (2020): 60–5.
interpretations, or interpellations, narrative politics highlights the extent to which doing academic work is always already entangled with the unreliability of language, affect, and communication.

Reflecting on the texture of such entanglements, Alexandra Hyde offers insights into her practice of poetry writing during ethnographic fieldwork with the British Military. As she observes:

> It strikes me that poems are an intensely unreliable written form; inherently unstable and susceptible to failure, particularly if one mistakes their purpose as being to communicate a single meaning or argument. There is always the risk that the reader might not get it. But this is also part of poetry’s appeal. In terms of diffusing the false security of authorial intent, one can always rely on the possibility that the poem’s layers will rebel, and that it will be interpreted in an entirely different configuration by someone else.45

Practicing a loosened art of writing within academic practice enables writers to insert a sensory experience that goes beyond a descriptive and analytical function of language. As Hyde notes, ‘[poems] . . . are a slow form when compared to the click of a shutter or the hasty notes that go on in fieldwork diary’.46 That slowness comes with a texture on its own, where recording the ‘real’ becomes a conscious practice of mediation between a series of sensory experiences and ‘language and form, where events are taken out of context or out of sequence to make connections that perhaps were not explicit at the time’.47

In effect, poetry writing is an exaggeration of any kind of knowledge-writing. It situates the writer as much as the reader in relation to the materiality of language and the forms that language produces, in an effort of sense making. Just as there is no guarantee that a reader will get a poem, there is no guarantee either that a reader will get a linear and propositional argument.

Yet loosening the boundaries of our disciplining writing practices is a valuable tool for becoming aware of our intimate connections with the material of our research. Although I have always sensed that my academic practice was anchored in much more than the academic references and primary material I work with, I came to realise the breadth of bodily, emotional, and affective relations to my work once I started to take creative writing classes as part of my research on creative methods. My aim in taking these classes was to experiment with different genres of writings and to observe their effect on my thinking and understanding of things. As I was asked to craft different kinds of narrators that did not necessarily represent myself, I started to experience how much these narrators revealed themselves to me through my own act of writing. Inspired by this experience, I started to experiment with writing earlier drafts of this article from the perspective of a third person singular masculine narrator. I was amazed to experience a new sensory pallet very quickly. One of the things that stayed most with me (because it

45. Alexandra Hyde, ‘Omissions and Admissions: Poetic Writing, Feminist Ethnography and Empathetic Violence’, *Journal of Narrative Politics* 1, no. 1 (2014): 29–30.
46. Ibid., 30.
47. Ibid., 31.
was as much surprising as ironically expected and enraging) was the feeling that this third person singular masculine narrator made me feel more entitled to try things out, to propose an argument that may be provocative and challenging. Shifting narrator made me realise how powerful positionality is, but also how creative writing techniques are powerful tools to play with the weight of psycho-social and psycho-physical power relations inherited from personal, cultural, and institutional histories.

In parallel to experimenting with different kinds of narrators, I discovered the power of crafting scenes that ground readers in a very specific place at a very specific time. The more sensory details, the livelier the scene becomes, the more readers can enter the experience of reading. Writing the first stanza of ‘Archival Landscapes’ for instance, I already refer to four kinds of senses: sight (you take in / the tables / the light / damped atmosphere), sound (no voices / but whispers), touch (the boxes / rust and dust), and smell (the smell of / old paper). Similarly, making you visualise, in Section #2 of this article, the portraits of white men on the wall of your faculty makes use of just the same technique. By crafting scenes, I allow you to accompany me in the spaces I envision while writing. Yet, the point of writing scene is not only to draw readers in. It is also to make space for the field of the sensory to enter the text and to openly support the elaboration of the argument. The more I allow myself to use creative writing techniques, the more I find myself listening to my sensory pallet. And the more I listen to my sensory pallet, the more I become aware of what is driving my desires, my fears, my rage, my hopes.

