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

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Abstract

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.

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Introduction

We work in the same department at a public research university.¹ None of us have worked in this department for more than five years. This indicates that there was a reasonably large turnaround in the makeup of faculty in the past five years due to the college’s growth, transition to tier one status, and new initiatives. Being that all of us are new to this environment, we have been struggling to meet growing institutional demands in addition to the huge amount of pressure to excel in the three areas of research, teaching, and service. Moreover, a key part of our departmental strategic plans is to increase faculty productivity, a standard expectation for an R1 institution, despite experiencing unusually heavy service demands and advising loads created by an increasing enrollment situation to meet the higher education’s neoliberal agenda. As we do our due diligence as good academic citizens, we have become increasingly concerned about our emotional well-being, given how difficult it is to take care of ourselves while juggling (what seems like) a million tasks.

In order to address some of these concerns, we developed an academic writing group that met for five hours a week each Thursday. The members included two tenured professors and eight tenure-track assistant professors. The writing group was created as an official place solely dedicated for academic writing, carved out of the demanding work schedule. However, we also found the writing group becoming a place not only for celebrating each other’s academic accomplishments, but also for support during instances of intense feelings of inadequacy, sorrow to the point of tears, petty frustration, mistrust and betrayal. We frequently shared all of these feelings that were felt within the context of our job situations, and they inevitably became integrated into our act of writing.

Within this backdrop, we collectively became interested in our shared experience of the act of writing. Hence, in this article, we explore what it is like to write in the modern academy increasingly influenced by the institution’s neoliberal agenda, drawing upon the voices of tenure-track assistant professors in a research university, using the lens of affect theory. In particular, our inquiry is guided by the following questions:

What does *writing* mean to assistant professors in a research university?

In what ways does an act of writing affect assistant professors in a research university?

In what ways does the writing group affect assistant professors in a research university?

It is our hope that sharing of the affect of writing would not be something isolated in our institution, viewed as merely sharing of our emotion, which is a *contracted affect*—one that is no longer able to flow. Rather, we hope that the affect of writing or affective writing would flow from body to body, cutting across our personal, subjective feelings, reaching far to those who are in a situation similar to ours existing in the space outside of our reality, what Massumi calls, “the virtual realm” (2002, p. 35).

Affect Theory

Let us first discuss our theoretical framework, affect theory. The history of affect theory can be traced back to Deleuze's lectures on Spinoza, in which he revived the Latin concept of *affectus*. Deleuze defines it as the continual durations that link between the preceding state and the next state, which then lead to variations of perfection to be realized (Deleuze, 1988). That is, the *affectus* (affect) refers to the "passage from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of the affecting bodies" (p. 49). For example, an existing state has a certain capacity for being affected by a different mode. When the existing mode encounters another mode that is "good" for it, the existing mode transitions to a greater perfection; but when it encounters another mode that is "bad" for it, the existing mode passes to a lesser perfection. Therefore, the existing mode's power of acting or its force of existing may increase or diminish.

Drawing upon the work of Spinoza and Deleuze, Brian Massumi has been exceptionally influential in the theorization of affect; he sees affect as central to an understanding of our neo-liberal, capitalist times. According to Massumi (2002), there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect as it is generally understood as a synonym for emotion. But in affect theory, emotion and affect need to be distinguished, and in fact, according to Massumi (2002, p. 35), it is *crucial* to theorize the distinction between affect and emotion as they follow different logic and different orders. Emotion, for example, is a subjective feeling, while affect is an "impersonal dynamic principle that cuts across personal feelings and experiences" (Vermeulen, 2014, p. 122). Unlike emotion, affect has intensity with two-sidedness: "one side in the virtual (the autonomy of relation), the other in the actual (functional limitation)" (Massumi, 2002, p. 30). The virtual is a realm of potential that is indicated in incipencies and tendencies. In other words, the virtual is "a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and felt" (p. 30). Binary oppositions or contradictions, such as mind and body, subjectivity and objectivity, passivity and activity, past and future, action and reaction, happiness and sadness, and so on, emerge and come together in their virtual coexistence and interconnection. That is, affect, residing in one's perceptions and cognitions, are "*virtual synesthetic perspectives*" (p. 35, italics in original) that are functionally limited by the actual particular things that embody them. Affect exists in a virtual realm of potentiality and possibility in relation to the actual.

