

Conversation-as-Material

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Abstract

Conversation-as-material is a language-based artistic research practice for attempting to speak from within the experience of collaborative artistic exploration, a linguistic practice attentive to the lived experience of aesthetic co-creation. The practice of conversation-as-material, which forms the basis of this article, has evolved through tentative exploration of the questions: How can the shared act of conversation bring into reflective awareness the live and lived, yet often hidden or undisclosed, experience of artistic practice and process, especially within collaboration? How can the event of conversation be developed as an artistic research practice for attempting to give tangibility, whilst also remaining in fidelity, to the pre-reflective aspects of this lived experience? Considered less as a means for talking *about*, conversation-as-material may be understood as a practice for inviting immanent, inter-subjective modes of verbal-linguistic sense-making emerging through different voices enmeshed in live exchange. Conversation — from *con-* meaning ‘with, together’ and *versare*, ‘to turn, bend’; or else, from *conversare* — ‘to turn about, to turn about with’. Conversation-as-material has emerged as a practice of collaborative writing, which unfolds through the interplay of different voices ‘turning about’ together in conversation. In this sense, the practice can be differentiated from that of interview — for in the practice of conversation-as-material there is no researcher/researched dichotomy. Within the practice, an attempt is made to develop an approach to writing that finds expression first through verbal conversation, which is then subsequently distilled, even densified, towards poetic text. Conversation-as-material involves the gradual revelation of an artistic-poetic, perhaps even phenomenological, mode of emergent writing for speaking from the experience of collaborative co-creation, where linguistic content is not already known in advance, but rather emerges in and through the lived working-with of language. The practice of conversation-as-material thus comprises a quadripartite process of conversation, transcription, distillation, and presentation, where each part involves the activation of a particular aesthetic or poetic mode of attention, perhaps even a specific phenomenological attitude or disposition.

Keywords: conversation, artistic research, phenomenological writing, collaboration, inceptual thinking.

How to navigate the article: The article is comprised of two related components: PART 1 — the following text which attempts to draw out possible connections between conversation-as-material as a language-based artistic research practice and phenomenological writing; PART 2 — an ‘exposition’ for evidencing or demonstrating the practice of conversation-as-material itself, presented on the Research Catalogue (RC), an online platform for publishing artistic research. The reader is invited to *move between* PART 1 and PART 2 by following the hyperlinks inserted in this text. The full exposition can be accessed here: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/458217>

Introduction

This article aims to explore the commonalities and resonances between conversation-as-material as a language-based artistic research practice and phenomenological writing. In so doing, it responds to a call: to explore existing and possible connections between two different sets of practices — phenomenological research practices and artistic research practices. Can this specific artistic research practice answer such a call? Is that what is called for? If it is, however, the response is not one of answer or reply (known already in advance of writing), but rather to explore how the call activates a style of thinking. How can we think-with the call? What is *called forth*? Within this article, an attempt is made to think-through or else think-with the practice of conversation-as-material afresh, to explore this approach in working with conversation as an artistic research practice, potentially even as an accidental or coincidental practice of phenomenological writing. For indeed, the practice of conversation-as-material has evolved as a hybrid artistic research and art-writing approach, without formal correspondence with the wider context of phenomenology. As such, it would be disingenuous to pretend that existing correspondence exists — to present (validate, justify, defend, and retrospectively rationalize) the practice of conversation-as-material as if it had always and already been conceived within a phenomenological frame. Yet still, there may be intuited a relation, a commonality, between this practice and specific phenomenological methods or practices. And this intuition (hunch, sense, and even suspicion) creates the impetus for the enquiry of this article. Certainly, this may be daunting, even a touch risky for how much should one know of phenomenological method (in its diversity, divergence, and deviation) before claiming commonality? As such, no definitive claim is made at the outset, but rather this article explores tentatively how possible connections between phenomenological writing and the practice of conversation-as-material might be revealed, through sharing evidence of the practice of conversation-as-material as it has developed over the last decade within a series of artistic research collaborations including: (1) *Re-* (Cocker with Rachel Lois Clapham, 2009–2012); (2) *The Italic I* (Cocker with Clare Thornton, 2012–2018); and (3) *Choreographic Figures: Deviations from the Line* (Cocker with Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil, 2014–2019).

By attempting to explore new ways of showing and sharing the practice itself, this article (for want of a better word, for how does this naming — how something is *called* — already determine how it will be read?) unfolds across two contexts. The article comprises an ‘exposition’ presented using the online multimodal platform of the Research Catalogue for evidencing or demonstrating the practice of conversation-as-material itself, alongside this written component or even ‘essay’ which attempts to draw out possible connections between conversation-as-material as a language-based artistic research practice and phenomenological writing. The relation between the written ‘essay’ and the exposition of practice presented on the Research Catalogue is intended as reciprocal and non-hierarchical — the reader is invited to move between. At times, there are invitations within this text for the reader to engage with specific examples of practice via individual hyperlinks. The overall research catalogue exposition [which can be accessed here — <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/458217>] specifically attempts to demonstrate the quadripartite process of conversation, transcription,

distillation and presentation for each of the named collaborations listed above, revealing how conversation transcript material becomes distilled gradually towards poetic text, alongside considering how the format of textual presentation (the matter of how the text operates visually, graphically, temporally, relationally, performatively) may be understood as integral to how each text is read. This gesture is not about showing the process of conversation-as-material as a step-by-step account or guide, but rather to explore how each stage of the practice (conversation, transcription, distillation, presentation) may be considered a discrete, yet interconnected, research activity or practice, each of which is capable of being imbued with a phenomenological attitude. The expanded format of this article thus has potential to open up new ways for revealing aspects of a practice that might otherwise remain hidden or concealed, to see or experience the practice afresh. It may even reveal (for, perhaps, the first time) the specific relation between the process of conversation (shown through inclusion of extended transcript material) and resulting poetic textual distillations. For those readers with time and inclination, the conversation transcripts presented in the Research Catalogue might be read at length, offering insights into the nature and tone of the conversations themselves within the practice of conversation-as-material. In parallel, the process of writing this article has involved revisiting the transcript material anew, excavating condensed extracts from the transcripts (which are presented in this text in indented italic sections) for helping to disclose further how conversation-as-material might share commonalities with phenomenological writing.

