

Touching Text: Feeling My Way Through Research-Creation

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Nike Romano¹ 

Abstract

This article explores how artistic research practice, as a thinking through art, generates different understandings of the world. Having come to higher education through my visual arts practice, I trace threads of thinking-making practices that, while seeded in the studio, continue to generate new connections and concepts that in/form my PhD inquiry into different ways of learning in South African Higher Education contexts. Guided by Manning's conceptualization of research-creation as an ecology of practices operative within the interstices of making and thinking, I show how artmaking as an intuitive process nudges my thinking through-and-around concerns obliquely, attuned toward different registers and levels of intensities, cutting across normative accounts of what it means to know. Referring to two bodies of my work, *sum of the parts* (2010) and *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2014), the article shows how materiality and making conjugate new languages that give expression to the ineffable obscured in the name of Science and Fine Art. Exploring the diffractive entanglements of thinking-making practices in the “between” of writing and drawing, the article shows how writing-with, drawing-with, doodling-with, and scrawling-with activate and agitate the spaces between words and images and do inquiry differently.

Keywords

research-creation, doodling-with, scrawling-with, stenciling-with, drawing-with

When the artist refuses to produce an object as the object of her work, when the artist refuses to be the subject of the work, when the philosopher refuses to write at a distance, when the work becomes the practice, when the practice invents its own language, research-creation deeply threatens the power/knowledge that holds the academy in place.

(Manning, 2020, p. 221)

Introduction

On completion of my Masters of Fine Arts (MFAs) in 2013, I began to teach art and design history at a university of technology in Cape Town. Having had no prior teaching experience, I turned to my studio practice to guide my approach to pedagogy. Like studio practice, the pedagogical encounters became learning opportunities that propelled me to re/turn to the academy where I embarked on my doctoral project that explores ways of doing academia differently, or more specifically, to consider how art does its work of thinking anew. As an undergraduate student of art history and economic history, I was frustrated by the schism between the disciplines. Although intricately entangled, the two did not “speak to each” other in the academy. I understood economic history through my encounters with artworks because, for me, these artworks somehow made more sense than academic texts. I have always struggled to

express myself with words, so it is with some surprise and consternation that at this point, I find myself in the final stages of “writing” up my thesis. Moreover, given that my research focus is on finding ways of producing knowledge using more-than-linguistic modes, I find myself in the challenging position of trying to explicate precisely that which I argue is not expressible in traditional linguistic form. How then do I make explicit my research methodology of thinking-through-making, as a thinking-through-artworking, that generates understandings of the world that manifest in more-than-linguistic registers? In this article, I show how, in extending beyond traditional academic modes, tentative making practices in the studio and in my research practice sediment my thinking and draw me back to words.

I trace threads of thinking-making practices that, while seeded in the studio, continue to generate new connections and concepts about how knowledge is produced. In so doing, I foreground the reciprocity between artistic research practice and research methodological practice. The point of

¹Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa

Corresponding Author:

Nike Romano, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, District Six, Cape Town 8000, South Africa.
Email: romanon@cput.ac.za

this is to consider how art making practices that exceed the realms of normative academic modes of inquiry might shape content in ways that make more sense than those knowledges presented in traditional linguistic form. Erin Manning's understanding of research-creation is as an ecology of practices (from Isabelle Stengers) that operates in the interstices of making and thinking which in turn activates new registers beyond "making on the one end and thinking on the other [that are] neither art per se nor philosophy" (Manning, 2016, p. 13). Guided by this understanding, I put forward artmaking as an intuitive process that nudges my thinking through-and-around concerns obliquely, and opens toward different registers and levels of intensities that cut across normative accounts of what it means to know (Manning, 2016, p. 27). The aim is to make explicit how thinking-making processes in/form my PhD research inquiry and show how these embodied practices help me to understand the world obliquely, in ways that make more sense to me than traditional academic forms. These processes help my approach to pedagogies that urgently seek other ways of creating knowledges within the academy.

The article is structured in two parts. The first section focuses on studio thinking-making practices that enact a "way of learning, [that] acts as a bridge toward new processes, [and] new pathways and highlights the generative possibilities that an aesthetics of experience offers learning" (Manning, 2016, p. 47). To do this, I refer to two bodies of my work—*sum of the parts* (2010) and *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2014)—that explore the opening between Art and Science through the lens of feminism, and usher forth nuanced understandings of how Knowledge¹ is constructed and in so doing, how new knowledges are created.

In the second section, I attend to my PhD research inquiry that draws on feminist new materialist and critical posthumanist reconfigurations of research methodologies that seek to dismantle humanist Cartesian logic and its foundations on transcendent binary splits. I give a detailed description of the methodological keystones of my PhD research process and explain how, like my studio practice, writing-with, drawing-with, doodling-with and scrawling-with academic text help me to both trouble the authority of text and make sense of it. In addition to referencing specific artworks, the article includes visual documentation of thinking-through-drawing and thinking-through-writing journaling extracts that trace trajectories of my PhD research journey to explore the "fragile differences" that materialize when practices—construed as modes of "thought in the act"—are diffracted through one another (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. viii). Rather than setting up a binary juxtaposition between studio and research inquiry, this arrangement generates iterative diffractive² intra-actions³ through which different practices build on and through ongoing entanglements with each other (Barad, 2007). Importantly, given that these practices are activated by techniques

immanent to their process, I attend to their intra-actions, as ruptures out of which new and complex patterns manifest, patterns greater than the sum of their parts, entangled like inextricable threads of felt⁴ (Springgay, 2019, p. 62).

Studio Matters

My artistic practice is informed by the medieval understanding of art that emphasizes art's performative function as "manner," or "way" that "shows the way." Valued as a processual practice rather than a process that produces objects of aesthetic value for the art market, this understanding orients me toward the "what else [that] art can do" (Manning, 2016, p. 46). When opened toward the "what else," also referred to as the "more-than," art activates an immanent process of "artfulness" defined by Manning (2016) as "an aesthetic yield that opens experience to the participatory quality of the more-than . . . [and] . . . opens up new conduits for expression and experimentation" emerging in the in-act (p. 55). To attune to these "conduits for expression and experimentation," I adopt speculative processes that respond to ideas as they seed in the in-act. In other words, rather than setting out to create something new in the studio, the practice is best described as one of sense-making in which I think-make through entangled relationships with materials, processes, and materiality. The intended effect is not to reduce art's role to didactic sense-making, but rather to show how artmaking can recast the very question of value within the academy.⁵ For example, these slow repetitive practices take time and make time in ways that iteratively thicken sense-making and allow what needs to be known to make itself felt.