Hence, Massumi (2002) states, "affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is" (p. 35). It always maintains an element of its virtual origins. When we isolate affect in an individual and attempt to name it, according to Massumi, this is the end of affect, and it becomes emotion, a contracted affect that is no longer able to flow. It is not until the virtual autonomous realm is called upon by the ac-

tual that an affect forms the synthetic actuality and limitations attributed to itself. Affect is found in those intensities that pass and flow from body to body, which can be human, nonhuman, part-body, or otherwise (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010).

It would make sense, then, to conceive of our writing group as a body without organs (Deleuze, 1990; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987) through which affects flow. Rather than being an organic organism that exists in a definite structured way, it is a *schizoid* (Deleuze, 1990) of *multiplicity* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987): schizoid because it is fraught with tensions, sustaining multiple, often contradictory views at any given time, and a site of multiplicity because it is assembled at any given time of individuals, each one of whom is many, as “each of us is several” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). We believe this body without organs conceptualization is particularly fruitful given our intent in this paper: to highlight the affective valences of a group of assistant professors as they reflect on their writing practices. The body without organs, claimed Deleuze and Guattari, is itself a point of zero intensity, in which intensities may be inscribed. It represents a plane of immanence within which the virtual of affect is able to actualize itself freely, growing and diminishing as they are embodied by various, actual particulars. If we conceive of our group as a point of zero intensity, those who are a part of the group represent and bring with them intensities that manifest and play out within the group. However, the group is never able to become a closed organism, as these intensities establish no stable hierarchy or organizing structure. Frustration, celebration, confusion, toxicity, playfulness, desire - each of these intensities (and others) undulate, glow, and evanesce, replacing one another here and there, just as the individuals within the group come and go, staying for the full meeting time on one day, being wholly absent on another, and changing the plane of immanence wherein affect synthesizes and actualizes. Conceptualizing of the writing group as a body without organs allows us to think of the affective states that we occupy (or that occupy us) during writing as transient, contagious, and often unpredictable. We believe that academia is an area particularly ripe with affective intensities, and the body without organs, as well as affect theory more broadly, allows us to explore these intensities with greater depth and nuance.

Writing in Academia

But why do we need to explore the affective arena of assistant professors and their writing? What is at stake? One of the assistant professors in our writing group writes a review of the literature on academic writing in the following:

Imagine that you are playing a game of cards, one that had always been attractive to you because there are seemingly endless combinations and permutations that can evolve from your imagination and intellect. As such, you spend years honing your knowledge and skills to one day have a seat at the table. However, in this game, the dealer has stacked the deck against you, and your

ability to play this game successfully dictates whether or not you may remain at the table and participate in this game in your future.

Imagine now this game is academe, where the skill is writing and winning hands are publications for promotion and tenure. The stacked deck are the various institutional barriers and pressures you face as a new faculty member: garnering social capital with your new colleagues and institution, balancing home and work, a lack of (a) mentor/ing, or a general lack of infrastructure to support writing and scholarship-based skills (Sonnad et al., 2011). If you are a person of color (Warner et al., 2016) and/or a woman (Freund et al., 2016), you'll note that the dealer is dealing from the bottom of the deck so others get higher value cards; perhaps you receive fewer cards from the dealer than the other players seated at the same table. And, since you are one of the newest players to the table, veteran players may try to peek at or downright steal the cards you do have (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). When it is finally your turn, these other players will try to distract you with other games (grant proposals, advising, teaching, service) and bully other players so they can play their cards instead (Sedivy-Benton et al., 2014). If you play well, these players may try to change the rules mid-game (Lisnic et al., 2019). If you play poorly, these players can blame your inability to understand the basic rules or skills, rather than acknowledging the disparate factors of the game itself. Although these veteran players are not good at the game or even understand the game anymore (perhaps the game has changed since they were a new player), they may remain at the table for as long as they'd like. As spurious as those players are, you are encouraged to somehow collaborate with them, even though playing, much less winning, this game is little of their concern. If you are playing the Research 1 (R1) version of this game, you know that the rules are even more complex; the game is played faster and more competitively among the players as the stakes are higher (Potter et al., 2011). Because it's harder to move from table to table, you know if you lose, it is unlikely you will ever play at the table again.