Attending to the Lived Experience of Artistic Process and Practice

Before focusing on how conversation-as-material is activated within different collaborative projects, the practice must first be situated within a broader research enquiry and its context, drawing attention to the specific lived experiences or phenomena that are approached as the basis of its study. Conversation-as-material operates as a nameable research practice within the frame of my own research enquiry into the live and lived experience of artistic process and practice, and the challenge of finding linguistic means adequate to the task of speaking with, through and from that experience. In one sense, this enquiry might be conceived in phenomenological terms as an exploration of the phenomena of artistic practice, that is, an enquiry into, with and through the experiential *how-ness* of artistic (research) endeavor. This is not about a revelation of a process as artistic *techné*, as the concrete skills, techniques, or ways of doing things, but rather an attempt to engage specifically with the experience of thinking-feeling-knowing as well as not-knowing within artistic exploration, especially within artistic collaboration. The enquiry is not concerned so much with what is produced through practice (in terms of resulting artworks), but rather the research object is the phenomenon of sense-making therein: *How* is the experience of artistic thinking-feeling-knowing? How is the being-in-the-midst of thinking-in-action within artistic-aesthetic practice, the event of thinking-through-doing, or thinking with-and-through practice?

The term practice is used in multiple senses throughout this article. In one sense, the singular term ‘practice’, or the plural ‘practices’, signals towards those nameable or recognizable ways of doing things within the broader context of a given practice. This

second use of the term ‘practice’ may serve as a form of denomination for naming a wider field of activity, for example, artistic (research) practice, as well as referring to the lived experience of practice or of practicing therein, specifically the non-cognitive and embodied knowledges that are co-emergent to the event of practice, that become activated live and *in situ*, in and through different actions, relations and situations. Reflecting this dual sense of the term, the research focus for this enquiry into the live and lived experience of artistic practice and process involves attending to and attempting to give tangibility to the often hidden or undisclosed experiential aspects of the practicing of practice, focusing on the contingent moments of incipient decision-making; the navigation of competing forces, resistances and pressures; the activity of working with and through obstacles; of ‘figuring’ something out or of ‘feeling one’s way’, with particular emphasis on the event of collaboration with others, both human and nonhuman. This enquiry involves an attempt to become more attuned to that affective, pre-reflective realm of energies, emergences and intensities operating before, between and below the more articulable or recognizable gestures of artistic practice. *Infra* — below. *Intra* — inside, within. *Inter* — between, amongst. The research process often unfolds through collaboration with other artist-researchers within durational projects where the studio-gallery or site-specific context becomes a live ‘laboratory’ for shared exploration. My own live experience of *being within* (as participant) and *being with* (as observer) the process of artistic exploration is accompanied by various dialogic and linguistic practices for attempting to reveal insights into (specifically *from* rather than necessarily *about*) the lived experience of the embodied, experiential, relational, even non-cognitive, dimension of artistic exploration, in and through language.

A Challenge for Language?

The quest to communicate the embodied, experiential dimension of enquiry through language is a perennial challenge for both phenomenology and artistic research. However, within the field of artistic practice and research there can appear some scepticism, even doubt, around the capacity of language for giving expression to this non-cognitive dimension of artistic experience. Artistic research theorist Borgdorff (2011) asks, “Is it possible to achieve a linguistic-conceptual articulation of the embedded, enacted and embodied content of artistic research?” (p. 60). Indeed, what is at stake in the bringing into speech, into language, of those artistic experiences that are often pre-reflective, non-cognitive, that are habitually undisclosed or concealed? This is not to disqualify, override or otherwise invalidate the non-linguistic dimension of artistic practice. Still, within the field of artistic practice and research, the relation between art and writing can sometimes seem tense, even antagonistic, where writing is often perceived as a form of explanation or justification, all too keen to explain away that which is untranslatable, unsayable; the embodied, experiential dimension of both artistic activity and artifact. Philosopher Cazeaux (2017) observes thus:

The art-writing distinction opens on to a broader set of tensions. It implies that there are two kinds of activity: one that deals with the tangible, physical world and is practical, and another that deals with words and concepts and its theoretical. With art practice, one is encountering ‘the stuff of the world’, ‘the stuff of life

itself', whereas words are echoes or vestiges of experience; dry, crackly leaves that have long since been drained of the sap's vital force (p. 77).

Here, writing seems to be perceived as incapable of what is vital: of manifesting life, of attending to what is most necessary or important. Writing may appear to be conceived as little more than an act of ventriloquism that seeks to speak on behalf of art, somehow compensating for or overcoming — in turn diminishing the criticality and potency of — art's potential resistance to language.