If I am telling these micro stories of my writing experiments, it is because they stand in direct relation with the core argument that I’m presenting: the way we write has a profound impact on the reality that we observe. Letting creative writing and academic writing converse therefore relates to a theoretical and critical understanding of the ways in which our academic practices foreclose and discipline knowledges. But as bell hooks reminds us in her humbling reflections on education as the practice of freedom, power relations within knowledge institutions will not be challenged if we stop once we have grasped the problem on a cognitive level. Making space for different kinds of knowledge to be present is to practice a different kind of relation to knowledge inside the academy, including the classrooms. As hooks teaches us, teaching to transgress is about the quality of presence, listening, and care that a professor brings to the classroom. By extension, writing to transgress is about bringing that same quality of presence and listening into a text. A quality that listens to difference; that values expertise beyond the immediately visible; that recognises the impact of the private on our habits of learning; in short, that ‘[provides] the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin’. For how could we possibly emancipate from the constraints and repressions imposed by traditional academic guidelines if we do not make space for psycho-physical and psycho-social histories to interrupt and disorient our habits of doing and our understanding of things?

48. hooks, Teaching to Transgress.
49. Ibid., chap. 4. e-book.
50. Ibid., chap. 1. e-book.
Loosening the codes of writing amounts to taking risks. Because change will occur when we do so. Change will occur as we become aware of and actively challenge the colonial and patriarchal norms that constitute the academy; change will occur if we truly engage in revising our curricula, not only to include women and authors of colour on students’ reading lists, but also to engage in practices of feminist epistemologies, as well as in practices of decolonising knowledge. Taking those risks is what we must do to seek ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’.51

#6 The Biggest Difficulty Is. . .

3rd Proposition for Thought in the Act: Design Enabling Constraints
– Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, Thought in the Act52

Just as writing poetry is a slow form of note taking as compared to the click of a shutter, reading poetry might require slowing down. But that slowness, that impediment, might be the condition for accessing those layers of knowledge in which scientific claims are germinating. As Isabelle Stengers wrote in her manifesto for slow science, ‘[the] right to slowness is not a right in itself’.53 Yet slowing down participates in a movement of thinking with, of ‘rewearing the bounds of interdependency’, of ‘creating relationship with others that are not those of capture’.54 Not only does slowing down enable the practice of a different kind of science, it is a creative practice of regenerative care.

This is particularly true for the slowness that poetry retains. A slowness that invites a movement of thinking with, if only because poetry is an invitation to breathe with the texture of language presented on the page. As M. NourbeSe Philip reminds us, breathing with and breathing for is a fundamental practice of ‘radical hospitality’.55 ‘Each of us had someone, a woman, breathe for us. To keep us alive. Each of us has allowed someone, a woman, to breathe for us, our coming to life dependent on an Other breathing for us’.56 Although this experience of being breathed for and breathing with belongs to the unconscious of our psycho-physical space, we do continue to breathe with and for as we think and write. Knowing who and what we breathe with is vital for understanding the situatedness of our knowledge-writing practice. Breathing with is never restricted to the words on the page. But words on the page can be an invitation to pause and breathe, and while breathing, to stay with the trouble. Breathing is an act that connects the different layers of knowledge that we work with, be it bodily knowledge, molecular, cognitive, affective, historical, futuristic, conscious, or unconscious.
Just as writing poetry can become a tool for capturing forms of knowledge that exceed the singular voice of linear and propositional argument, Jane Rendell’s practice of ‘site writing’ makes space to work on the entanglements of space, time, and thinking while writing. Site writing, she explains, is ‘a practice of critical history that searches for the most appropriate manner in which to try to articulate the position of the writing subject and her choice of objects of study and subject matter – intellectually, creatively, critically, emotionally’.57 As an architect, Rendell is interested in the ‘physical and psychic scene of the psychoanalytic encounter’, and in understanding the ‘relationships between subjects, objects, concepts and sites in architectural historical research and practice’.58 To me, the importance of her contribution is in pointing out that our relationship to the figurative and literal spaces we visit and inhabit contribute to our sensory experience and critical position. As she explains,

From those who theorize to those who tell stories, from those who list items to those who describe personal memories, from dictionary definitions to records of informal conversations, from statements to observations, from the walk through the gallery to an alternative space from which to imagine a work, my interest is the multiplicity of voice and the variation of standpoint. Such an approach can draw upon the remembered, the dreamed and the imagined, as well as descriptions and observations of the “real”, challenging criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now.59

The distinctive pedagogical proposal here is to acknowledge the multi-dimensional perspectives that always already inform our thinking and knowledge production. There is a direct relationship between the materiality of the places we are in, the places we remember, the places we imagine, and the texture of the texts we craft. In critical writing, the entanglement of our physical presence in physical spaces is always already entangled with the stories of our knowledge-writing practice.