Considering this analogy, the card game is clearly an unthinkable and unwinnable scenario. Yet, it is an apropos reality, nay, expectation for new and junior faculty (a pejorative term, certainly, but ubiquitous) in academe for writing and publications. That is, if one is 'lucky' enough to obtain a tenure-track, non-adjunct position, especially at an R1, right out of their doctoral program or post-doc. What does it matter what junior faculty members think about writing for publication? First, the 'publish or perish' mantra is alive and well in academe, with h-index and impact factors as vital considerations of one's 'worth' as an academic (Potter et al., 2011). As research (and dollars) become more important to cash-strapped universities, so does scholarly productivity, especially for new faculty. Given the aging of the academic workforce (Blau & Weinberg, 2017), it should matter what new and junior faculty think about their own scholarly productivity. Specifically writing, given the coin of the academic realm are publications. If assistant professors are unable to write and are consequently denied tenure, they must leave. Given this level of pressure, it is understandable assistant professors develop anxiety towards the writing process (Belcher, 2009). This only perpetuates faculty turnover, which "has long been a practical and research concern in higher education due to the costly monetary and academic

consequences that the institutions have to bear” (Xu, 2008, p. 40). In 2008, faculty turnover cost US public universities 68 million dollars (Figueron, 2015). Academic consequences are equally detrimental, by exacerbating minorities and women leaving academe; citing issues of institutional support for their scholarship (Alire, 2001; Warner et al., 2016). Specifically, a study by Xu (2008) found female faculty reported they were stymied in their scholarship, facilitating their leaving compared to gendered issues (e.g. family care).

Clearly, this warrants further exploration of assistant professors’ views on writing, the mechanism of scholarship, to better understand the unique challenges they face as they are inculcated into academe. For example, a study by Sonnad et al (2011) explored the experiences of a writing group specific to female assistant professors in medicine, intended to improve their writing skills for publication. The authors had found that participants were able to publish more, but for reasons beyond ability. Participating women reported their lack of productivity was not a failure of their ability to write, rather the writing group provided information to cultural norms around publishing (e.g. it being okay to publish smaller studies or submit to lower-tiered journals), helping them in “finding collaborators for all aspects of writing, developing, and communicating authorship arrangements, and not allowing manuscripts to “languish” on the desks of coauthors” (p. 814-5). In a research-focused environment that is moving faster, spaces for assistant professors to explore, discuss, and share academic writing culture is a growing imperative.

On the surface, a simple reason that we should think about writing and assistant professorship is the fact that injustice exists. Assistant professors, especially those who are persons of color and women, are dealt a difficult hand. We see this as one potentially convincing reason to more deeply explore the assistant professor’s relationship with writing. On the other hand, there is something unusual about this writer’s style that we seek to explore, and this can be done in terms of affect. While this literature review on writing and the writing group explores the difficulties that may be present for assistant professors and their scholarship as well as benefits of collaboration, it is just as much an expression of one’s perceived reality as it is an *objective* review of literature. The concepts were spun from a Massumian virtual environment (the empirical literature) and sewn into a tapestry of analogous expression on writing as an assistant professor. As such, this review is a virtual synthesis: a synthesizing of existing material, but also a synthesis that extends from the virtual to the reality of the writer. It might be called an affective review, both a singular and a multiple experience, an actual manifestation of our group member’s thoughts and her personal emotion, but drawing from a virtual environment, constructed from various sites or voices that spoke through her affectively. She speaks her truth as much as she speaks others’ truths, as much as others speak her truth (if read and cited upon publication) in infinite reciprocation. The literature review is an actualization of affect, deriving from the virtual plane of voices that have never actually spoken *to* each other, existing virtually apart, synthesizing into the analogy of the rigged card game. It is, then, one productive way that we might think about affect as

it occurs within (or begets) writing studies, especially with regards to the assistant professor. We wish to explore the possibilities further, and to this end, attempt to see how affect plays out within our body-without-organs group, as we interact with, write together, and affect one another.