At times, there may be perceived a tendency within the arts, for understanding or even equating writing with the activity of explaining, rationalizing, positioning, arguing, where writing is considered as somehow synonymous with theory, with theorizing, conceptualizing, contextualizing, for reflecting on or about practice through the prism of existing theories and concepts. For language-based practices, there can be a risk of being reduced to a role of explanation or explication — which gives the practice both undue authority (power over) and at the same time impoverishes or disempowers it, strips it of its creative capacity as a linguistic research practice. Yet artistic research writing is not only theoretical writing. Rather than conceiving writing in such terms, or even somehow as an obstacle or as a problem, the issue at stake as philosopher and media-theorist Mersch (2015) suggests, is one of rising “to the challenge of nevertheless finding words to say the unsayable” (p. 10). Mersch (2017) voices a call to action — rather than “talking about art”, how might writing practice the “more careful and gentle *of* which merely dares to touch” (p. 122). Indeed, how might exploring points of resonance or affinity between practices of phenomenological writing and language-based practices such as conversation-as-material open up further ways for considering *how else* writing could operate as (part of) an artistic research practice? Affinity — a sense of relatedness or of relationship, literally meaning ‘bordering on’, from *ad-* ‘to’ and *finis* ‘a border, a boundary’. How do these two fields of practice — phenomenological writing and language-based artistic research — border one another, how might they come into closer touch? Where or how does their sense of affinity become revealed?

Towards a Poeticizing Language

The practice of conversation-as-material forms part of a wider enquiry comprising the dual attempt to bring to reflective awareness the hidden, concealed or otherwise undisclosed aspects of practice, whilst at the same time, searching for a mode of linguistic description-reflection capable of operating in fidelity to that experience. Here, fidelity refers to a faithful adherence to the reality of that experience, a staying true; alongside an attempt to represent or reproduce that experience through closeness, precision, exactness. Counter-intuitively perhaps, this search for a close, precise, exacting means of correspondence between experience and language is poetic. Accordingly, poets and writers have often been the guides. “Let me tell you”, says writer Lispector (2014), “I’m trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it’s already gone because it’s already become a new instant-now that’s also already gone” (p. 3). She follows:

And if here I must use words, they must bear an almost merely bodily meaning, I'm struggling with the last vibration ... I make a sentence of words made only from instants-now. Read, therefore, my invention as pure vibration with no meaning beyond each whistling syllable (p. 3).

Writer-poet and philosopher Cixous (1991) observes how Lispector's approach to writing teaches us, "The lessons of calling, letting ourselves be called. The lessons of letting come, receiving" (pp. 60–61). Cixous (1991) reflects that Lispector's practice:

Gives us the lesson of slowness. Slowness: the slow time that we need to approach, to let everything approach [...] all the time we must put in to reach the thing, the other, to attain it without hurrying it, to come close to it [...] We must save the approach that opens and leaves space for *the other* [...] to keep the space of waiting open ... what is open is time: not to absorb the thing, the other, but to let the thing present itself (pp. 62–63).

Approach — to come close or near in both time *and* place, as well as to come near in quality or character, perhaps even to resemble. For Cixous (1991) the task of "*How to bring forth claricely*" involves the practice of, "going, approaching, brushing, dwelling, touching, allowing-entrance, -presence, -giving, -taking. Restoring things to things, giving ourselves each thing for the first time, restoring the first time of things to ourselves, each time, restoring the lost first times to ourselves" (p. 64). To restore — to give back or renew something lost: from *re-* 'back, again', or 'back to the original place', and *-staurare*, as in *instaurare*, 'to set up, establish'. To go back or to give back, to set up or establish (one's relation) anew.

The practice of conversation-as-material presented within this article may be considered as a possible way of approaching the pre-reflective dimension of artistic-aesthetic experience through the medium of language, even for restoring a relation to experience. It is a linguistic practice that attempts to remain close to the direct experience that it seeks to communicate. This sense of 'remaining close' does not always mean linguistic articulation is sought in the very moment or 'instant-now' (in Lispector's terms) of the original direct experience from which it seeks to speak. There are occasions where the practice of conversation-as-material is activated 'in the moment', in temporal-spatial proximity or synchronous to the original experience that it takes as its focus; however, there are other times when closeness is attempted after the fact, by trying to stay with or dwell for longer within the felt sense of an experience through the process of repeatedly returning and restoring a relation to it, extending the felt residue or reverberation of direct experience in and through the act of conversation. In a dual sense, 'remaining close' might also speak less of spatial-temporal nearness to a direct experience, but rather of venturing towards a language that is somehow proximate to that experience. Proximity — nearness in place, time or in relation, from *proximus* — meaning most direct, most faithful. Towards a mode of languaging in fidelity to direct experience: close in felt tone, more than in time. For Cixous (1991), what is needed is a mode of writing for "touching the mystery, delicately, with the tips of the words, trying not to crush it, in order to un-lie" (p. 134). Cixous (1991) suggests that, "*To allow a thing to enter in its strangeness,*" involves a patience that pays attention, "An attention that is terse, active, discreet, warm, almost imperceptible [...] Thinking delicately of ... surrounding it with a discreet, confident,

attentive questioning, attuning to, watching over it, for a long time, until penetrating into the essence” (p. 66).

For Cixous and Lispector, searching for a language adequate to the challenge of describing pre-reflective experience or phenomena, is not one of explanation, theorization, or conceptual rationalization, not about fixing or defining, but rather an attempt to re-connect with the fullness of a specific phenomenon or experience in its liveness, in its liveliness, to engage more deeply with the living of a given experience. As Cixous (1991) describes, “I would like to write to what is living in life” (p. 105). In Cixous’s (1998) writing, the attempt to approach through language that which is fragile and fleeting, incipient and barely perceptible, appears to involve the slowness of a patient attention in parallel with a sense of *quickening*, a mode of writing that has “to be written to the quick, on the now” (p. 146). Cixous (1998) observes that, “If you do not grab them in the instant they pass, these pulsations are lost forever” (p. 146). Quick — swift or sudden, with promptness or immediacy, the capacity to move with speed; yet, also meaning living, alive, animate, characterized by the presence of life: from the root *gwei-* meaning to live. Cixous (1998) reflects that, the delicate practice of writing involves an attempt to somehow, “Find the slowness inside the speed” (p. 144). What seems to be called for then is a mode of writing from the *quick* (or living) of experience, a practice capable of activating the coinciding of these two temporal modalities or even modes of attention — of slowness within speed, the quick of the slow.