In what follows, I discuss *sum of the parts*, an exhibition that sought to give expression to the more-than that exceeds the normative frame of Enlightenment hegemonic discourse that is founded on limitations and exclusions in its pursuit of ordering and classifying the natural world. I was frustrated by how the latter form of ordering and classifying in its desire to "know everything" fails to take into account that which cannot be known within those frames, yet makes itself felt. The exhibition embraced a range of materials and technologies that include handcraft practices—traditionally associated with the feminine and not deemed "high" art—as well as mechanized processes such as laser cutting and digital printing technologies. In doing so, the exhibition enacted a diffractive entanglement between the laboratory, the domestic, and the spiritual, making palpable the more-than aesthetic effects that each of these practices on their own occlude. The installation was activated within the bounds of an artwork, entitled *veil of sciences*, which served as both "foreground" and "backdrop" of the exhibition.

In its first iteration, a 3-m square diaphanous veil was suspended at the entrance to the installation (see Figure 1). Made from mull, a coarse muslin used to bind books, I



Figure 1. Installation view of *sum of the parts* showing mull version of the veil of sciences. Photo: Mike Hall.

laboriously traced with charcoal the taxonomies and definitions of all the scientific practices I could find on the internet. Held together by magnets and iron filings, the veil embodied my ambivalent pull toward humans' need to make sense of the world and concomitant repulsion of how, to do that, Humans⁶ had carved it up. The second iteration of the veil comprises the faint charcoal residue that filtered through the mull onto the surface of tissue paper placed below (see Figure 2). Hung on the opposite wall of the gallery, the veil is reconstituted as a fragile ghostly figure, the delicate sheets of tissue held together precariously with pins. The artwork enacts the damaging effects of humans' extractivist approach to producing Universal Knowledge as well the futility of conceptualizing and presenting knowledge as a complete whole.

Set against the paper veil is the Star Chart, an altarpiece that hovers above a modest altar. Incorporating all identified star types to date, this work holds the virtual and the real of the known universe (see Figure 3). Unlike the hand-scribed veil of sciences, the Star Chart is constructed from mechanically laser-cut perspex rays, each a different star name. Temporarily secured to a central ring with detachable bulldog clips, the rays are sheathed in metallic gold wool that is wrapped in such a way that the loosely exposed threads are ambiguously un/raveling. The circular arrangement allows for multiple nonhierarchical configurations that can expand to accommodate potential new discoveries in time to come, a reminder of the ongoing unfolding of infinite and incomplete knowledges. The work also re-enacts and troubles the Scientific gaze's obliteration of other knowledge systems by recasting the shadows as fertile sites of knowledge production. It is when light is directed toward the transparent perspex that its shadows are revealed, making the words to some extent visible only when light and shadow are combined (see Figure 3).



Figure 2. Tissue paper veil of sciences against which the Star Chart is hung. Photo: Mike Hall.

The task of laser cutting the 93 rays was a time-consuming process. After each cutting, I removed the many curiously shaped “in between bits” of the letter forms. Known as counters, apertures and eyes,⁷ these pieces signaled the ineffable quality that I sought to express. It became imperative that rather than disposing of these off-cuts, they become central to the work as reference to that which is sacrificed in the pursuit of Knowledge (see Figure 4).

Thinking with Manning and Massumi (2014), I now understand that the artwork activated “new modes of activity, already in germ [that offered] a potential to escape or overspill ready-made channelings into the dominant value system” (p. 87). In other words, the forms not only embodied that which was excised and undervalued within Cartesian thinking; they also gave expression and value to the ineffable and the more-than of words. Drawn to further explore the more-than that *sum of the parts* alluded to, I returned to art school to commence my Masters in Fine Art inquiry that culminated in *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2014), an exhibition that sought to visualize, materialize and make visible felt experience, or “things,” that while palpable, could not be expressed or measured within a normative modernist frame. I was curious as to how disrupting the grid, a trope of modernism, might claim territories for the feminine.

Eschewing transcendent modernist ideals of individualism, perfection and patriarchal hegemony, the ruptures

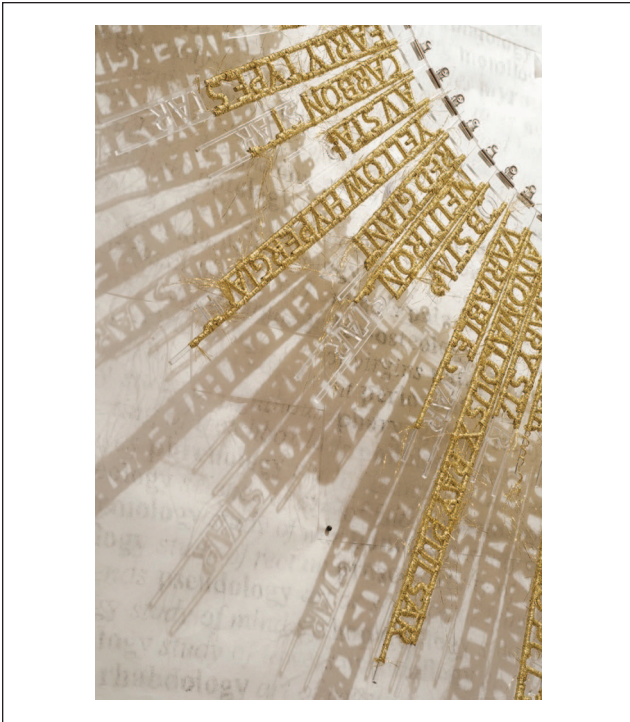


Figure 3. Detail of Star Chart (2010) and tissue paper veil of science (2010), revealing the play between light and shadow. Photo: Mike Hall.

materialized through practical and conceptual troublings of the x and y binary logic of the grid. Troubled by hierarchical distinctions of value inherent in modernist culture, I thought-with materials synonymous with children's craft practices, decoration, parties, and dress-up deemed unworthy of high art. Mulling over the proverb "all that glitters is not gold," a paradoxical truism implicated with value, I worked with sweetie papers, sticky tape, gift wrap and glitter, the undervalued "stuff" discarded after the party is over. Before long, glitter covered every surface of the studio. Evoking Edmond Locard's basic principle of forensic science stating that "every contact leaves a trace" (Blackledge, 2007, p. 1), the ubiquitous sparkles revealed the points of contact where the inquiry touched ground, giving texture to the quality of the "something that is exchanged and taken away . . . [thus forming] . . . the basis of the transfer and recovery of all scientific evidence"⁸ (Blackledge, 2007, p. 1).

