

Writing in Cramped Spaces

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Abstract

This conceptual paper focuses on writing in the cramped spaces of the thousand disciplinary plateaus. It inquires into the cramped conditions that enable the production of a new language through spacing-making. Taking up Deleuze and Guattari's (1975/1986) use of the phrase 'cramped spaces' in their discussion on Franz Kafka's minor literature, this paper offers ways to think about writing in spatial terms. It suggests that post-qualitative writing that tries to dislocate from disciplinary plateaus, moves beyond drawing on multiple disciplines, towards disciplinary deterritorializations, diagramming, and rummaging. The paper draws on philosophy, literature, medicine, geography, ecology, and art, to draw a series of lines with which to think about writing in cramped spaces.

Key words: Deleuze and Guattari; transversality; transdisciplinarity; Kafka.

Creation takes place in choked passages...Your writing has to be liquid or gaseous simply because normal perception and opinion are solid, geometric (Deleuze, 1995, p. 133).

This conceptual paper focuses on *writing in the cramped spaces of the thousand disciplinary plateaus*. It inquires into the conditions that enable the production of a new object and a new language through spacing-making. Inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1975/1986) focus on Franz Kafka's minor literature, it suggests that writing from a post-qualitative (St. Pierre, 2011; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) approach is not about drawing from multiple disciplines, but about disciplinary deterritorializations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1986, 1987) and diagramming, akin to the practice of minor writing (Bogue, 1997). Ultimately, the paper draws on philosophy, literature, medicine, geography, ecology, and art, to produce a series of lines with which to think about writing in cramped spaces.

Whatever interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary¹ utopian hopes are said to have formed in the 70s and 80s have fizzled early on (Marcus & Saka, 2006). For instance, Stanworth (2002) argued that

¹ The terms interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity (as well as multidisciplinary, supradisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity) are often used without differentiation, despite being significantly different in aim and process. Osborne (2015) provides an in-depth overview of the differences between inter- and transdisciplinary. In short, interdisciplinarity occurs when multiple disciplines are brought together to focus on a problem (for instance epidemiologists working together with urban planners and educators on

while “a rhetoric of interdisciplinarity informs (...) curriculum changes, and public outreach, the reality of discipline-based peer review for tenure, grants, and promotion continues to reiterate and validate narrower academic territories” (p. 110). The disciplines, in striving to demonstrate their relevancy within precarious funding and hiring landscapes, have replicated themselves more tightly as/through discipline, becoming “more obedient as [they] become more useful, and conversely” (Foucault, 1975, p. 138). Osborne (2015) argues that disciplinary practices give researchers a sense of belonging, specialization, legitimation, and professionalism that operate on principles of inclusion, but unfortunately, also exclusion.

The fear of inter- and transdisciplinary scholars, who focus on entanglements, interregnums, and ontological and epistemological problematizations (Foucault, 1984/2000) across the disciplines, is to be positioned as jacks-of-all-trades, and masters of none (Callard & Fitzgerald, 2015). This is challenging to new scholars who engage in interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or transversal (more about that in a moment) forms of inquiry, and invites questions about the space in higher education for interesting stirrings of methodology, ontology, and epistemology, which tend to come from paradigmatic proliferations that often emerge from encounters between seemingly separate fields.² Part of my interest in writing in cramped spaces is my own becoming-writer, and in the political role of writing to carve out space that is not distinctly disciplined. Often, writing in cramped spaces at the intersections of environmental and political education, social movements, and communication studies—fields which I engage within my work—demands taking space to prove deep anchorage within not just one, but multiple disciplines as an antecedent to engaging with mappings that post-qualitative and non-representational inquiry and contributions can open up.

