

A Response to Thought in Motion

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Right in the middle: chaos. Or better put: chaoz. “A radically empirical, chaozmatic qualitative inquiry, then, is one that reckons with the quasi chaotic threshold of the middle—the middle of the method, the middle of the field, the middle of the muddle” (Bradley Robinson).

This “z” of the chaozmosis, the zig zag that lurks at the intersection of disaster and spontaneity in a book on thought in motion, could be missed. It could be seen as a typo, particularly as it remains strangely in the offing, unaddressed, doing its angular work, “where research-creation coheres and is expressed by virtue of chaos, not in spite of it.” But it isn’t missed, Robinson’s contribution scintillating through its absent-presence, his an acute reading of how writing composes itself at the edges of a quasi-chaos.

zzz started to appear everywhere in the surrounds. It was 2017 or 2018 and SenseLab was exploring the potency of the swerve and the cut of the schizz. In this period of great creative exploration,¹ the s barely surfaced, its softer intonation differentialized, reZonated, in that powerful angular expression of two directions at once, zig-zag.

In Robinson’s paper, the z carries a similar tendency, moving the concept from the middle in two directions at once, disorder and spontaneity in tense overlap, the anarchic share of the chaozmosis always at risk of agitating the field to such a degree that nothing at all can extract itself from the muddle. This risk, the risk that comes always with the act of thinking-making, is here theorized as the dance that carries the ineffable excess of what lives on beyond the archives we capture, and that capture us.

This is the wager of *Thought in Motion*: can the zigzag of experience make a difference? Can it make different felt? Can its ineffable anarchic share - that potency that always threatens to explode its uneasy framing even while pulsing it into form - carry thinking toward other modes of

¹ There were many people involved in the zigzagging of expression. Some who stand out: Halbe Kuipers, Mayra Morales, Matisse ApSimon Megans, Anouk Hoogendoorn, Francisco Trento, Andre Fogliano.

knowing? Can thought survive at this tense abyss where its edges remain unclear? Can we do our work here, where things are still in the muddle of the middle?

The care of the writing suggests that much is at work here. This work at work, this *faire oeuvre*, propositional in its force, moves in the “too much [of] nothing and [the] not enough [of] something” (Bowstead), writing moving worl()ds into undercommon conviviality. A minor sociality is born here – thought in motion – at the interstices where the risk of “not enough” meets subjects unforming. Despite not understanding Finnish, *ollaan* (Pyyry) feels like a gift of transindividual becoming, a recognition of the potency of the anarchic share in experience. What is writing when moved by the impersonal force of a becoming? What is the work's work, the *faire oeuvre* of a process that remains uneasy, tangled in the risk it takes to bend legibility, to bend to that which will not be claimed in advance as knowledge?

Hanging out in embroidered disarray, constraints are born not of method, but of experimentation. Here, where “the writer has become writing itself” (Ramos), the constraint has become enabling.

A constraint's enabling potential is heard in the “nachklang” (Mark), in the afteraffect of an event having expressed a world into being. Passing the embroidery hoop between two people to explore what can happen when its messy backside becomes a surface for the work's work is to propose a constraint. This constraint enables not a finished work so much as a revaluation of how the aesthetic yield – artfulness – makes itself felt in a process. “As we attuned ourselves to how thinking back-and-front together mattered, we found that our artful inquiry required us to rethink both *what* we thought and *how* we thought” (Coogler, Guyotte). The constraint enables a certain facilitation whereby the hoop itself becomes adventurer in the process of redirecting the thread and sharing the knot. That the constraint is felt as enabling in the nachklang is due to its anarchival tendency: what the enabling constraint makes possible is an angle on experience that shifts the contours of what matters and how it matters. It is enabling of new contours of experience, new modes of existence.

Ana Ramos moves with this intuition, directing us to its relational feel. Intuition does not emerge from the subject. It comes from the field of relation, propulsing the act into orientation. Intuition is the conduit, that most rigorous of modes of thinking-feeling, “attunement to the relational field's immanent directionality” (Ramos). Ken Gale and Fiona Murray seek its emergent sociality, an interval also experimented by Aisha Ravindran in the act of intervieweig-encounter: in:tuition. Where intuition might be thought as the activating force of a field in the making, in:tuition asks how a togetherness is staged at that intersection where a world opens but doesn't yet know what shape it will take. Intuition meets in:tuition with the question of *how* a field crafts a shape that invites us to enter into it: interview-interval (Ravindran).