I was pulled toward the quality of difference between the "something" that was exchanged and the "something" that was taken away in the contact trace of the glitter. Each twinkle shone light on the inquiry, tracking infinitesimal potential points of departure and return that signaled the elusive and ineffable felt experience that I struggled to articulate in words. In retrospect, I recognize I was coming into proximity with Marcel Duchamp's indefinable notion



Figure 4. Counters, apertures, and eyes on the altar, *sum of the parts* (2010). Photo: Mike Hall.

of the "infrathin," characterized by a "sensitivity to difference . . . [that is] . . . a form of difference . . . [that] simultaneously destabilizes and generates" (Murray, 2013). Concerned with the "similarities in difference and difference in similarities," Duchamp maintained that the infrathin is a specific quality of difference that eludes generalization and can only be gleaned through example⁹ (Murray, 2013). Put differently, the infrathin is not difference per se, but the quality of the "between" of difference. In other words, the quality of the infrathin is what really makes the difference (Manning, 2020, p. 16). In *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, Manning explains that the infrathin makes manifest a capacious relational field in which all that makes up a particular experience "cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts" (Manning, 2020, p. 16). Of significance is how the infrathin touches on the differences at play, materializing them as both figure and ground, opening up fields of perception to the potential of more-than. Put differently, she writes, "[that which] is not seen within the seeable is more-than appearance . . . is [what is] at stake in a politics of the infrathin" (Manning, 2020, p. 1). In other words, Manning argues that in backgrounding/foregrounding, the infrathin not only attends to the more-than of perception but also manifests its capacity to activate both/and.

The infrathin, as elaborated above, has for me resonances with feminist theorist, psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger's theory of the matrixial borderspace¹⁰ that gave shape to my MFA artworking. Born out of her artistic praxis, matrixial theory is modeled on the trans-subjective relationship between becoming-mother and becoming-child during the final trimester of pregnancy as they hospitably co-inhabit a joint-yet-separate psychic space in which they recognize each other without actually knowing the other (Ettinger, 2006, p. 220). Unlike phallogocentric configurations of subjectivity defined by discrete boundaries based on cuts and splits, matrixial subjectivity is partial,



Figure 5. Detail of *Partial Eclipse I* (2013). One of six paintings measuring 1,800 mm × 1,800 mm. Black glitter and paint on board. Photo: Nike Romano.

trans-subjective and co-affecting within and along shared border linkages (Pollock, 2004, p. 6). Crucially, this asymmetrical, yet nonhierarchical and capacious relationship “between” I and non-I allows difference to flourish within a compassionate and interdependent web. Conceived as an invisible web that materializes within and alongside phallic logic, the matrixial critiques without rejecting the phallic model in its entirety (Pollock, 2004, p. 6). Mindful of the othering a/effects of the scopic gaze that reinforce separations between the subject as active seer, from the object that is passively observed, the matrixial gaze is spectral, revealing a difference-within that shifts attention from the visual to the felt (Pollock, 2010). Unlike the male spectator gaze’s emphasis on “looking and seeing, looking and knowing, sight and power, vision and desire” (Pollock, 2010, p. 857), the matrixial gaze is felt and distributed within and across the aesthetic field, “connected to and affected by the unconscious of the Other and the consciousness of the Cosmos” (Ettinger, 2005, p. 710).

Like Gilles Deleuze, the image for Ettinger is not a mirror that reflects the world, and art’s work is not to represent nor aestheticize reality. Thinking through her painting practice, Ettinger conceptualizes the shareable “matrixial” space-subject that unfurls within the luminous layers of her paintings. For her, it is within this space that ideas become translucent and the “space of a potential subject and the subject of that becoming-space” co-emerge (Evans, 2017). Ettinger’s conceptualization of the matrixial symbolic feminine co-existing within and alongside the phallic framework resonated with my engagement with rupture, intersection, and overlap as ways of understanding difference differently. In following a speculative process, I never “knew” in advance what the invisible would “look” like. Instead, I was guided by thinking-making processes and

materialities that allowed what needed to be revealed to make itself shown. The nonlinear approach was punctuated by questions that prompted further exploration. For example, in the *Partial Eclipse* series of black glitter paintings, a single directed spotlight triggered a blinding flash that repelled one’s eye, enacting the difference between looking and seeing (see Figure 5). When lit obliquely with soft ambient light, however, a myriad of sparkles shimmered, evoking the infinity of the night sky. Cast in this light, the dark paintings became more alluring, their sparkles shimmering above the paintings’ surfaces, dancing in the vertiginous space between viewer and canvas, signaling the inherently relational encounter. The following thinking-through-writing journal excerpt is an account of how thinking-through-making foregrounded the elusive difference between seeing and looking:

Evidence of Things Unseen and *sum of the parts* materialised in the between of seeing and looking. In agitating the relationship between foreground and background, both projects helped me make sense of looking and seeing. For me, seeing prehends that which is visible and immediately apparent, that which is there to be seen, that exposes itself to be seen, that is available to be seen. Looking, however, is a quest that is borne from curiosity and desire, requiring more energy and engagement—a relational reaching and opening towards. Pulling cannot happen in isolation, something pulls something, something pushes something. The challenge is to find other modes, means and materials that respond not only to what cannot be seen and overlooked but also that which infrathinly has yet to find form and expression. It is not simply about joining the dots, but a following of lines of flight that open up new thinking and new knowledges, not knowing what I would find.

Embodying the multiplicity, complexity and nuance of the diffractive gaze, encounters with the *Partial Eclipse* paintings elude the capture of photographic form, an uncanny enactment of Manning’s (2020) account of how “there is much more that shimmers in experience than can be captured consciously” (p. 96). For me, *Evidence of Things Unseen* exemplified how iterative inquiry affects a differential becoming-with inquiry. As each artworking catalyzed new provocations prompting further inquiry, the iterative encounters materialized more textured understandings of what had come before, driving nonlinear ongoing reciprocal in/formings across multiple temporalities.