Writing is our mode of sensing and curating, yet all too often is used to “describe, orient, defend” (Manning, 2015, p. 660). Instead, I want to think about “situating writing as a tool for possible invention in thought” (Bridges-Rhoads, 2015, p. 705) in a way that might struggle through/in writing between and across disciplinary plateaus. As a concept, writing in cramped spaces refers to the generativity that emerges from writing in-between disciplinary spaces in a way that also considers the various ontological and epistemological commitments that shape the bodies of work on which we draw, or to which we make connections. Disciplines are clearly not singular, nor are they separate, hence my reference to them as plateaus. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) defined a plateau as “a multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome” (p. 2), suggesting that a role for writing is documenting one’s writing process as a nomadic subject (Braidotti, 2014).

My thoughts on how writing can enact disciplinary deterritorialization is informed by post-qualitative inquiry, which prioritizes creative (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012) and conceptual (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Taguchi, 2016) approaches to inquiry and data extensions (Koro-Ljungberg, MacLure, & Ulmer, 2018), which are grounded in Patti Lather’s (2007) deliberately disorienting methodology of ‘getting lost’ that aims at a “dislocation of our knowledge practices” (p. 1). Deterritorialization is the process of becoming dislodged from the signifying and representational logics of territory, a process which Deleuze and Guattari (1986) define as “a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words—a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying” (p. 6). Deterritorialization

the eradication of disease. Interdisciplinary research tends to be solution and intervention focused. Transdisciplinarity refers to drawing on multiple disciplines in a way that troubles their distinctions, which often leads to a ‘new’ disciplinary offspring, in the way that, for example, environmental humanities became an offspring of environmental science, philosophy, ecocriticism, and literary studies.

² Consider for example Pederson’s (2010, 2013) excellent work that traverses education and critical animal studies through post-qualitative inquiry.

strives at becoming (and staying) minor without aspiring to be recognized within dominant signifying categories of a dominant model. Minor writing practices are “practices that, until now, had to pass through a long purgatory before even being read, much less recognized” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. xiv), and the objective of minor writing is the process of “becoming-imperceptible” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 45), that is, the opposite of being recognized.³

Toward Transversal Writing

In reference to interdisciplinary writing, Roland Barthes (1986) wrote that perhaps what was needed was a new language:

the interdisciplinary is not a comfortable affair: it begins effectively when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down – perhaps even violently, through the shocks of fashion – to the advantage of a new object, a new language. (p. 56)

I turn to Deleuze and Guattari to examine how their own approach to concept development was inspired by authors who prioritized the creation of new language. But first, I want to highlight Deleuze and Guattari’s own relation to disciplinary work. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argued that disciplines “produce [their] own illusions” and “hide behind [their] own peculiar smokescreen” (p. 6). Their writing focused on concept creation, many of which emerged by showing how concepts and methodologies operated in the intersectional space of disciplines such as psychology, arts, linguistics, political science, science, and literature. We see this most acutely in *What Is Philosophy?* in which Deleuze and Guattari (1994) focused on practices of thought and modes of inquiry across the disciplines of philosophy, art, and science, to show how they produce concepts, affects and precepts. Their work is characterized by an interest in practices of thinking/doing/creating that composes bodies (writerly and disciplinary) and produces force.

Around the same time, Guattari (1989/2000) insisted on reworking transdisciplinarity towards transversality, which stemmed from his urge towards radically ecological thinking. He reconceptualized subjectivity as an assemblage of social, mental and environmental ecologies in light of “ecological disequilibrium” which “will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the plant’s surface (p. 24)? Most poignantly, the concept also did two things methodologically. First, it provided a language through which to investigate the way in which institutions and disciplines (and in Guattari’s case psychiatry) produced and disciplined subjects, and second, it produced a concept based on the idea of ‘lines’ which involved moving across disciplines and mapping their methodologies in relation to assumptions of ontology and epistemology. In transversality, mapping becomes a means of enacting space, rather than its representation (Genosko, 2002).⁴

“Of a bastard line” (p. ix) is how Massumi (1987) referred to Deleuze and Guattari’s de-rooted philosophical transversalities between the sciences, math and humanities. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) implored readers of their work to ‘plug-in’ their concepts with whatever issues they found relevant, and transform them, rather than reproduce what they did. Yet some thirty years later, it continues to appear

³ The danger of deterritorialization is that ‘the minor’ becomes reterritorialized, or signified and organized in relation to ‘the major.’ Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the risk that people face as they navigate spatial and symbolic productions that try to organize their desires from all directions: “You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you’re just deprived. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one” (p. 159).

