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The Messy Affect(s) of Writing in the Academy: An Introduction

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Introduction

The Messy Affect(s) of Writing in the Academy

David Lee Carlson & Kenneth Fasching-Varner

Introduction

Edna St. Vincent Millay writes in her rather pithy sonnet, “I will chaos in to 14 lines” and in the end, she proclaims that she will make her writing “good.” Her sonnet reflects many writers’ feelings about the writing process. Of all of the tasks that academics have to complete, writing is perhaps the most important, the one that consumes the most time, and it’s the one that is least talked about among academics. Philosophers and writers have commented on the ontology of writing (e.g. Foucault) the relationship between the body and writing (e.g. Cixous) and composition scholars trace the history of writing in schools. Writing is perhaps the *sine quo non* of being an academic. The editors of this special issue accepted pieces that trace the messiness of writing inside and outside the academy; or to evoke Millay, the process or the struggle of putting chaos into fourteen lines.

For this issue, we received a diverse range of manuscripts from traditional academic articles, to poems, art, and rants, and/or a combination of these forms. We accepted manuscripts that push beyond the traditional academic article and potentially forced readers to think differently about writing and about various modalities of writing. The editors of this special issue were interested in articles that showcased the messiness and the affective aspects of writing in the academy and outside academic spaces. For manuscripts submitted we not only wanted novel

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and taboo articulations of content, but we also want to see the approaches taken in the writing of the pieces to draw upon similarly novel and taboo forms.

The submissions for this special issue did not disappoint, in fact they surprised us in their creativity, their thoughtfulness, and most importantly how they engendered a sense of play with and through writing. This special issue will not only be fruitful for scholars interested in the writing process, but who are also entrenched in theoretical considerations of writing production, theoretical considerations necessary in the writing process, and in the more-than-human aspects of articulation. The editors were overjoyed with the brilliant articles in this special issue and are quite proud of it. Anyone of the articles could be the lead article and thus they are arranged in no particular order. The issue read in full is a series of provocations that should be pleasing in its unsettling.

Queer Librettist; or, Notes on the Composition of “Fox: An Opera-Comique”

Benjamin Arnberg, Auburn University

My article is a writing process narrative for social justice scholars. Arguments seem apropos, considering the academic genre in which I write. For clarity's sake, I shall list these arguments, then spend the article demonstrating (through practice) how my arguments hold. (1) There is no universally accessible and effective process for writing to/for contemporary academics, so (2) If anyone gives you tips, read said tips with skepticism and open-mindedness, because (3) Academe needs to reduce the amount of stylistic and onto-epistemological similarity, which yields banal and esoteric (white-hetero-patriarchal) products, that (4) No damn body wants to read, for (5) How useful is our work if no damn body wants to read it, learn from it, and apply it in “everyday” life?

Manuscript Rejection and Shame Resilience in Early Career Faculty of Color:

Vignettes on Coping and Overcoming

Rene O. Guillaume, New Mexico State University

Jesús Cisneros, University of Texas at El Paso

Edna Martinez, University of Texas at El Paso

Central to the role of the professoriate is the concept of scholarship, with a major hallmark of the profession consisting of peer-reviewed manuscripts as an expectation for promotion and tenure as well as annual review. A common occurrence for faculty submitting manuscripts as part of the peer-review process is manuscript rejection. The implications associated with manuscript rejection for early career faculty range from negative annual reviews to not earning promotion and tenure. The purpose of this study, utilizing Shame Resilience Theory (Brown, 2006), was to explore our experiences as early career Faculty of Color to bet-

ter understand the ways in which we coped and overcame the shame associated with the rejection process associated with peer-reviewed scholarship. The nine first-person portrait vignettes presented in this manuscript are centered on three overarching themes: (1) recognizing vulnerability, (b) tempering rejection, and (c) negotiating and reconciling rejection. As these vignettes reflect our lived experiences, we maintained first-person narration.

Chopped to Pieces, I Write Myself Together

James P. Burns, Florida International University

In this paper, the author reflects on being a writer in the academy in dialogue with writers who have been instrumental in the author's academic work: James Baldwin, George Orwell, Eduardo Galeano, and Michel Foucault. The author first contextualizes the paper in the current historical moment, characterized by resurgent authoritarianism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and mass non-violent protests in response to the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor to reiterate the importance of academic writers as public intellectuals. The author then reflects on the messy affects of writing in the academy, particularly as a pre-tenure faculty member, through four purposes, proposed by Orwell, that motivate most writers: sheer egoism, an aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse, and political purpose. The author concludes that academic writing comprises an aesthetics and ethics of the self as well as a political project of self-cultivation, the embodiment of truth, and care for the world.