Griselda Pollock suggests that Ettinger’s use of the term “matrix” operates both metaphorically and mathematically to signify a certain complex or originary composite of elements. She proposes that language itself has remembered, or unconsciously registered, in the double sense of the term matrix, that the maternal is a generating structure that brings forth new life while symbolically representing imaginative and intellectual potentiality (Pollock, 2009, p. 13). The title of the painting *Mary, Mary, quite contrary* (see Figure 6)

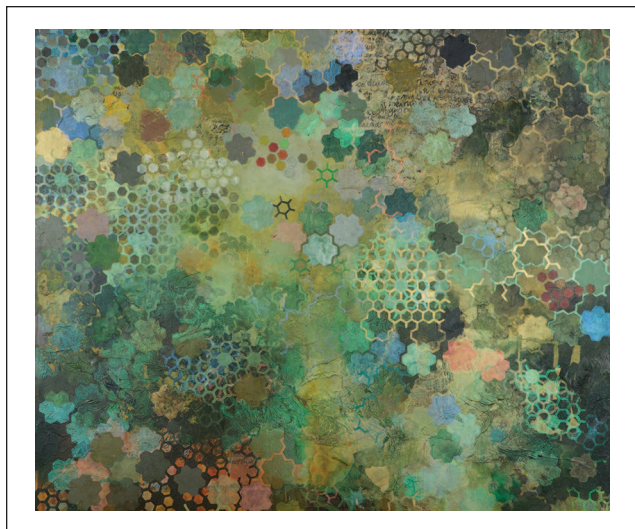


Figure 6. *Mary, Mary quite contrary* (detail), 2013, acrylic paint, iridescent paint, marker, glue, tissue paper on board, 180 × 180 cm. Photo: Vanessa Cowling.

alludes to a nursery rhyme that references a young girl's garden (the second line reads, "how does your garden grow?"). "Contrary" is a term usually associated with binary oppositions. However, in this instance, the qualifying adjective "quite" offers a more nuanced understanding of difference that resonates with the matrixial. Curious to explore the limits and possibilities of language as a means of accessing early childhood memory, I began a daily practice of recording early recollections onto sheets of tissue paper. Although the ritual afforded an opportunity for thoughts to flow freely, I became frustrated with the inability of language to "paint a full picture" of events that elude conscious memory yet continue to texture and contour experience. I began to layer the tissue texts onto a large board smothered with wood glue. On drying, I tore off sections that were then reapplied in other areas and began to paint. The gaping holes and overlays formed a complex palimpsest that paradoxically obscured the legibility of my writing yet spoke more eloquently of the felt experience. The layers of tissue paper texts absorbed the pigment in the *Mary, Mary* work, thereby collapsing the division between figure and ground. The slippage and spillage between the broken bits of text and pigment dismantled either/or and inclusion/exclusion binaries, offering instead new configurations of multiplicity, and/and.

Feeling thwarted by the expressive limitations of language, I turned to French feminist Hélène Cixous' *L'Écriture Feminine*. This work addresses the conundrum of trying to articulate the feminine within inherent phallogocentric logics that pervade language and reinforce patriarchal expression. In her essay entitled *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous (1976) encourages women to practice *l'écriture féminine* as

an act of writing ourselves into history. In like manner, Ettinger inscribes the feminine in her construction of words that embody the invisible symbolic feminine. Although her writings are dense and complex, she is able to highlight gaps in language and utilize the space of these lacunae to open up toward the invisible feminine.

Profound learnings were activated by *sum of the parts* and *Evidence of Things Unseen*. The exhibition events became further points of rupture that left me feeling unexpectedly troubled. The display of the artworks had re-positioned them as objects to be looked at by viewers rather than ongoing materializations of thinking-with-making practices. By casting them as objects of aesthetic appreciation in the gallery space, rather than agential figurations that activated new knowledges, the works became fixed figures against the white cube background. Paradoxically, it was in the blinding light of the spectator gaze that for me, art as the way, had lost its way. My graduation from art school coincided with taking up a position as art history lecturer. As previously mentioned, my studio practice guides my approach to pedagogy. This led to speculative, experimental, and affective pedagogical interventions whereby students and I explored different modes through which to express our entangled encounters with art history. Excited by the intra-action between these practices that included drawing-with and writing-with art history, I re/turned to the academy where, moving from Fine Art to higher education, I embarked on my doctoral project to further explore how art does its work of thinking anew. What follows is an account of my research methodology that entangles studio practice and feminist new materialist and critical posthumanist scholarship to find ways that materialize new knowledges by doing inquiry differently.

A Matter of Thinking-Making a New

I begin this section with a discussion on feminist new materialist theorizations of research-creation¹¹ (also known as arts-based inquiry). This is followed by a description of my immanent research-creation practices that have become the methodological keystone of my inquiry.

In recent years, arts-based inquiry has attracted considerable interest among educational researchers because it opens up a space for educators/students/researchers to de-center dominant discourses in educational practice and research (Pasque et al., 2012). Arts-based research is generally conceptualized as a primary way of understanding and examining experience through the systematic use of the artistic process. It represents "an unfolding and expanding orientation to qualitative social science that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, and representation from the arts, broadly defined" (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. xi). This "broad definition" of the arts is interesting in the sense that it foregrounds artistic processes and expands on different

forms of doing research. However, it fails to take into account the performative and affective possibilities of art that move beyond neoliberal notions of artmaking and art appreciation as aesthetic endeavors produced for the market. In other words, when arts-based practices are utilized as supplementary to traditional research methodologies, they don't necessarily make the difference that matters to research because they simply illustrate or translate concepts into different forms within the normative humanist, qualitative research methodological framework (Rousell, 2019, p. 888). To move beyond art being in service to research methodology, I think with the following provocations: How might arts-based research instantiate theory (Loveless, 2020; Springgay, 2019)? How might researchers explain what a work of art is, the potentials of what art can do, and how art does its work in the study (Rousell, 2017). How might art become "a problem, a provocation, and an irritant for the humanities and social sciences" (Rousell, 2019, p. 888) that is real rather than representational?

In expanding an understanding of art as "an event that is both an object of encounter and the name of the encounter itself," Deleuze ushers in new possibilities for art and thought beyond representation toward, as Simon O'Sullivan (2006) writes, "an aesthetic function of transformation . . . [that is] . . . involved in exploring the possibilities of being in—and becoming with—the world" (p. 52). This understanding has resonance with feminist new materialist scholarship that, as a counter to humanist Cartesian logic that is founded on the transcendent binary splits, reconfigures relations between humans and nonhumans by foregrounding "'vitality' across all kinds of matter, and a capacity for agency (or even thought) within all kinds of matter . . . as well as immaterial 'materials' such as thoughts, theories, and the relationships between things" (Truman, 2019, p. 3). It follows, therefore, that new materialist research methodologies are grounded in a "non-dualistic study of the world within, beside and among us, the world that precedes, includes and exceeds us" (Van der Tuin, 2018, p. 277). Barbara Bolt (2013) calls for the decolonization of art from cultural theory to free art from "the textual, the linguistic and the discursive" (p. 13). What does this mean in practice, or more specifically, how might new materialist artistic practice "engage with the matter of things and at the same time acknowledge the material groundedness of cultural practices" (Bolt, 2013, p. 13)?