The Cut-up Method & Poems

It was William Burroughs who experimented and adopted the cut-up method in his work inspired by his painter friend Brion Gysin, who cut newspaper articles into sections and rearranged the sections at random, like the collage.² This methodology was chosen as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) were also inspired by the cut up method, describing it as:

the folding of one text onto another, which constitutes multiple and even adventitious roots (like a cutting), implies a supplementary dimension to that of the texts under consideration. In this supplementary dimension of folding, unity continues its spiritual labor. That is why the most resolutely fragmented work can also be presented as the Total Work or Magnum Opus. (p. 6)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the cut-up method, albeit fragmented, provides a multiple dimension of folding that constitutes a rhizome which “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains” (p. 7). These chains allow us to think about the possible ways that affect actualizes in our writing group’s reality, or multiple realities, virtually experienced as a manifestation of our separate emotions and conjoined affects. Hence, the cut-up method is an arrangement of ideas that we share at a particular time of our affective writing.

To collect the participating assistant professors’ thoughts and insights into the questions that we raised earlier, one of the lead authors (tenured faculty member) distributed more specific questions (see the Appendix) to the writing group. The participants’ responses to each question, which were long narratives, were then anonymized by the first author to protect their identity. After that, the responses were analyzed using the cut-up method in collaboration with two other lead authors. The chosen words and passages (direct quotes) from the data made up the poems we share below.

Who Am I?

An assistant professor,
 A step toward being a tenured professor
 I write, I research, I teach
 I read, and think, and write, mostly on my terms
 A self-indulgent exercise
 I get to think about abstract concepts and play with ideas
 Paid to focus on scholarship, teaching, and service
 I feel genuine, straight up gratitude for it almost daily
 I am new to the University as well as untenured

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I am at the bottom of the hierarchy
Being aware of the precarious nature of my position
That requires a lot of work and a major investment of time
in order to meet a school’s expectations.
In other words,
I have to work to survive
I am a social misfit
I find myself standing alone in the corner at parties
But I find myself flourishing when talk involves academia
Some of my colleagues are cordial, my comrades
Others indifferent, tepid, just my coworkers
Still others poor, harassing, a direct adversary

Am I valuable to them?
I can be
Insofar as I continue to write and publish
and write A LOT of grants
As long as I am mercenary and focused on deliverables
Bending to the neo-liberal agenda

It’s the numbers game
Do I feel threatened by it?
Maybe?
Maybe not?
I delay gratification as I work to “publish or perish”
My next ultimate goal being in getting tenure
which depends on my ability to produce,
and to navigate the politics of an R1 institution

As a tenure-track faculty,
I cannot help comparing myself to others.
Sometimes, I felt ashamed of my writing because of my limitations – I cannot
write like “them”
However,
I try to forgive myself when I cannot write like others but evolve as a writer
In other words,
I have to write to survive

Writing

Writing is a central part of my job
It is the currency of academia,
as I have been repeatedly told
I carved out a “writing day” to attend to this important part of my work as a scholar

Writing is a critical component of being a researcher
the most enjoyable part of my job,
having something to say
sharing new ideas

helping readers understand a complex text
infusing the various versions of who I am

There is always a possibility of rewriting, crafting
a drawn-out, artful dialogue
Flow is when I am happiest writing – when all of my ideas
seem to have aligned in an organizational way
It's almost euphoric
Excited in a squirmy kind of way

Academic writing is impersonal, positioning the writer as a neutral observer
It sees itself as the antithesis of a creative idea in a way
A lot of it seems to be hoop jumping
I write to meet a deadline
Write to please co-authors
Revise to meet the demands of peer reviewers or an editor
Frustrating, difficult, challenging
It feels like a game of template-finding
Which template works well for this journal or that grant agency?
Being cautious not to be rejected by editors
I feel a big sense of pride, yet apprehension when I finally submit it for publication,
Happiness is not a goal for my writing

I always think about how I should be writing
The “You should be writing” sign is everywhere
The anxiety builds when I think about all the precious time I am wasting
The pressure for academics to write is enormous;
It removes a lot of the joy
I know my paper will be criticized by reviewers and readers,
No matter what

But I want more
I want to push the boundaries of my own writing
I want to write in a more unconventional style
I want to take risks
I want to avoid coldness and disconnection that used to exist in my writing
Integrating my emotions into an academic piece
I want to be more creative and artistic with my work

Happy and Sad Memories of Writing

I enjoy writing most of the time,
sitting and thinking and developing that argument in my head and on paper
Writing is one of ways that I can represent my thoughts and ideas
It is a tool that helps me better understand my thoughts
It's like weaving –
Weaving fragmented pieces of knowledge to become integrated
That makes me happy
I'm happy when I do the micro-level crafting