⁴ I would argue that transversality might be imagined as an early post-qualitative approach to inquiry.

necessary to assert allegiance to a terrain, before spending time on articulating new lines: statements that might produce the various lines and movements crossing thresholds through the writing of a more-than-disciplinary scholar. When one wants to engage with developments of various concepts across these disciplines, too much deterritorializing without due disciplinary anchoring might be too quickly dismissed. Before one can engage in posthumanist explorations of environmental education, and the intersections of Deleuzian approaches to subjectification in social movements, for example, one needs to continuously take space up on a page to demonstrate disciplinary anchorage by at least showing how, for instance, environmental education and social movement communication literature and issues of subjectification might intersect in the first place. Despite, or because of ongoing practices of compartmentalization, academics, and new scholars in particular, might consider what particular cramped spaces they occupy and how these are productive for their writing.

To give a better idea of what gave rise to the concept of *writing in cramped spaces*, in the next part of the paper I focus on Deleuze and Guattari's engagement with literary disciplines and their desire to show how writers, particularly those who felt cramped within their disciplines or fields, were able to engage with the conventions that produced those conditions. One of the ways in which Deleuze and Guattari engaged in transversal writing was by focusing on how the aesthetics and practices of writing could transform various disciplinary fields. Particularly relevant for thinking about what we are doing when we are doing when writing between the disciplines is Deleuze and Guattari's focus on Franz Kafka's work, which inspired them to produce concepts such as assemblage and minoritarian.

Writing in Cramped Spaces

Kafka exposed the disciplining expectations of genre and literary style not by using techniques that may be expected of great literature, but by "effacing them to the benefit of a sobriety, a hyper-realism, a machinist that no longer makes use of them" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986/1975, p. 70). His writing depicts hierarchical spaces (castles, courts) that are navigated through multiple points, a myriad of insignificant characters, and hidden connections (castles with side doors, which, when opened by characters, would lead to other stories), often with no escapes. Kafka's work depicts "minor qualities of minor characters—part of a project of literature that wants to be deliberately minor and draws its revolutionary force from that" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986/1975, p. 65). He did not describe what it means to be a minority, nor sought representation for any groups through his writing. He rather wrote about the intensity of ordinary political struggles at the level of daily life organized in relation to major identity categories. Kafka's work was seen to be a "minor language to send the major language racing" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 105). His work depicted the feeling of moving within administrative bureaucracies with no success so aptly, that such an experience is now infamously referred to as Kafkaesque. A decade after focusing on Kafka's minor-literature, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) continued to find analytical value in the concept of the "minor" in their opus *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as a way to think of other ways in which the ongoing process of "becoming-minoritarian," rather than majoritarian, could apply to new subjectivities that could emerge between major categories dualisms of man-woman, human-non-human, etc.

Kafka's works, such as *The Castle* and *The Trial*, performed deterritorializations in two ways. First, he displaced "high German" literary conventions by making language stutter, because he felt cramped by the literary machine of how writers should write. Second, he focused his stories on mapping the way in which protagonists navigate regimes of power, just as he did the literary machine, regimes that appear to have no one in control. In *The Castle*, K, the main protagonist navigates an enigmatic castle, ruled by its equally mysterious authorities, while in *The Trial*, the character Joseph K navigates a legal system that refuses to tell him why he has been charged with a crime. In both cases, Kafka makes their characters'

labour as mechanics or engineers who need to understand the statements, rules and utterances which produce the operations of the machine, which Deleuze & Guattari (1975/1986) call the assemblage. What might be gleaned from Kafka's work is the emergence of a new language that performs disciplinary problematizations (Foucault, 1984/2000) in which a writer unravels disciplinary conventions, developed as solutions to problematic writing. The term Kafkaesque is not only about navigating frustrating institutions but also about Kafka's construction of deliberate stories in which characters examine the possibilities of mobilities, literally and figuratively, and explore explores disciplinary conventions.