Like Cixous and Lispector, van Manen (2014) is also alert to the challenge of trying to capture the living instant of ‘now’ in language, of exploring “what is given in moments of prereflective, prepredicative experiences — experiences as we live through them” (p. 27). However, he also notes that, “phenomenology is always aware that when we try to capture the ‘now’ of the living present in an oral or written description, then we are already too late” (van Manen, 2014, p. 34). For van Manen (2014), phenomenological writing involves the “aesthetic imperative” (p. 240) of a “poetizing form of writing” (p. 241), that “aims to bring experience vividly into presence” (p. 241), “to fasten a hold on nearness” (p. 242). Van Manen (2014) affirms that, “A phenomenological text does not just communicate information, it also aims to address or evoke forms of meaning that are more poetic, elusive, or ambiguous, but that cannot be easily told in propositional discourse” (p. 45). He asserts that the process of phenomenological writing attempts, “to express the noncognitive, ineffable, and pathic aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomenon” (van Manen, 2014, p. 240), which involves attending to, “what is singular, subtle, or what can only be grasped with inventive and vocative means of reflective writing” (p. 27). Vocative — the voking dimension of language. For van Manen, “the term *vok* derives from *vocare*: to call, and from the etymology of voice, sound, language and tone; it also means to address, to bring to speech” (p. 240). Vocative — both to bring to speech and the capacity of a text for ‘speaking to’. Van Manen (2014) outlines the vocative dimension of phenomenological writing by methods of the *revocative* (lived throughness: bringing experience vividly into presence through anecdote and imagery); *evocative* (nearness: an in-touch-ness activated through poetic devices including alliteration and repetition); *invocative* (intensification: a calling forth by incantation); *convocative* (pathic: expressing an emotive, non-cognitive sensibility). Within phenomenological writing, as van Manen (2014) suggests, “poetic language ... helps to communicate forms of meaning that are unique to phenomenological understanding and

that are impossible to mobilize in texts in any other way” (p. 46). Mobilize — to render capable of movement, not fixed nor stabilized, but rather with the capacity to move. To stir, to shift, to excite, incite or awaken. How then to explore the capacity of language for mobilizing, for connecting with the aliveness of life? For van Manen (1984), “To be attentive to the etymological origins of words can sometimes put us in touch with the original form of life where the terms still had living ties to the lived experiences from which they originally sprang” (p. 53). In parallel, he suggests that “idiomatic phrases proceed phenomenologically: they are borne out of lived experience” (van Manen, 1984, p. 54). A commitment made to “tracing etymological sources” (van Manen, 1984, p. 52) and “searching for idiomatic phrases” (p. 54) may be discerned within the practice of conversation-as-material; moreover, has been made more explicit and tangible in writing this article.

A Common Quadripartite Process

Resonating with aspects van Manen’s (2014) philological method of the ‘vocative’, the practice of conversation-as-material may be conceived as the search for a mode of writing that has the capacity to set in motion, for activating understanding in affective or experiential rather than only in cognitive terms. Attempting to activate a practice of languaging with the potentiality of Cixous’s (1998) “slowness inside the speed” (p. 144), conversation-as-material tries to couple of the immediacy of spoken conversation, the potential of conversation for inviting thought on the cusp of articulation, with a sense of slowness. Conversation provides a frame where the felt sense of a previous direct experience may become somehow durationally extended or dwelled within for longer; in turn, the activities of transcription and distillation further involve the act of returning again and again, coming back to the experience once more. Conversation becomes a way of staying with, for remaining close to, for opening up into speech the felt dimensions of a shared lived experience. Etymological playfulness helps activate the vocative dimensions of language, as singular words and phrases are ‘turned over’ in the interplay of different voices engaged in live exchange. The process of transcription and of distillation helps to further amplify the vocative dimension of recorded conversation, removing extraneous material whilst emphasizing the poetic potential of language, its specific rhythm, cadence, and acoustic charge.

Whilst the practice of conversation-as-material has been adapted and modified within the frame of different collaborative contexts, there is a common quadripartite structure that unfolds thus: (1) *Conversation*: Engaging in a period of framed conversation as a way of touching upon, getting in touch with or turning over together some aspect of (shared) experience. The conversation may have a specific object of enquiry identified at the outset or the focus might arrive or emerge in and through the process itself; (2) *Transcription*: Transcribing the conversation, by listening slowly and carefully to the recording of the conversation, paying special attention to the peripheral and the incidental parts within the dialogue, those moments of speech that might have gone unnoticed at the time of conversation or that functioned as asides; (3) *Distillation*: Distilling the transcribed conversation through a process of editing or condensing the transcription material which might involve highlighting or redacting content, in an attempt to allow a more dense form of poetic text to gradually appear, become revealed;

and (4) *Presentation*: Exploring ways for sharing the poetic distillation with others, through various modes of presentation which attempt to further activate or amplify the vocative potential of the text for communicating a felt sense of the pre-reflective, living experience that the overall practice takes as its focus. What now follows is an attempt to show how the practice of conversation-as-material has evolved through different collaborative projects: to explore how the practice is activated in relation to different lived experiences within the wider field of artistic exploration, alongside reflecting on how each singular manifestation also reveals something of the qualities and characteristics of the practice of conversation-as-material, and its potential resonance or affinity with the wider concerns of phenomenological writing.