Ramos conceives of intuition as a “pivotal milieu.” Intuition carries the force of a redirection, its motor not volition but attunement in the act. “It is through attunement that the affective dimension of experience (relation), may appear—revealing what else qualitative research may become” (Ramos).

As Ramos underscores, this attunement is emergent in the event. It is not subject-driven, as though the subject existed prior to what edged itself into activation. In:tuition is that edging-with, that opening into itself of a field of expression that must be tended in order for its potential to germinate. Gale and Murray write here of children scribbling a tale in an invented language, a tale then read to the teachers who listen attentively not to “comprehend” it, to enclose it within a system, but to recognize its own mode of existence. What is in:tuitied here is not language per se. The story is not about children inventing their own language. The story is about how the scribble communicates a mode of existence that opens the way toward forms of pedagogy uncharted. Sadly, this is lost on the head teacher.

In:tuition, like chaozmosis, carries a risk. There is always a head teacher. And modes of existence as yet uncharted are often illegible, and so erased before they can even begin to squeak the scribble. “Spoken language is merely a series of squeaks” (Whitehead 1978: 264). It may just not be possible to hear what else the scribble can do. The power of Gale and Murray's contribution dwells here: the ineffable heard in the uneasy overlap of voices writing each other into act.

To refuse value as given, to practice a pragmatics of the useless, defeats situatedness. We never know quite where we are, or whether there will be a vocabulary to situate us once we settle a bit. This is what I loved about the gestures of sharing the hoop, the embroidery not the finished object but the echo of knots calling forth the next gesture. Artfulness lives here.

Elke Mark speaks of a “buffer zone,” that terrain of the relation of non-relation where what is at stake is not my presence so much as how relation itself fields the emerging event. In the performative lexicon of her collective practice, the relation of non-relation is the site of inquiry. Robert Irwin speaks of this as “site-conditioning” work,² work that emerges in the modality of expression it calls forth, work that edges into experience rather than fitting itself into it. This kind of work asks us to follow it, to angle into its presence/absence. It's terrifying not to fill the empty spaces with all we already know, but if we can resist that gesture, we might not only know differently, but be performed otherwise by the knowing.

This is the ethos of a “pedagogy of suspensions,” a proposition to follow the lead of the event as it unfolds across trains and metro stations and streets and hallways and rooms in which our bodies become echo-chambers: “To inquire through a pedagogy of suspensions is to learn to sense infrathin differentials of events, to become sensitive to what makes the slightest differences felt.” (Roussell, Cary, Kik, Robertson, MacRae). What is suspended is not the content of the act so much as the very concept of it. The suspension pulses into it, inviting it to activate in ways as yet uncharted. “Lag,” “latency.” “Buffer-space.” “Hanging-out-knowing” (Pyyry).

Noora Pyyry quotes Jane Bennett: “The capacity to detect the presence of impersonal affect requires that one is caught up in it” (2010: xv). Hanging-out-knowing is rife with the impersonal

² <https://www.itsliquid.com/robert-irwin.html>

affect of a certain quality of lag. *Ollaan*, Pyyry suggests, the Finnish word for being, doesn't claim personal standing. It is the preindividual force of a certain emergent personing. How exquisite to imagine that there needn't be the strong claim of a monumental "I" at the beginning of each act.

Chairs can be like that monumental I. This is what I take from the careful reading of how chairs stage geographies of docility in school and beyond, "an extraction device with the purpose of yielding neurotypically achieving students. The chair extracts the body from thought, from learning, much like the method extracts the material from the ecology of experience. Both chair and method tend to privilege the cognitive over the affective, embodied, and experiential" (Vasquez, Wells, Basu, Laroy Johnson). I wonder here also about fractured masculinities (Sweet). How do those chairs gender bodies, legs splayed, bodies curled in on themselves? Much of my own thinking has also moved around that chair that organizes frontality in the classroom and the normativity of its alignments. Over the zzz years it wasn't unusual at SenseLab to find them hanging from the ceiling, the frustration with the neurotypical classroom always palpable. Which reminds me of the time a close collaborator found herself apologizing for needing a chair because her back just wasn't happy with the floor! We had to keep reminding ourselves: experiments too can turn to dogma! And before you know it they become methods: all chairs! no chairs! Each site needs its own conditions of sitability. Site-conditioning always sits differently, chairs amuddle.