Intrinsic to both *The Trial* and *The Castle* is their protagonists' diagnostic capacity to physically and figuratively move through, access, attempt to map, and explore the various corridors, bridges, channels, pathways of the edifices that comprise the castle and institutions such as law, politics, and of course the idea of 'good writing' itself. Kafka performs a spatial methodology of mapping within his stories by focusing on minor characters and their interactions with grand narratives, rather than the narratives themselves. Movement as space making, which is produced through rummaging, is experimental and more interesting than the potential 'meaning' of the stories themselves. The significance of Kafka's spatial work is that it serves as a "diagnosis of the diabolical powers around us" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 143), and is a reminder of the way in which writers, performativity through writing, reproduce their disciplines, or can create new space within cramped conditions.

Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986) used the term minor literature to refer to writing that effaces disciplinary conventions because of an experience of being cramped. As such, minor literature does not necessarily refer to literature written by someone from an ethnic or racial minority (though it could) but to one that aims at dismantling major ontological or epistemological categories with the aims of, as well as through, becoming-imperceptible. Ronald Bogue extended the term minor literature to talk about minor writing (Bogue, 1997), or writing that in its very aim and process is anti-essentialist. Minor writing's "deterritorialization of language necessarily entails a dissolution of cultural codes" (p. 109). *Writing in cramped spaces*, as minor writing, is not about drawing from multiple disciplines, but about rummaging, to quote Deleuze and Guattari (1987), "at the edge of the fields or woods.... at the borderline of the village, or between villages" (p. 246) in a way that requires first, mapping the connections between literature, and second, deterritorializing within the cramped spaces of multiple disciplines by inventing a new language: a minor language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Writing in cramped spaces, as minor writing, might be oriented to what life might become.

Thinking with a Writer's Cramp

Writing in cramped spaces necessitates paying attention to the forces and desires that produce or comprise bodies, including what practices and forces constitute disciplinary bodies, or epistemological fields. We may think of writing as an embodied act and an act that acts on bodies, as there is no separation between body and mind. Here, I want to use the writer's cramp as a trope for thinking and doing. The etymological root of the word cramped is the Proto-Germanic *krapmhe*, meaning 'bent' or 'crooked' which had its first uses in medicine in the mid 19th century in relation to mogigraphia, which is *scrivener's palsy*, or a writer's cramp in the hand (Vance, 1878). Writer's cramp was seen to be an occupational hazard caused by repetitive movements that caused the hand to bend and seize up. While debilitating, scrivener's palsy forces writers to stop the "performance of habitual and acquired acts" (p. 265). Cramping might therefore be seen as a condition through which an encounter with it forces a shift towards unlearning and deterritorializing a language that has become habitual and performative. The very word 'discipline' suggests both subjection to a set of authoritarian rules, as well as the researchers' own subjectification through repetitive practices associated with governmentality. Foucault (1975) argued that disciplines control the types of questions, methodological and ontological assumptions that

preoccupy writers. Disciplinary conventions ‘guide’ development of subject matter and methodological practices produce researcher subjectivities.