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to make sure the flow of the sentence is as good as it can be,
And that every word is picked for a precise purpose,
Which sparks my joy of writing
Happy memories of writing mostly pertain
When something is accepted and published

And yet,
Sad memories of writing mostly pertain to being unsuccessful in my writing;
when I feel as if I am wasting time on a project that is headed nowhere;
when not given the time or space to write scholarship of my own.
I am never happy with my writing and am constantly revising sentences repeatedly
Two hours have passed
And I've only gotten two paragraphs completed
I get to be sad
when looking back on time passed
and realizing that I did not accomplish what I wanted to accomplish
The saddest memories are those of rejection,
Which creates conflict with my position as an assistant professor
It's hard not to internalize rejection in some particularly negative way
I need to take care of my emotional wellbeing

Metaphors for Writing

Writing is not a part of my day job, but a part of my night shift
It looks like a skeleton and fits together like a jigsaw
My ideas are woven by sentences to become a paragraph

It is a juggling game, but my stamina is short
And it is not easy to maintain writing inertia;
It's like having to eat all your vegetables before having dessert
And I am running as fast as I can to just barely keep up with my peers

It is an evolution;
My writing and I grow together
And there is never an ending point
to my work day every day
Even though I have a hard stop!

I am fueled by the desire to share ideas
But am disconnected from words
Maybe I'm a remixer
Capturing something unique,
Doing something outside the box,
But I feel like I'm always coming out flat

And then writing becomes toxic,
A weapon to kill non-tenured faculty
And in my work there is coldness
Among tepid coworkers
So I survive with my writing

And the writing group?
Feels like a bandage,
a band-aid
rather than a structural fix
Amidst fractured trust,
Making time for writing in a sea of urgent requests
While it could be an energy flow:
everyone's energy of writing flows together
and creates a writing sea
Rather than a sea of urgency

I Want/I Wish

I wish to emulate as a scholar, conducting the compelling research and seeking
answers to the great questions within my discipline

But

I want to push myself in thinking about research as a more creative endeavor

I want to write more like my colleague who is a children's author

I want to push the boundaries of my own writing and write in a more
unconventional style

I want to take risks and write in more pragmatic ways that are truly meaningful
to my readers

I want my students to go beyond what is safe and feel that they can take some risks

And

I wish that more of the full rank professors in our department joined the writing group

Because

I want the writing group to be a genuine and unaffected but supportive emotional group

Because

I want it to be a place where we share best practices in writing, discuss our
challenges experienced with writing in the academy

Because

I want to fit in, not to exclude myself from my colleagues

Because

I want to show... that I [am] not a person who sought to do harm to others

Because

I want to see myself evolving into someone that is better able to carve out time
for writing

And

I want to see these people here because it distracts me from my own emptiness
and meaninglessness

Coda

Quiet vigorous typing sounds;
serious thinking faces;
funny expressions of faculty that they didn't even realize they were making;
those are what I want to feel in the room.

Affect and Writing In-between

As we live in the academic culture of ‘publish or perish’ as noted in one of the poems, we continue to write in-between. Writing is a ‘self-indulgent exercise’ and produces happy moments, but we cannot avoid feeling pressured, threatened while trying to obtain the ‘currency of academia.’ Gregg and Seigworth have identified that affect “arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*” (2010, p. 1, italics in original), and found in those intensities and resonances that pass, flow, and move from body to body (one individual to another in the writing group). As we try to develop a virtual relation between the act of writing and who we are as assistant professors, we see how we affect and are affected by the “force or forces of encounter” (p. 2) that happened in the writing group. Affect is the name we give to those forces, vital forces that move us forward or leave us overwhelmed. Hence, affect is “persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (p. 1). Under the tyranny of publish or perish, with “all the minuscule or the molecular events of the unnoticed” (p. 2) that we experienced in-between, we become *academicwritingmachines*, *universitymachines*, and *publishingmachines*, which weigh down thought and passively lay down the sediment of a state apparatus (Honan, Bright & Riddle, 2018). As such, university agendas still weigh heavily on us, shown in the poetry above. Still, we flirt with these directives, indulging ourselves, attempting to push the bounds of creativity, sometimes even feeling joy. Despite adversity and negativity, we press on.