Re– The Lived Experience of Writing-as-Practice

Initiated in 2009, *Re–* is a collaboration with writer Rachel Lois Clapham, for exploring the live and lived experience of working with language within the context of an art-writing practice. *Re–* comprises a series of performance lectures evolved over four years, which in different ways each engage with the endeavor of writing-as-practice, the event of collaboration, and the labor of making the work itself. Each iteration of *Re–* and the resulting performance lectures address different aspects of the writing experience explored collaboratively, moreover, where the process of writing is itself conceived as a collaboration *with-writing*, a negotiation between writer and the writing's material agency and resistance. The 'content' of the performance lectures was generated through the practice of conversation-as-material; or rather, the incipient practice of conversation-as-material emerged in response to the task of generating content for these performance lectures. For each iteration of *Re–* a process of conversation was undertaken, conceived as an aesthetic activity for investigating the conditions of its own becoming, for reflecting on the event of artistic collaboration and the wrestle therein to find a shared language. The recorded conversation was then transcribed and distilled in two ways — (1) Textual: the conversation transcript was gradually distilled by Cocker into a series of poetic textual fragments, which became the script for the spoken-word component of the subsequent performance lecture; and (2) Visual-diagrammatic: in parallel, the conversation was translated by Clapham into a number of visual diagrams — drawings and performative micro-gestures that attempt to give tangibility to those parts of the dialogic exchange that existed beyond words, as an affirmation perhaps of conversation's sensible, affective potentiality. These two distillations (textual and visual-diagrammatic) become reactivated side-by-side within the live performance reading — broken fragments from earlier conversations, a spoken text of dislocated phrases; mute utterances of a finger pointing, nails pink; a diagram drawn; the space of breath.

LINK TO PRACTICE: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1515399>

Within this collaboration, two art-writers attempt to get in touch with and share together the lived experience of an art-writing practice, through the process of conversation searching for a way of speaking with and from the experience of wrestling with language and the struggle of articulation. Together in conversation, striving for a sense of *nearness*, trying to find a language for communicating the *how-ness* of a particular lived experience of practice:

It is a proposition and a proposition about a writing practice ... an attempt to address the live struggle, the live struggle that is hidden [...] The gesture of writing ... is not so much to do with the struggle to find the words verbally ... as the struggle to find the word on the page, and the way that a text fluctuates and shimmers and disappears and comes back [...] That sense of struggling to find a way of articulating something [...] and struggling to locate that thing that you think you are looking at. It is the how rather than the what and the why [...] It is going back to how it felt ... the nearness [...] There is a sense of wrestling with the practice of practicing.¹

The exposition component of this article on the Research Catalogue shows how the conversation transcripts were distilled into a series of performance lectures; however, in writing this article the transcripts have been returned to again, differently (see indented extracts in italics). Writing this article has enabled the transcripts to be encountered afresh, specifically for attending to how the process of conversation itself engages with the phenomenon taken as its object of enquiry (the lived experience of a writing practice), with potential perhaps to reveal possible resonances and commonalities between the emergent practice of conversation-as-material and wider phenomenological concerns.

The extracts of conversation transcript speak to the lived experience of a writing practice (which *Re-* takes as its focus) but also appear to describe the live and lived experience of the collaborative practice of conversation-as-material itself. Turning over of language: towards a nascent vocabulary for describing the practice of conversation-as-material in its specificity. By returning to the original conversation transcripts and attending to how the lived experience of a (writing) practice is described therein, what becomes revealed is how the desire to get close or *near* to one's object of enquiry is not always achievable through directness of approach, through focused questions identified in advance.

The work circles, tries to think through [...] The finger ... circles the point but ... what is it circling ... What is the mode of hesitation there? [...] It feels as though there is a definite attempt to get at something. The thing is definitely what I am trying to get at. It is that point there ... only that thing might change [...] It is the point where you are trying to work something out, something through. There is a sense of purpose without it really knowing what it is [...] There is a blindness, a grasping or a groping towards language. This notion of groping for something that you never get towards [...] The closer you get ... you get closer but you don't necessarily get any more [...] Having something to say but not being sure what it is [...] The reaching out is purposeful, but it doesn't quite know what it is going to get ... Purpose is accidentally found ... There is something that couldn't be anticipated [...] The purpose reveals itself in the work [...] There is a purposefulness ... that came from it being completely aimless in the way that it

¹ The italicized extracts in this section of the article are condensed distillations comprising fragments of transcript material from a series of conversations between Clapham and Cocker. The full transcript materials can be encountered within the research exposition forming part of this article here — <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1515399>

was started [...] So the words come, and in their own time. And often they come slower than you want.

Circling the object of enquiry rather than locating it directly: but *how* is the experience of this circling described? Or rather, how might different experiences of circling be understood, for it seems that there could be more than one register of possibility for circling the still-not-fully-named object of enquiry? One mode appears operative in a more willful sense — reaching out, getting at, grasping towards, even groping for. Grope — to ‘feel about’ as though blind or in darkness, to search out by sense of touch alone. Whilst the sense of circling refers to the linguistic operation of conversation, the verbs for describing that experience foreground the action of feeling, of touch. Their presence perhaps indicates towards the limitations of language — moments where the linguistic-cognitive function of language seems to shift towards a more haptic register of sense making, where experience cannot be described in words but can only be felt. Furthermore, it appears that as language strives to approach or get closer to the object of its enquiry, the object of attention somehow shifts or changes, eludes the grasp of words. Or rather, it could be that this mode of approach is too forceful for its object of enquiry — for the verbs used indicate a desire to take hold of, to seize or to attain. To take possession of, take by force or capture. However, there also appears a second mode of circling, which rather than actively reaching towards, seems rather to hold back, circling as a way of holding a space open. To revolve — to travel or orbit around a central point, again and again, to return, repeat or come back. Here, perhaps the circling is rather more elliptical. Ellipse: etymologically to fall short, leave out, a sense a deficit. Towards an emergent language that recognizes its own sense of lack or want. Want — deficiency, an insufficiency or shortage, meaning simultaneously that which is lacking or wanting, and that which is desired or wished for. Here, the circling of language may be thought of as an attempt to leave open a space for what is beyond language — for that which language longs to articulate yet remains beyond the reach of words.