Expanding Academic Writing:

A Multilayered Exploration of What it Means to Belong

Sara K. Sterner, Humboldt State University

Lee C. Fisher, Minnesota Writing Project, University of Minnesota

In this article, we explore the impact of rigid boundaries of what counts as academic writing and what it means to belong through the construction of a multilayered text that draws on the work of Patti Lather. Our layered writing engages with and documents the complexity of the writing *process and the struggle of putting chaos* into a static format that cohesively considers the multiplicity of knowing. This alternative format productively disrupts the status quo and honors an engagement with writing we would like to see embraced in the academy.

We Will Chaos into Three(lines):

Be(com)ing Writers of Three Through (Re)etymologizing "Write"

Rebecca C. Christ, Florida International University

Tara Gutshall Rucker, Columbia Public Schools, Columbia, Missouri

Candace R. Kuby, University of Missouri

In this manuscript, we take up the invitation by the editors of this special issue *and* Deleuze to expose, explore, and expand Deleuze's triple definition of writing. We will chaos into three(lines). We become writers of three. We ask questions without definite answers: How do we write a piece that is never finished? Is writing supposed to be clear? What if writing is supposed to be listened to? Experienced? What does it provoke? And in an attempt to write that which is not supposed to be on paper, we write. Sketch. Drag. Produce a mess. Struggle. Resist. Create. Map. Sustain.

**Affective Writing as a Promise of “Yet-To-Become”:
Unearthing the Meaning of Writing through the Voices
of Tenure-Track Assistant Professors**

Jeong-Hee Kim, Texas Tech University

Joshua Cruz, Texas Tech University

Rebecca Hite, Texas Tech University

In this article, we collectively explore our shared experience of the act of writing in academia. Drawing upon the voices of tenure-track assistant professors in a research university and using the lens of affect theory, we inquire into what it is like to write in the modern academy increasingly influenced by the institution's neoliberal agenda. Our experiences are shared in multiple poems, created by the cut-up method. It is our hope that the affect of writing or affective writing would flow from body to body, cutting across our personal feelings, reaching far to those who are in a situation similar to ours existing in the space outside of our reality.

Mucous Bodies, Messy Affects, and Leaky-writing in Academia

Teija Rantala, University of Turku, Finland

Taru Leppanen, University of Turku, Finland

Mirka Koro, Arizona State University

In this article, we conceptualize and exemplify how we, as academics, might write with our always-already gendered (leaky) bodies. We form assemblages of writing by following Erin Manning's (2013) theorization of leaky bodies and leaky-writing. Here, the mucosity and the leakiness of our storylines, narratives of affects and processes, work as an anchor through which we process our differentiating materialized bodily realities in academia. Therefore, the focus is on the materialized narrative intensities, which, through academic writing practices, the movement of affects in academia fold into acts of writing, hand-pens, and thinking-feelings. Our aim is to offer fresh academic narratives by following what happens to storytelling in this composition of various kinds of lines. These narratives do not fold neatly into chapters because they stem from storylines of vitality, materiality, and molar and molecular lines. They leak into one another, creating lines out of utterings, expressions, and words—as well as visual, moving, and

troubling experiences. The writing academic mind-bodies leak emotions, materialities, fluids, and uncertainties to the neo-liberalist outcome-orientated academic writing-machines (see Massumi, 2017). They contest the idea of academia as a molar structure that works on rational logic by allowing vitality, porosity, and leakiness to transform academic writing practices.

The Frankenpaper:

One or Many Essays on Writing and Frankenstein and Deleuze and...

Joshua Cruz, Texas Tech University

Holly Corkill, Texas Tech University

This paper (or papers?) makes explicit the “Franken-” qualities of writing. Rather than a linear process, writing is an assembling of ideas, sometimes disparate but always overlapping. We have cobbled together something like a paper on writing, although it is also a reflection on Deleuze, Frankenstein, Frankenstein, Shelley, anxiety, composition as a field, composition as a practice... the list goes on. This paper, we believe, takes on and insistently exhibits monstrous and un-identifiable qualities. It is poorly sutured; the seams show glaringly; and we, the authors, realized around the time of completion that it was probably a bad idea to send this thing into the world. Still, the deed is done, and the paper now exerts its own agency upon those that chance to read it. We can only hope that writing of this nature does not come back to kill us (or our careers) in the long run.

Academic Joyrides: Uncreative Reading and Writing

Susan Canon, Mercer University

Teri Holbrook, Georgia State University

With this article, we invite you into our experiment with uncreative reading and writing drawing on the work of Kenneth Goldsmith (2011) and the Situationist International. In particular, we take up two situationist concepts, *dérive* (drift) and *détournement* (rerouting or hijacking). We experimented with these concepts through a series of invitations to see how they might work on our writing and thinking. The concepts are meant to take participants out of their predisposed and unnoticed practices to encourage new ways of thinking and being that work against restrictive forces. In this case, we desired to push back against the pervasive notions of efficiency and productivity in academic reading and writing to attend to other things of value.