Interestingly, writer’s cramp takes place somewhere between thinking and practice as it is seen to mimic something in between a muscle and cognitive disorder (Flaherty, 2004). Neurologists have found that while writers with this disease can still use their hand to perform other actions using the same muscles, for instance, playing music on a violin, it is the specific practice of writing that causes them pain. Writer’s cramp primarily affected clerks in the 19th century, whose main task was to be photocopyers (Flaherty, 2004), that is writers whose aim was the reproduction of previously existing work. The repetitive nature of writing that stimulates cramping is also the result of a subjects’ drained capacity to integrate sensory information (Sanger, Tarsy & Pascual-Leone, 2001), as though bracketing a becoming-world that reverberates on other registers. Feeling cramped in the inadequacy of disciplinary language and the refusal to “‘write it up’ as recognizable research” (Bridges-Rhoads, 2015, p. 704), writing might sometimes feel like a form of paralysis, that is uncomfortable, but which might be engaged with productively by writing “with/against/through paralysis” (p. 704). A hand that might have been cured of scrivener’s palsy might be more cautious to replicate any repetitive motions, writing with a restored sensory ability that enables thought and action to connect through the production of words that produces new language.

Writing as Spacing

To write is to struggle and resist; to write is to become; to write is to draw a map: ‘I am a cartographer’ (Deleuze, 1988, p. 44).

There is nothing more to writing in cramped spaces than becoming a new cartographer.⁵ “To space, that’s all” (Doel, 1999, p. 125). Topological thought diagrams plateaus, folds, and the sedimentary beds that form strata (Deleuze, 1988) of disciplinarity, and the role of the writer becomes that of making a diagram to “create a path between two impossibilities” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 133). Becoming-writer involves folding the old into the new by diagramming. Subjectification comprises constant folding (Deleuze, 1988); a becoming that is both archive and diagram (Conley, 2005); simultaneously being folded and unfolding, though never unfolding so far as to fall into a kind of void of disciplinary irrelevancy. Writers break with the disciplines, so as to become non-representative, but neither do they sever their relations. This is what topologies do—they flex. In a way, one needs to start somewhere. This is why Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest the following:

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times (p. 161).

My point is that despite the persisting pressures of needing to explain and situate how one fits within a discipline, the shifting conditions of cramping and being cramped feel necessary for the possibility for a new language. There really is no outside, but a series of spacings that are continuously reworked in new ways. It is precisely the inability to escape to ‘an outside’ of these cramped spaces, in transcendental fashion, that forces engagement with it (Colebrook, 2015) through production of space-making. Writers

⁵ I borrow the term from a chapter titled *A New Cartographer* in Foucault (1988), in which Deleuze argues that Foucault developed diagramming as a new methodology of charting power.

in cramped spaces do not really seek to become ‘unearthly’ but ‘all the more earthly’ (Deleuze, 1995) by producing subtle murmurs that produce a sonic space to disorient disciplines, fields, and genres. In other words, by exposing the conditions that cramp them, and reorienting, not transcending space, writers can produce new space that is ‘the inside of an outside’ (Deleuze, 1988), reworked otherwise, perhaps reimagined as subtle murmurs, a layering intensities, and non-intersecting lines (layerings).

In this sense, writing in cramped space is not opposition to the disciplines, and their ‘occupation’ of space, but poses resistance that is internal and complicit (Colebrook, 2015) and aims to shift and reorient space, not step outside of it. We might understand writing in cramped spaces as constant arrival, as arrives the exile that appears not to know all the right rules to follow (Bauman, 2000). Stuttering within a discipline is a form of emergent and hesitant writing (Gale, 2016) that is invariably involved in space making which might evade singular disciplinary endeavors and the epistemologies found within.