Rather than reaching or grasping towards the object of enquiry through language — let it come. To let — to allow, let go or slacken. Come — to move with the aim of reaching or to arrive at by movement or progression, but also to move into view, appear or become perceptible.

When you are not looking directly it will come ... Looking away from the thing, looking away from your subject of study [...] You step away but the thought is still there [...] Not to make it too direct ... It comes from a sideways glance [...] There is certainly not a direct view. The notion of what you miss is critical. Taking tangents, going off, looking away. You have to spend time away from it. The time away from it is almost as critical [...] It rests on what is latent and what is not said. The thing that is not being said ... is where the work comes from. [...] It is that which is produced ... as a by-product of intention. It reveals itself ... in the shadow of what is being consciously produced [...] The active spaces of work ... are the spaces where I am not quite sure what is happening. Maybe this is a different kind of thinking. The speed at which it has to happen is different [...] It creates a kind of focus, or pressure point, but it is just to the edge of where the actual vocabulary will come ... It is around the edges of what we are saying, rather than the thing that we are focusing on. Maybe it is the difference between

waiting for something to happen and making something happen [...] Letting go allows it to become something different to what you have been preparing, but at the same time still related to what you have been anticipating [...] So it is being open to the unexpected ... to the situation. The idea of receptivity — of not being too hurried, teasing a way forward and letting something wave towards you.

Rather than moving towards the object of enquiry, an attempt is made to slacken or loosen that impulse, such that it is the object of enquiry that moves from a state of latency (the condition of being concealed, of unobserved existence), from the shadows or the edges, towards appearance. Here, it might seem that to allow something to appear (in its own terms) also involves *looking away*. Away — looking aside or in another direction, but also meaning away from one's own or accustomed place. In this sense, it is not only the object of enquiry from which one looks away or to the side of, but perhaps also away from one's habitual or accustomed place or position. *Epoché* — “putting into brackets the various assumptions that might stand in the way from opening access to the originary or the living meaning of a phenomenon” (van Manen, 2014, p. 215). Abstaining, suspending, putting to one side. *Dis-place* — to put out of place, from *dis-* ‘apart, away’ and *locare* ‘to place’. Moreover, it is also *time away* that seems to be called for. Time away — a pause or break in the continuity of activity. Interval. Interlude. Intermission. Time away as rest or breathing space. Recalling again Cixous's (1998) “slowness inside the speed” (p. 144), it seems that the coexistence of seemingly incompatible registers of attention are somehow invoked. First, waiting — the unhurried quality of abiding or of biding time, of open-ended attention. In parallel, the act of glancing or glimpsing: glance — a sudden movement producing a flash (of understanding), a brief or hurried look; glimpse — faint or transient appearance, to catch a quick view.

Returning to and distilling again the original conversation transcripts, what becomes revealed is how these two modes of attention (the slowness of waiting and the speed of glimpsing) do not appear as antagonistic or oppositional approaches. The practice of conversation-as-material itself seems also to involve both modes of circling attention: of actively reaching towards (or of glancing or glimpsing) the object of enquiry, whilst at the same time holding a space open for what is not-yet-named, or perhaps not even yet known. Or rather, might it be that the capacity of conversation for holding the space open, through circling, its sense of indirectness, somehow creates conditions for moments of insight to be glimpsed? As psychiatrist van den Berg (2021) notes of the phenomenology of ‘the conversation’, “our communication is always communicating with an appeal to a mutual understanding that the word itself can never guarantee. Our communication is always indirect. [...] *The conversation is an indirect communication* [...] The conversation communicates the *hidden*” (p. 41). To appeal — to call or summon: from *appellere* meaning ‘to prepare’. How to then call or prepare for a common understanding that the words themselves cannot guarantee? How might the sense of indirectness within conversation communicate the hidden or else create the conditions for the not-yet-known?

It is to do with setting up the frame for something or setting up the conditions in which something happens ... wherein something unexpected or ... that could not have been anticipated comes about [...] It is live, it is happening, it is very felt. It has a framework ... there is a conversation; there is an internal logic. It needs the

frame, for otherwise you are talking about such slight gestures — they just fly away. [...] This is the space which is generative ... generating something ... it is that something not known, or not previously known is somehow produced [...] It brings a form of attention, for capturing something that is so ephemeral. The attention, without that, without that frame ... it is very gaseous or easily dispersed or not seen in a way. It is about attention, the attention that we are bringing, the focus that we are bringing [...] You give in the sense that you yield. It is a form of surrender.

How might the practice of conversation itself create a frame or conditions for a mode of thinking that is fragile, emerging between the words of the voices engaged? Reflecting on conversation, van den Berg (2021) observes:

Speaking is *explicating*, a *setting apart*. And because this *setting apart*, this separating of aspects of the world takes place in a con-tact with the other — this *setting apart* is *con-versant*, *con (together) verse (line, draw, express, poetic.)* Conversation is together expressing a shared world. In other words, conversation is the shaping of togetherness (p. 39).