Bolt's thinking has resonance with Barad's (2003) often-quoted statement "language has been granted too much power" that draws attention to how matter itself has been "turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation" (p. 801). Barad's (2003, 2007) agential realist theory does away with notions of "a correspondence between words and things" (p. 44) by proposing a performative understanding of material-discursive practices as "material conditions that define what counts as

meaningful statements" (p. 63). Therefore, rather than highlighting the specificity and "temporality of knowledge" itself, nonrepresentational research turns toward generative possibilities of the present moment as a potential space in which open-ended questions seek new understandings of the ontological implications of knowledge and how it affects the future (Vannini, 2015, p. 12). Springgay and Truman (2017) also turn toward more ontologically nuanced research events that generate new modes of thinking-making-doing that begin in the "speculative middle" (p. 4). For them, speculative middles are "future provocation[s] for thinking-making-doing [that] emerge as agitations and as affective force . . . As the agitations take shape, it is the (in)tensions that incite further action, which elicits additional propositions, and new speculative middles to emerge" (Springgay & Truman, 2017, p. 207). This has implications for their notion of "being inside the research event" that troubles binaries between the knower/known and researcher/data because it is only through the experience of the material-discursive encounter that both the knower and the known come into being. Just as my studio practice is guided by a speculative and indeterminate process, so too my PhD research inquiry follows ongoing immanent research events that escape predetermined formularization and "might not be recognizable in existing structures of intelligibility" (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 7). Responding to and in/formed by the thisness of the event, immanent critique practices problematize traditional research methods and draw me toward such thinking-making practices in the "between" of writing and drawing that conceive of research processes as "more-than-writing" and "more-than-drawing" respectively.

Manning (2016) theorizes research-creation as a field of inquiry that follows immanent propositional processes that rattle the "strong frames drawn by disciplines and methodological modes of inquiry" (p. 43). As I think with the differential activated by the hyphenation of research and creation, Manning's configuration of research-creation becomes central to my inquiry. Her configuration of research-creation is that of an operative assemblage that "brings making to thinking and thinking to making." This process materializes extralinguistic forms of knowledge that exceed traditional academic registers (Manning, 2016, p. 13).

Reluctant to label my thinking-making practice/s as either "this" or "that," I allow the inquiry, in its unfurling, to lead me toward processes that best respond to the proposition at hand. These practices—that include writing-with, drawing-with, doodling-with, scrawling-with, and stenciling-with—signal my interest in and desire to give shape and expression to the more-than of language and drawing, to think anew with academic text. In other words, these performative practices activate and agitate spaces between words and images to touch on the more-than, to flesh them out so to speak.

Writing-With

In this art-practicing, I am inspired by Elisabeth St. Pierre's use of the "aside" in writing that simultaneously enacts her resistance to the linearity of conventional qualitative research report writing and affirms writing as an empirical field of inquiry. An aside is a theatrical device whereby a remark or passage is directed at the audience and supposed to be unheard by the other characters in the play (Oxford English Dictionary (OED)). However, in St. Pierre's case, it activates a thinking through writing that is not intended to be read as part of the main act (read as Academic Text). She describes the aside as "a breather in the long, formal text of the dissertation" that facilitated a space in which she could "playfully and poetically deconstruct the formal, academic text I believed I had to write even as I wrote it" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 605). Working with St. Pierre's notion of the aside in writing, and Manning's (2016) understanding of art, I think-write together with ongoing making-doing-thinking practices as I, to quote Manning again, "pause to allow language to find its way" in shaping these encounters and drawing me toward and beyond words (p. 2). St. Pierre is mindful of the limitations of an enquiry driven by the scientific methods of the Enlightenment in that it discards "too strange" or "too big of inquiry." She advocates instead beginning with the "too strange [and] too much that demands experimentation" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 607). In embracing writing as a method of inquiry, St. Pierre (2018) invites us

to trust that something unimaginable might come out that might change the world bit by bit, word by word, sentence by sentence. . . In writing, we can and do invent and reinvent the world. (p. 607)

The above encourages me to experiment with new ways of thinking in-the-act that nudge me beyond what I already know toward new concepts that are immanent to each specific material-discursive encounter. One example of how studio practice has steered research practice is the affective force of the Star Chart's residual letterforms that led me to explore the development of writing and its imbricatedness with so-called Western Civilization. Writing developed hand in hand with humans' transition from nomadic to agrarian culture, the so-called "beginning of civilisation." Humans were initially part of the world but the transition to farming set them apart from nature. Concomitant with the production of surplus food came trade and the need to record commercial transactions. Underwritten in the narrative of humans marking text into clay is civilization's imbricatedness with increasing disparities between humans and humans as well as humans and nonhumans. The following aside documents my thinking-through-writing about the power relations embedded in bodies of text:

How does academic text perform? What practices and hierarchies does it reproduce? How can one work with text? How can one open the text to its more than? Knowledge is packaged in a particular form. As readers we are presented with finished text, neatly framed and laid-out according to the grid of the page, using fonts that are legible, line spacing that is regular, hyphenation turned on so that the text is moulded into the rectilinear shape of the page, rendering reading more difficult. The writer's drafts are occluded from the reader. So too are the reviewers' comments. As a student I was unaware of the iterative re-writing process and felt so intimidated by the finished Text, in fact I still am . . . (Journal extract, May 12, 2021)

Linked to the Renaissance and subsequent Enlightenment eras, the invention of Gutenberg's printing press marked the transition from handcrafted manuscripts to printed texts, as my thinking-through-writing elaborates:

Constructed by Humans for humans . . . it is no wonder that letterforms are anthropomorphised. In the anatomy of a typeface, letters are structured according to the human body . . . each has its own leg, arm, ear, spine, shoulder, to mention a few. Typography is categorised into families of fonts, united in their sameness, in their similar characteristics. The "body" of text marks the transition of human (thinking) beings from being embodied-thinkers. Text materialises as the repository of knowledge, thinking no longer resides in the body of the human. Instead, it inhabits the body of the letter forms themselves . . . abstracted from the body, channelled out of the body, disembodied between mind and font. This was exacerbated by the invention of the printing press and the moulding of letterforms out of molten lead. Detached from the embodied gesture of handwritten manuscript to mechanically produced typescript, letters no longer flow with the movement of thought. They become fixed within the grid of the letter press. The page feels impenetrable, gridded, barred off. Is it possible to physically enter into the text, to play-with, to think-with, to make-with, to muddle-with, to swim-with the text? (Journal extract, May 14, 2021)

The etymological roots of "text" are from Latin *textus*, which means "to weave, to join, fit together, braid, interweave, construct, fabricate, build." I understand that *textus* refers to the process of how text materializes as interwoven thoughts and ideas. However, when presented as Text, they are posited as fixed and impenetrable, leaving me as a reader at a loss for words. Although the notion "at a loss for words" can be associated with lack, it also holds the potential for the more-than of felt experience¹² that drawing-with-writing touches on as it moves through and beyond the letterforms. Rather than drawing lines between image and text, they enact movements toward new modes of thinking and expression.