Sharing Guattari’s (1989/2000) concern for ecological catastrophe, I wondered in what way the catastrophic might be useful trope through which to examine writing/spacing in my on field. A catastrophe is a reversal of what is expected, a substantial undoing. “*Survival* is not an academic skill” (Audrey Lorde as cited in Minh-ha, 1989), in as far as surviving refers to writing as disciplinary enactment through face-saving repetition.⁶ Face-saving repetition is akin to the damaging language of sustainability within environmental rhetoric that somehow sees the sustenance of an already failing system as a positive thing (Alaimo, 2016). It echoes anthropocentric reactivity (Wallin, 2016), or the re-valuation of human life through the resuscitation of a humanist subject in educational research in response to ecological crisis. Disciplinary writing, just like sustainability and anthropocentric reactivity, feel safe, but their limitations are in failing to see in infrared or other spectrums to advance transversal mobility of concepts, and concepts that emerge in the interregnum.

Moving concepts between disciplines might help to make space by deterritorializing colour, which is vital in in the field of environmental education. Allow me to explain. In his conversation with Deleuze (2004), Stefan Czerkinsky discusses the mobility of concepts from field to field. Czerkinsky, a painter, explains the need to arm oneself with a portable toolbox, canvas and some paint:

Arm yourself with a concept carrying case in leatherette...take a canvas that you yourself will boldly prime... sandwich it between two pieces of a wooden frame... make sure the canvas is much larger than the frame – at least by two inches. First, paint on the one side according to the direction you’ve chosen...next you go around the back to see what happened on the other side.... Now you paint the other side, using a different brush.... This is how you get deterritorialized movements of color. (p. 282)

An excellent example of this has taken place in the field of environmental humanities and environmental philosophy in which the colour ‘green’ has been deterritorialized through film, literature, art, and geography. In *Prismatic Ecology*, Bryant (2013) argues for an approach to post-green environmental research in which “the ‘stars’ that once guided our way disappear, and we find ourselves adrift in a black universe without any ultimate or transcendent guides” (p. 291). Writing in colours as varied as black (Bryant, 2013), grey (Cohen, 2013), violet-black (Alaimo, 2013), and red (Wark, 2015)—deterritorialized colour—has been incredibly useful to transgress boundaries between environmental science, history, art, and the humanities to conceptualize the scene and atmosphere of the political in the

⁶ I am indebted here to Guattari (1990) who introduced the idea of a face ritornello, which is linked to his and Deleuze’s (1987) concept of faciality.

post/anthropocene, and move the conversation out of the field of 'green' ecocriticism, associated with sustainability, romanticism, and emancipatory transformations and public mobilization. Perhaps we need even more movement of concepts and colours between fields in order to sense-forth a new language that can help to diagram the maps of how desire operates within political struggle, to move away from the major language of royal science (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) readily employed in environmental movement and education literature, against which questions and language are bound and measured, and to which their analytical value is compared.

My turn to posthuman, de-centred engagements with issues of subjectification and education, communication, and the environmental humanities, has made me think of the non-representational (non-reproducing) gesture of writing in a transversal ethos that posits agency in the capacity to affect and be affected and continuously produce new space; conceptual and a space-for-the self that emerges through folding and being folded (Deleuze, 1988). Diagrams chart forces and intensities with the intention of assessing their capacity for affecting and being affected (McCormack, 2005). They can be used to examine embodied forces at various levels of interaction. They focus on the various practices and statements made by these bodies and they investigate how these bodies and practices are taken up. Finally, they observe whether they move towards territorialization or deterritorialization (Lambert, 2005). For the purpose of writing in cramped spaces, diagramming involves becoming attuned to the capacity of disciplinary suppleness as well as their rigidity. Transversal diagramming is important for researcher reflexivity of the genealogical variety (Pillow, 2015), as writers are folded (Deleuze, 1988) by a plethora of lines that traverse their subjectivities, some, which a writer takes up, and others, which they may create (Deleuze, 1995). Writers are tasked with refusing the seductive pull of familiar language that is available and invites them to enact their disciplines performatively. Writing in cramped spaces, as deterritorialization, is a rupture, an event, or a moment of chaos. Within this logic of the conjuncture and of entanglement, I am drawn to writing in cramped spaces in order to see how the 'and' shifts and dislodges territorial space.

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