The frame of conversation appears to involve the dual activities of separation and connection: suspension of engagement with a wider context (with all its attractions and distractions) alongside the deepening of commitment to the ‘other’ within the conversation, such that a ‘shared world’ might emerge in and through the conversational act itself. Coming together, to gather — to unite or join. Van Manen (2021) observes that, “Van den Berg’s phenomenological analysis (reduction) aims to show that a genuine conversation depends more fundamentally on the blending as well as the separation of the subjectivities of two people into the special conversational sharing of a common world” (p. 48). Whilst dialogue can also refer to conversing or discoursing together, its sense of ‘speaking across’ (*dia* ‘across, between’ and *legesthai* ‘to speak’) might heighten the space in between, in turn preserving the distance or separation of its speaking subjects.

Inviting Unbidden Thought

Echoing van den Berg’s reflections on conversation, the practice of conversation-as-material attempts towards the blending of subjectivities in the hope of co-creating a shared language. Blend — to mix in such a way as to become inextinguishable, to mingle. The process of transcription within conversation-as-material does not differentiate one speaking voice from another — the perspective of the singular speaking subject talking from their own experience is loosened through the process of attempting to distil a singular text for speaking of an experience beyond the individual “I”. But still, how might conversation operate as a holding space for the unknown? How might the practice of conversation, especially the aesthetic practice of conversation-as-material, create a frame or the conditions for the unexpected to arise and for inceptual thought to appear? The indirect aspect of the practice of conversation-as-material also seems somehow to resonate with van Manen’s description of inceptual insights. For van Manen (2014):

Inception is that fragile moment of a heuristic event: of the coming upon, being struck by, or suddenly grasping an original idea, experiencing a fundamental insight, realizing the depthful meaning of something ... the sudden thought may come as a surprise at a moment when we were not even thinking of these things. (p. 237).

Van Manen (2014) affirms that:

An inceptual thought tends to come to us indirectly, as if through the backdoor [...] We cannot find an inceptual thought; rather, it finds us. The original thought or idea is not something we find by willful action or deliberate efforts [...] We seize an inceptual thought by letting it seize us or by being seized by it. And yet, paradoxically, if we are not searching, it will not find us. This means that inception is most likely to happen when we are in a state of active-passivity (p. 238).

For van Manen (2014), whilst the inceptual thought comes unbidden, it “does not happen in an area where we are not residing” (p. 238). Conversation, from *conversari* — to live, dwell, live with, to keep company with. An archaic meaning of conversation is the “place where one lives or dwells”. The practice of conversation-as-material then may be thought of as creating the conditions for dwelling or residing with language; moreover, for dwelling and extending the duration of a particular direct experience, in and through language.

Returning once more to the etymology of conversation — to turn about, turn about with; from *com-* ‘with, together’ and *versare* ‘to turn’ or bend. Drawing on Heidegger’s (2012, p. 52) reflections on inceptual thinking, van Manen (2014) asserts that, “An inceptual moment happens like a sudden twist or turn. The significance of epitome or incept ‘lies in the grasping of the turning itself’ like a radical turn in our thought” (p. 237). Conversation can sometimes seem to increase the potential of these twists and turns of thought, where the other’s interjection or response can throw one’s line of thinking unexpectedly off course. Interject: to throw between, impel (to set in motion). Yet the sudden twist of thinking might also refer to more than a moment of turn. Twist — etymologically the term has its root in *dwo-* or ‘two’. The origins of the term twist then seem to refer both to a sense of dividing or separating (in two) as well as to combining two into one, as when spinning two or more strands of yarn to make a single thread or rope. In these terms, the inceptual flashes of insight within conversation may be felt to emerge in those moments when the singular thread of one thinking-speaking subject becomes twisted with the ‘yarn’ of the other, through the encounter with the twist and turn of another’s thoughts. Or else, rather than the interweaving and ‘turning about together’ of individual speaking subjects, insights can sometimes seem to emerge through the ‘turning’ of conversation itself. For van Manen (2016) “a conversation is structured as a triad. There is a conversational relation between the speakers, and the speakers are involved in a conversational relation with the notion or phenomenon that keeps the personal relation of the conversation intact” (p. 98). Here, the triad seems to involve the speaking subjects and the phenomenon in relation to which they converse. However, reflecting on the process of conversation-as-material may reveal a further force or agency at play — that is, the practice of conversation itself. The framing agency of conversation

seems to have the capacity for opening possibilities of thinking that are not only to do with the active interplay between speaking subjects and the phenomenon in question. Conversation can create a space of attention or of energy that is not created by or belonging to one or the other speaking subject, or even produced between, but somehow belongs more to the event of conversation itself.

The practice of conversation-as-material involves trusting that a vocabulary will emerge for describing the phenomenon in question, by not being too effortful, not being too focused or forceful in the attempt to generate that vocabulary. In one sense, this notion of trust or even of confidence might refer to the relation of the speakers, and to the quality of communication that emerges through the cultivation of mutual trust. Here, confidence does not refer to certainty or self-assuredness on the part of the individual speaking subject — their own sense of confidence in what they are themselves saying. Indeed, the practice of conversation-as-material strives to move away from what is known and certain, towards a mode of live voicing-thinking emerging in and through the practice itself, for embracing the possibility of the not-already-known. Trusting that the vocabulary will emerge is less about having confidence in the capacity of one's own words, but perhaps rather more about one's willingness to let go or become less guarded in one's speech — to enjoy the confidence of another, the private intimacy of a conversation held *in confidence*. Not knowing what one will say before saying it — a specific mode of speech emerges through the supportive attention of the other. This might involve the listener being attentive to the phatic and affective aspects of conversation, where speech is, as artist, writer and theorist LaBelle (2014) observes:

punctuated by small interruptions and hesitations ... In preceding the spoken, these hesitations come to assist in the final delivery of words: they figure the gap in order to get the body going [...] reveal a body tuning itself to the sociality of speech, of being in front of another (p. 133).