In addition to interrogating the relationship between the scripto-visual, I explore how drawing-with text not only

undermines the centrality and authority of language but also generates a different way of thinking with academic texts. Taking a leaf from Barad's book, I ascribe to material-discursive entanglements that are generative, rather than descriptive, and immanent rather than transcendent, to explore the interstices of language and attend to "not what is said . . . [but] . . . that which constrains and enables what can be said" (Barad, 2007, p. 146). This resonates with Manning and Massumi's (2014) notion of enabling constraints that are "'enabling' because in and of itself a constraint does not necessarily provoke techniques for process, and 'constraint' because in and of itself openness does not create the conditions for collaborative exploration" (p. 94).

Drawing-With

Drawing-with-writing is not a translation between two modalities attempting to articulate the same expression through different forms. It is an ecology of practices that not only reveals how writing and drawing do different things but also gives shape and expression to the more-than of language and drawing. In this regard, I think with the etymological roots of "to draw." For example, in Old English "to draw" comes from *draggan*, understood as "to drag, protract," and in Proto-Germanic drawing comes from "to draw, pull," whereas in Middle Dutch to draw meant "to carry, bring, throw." For me, these readings evoke how drawing-with-text becomes an embodied act of drawing out or extending out of the text in ways that both enliven and prolong its possibilities and expression. As a thinking in-the-act, writing-with-drawing reaches toward the unthought within thought, producing figurations for learning-with, and responding to problems as they surface. Unlike the fixity of academic knowledge, drawing-with-writing draws breath from the liveliness of concepts that mutate according to the specificities of their evolving assemblage. As a practice, it touches on the qualitative effects germinated in academic texts that on reading glow in ways that words signal but cannot fully articulate (MacLure, 2013b, p. 661).

Manning (2016) configures "the ineffable felt experience of the more-than [that] is also a kind of thinking, a kind of knowledge in the making [that] changes experience" (p. 31). In so doing she proposes autistic perception that "engages with the edges of perception in the forming [that] dwells in the shaping" (Manning, 2016, p. 286). Put differently, she writes that "autistic perception feels-with the world in difference without separability, incapable of reducing experience to a common denominator" (Manning, 2020, p. 256). For me, drawing-with-writing becomes a pedagogical practice that activates and agitates that which is not immediately apparent but is nevertheless palpable between the words. In other words, the inquiry is drawn toward the infrathin quality in the between of writing and drawing, a quality that is felt but nevertheless remains elu-

sive, a quality that touches on that which words alone cannot express:

If the research is about the ineffable . . . how does one foreground that which has no form or shape but matters? Why is this important to me? Because of the limitations of parsed out knowledge that excludes so much. The other senses need to come into play, with all their other knowings. Drawing moves ink across the page. Doodles in between and alongside the text follow different directions, flows, movements and expressions. Taking their time, they linger with the text, inhabiting a shared space-time they do something else, something different . . . They bring into being new ideas, they are new ideas (they don't represent new ideas). The marks beget new marks, the marks generate new marks, they are part of the thinking, they think-with the text. Dismantling the grid as they move through the text. They are concepts, they are creative forces, they are the in-act of thought. (Journal extract, May 11, 2021)

More-Than-Margins

Although mindful of new materialist critiques of the linguistic turn, Sarah Truman seeks to free language from Maggie MacLure's (2013a) positioning of language as imperial mediator of the world (p. 633). Arguing that language is both "a material force and a material event," Truman (2021) does not jettison linguistic theorizing from the materiality of her research practice (p. 38). In her chapter *Minor interferences: Marginalia as research-creation*, Truman (2021) explores how "radical 'reading-writing' practices and annotation might affect engagement with texts and disrupt the genealogy and meaning of texts" (p. 58). Margins denote edges, brinks, and borders; they are the areas of the page around the text. Marginalia are illustrations and notes in the margins and are associated with being of little effect or importance; they are the sideshow to the main event of the text. In my practice, I attempt to re-center and redeem that which is marginalized. Drawing-with-writing also opens up possibilities for different kinds of writing brought into being through material-discursive encounters that unsettle binaries between text and image as well as hierarchies between the material and discursive. Each mark-making leads to further mark-makings between the scripto/visual as I attempt to articulate the ineffable effectively.

Doodling-With

The word "doodle" originally denoted a simpleton or fool. However, in contemporary use, doodling describes "scribbling or scrawling aimlessly." As a noun a doodle is defined as "a rough drawing made absentmindedly." Encoded within these definitions are value judgments that position doodling as a mindless activity that is not to be taken seriously. For me, however, the embodied "mindlessness" of

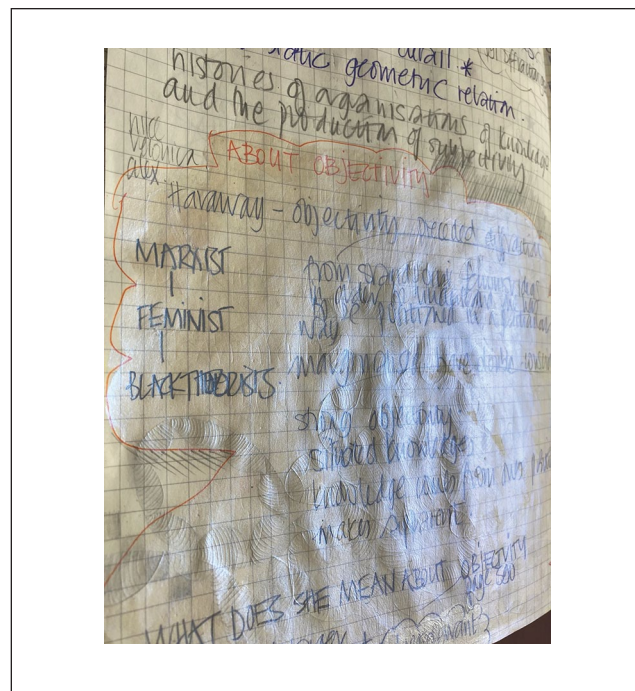
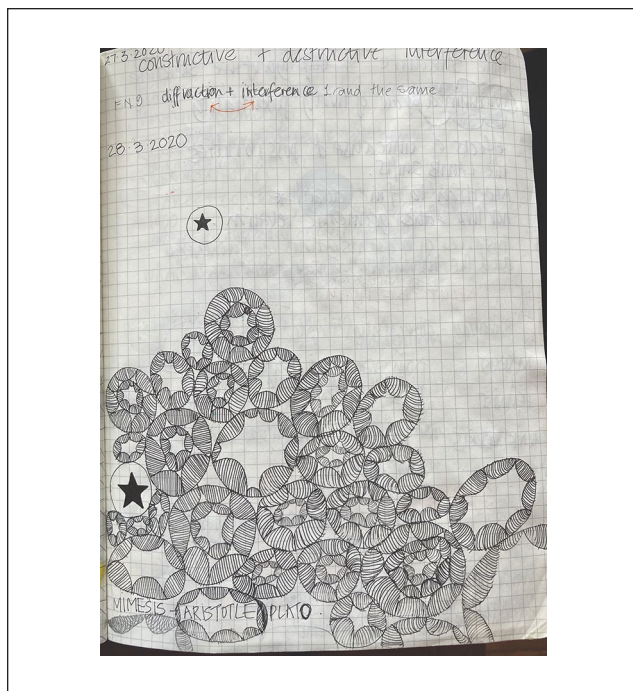