There is no doubt that this text has been shaped by the contexts of the geographical and architectural sites in which it matured, as well as by the intellectual spaces I engaged with. From a commuting experience between two cities and two countries, one where I lived the other where I worked, to the confinement of a lock down period in a city that had only become a home a couple a months before. The spatiality and temporality of the places where I write inevitably interact with the thoughts I capture. Even though the writing of the text had started well before I became conscious of the entanglement between these spatial and temporal experiences, let alone before I could even imagine experiencing the confinement of three months of Covid-19 lock-down, there is no doubt that the experience of crossing borders, making space, and reconfiguring space in times of confinement is in the end intimately connected with the histories that propelled the writing of the text at first.

57. Jane Rendell, ‘May Mo(u)Rn: Transitional Spaces in Architecture and Psychoanalysis – a Site-Writing’, The Journal of Architecture 24, no. 2 (2019): 224, https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2019.1578076.
58. Ibid., 223.
59. Jane Rendell, ‘Architecture-Writing’, The Journal of Architecture 10, no. 3 (2005): 258, https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360500162451.
The same applies for the intellectual spaces that I engaged with so far. Trained in Literary Studies and Cultural Analysis yet more and more focused on the juridical political question of deprivation of citizenship and its genealogies, I have always engaged with the academy across disciplines, faculties, and institutional boundaries. In these interdisciplinary encounters, the question of language, creativity, and knowledge-writing has always interpellated me, if only because I constantly find myself engaging with new vocabularies, frames of reference, and the associated expectations. This fascination for language, creativity, and knowledge at the intersection of different practices brought me to start working with creative writing, and to become a member of the Tavistock Institute’s programme of Deepening Creative Practice with organisations. Crossing boundaries, making space, and reconfiguring space is in this sense what I do all the time. Perhaps, it is what I know best. Perhaps, it is what I have learned in my youngest years, having grown up in a tiny village in the North-East of France, leaving after high school to build my life elsewhere, moving abroad, settling in cities, learning new languages, losing languages, feeling lost, making space, reconfiguring space. Of course, my personal histories are not the flesh of my argument. But it is hard to deny their intimate entanglements with the obsessions, desires, intuitions, and creative subversions that have led to the act of writing this text.

As Haraway reminds us ‘[i]t matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories’.60 Embracing the awareness of situated knowledges, Rendell’s practice of ‘site writing’ offers concrete threads to work with matters, thoughts, stories, and worlds, when trying to loosen our knowledge-writing practice. She shares her experiments:

At times I have used the spatial form of a walk through a building, exhibition or a work to structure the writing, at other times I have used dialogue to bring in other voices. For some essays I have drawn on memory and imagination to construct alternative sites from which to consider art works, and in others I have adopted different voices and subject pronouns, as well as the integration of found words, in order to produce site-writings, texts that are spatially constructed in relation to the works I have been asked to “critique” or “write about” 61

In line with Edkins’s prompt to develop ‘an unashamedly aesthetic practice’ in IR,62 Rendell’s practice of site writing opens unashamedly aesthetic, embodied, and imaginative spaces within academic knowledge-writing practices, thereby making space for the irreducibly plural layers of knowledge that shape our arguments.

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60. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, chap. 1. e-book.
61. Rendell, ‘Architecture-Writing’, 258.
62. Edkins, ‘Novel Writing in International Relations’, 292.
#7 What Surprises Me . . . Is the Extent to Which How We Write Impacts What We See

_The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought._
–Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics^{63}

When invited by a group of post-doctoral students at the University of Amsterdam to give a workshop on creative writing, I came with a simple exercise, asking participants to review parts of their writing by either writing a scene with as many details as possible, evoking all the senses, or by thinking about the narrative structure of their stories: who or what are the characters? What is the story? What happened?