As we work to achieve tenure and try to win the ‘numbers game,’ we sometimes encounter the passage to a better perfection with the feeling of joy and happiness; other times, we encounter a passage to less power and lesser perfection with sadness of writing. We sometimes find our writing act a ‘toxic, band-aid, a weapon to kill,’ while it is also the ‘desire, flow of energy, a writing sea.’ These affects are caused by external demands and expectations as well as by our own ideas about what writing is and what writing should be. Our bodies have the capacity for emotion (sad or happy in the virtual), fostering a lived paradox in which both happiness and sadness as well as toxicity and desire coexist (Massumi, 2002); affect is thusly born in *in-between-ness* of the actual. Affect then helps us understand that these virtual and actual spaces are muddy and blurry; hence, it is a “gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever modulating force-relations” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 2).

Affect and Poetry: The Relation

Deleuze and Guattari (1983) describe the need for poetic (and lunatic) variability in language, and their position is particularly appropriate as we discuss the Massumian (2002) affect: the virtual synthetic of possibility and actualization. They stated that such poetic possibility and potentiality in language helps

to bridge the gap between the virtual and the real: “‘Potential’ and ‘virtual’ are not at all in opposition to ‘real’; on the contrary, the reality of the creative, or the placing-in-continuous variation of variables, is in opposition only to the actual determination of their constant relations” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 99). Playing with language, using variations in language forms intentionally against those used by academic writing machines (Honan et al., 2018) becomes a way for us to dive into the virtual, a world not of forms but of formation, where we see affect emerge and thrive. Affect here emerges in the form of poetics, a shifting language due first to its attachment to feeling and sensing rather than cognizing, and second because these particular poems are not expressive of any one individual; they are instead a “[letting] go of the ‘I’ to walk-write the shifting sands” (Henderson, 2018, p. 143) that form our writing group. Here, the ‘I’ is multiple subjectivities, multiple roots, which represent the virtual synthetic of affect that surrounds us. Even if the data stems from individual instances of “I,” each I is multiple, inscribed by the affects that flow through the group. The poetry, then, is suggestive of the affects that inspire the group.

These poems emerge from the multiplicity that we occupy and allow affect to remain unclosed and autonomous, as Massumi (2002) described. In a single voice, we use many voices—while sourced from individual members, they also belong to the group. Once uttered, they exist outside of the speaker and penetrate our body(ies) without organs. The intensity described in each line is not an emotion, but an affect because it has the ability to intertwine with other lines, other thoughts, to extend itself ad infinitum before it sinks back to the virtual. Guttorm (2012) describes writing poetry as a moment “when percepts, affects, and concepts connect the individuating molar self [me] in relation to the milieu of space and time” (p. 596). She further acknowledges poetry “as having the deconstructive, evocative voice, the personal, becoming voice without clear interpretations, without fixed categories, fixed results, fixed outcomes” (p. 597). Here, poetry becomes a means to connect molar self to molar self without having to define those connections outright; a line of intensity is enough to describe connection. That is, the connections exist in the shared experiences and affective currents that ebb and flow within the writing group.

Similarly, Wyatt et al. (2011) reflect on their experiences writing together. They too suggest that “poetry leaves more spaces. Poetry does not seek to tie together and gather up” (p. 733). At the same time, they acknowledge that collaborative writing is an exercise in forgetting oneself, deterritorializing the “I,” giving oneself over to the flows present in the group, forgetting the haecceity that comes with a particular piece or kind of writing that one adopts and uses regularly. Poetry allows for the simultaneous existence of bodies (individual scholars) as well as a subsumption within a collective (e.g., writing group). Given our intent to give voice to the affective flows that exist within our group; use these flows to connect the molar individuals of the group; and allow the affect to continue to exist in an

open ended, impressionistic, non-categorical way, we feel that poetry is the best mode of representation. After all, “poetry is perhaps more Deleuzian than writing prose, if it’s possible to become comparative with Deleuze” (Wyatt et al. p. 733).