Figure 7 (left) and Figure 8 (right). Journal pages. Photos: Nike Romano.

doodling is valuable because it offers the potential to articulate the more-than of text. Doodling becomes a way of spending time with academic text whereby I roam in, through and around the text, getting to know it, slowly. Doodling is not a breaking-down of the text to extract its meaning; rather, it builds with the text thereby foregrounding the role of expanded perceptual sense-making through material-discursive encounters. Brushing up close to the letterforms, I touch, color and trace their contours, coming into proximity with the more-than of content that they in/form. Doodling becomes a process of metabolizing the text's embodied concepts. Doodling does not simply take time; it makes time, marking the materialization of sense-making, of thinking-in-the-act.

In his article "In praise of doodling," Matthew Battles (2004) says doodles are "the most common and most ignored art form" (p. 105). Battles adds that in their sensuous immediacy, doodles are not forms of expression. Moreover, being "beyond craft and criticism," doodles escape value judgments because it is "impossible to do it badly—or well." He writes that doodles spring "from that flourishing thicket, common to everyone, where mind shoots forth its florid branches from the rootstock of the animal brain" (Battles, 2004, p. 105). Although I do not ascribe to the arboreal structure of Battles' framework, I am interested in his allusion to doodles as being prelinguistic as well as how, as a performative practice, doodles become co-creators of knowledge. Whereas for Bennet (2010), who

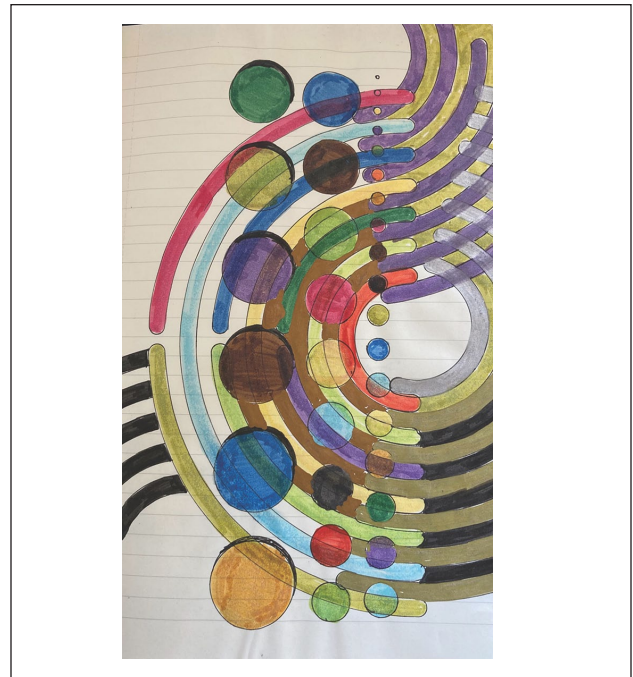
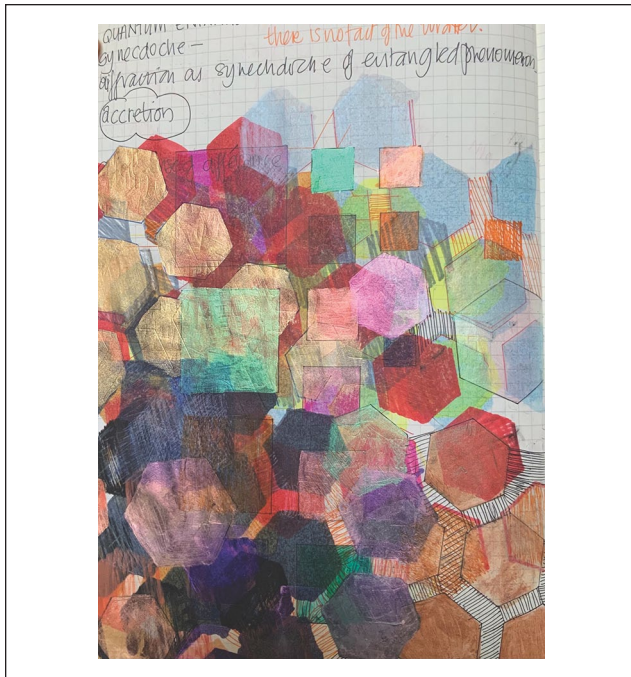
writes that doodles "don't need a lot of space" (p. 10), for me doodles make time-space in which thinking flourishes in the margins. More liquid than solid, doodles flow, they trickle, like matter following the pull of gravity, drawn toward the edges of the lines in their making.

Scrawling-With

I am also drawn to the verb "to scrawl," meaning to write or draw untidily. It is a verb of uncertain origin but thought to come from Middle English "scrawled" meaning "to spread out the limbs." Scrawling escapes the frame of the text; it melds and merges the body; gives new form and new shape; it reaches to the space around, the background; it leaks and seeps. It is bodily.

Concerned with the performativity of the text and the drawings, I explore how they think differently, how they produce newness rather than sameness, whether they can touch on the more-than of the text without being illustrative or decorative. In other words, how do the drawings lead me through the text and draw the text toward the more-than of the text?