The transformations that happened in forty-five minutes was remarkable. One participant, who had often heard that their texts were difficult to engage with, had crafted a vivid opening scene, grounding the reader in the space and time where their observations took place, paving the way for an intimate engagement with the theoretical analysis that followed. Although months ago, I still remember bits of the scene. The moon shining in the sky. The air. People sleeping. The scene crafted a sense of breath and connection that only creative writing can achieve. Another participant realised that thinking about their work in terms of a narrative had radically changed the ways in which they interacted with their material. When notes become characters, theories candidates for being the protagonist, when the stories of research, thinking, and writing are revealed, the texture of our material expands. This expansion can be breathtaking.

#8 What I Realise Now Is. . .

_But how do we take back up a collective adventure that is multiple and ceaselessly reinvented, not on an individual basis, but in a way that passes the baton, that is to say, affirms new givens and new unknowns?_  
–Isabel Stengers and Viciane Despret, Women Who Make a Fuss^{64}

Being vocal about this project made me realise how much desire there is for a more creative approach to teaching, research and writing in the academy, but also how anxieties the prospect of loosening boundaries generates. What if creativity in writing becomes an expectation that we cannot deliver? Not everybody might feel compelled to write creatively. What is creativity in the first place? So far in the academy, creativity has especially been highjacked by neoliberal managerial technologies of government that systematically inhibit spaces of expressions, reducing those physical and temporal spaces in which research and writing take place.

Aiming to recuperate the reparative in teaching, research and writing by allowing the creative to be present, visibly present, the proposal this article sets out is not a one-fix-all recipe, but rather a call for paying attention to those spaces where creativity is already

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63. Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).
64. Isabelle Stengers et al., Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaithful Daughters of Virginia Woolf, trans. April Knutson (Minneapolis: Univocal Pub, 2015), e-book.
there, but unallowed to speak. Rather than being prescriptive, this reparative proposal is expansive. It is a call to practice and listen, with all our senses, to the layers of knowledge that build our stories of research and our stories of writing. Our stories, as well as that of our students.

My understanding is that such an open attitude to research and knowledge-writing will, in time, help and make space for a more structural integration of creative practice within the academy. My vision of a creative pedagogy towards research and knowledge-writing would start by introducing creative writing to students of all faculties and all disciplines alongside trainings in academic writing. The point is not to ask all students and academic staff members to write poetry and fiction; rather, the point is to provide physical and instrumental spaces for those who need to write otherwise. For many, if not all, the stories that shape their arguments are beyond a linear narrative where words and sentences nicely follow one another; let alone can they relate to a seemingly neutral academic technique of reporting.

If institutionalising creative writing practice within the academy might be a good place to start, it remains important to acknowledge that stories are not only written at a table. The writing of stories requires a process of attention and presence to the elements that constitute them in the first place. To this end, other creative practices of all kinds should be welcomed and supported. Dancing, singing, drawing, cutting, laughing; all these are practices that release the stories that remain lodged in invisible cells when not invited to be expressed. Places where such spaces are made part of the curriculum show interesting results. For instance, Lela Mosemghvdlishvili explores the non-linguistic realms of ontologies and pedagogies as she integrates student-led discussions with dance improvisation in a course on Bridging Ontologies through Mind and Dance that she teaches to second year undergraduates at the College of Politics, Psychology, Law, and Economics, at the University of Amsterdam. One of the learning goals of the course is to enable critical reflection on individual biases and assumptions. She observes that students who had engaged in embodied learning tended to better perform in analytical skills and self-reflexive capacities, suspecting that ‘through engaging the sensory experiences, students received better intellectual stimulation to engage in analytical thinking’.65

More research and writing are needed to further assess such creative practice within science, yet when considering the myriad layers of knowledge that orient our attention and sense making process, Mosemghvdlishvili’s observation is no surprise. As Erin Manning and Brian Massumi express, ‘[every] practice is a mode of thought, already in the act. To dance: a thinking in movement. To paint: a thinking through colour. To perceive in the everyday: a thinking of the world’s varied ways of affording itself. . . The practice that is philosophy has no exclusive to thought or the composition of concepts. Like every practice, its only claim is to its own techniques’.66 Hence, embodied forms of knowledge are sites where we can help give thought to the ineffable so that it can be