Laura Smithers rages. "Academics can and should rage against the neoliberalism of our institutions and administrative classes." We need as much of that as we can get. Because too often bodies are tortured in classrooms, their confidence stripped, their postures shaped by the prerequisites of neurotypicality. Practice the useless! And remember: the useless is not a value-judgement. The useless is the interval, the uneasy site-conditioned expression of valuations as yet uncharted. But be careful. A pragmatics of the useless is not an endpoint – it's a way, its artfulness an experiment with an attunement to how expression produces new angles on *ollaan*. Methods are always just around the corner, threatening to stultify what sizzles in the name of organization. The risk is not not knowing (Smithers, Bowstead). The risk is being distracted from the lively attunement of the field remaking itself. Site-conditioning.

In *Writing as Participation*, Ken Gale and Fiona Murray define assemblage/ethnography as that which "works to elude and trouble the potential discursive construction that the naming of a category of difference can create and, at the same time, offer 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). An assemblage/ethnography of not knowing must be practiced, and tended. Murray touches on this in her fragile admission that there may simply be no words: "I wonder, what if the world just can't speak through me at all anymore, too full as I am with other things to act as its expression? Perhaps 'I've lost the capacity to affect.'" Surely this is exactly right: there are no more words. Because words too often already know how to write the world into being, the scribbles devalued for their adjacency of legibility. But to say that the capacity to affect and be affected is stunted seems wildly off! The no-words affect deeply. This is the power of not-knowing (in advance). But there is risk in this modality of not-being-able-to-say. There is risk that saying might

reveal itself to be a less powerful tool that we have been taught it is. I think here of classrooms buzzing with (bare) activity but not words, of that minor sociality that moves sideways, words simply not available for its framing. I think of how much can be attuned to in the offings of language. How to tend that quasi-chaoz where the knowing must remain unresolved, where resolve is not what is at stake. A schizz is activated here, it seems to me, cut and propulsion at once, of the very site of learning.

Gale and Murray suggest intimating as a technique. “Intimating ’(Gale, 2021, forthcoming) is both a pedagogical and research-creative practice that through its rethinking of our common notions of intimacy as human to the thinking of intimacy as more than human has the potential to bring to life the vibrant processualism of encounter and event.” Can we intimate a bodying-into-act that chairs when backs are sore but finds ways to architect experience in a manner thick with unknowing? Can we ollaan experience, ontogenetically orienting it toward those aspects of existence as yet uncrafted, modes of existence still rich with the uneasiness of the interval that hyphenates the more-than (human)? No project for rethinking knowing is more urgent than the pedagogical one.

I end therefore on that evocative portal activated by Osgood, Andersen and Otterstad. Early-childhood scholars have a gift I have often observed: they attune, in the event. You can see it in the posture, in the angle of the listening. This is also what I read in their contribution here: an angular posture is necessary to hearing otherwise. Open the portal and you will find its wanderlines. Don't assume you know what moves through it. We should all spend more time in those portals that haven't yet solidified into neoliberal institutions of knowledge. Often I worry that the portal has closed. But I've been to some of those classrooms and I know that other wayz are at work, and that these wayz, if we listen closely, teach us all we have to learn about thought in motion.³

³ In early 2020, just before the pandemic hit North America, SenseLab experimented with what we called *Playcare*. The proposition was to facilitate a coming-into-relation on Sunday mornings that would welcome children, their friends and family. Creating conditions for play, we would learn to play together. Food would be made, crickets would be tended, philosophy would be read, forts would be tended. Though it only lasted three months because of the lockdown, this exploration of play, deeply influenced by ReggioEmilia, and by early childhood scholars more broadly (including those in this issue), what I learned from this is that children are very attuned to transversality. They love the philosophy as much the fortbuilding precisely because it is the adjacency – the sideways – that they most respond to and respect. They field concepts generously, getting up to eat when they are hungry, drawing when they need to, and disrupting the field when it needs it. I would like to dedicate this text to all who play.