I write differently when I write by hand, I scribble, I hesitate, I erase, I change fonts and pens, the nibs sometimes sharper are more incisive . . . If scrawling is a practice, what is its technique? Scrawling, like crawling, moves between modes . . . lines of ink draw through lines of text, interweaving, interlacing, tracking,



Figures 9 (Left) and 10 (Right). Journal extracts, June and April 2020. Photos Nike Romano.

tracing, thinking-in-movement. As a technique, scrawling wanders and follows the line as it touches the page. Leading and following, scrawling is a perpetual mark in-the-making. Unlike St. Pierre's aside, scrawling materialises inside the main text. Neither pretty nor decorative, scrawling is untimely. Embracing varied tempos, scrawling is attuned to haphazard movements and pauses of the hands gestures. Depending on the hand's pressure on the pen, scrawling makes itself felt on both sides of the paper, incisive on the front, its imprint embossed on the reverse side of the page where lines protruding like veins, texture what will come after . . . woven threads of ideas . . . like felt that cannot be untangled . . . diffraction patterns.¹³ (Journal extract, May 14, 2021)

Figures 7 and 8 show both sides of a journal page. On the left is a thinking about mimesis using black liner. The reverse side, on the right, depicts a diffractive thinking-with Haraway's situated knowledges, using pen, pencil, and iridescent paint. The lines of the page on the left are embossed on the reverse, texturing further complexity into the layering.

Stenciling-With

Stencils have shaped my making-thinking practice for as long as I can remember. They help me to think through the perceptual relationship of figure/ground. My recent research into the etymological roots of the word "stencil" serendipitously uncovered uncanny resonances with my

interest in glitter, iridescence, and sparkly materials. Stencil comes from the Latin *scintilla* meaning "particle of fire, spark, glittering speck, atom." How is it that the name of hard-edged templates embodies the sparks of interest, the specks of glitter that trace the something that is exchanged and the something that is taken away, and shine light on my inquiry? Does the differential edge between the figure/ground of a stencil activate the *infra-thin*?

Figure 9 shows a sense-making of diffractive methodology. Although there are no words to speak of, the faint lines of the moleskine page invoke lines of text. Using two stencils, a small circle stencil and a large circle radius arc stencil, the mark-making activates ambiguous space and depth that attract different readings. The image can be read as an aerial view, conjuring the all-seeing gaze of Haraway's (1988) "god trick." Viewed from the side, it can also be perceived as a perpendicular to the horizon transection common to architectural drawings, the circles suspended in an up/down flow bubbling somewhere between land, sea and sky. A diagonal movement is also generated by the arcs that elicit a transversal gaze that flows between the circles and the arcs, drawing attention to the lively spaces around the shapes themselves. Working with stencils teaches me about the ever-shifting relationship between figure/ground. Depending on the cut, shapes become either figure or ground, or both figure and ground (see Figure 10).

Conclusion

Driven by a desire to express the ineffable and touch on that which is excluded or occluded from Knowledge, I have shown how my artistic-research practice, that operates in the interstices of making and thinking, nudges me through-and-around concerns obliquely and opens me toward different registers that cut across normative accounts of what it means to know (Manning, 2016). In referring to two exhibitions, *sum of the parts* (2010) and *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2014), I have highlighted how materiality and making processes that conjugate new languages draw me toward different ways of doing inquiry. In exploring the differences that materialize when practices—construed as modes of thought in the act—are diffracted through one another, I have shown how practices build on and through each other in ongoing iterative entanglements (Barad, 2007). In paying particular attention to how thinking-making practices in the between of writing and drawing can activate and agitate the space between words and their more-than, this article has offered new ways of becoming-with academic texts. Immanent research inquiry is practiced as an iterative process that cannot be replicated or formula-rized. As a result, writing-with, drawing-with, doodling-with, scrawling-with and stenciling-with trouble the traditional logocentric, linear approaches that are associated with academic research and shape my thinking otherwise beyond the strictures of Cartesian thought. Furthermore, by turning to the performativity of these research-creation practices, not only is visual art liberated from the limitations of representation and aesthetics, but binary splits between making and thinking are also dismantled, thereby confirming Manning's (2016) claim that "making is a thinking in its own right, and conceptualization a practice in its own right" (p. 41). My article thinks with Manning's (2016) theorization of art as "an operative process that maps the way toward a certain attunement of world and expression" (p. 47) and David Rousell's foregrounding of art's "unique potential to explore creative modes of thinking and practice that resist the capture of human language and cognition" (Rousell & Fell, 2018, p. 93). In so doing, the article has foregrounded the potential of research-creation to generate new connections and concepts by using different modes of expression that better explicate that which for me is difficult to explain in words.

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ORCID iD

Nike Romano  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2480-3524>

Notes

1. The capitalization of "Knowledge" references the hegemonic positioning of Western knowledge production and practices as normative within the academy.
2. Understood as a process of "reading insights through one another" (Barad, 2007, p. 25), diffractive analysis foregrounds the entangled relationship between material and discursive processes in the production of knowledge and positions researchers as part of ongoing diffractive entanglements.
3. Barad distinguishes between interactions (premised on separate individual agencies that precede their interaction), and "intra-actions" (conceptualized as the mutual constitution of entangled agencies). Discrete agencies emerge through their intra-actions and are "distinct" in relation to their mutual entanglement; they do not exist as individual elements (Barad, 2007, p. 33).
4. As an enmeshed composite material that is made by laborious rubbing together wet wool fibers with soap, felt undermines the gridded warp and weft structure of woven textiles. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), felt's rhizomatic structure comprises "a supple solid . . . anti-fabric [that] is in no way homogenous . . . it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction" (p. 475).
5. Thank you to the anonymous reviewers who helped me to make my intentions more explicit regarding the urgency of what counts in the academy.
6. The capitalization of Human is in line with Wynter's conceptualization of Man that embodies the notion of the human as Christian, white, heterosexual male.
7. Inner parts of letters such as the inside of an "O" and "D" are called *counters*. The spaces inside letters that are open at one end, for example, "n" and "u" are the *apertures*. The *eye* is the counter of an "e."
8. In his 2007 presentation at the *Trace Evidence Symposium*, Florida, USA, Blackledge (2007) identifies glitter as the ideal trace (p. 1).
9. There are 46 known examples that Duchamp jotted down on scraps of paper that have since been posthumously published.
10. Ettinger (1999) defines the matrixial borderspace as "a psychic sphere of encounters of I(s) and non-I(s) where traces, imprints, and waves are exchanged and experienced by fragmented and assembled I(s) and non-I(s) in trans-subjectivity and sub-subjectivity" (p. 7).
11. As a term that originated in Canada, research-creation is also known as art-based research in other parts of the world.
12. I have written elsewhere about a particular intervention with Manning's text "Radical pedagogies and metamodelings of knowledge in the making" (<https://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v8iSI.303>) in which I showed how drawing, mapping, tracing, and circling between the text exposed its more-than and drew me closer to the heart of Manning's concerns.
13. See Figures 9 and 10.

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Author Biography

Nike Romano is an artistic-researcher who lectures history and theory of art and design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Romano completed her PhD at Utrecht University and the University of the Western Cape. Her research explores how thinking-making practices between writing and drawing offer different ways of learning in South African Higher Education contexts.