Yet-to-Become Affective Writers: A Coda

The poems created by the cut-up method indicate how writing is an important venue for us to express ideas and our wanting to participate in larger conversations. We understand that writing is the cornerstone of academe. We should write; it’s our weapon against anti-intellectualism and the language we use within our respective fields. Further, these poems are an assemblage of our collective affect of assistant professors’ baggage, celebration, identification, multiplying our issues as assistant professors, as well as a rhizome that ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, unspoken emotions, felt tensions that come from our identities, differences, and multiple subjectivities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These poems, albeit fragmented, coming from multiple roots, taken directly from their narratives, such to shatter the neat and tidy unity of collective voice, constituting chaosmos, which is a “composed chaos—neither foreseen nor preconceived” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 204). We can regard these poems a chaosmos that is neither foreseen nor preconceived, drawn from the participants’ felt affects that continue to be oozed out and flow from one person/stage/moment to another.

So, what did we learn about ourselves as writers? What does writing mean to us? For us in academia, the turn to affect may mean to reject the possibility that we are merely treated as a writing machine that causes “academic anxieties” (Probyn, 2010, p. 73) in us; rather, it necessitates a substantive shift to Spinozist *not yet* of affect as a promise. This promise of not yet comes from the acknowledgement that “there are no ultimate or final guarantees—political, ethical, aesthetic, pedagogic, and otherwise” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 9) but that “capacities to affect and to be affected will yield an actualized next or new that is somehow better than now” (p. 10). As we can see from the poem, *I want/I wish*, we long for the *yet-to-become*, its futurities, however confined and limited in the actual. Although such a promise can just as readily deliver something worse, we want to note that the *yet-ness* of the affect is not supposed to give us any ultimate resolution to our seemingly deteriorating well-being, but it is what we want to live by as a driving force to write. Writing, thus, could be derived not from an anxiety, but from an intuition, what Manning (2016) refers to as the art that inevitably springs forth from the not-yet. Writing, then, becomes “the intuitive potential to activate the future in the specious present, to make the middling of experience felt where futurity and *presentness* coincide, to invoke the memory not of what was, but of what will be” (p. 47).

The affects that are felt by assistant professors from/of/with writing and the writing group provide insights into how they are “managed” under the pervasive neo-liberal agenda in academia as we know it. For too many, higher education has

become a place where we increasingly feel obligated to meet the demands for increasing enrollments, heavy service, among other bureaucratic business. Coupled with higher standards of research university, these demands also create a nightmare scenario for the untenured to write (create). Although the threat of “publish or perish” in academia may be the “nonexistence of what has not happened” (Massumi, 2010, p. 52), the future of such a threat is felt real now and perhaps virtually forever, encoded in tenure and promotion and community metrics of current and future academic success, respectively.

Hence, we find that affective writing is a necessity as it helps us see how writing is a promise of *yet-to-become*, for better or worse. Affective writing—at once all-powerful and powerless – must be fostered and nurtured into our everyday practice in academia. We hope that affective writing that we shared in this article, particularly in the poems, would flow to those who are assistant professors in different institutions and become the forces to affect and to be affected in deterritorializing the sense of who they are in the academic machine. This is the power of affect, which passes through from us to others, connecting all of us in the virtual realm of *yet-to-become* in relation to the actual situation in which each of us resides.

Notes

¹ Please note that one faculty member had left the university and one faculty member had been promoted to Associate Professor by the time this article was published.

² See *Minutes to Go* (1968) by William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Gregory Corso, Sinclair Beiles, which resulted from the initial cut-up experiment.

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Appendix

On Writing:

1. What does “academic position” mean to you, as you will address the following questions based on your understanding of it?
2. Can you share your personal philosophy about writing, if you have any?
3. Can you share a happy memory (or memories) of writing, if you have any?
4. Can you share a sad memory (or memories) of writing, if you have any?
5. Can you share some challenges/difficulties/struggles of writing, if you have any? How did/do you overcome them? And/Or, how do you live with them?
6. Can you share some of your habits, rituals, or superstitions of writing, if you have any? Why do you keep them?
7. Can you describe yourself as a writer? And, how do you want to see yourself evolving?

On the Writing Group:

1. Please recount the genesis of our writing group from your own perspective and describe the reasons why you joined the writing group?
2. After experiencing the writing group almost for a year, can you share your feelings about:
 - a. the writing group?
 - b. coming to the writing group every Thursday?
 - c. being in the writing group for 5 hours?
3. How would you describe the “culture” of the writing group so far and how is it affecting your writing and/or how is your writing affected by it?
4. How do you want to see the writing group evolve in the future?