65. Lela Mosemghvdlishvili, ‘Teaching Experience – Experiential Dance’. Available at: https://experiential-dance.com/teaching/. Last accessed 20 July 2020.
66. Manning and Massumi, Thought in the Act, chap. Preface. e-book.
expressed. And allowing the ineffable to express itself participates in the practice of critical pedagogies where teaching and transgressing go hand in hand.

**#9 Things Will Change Because. . .**

*To be prepared against surprise is to be trained.*  
*To be prepared for surprise is to be educated.*  
—James C. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games*

‘I wrote this [article] because I needed to read it’. 68 Although alternative and creative forms of writing have been present in academia for several decades, I hadn’t yet encountered the *practice* of it in my interdisciplinary fields at the convergence of the humanities and social sciences. Colleagues from Politics and International Relations, Literary Studies, and Cultural Studies, all perceived my article to be intriguing, challenging, and provocative. So did two of the three anonymous reviewers. It was comforting to come across the many writers I cite, to breathe in their creative practices, their critical pedagogies, their prompts for exploring writing practices in new directions. It was interesting, puzzling, comforting perhaps, to read the third anonymous reviewer’s report stating that in their field, this article brought nothing fundamentally new. They referred, among others, to Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* as an early example of such creative endeavours; 69 to Laurel Richardson’s many guides and practical prompts for writers to explore different modes of writing; 70 to ethnographic methods in qualitative social sciences as a method that for decades has emphasised the importance of thick description.

This article has no pretention to be the first of its kind, and its hope is not to be squared into a methodological box as a way of doing qualitative social sciences, because its breath speaks beyond methods. Certainly, its call joins a larger movement of critical scholars who have for generations requested attention for pedagogical and epistemological reflections. Trusting that the parts represent the whole, the aim of this article is then to address the community of academic writers, regardless of discipline and methods, to consider working with the intimate stories of our research and writing so as to make space for subterranean and marginalised flows of knowledge. Loosening the boundaries of our disciplining writing practices is a collective work in progress; it is a conversation that can only stay alive when practiced, when invoked, when remembered. Its current is as timely as timeless. Because the need to make space for the repressed to be allowed to speak is not something that can be resolved, but something that requires a constant and renewed attention, recognition, and care.

67. James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games* (New York: Free Press, 1986).  
68. Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1990), chap. Preface, e-book.  
69. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).  
70. Laurel Richardson, ‘Writing: A Method of Inquiry’, in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, ed. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003), e-book; Laurel Richardson, ‘Getting Personal: Writing-Stories’, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14, no. 1 (2001): 33–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390010007647; Richardson, *Writing Strategies*. 
And so, the point of such a reparative pedagogy within the academy has multiple aims. It is aimed at countering the power relations that have historically shaped the academic space as an exclusive order. The vision here is to make space, to reconfigure the space of our teaching, research and knowledge-writing practice so as to diversify the voices within science. Second, making space is intimately connected to a strategy of care so as to restore pleasure and joy in what we do. Where societal relevance and impact strategies have too often become boxes to be ticked when bidding for research funding, my understanding is that a reparative approach to teaching, research and writing will, at times, foster meaningful connections with a broader audience. Simply put, stories are powerful because they connect. The kind of stories that will emerge, and how, belong to an individual process and should not be controlled. But what we can do is nurture a climate in which these stories can flourish. In the words of Naeem Inayatullah forwarding Dauphinee’s *Politics of Exile*: ‘the most important aspect of writing is allowing it to write back. We direct our conscious energy in formulating and executing plans for research. But surprises emerge when we strike the balance between control and letting go. Then the writing writes back. Producing this surprise is the unconscious purpose of writing’.  

And in that surprise lies the most reparative quality of our work.

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71. Naeem Inayatullah, ‘Preface’, in Dauphinee, *The Politics of Exile*. 