The practice of conversation-as-material does involve trusting the other and building a sense of mutual trust, yet still, this does not feel quite adequate for describing the nature of trust or confidence that the practice involves. Rather, it may be understood that the practice involves trusting the process, indeed, trusting the practice. Trust — to rely on the veracity or integrity of someone or something. Placing one's faith fully in the practice of conversation — trusting that a vocabulary will come by committing oneself fully or by surrendering to the process opens to the possibilities of language as it emerges in fidelity to that experience. Having faith in the process somehow allows for the emergence of a language that is true to it. This sense of fidelity extends beyond the conversation itself into the phase of transcription and distillation — transcription attends to the tentative vibrations of thought in conversation, those instances of speech that were disappearing even as they were coming into being. Indeed, there may be moments of inceptual meaning that give themselves only in the transcription and distillation process, where certain insights suddenly become revealed or appear through the subtractive paring back and removal of words to leave only what most shines forth, rings most true.

***The Italic I* — A Fall from What is Known**

Through the process of reencountering the transcript materials afresh in writing this article, what seems to emerge is a sense of reciprocal relation between the practice of conversation-as-material and the object of its enquiry. Conversation-as-material operates as a language-based artistic research practice for bringing to reflective awareness, and into language, something of the live and lived experience of artistic practice and process, especially within collaboration. In parallel, dimensions of the lived experience taken as the object of enquiry, appear to be enacted or evoked within the practice of conversation-as-material itself. For example, within *Re*— the struggle of working with language as part of the lived experience of an art-writing practice, becomes mirrored or echoed in the circling and indirectness of the conversation itself. How then, might the practice of conversation-as-material operate and evolve within the context of a different collaboration, with a different object of enquiry? In turn, what might be revealed of the practice of conversation-as-material and its potential affinity and resonance with phenomenological writing? The second activation of the practice of conversation-as-material is within *The Italic I*, an artistic research collaboration with artist Clare Thornton which explores the event of surrendering to a repeated fall, which is then slowed and extended through use of both language and the lens. The event of falling is approached as a motif through which to explore the live and lived experience of disorientation and of leaning into the unknown within artistic practice and collaboration. In a studio, a body falls over and over, lens as witness. A practice repeated over years. In the intervals: conversation, recorded, transcribed, distilled.

LINK TO PRACTICE: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1515404>

The collaboration, *The Italic I*, involves the triangulation of three practices: (1) Performance/choreographic practice: Thornton engages in a process of repeatedly falling; (2) Lens-based practice: Cocker records the event of falling as a series of still photographic images, as well as through drawing/diagramming; (3) Conversation-as-material: an attempt is made through conversation to generate a poetic lexicon for describing the different episodes within the lived experience of falling. Within *The Italic I*, the practice of conversation-as-material was activated again and again over a period of years, where thousands of transcribed words from hours of recorded conversation were gradually distilled towards a poetic vocabulary for trying to describe the becoming of falling (to fall — a verb, a process-oriented operation), for reflecting on the interior complexity of falling — the capacities, temporalities and affective dimension therein — which visual expression can only hint towards. Like the practicing of the fall within this collaboration, the practice of conversation is also framed, undertaken as a specific exercise within a time-bound period — usually between one and three hours — allocated only for this purpose. The process of conversation took place directly following the live performance of falling itself (with Thornton falling, Cocker observing, recording, diagramming), as well as being activated later after the event itself using the performance documents as provocation or prompts for conversation. Language allows for lingering in and extending the phases of falling in ways that the photographic documents did not allow, that were too fleeting to attend to in the moment of live unfolding. Different practices have different temporalities, intensities, durations. Conversation-as-material

slows, or rather it combines the quick (the immediacy, the aliveness) of speech, of leaning into the unknown (as a kind of linguistic fall), with a slowness made possible through returning to the transcripts, for gradually intensifying and densifying a language through distillation.

Within *The Italic I*, focusing on the motif of falling enables reflection indirectly on the experience of collaboration, specifically on how collaboration can be experienced as a mode through which to render the edges of self as porous, for leaning into a space of practicing that is unknown.

You can only talk about something by not talking about it ... we could have only conceived of a vocabulary for talking about collaboration by not looking at it. By talking about something else we are inadvertently producing this vocabulary for speaking poetically about something that we were never intending to speak about [...] Talking about the edges of the self and trying to put them under pressure in some kind of way through collaboration ... rendering the limit blurry [...] To get close to a way of reflecting on lived experience ... and what it means to be alive ... Trying to find a vocabulary for articulating certain kinds of lived states [...] Trying to represent the lived, the true duration [...] To make the lived experience palpable ... at the moment when you are in your deepest flow of lived experience.²

The emergent vocabulary generated through conversation-as-material, for attempting to get close to the experience or feeling of the fall as force rather than as form, also offers possibilities for reflecting (indirectly) on the experience of collaborative, aesthetic exploration. In the first year of the collaboration, it became possible to discern sixteen overlapping poetic categories, titles or even themes for exploring the arc of falling (and potentially also the arc of collaboration, even of conversation-as-material): Testing (the) ground— setting up the conditions; Opening attempt— warming and flexing; Entering the arc— trust, twist, torque; A commitment made— working against impulse; Voluntary vertigo— ilinx, inclination; Becoming diagonal— the Italic I; Touching limits— tilt towards (the other); Embodiment / disembodiment— mind-body partition; Formless— horizontality; Letting go— a liquid state; Ecstatic impotency— the jouissance of impuissance; Folding of attention— a heightened subjectivity; Gravity / levity— striking the right balances; Breathless— ventilating the idea; Voluptuous recovery— return, yet charged; Recalibrate ... loop— desire to repeat. The titles, an exercise in naming — each name a call through which to conjure a corresponding language, to summon up, invoke. Once tentatively identified, these ‘themes’ were then fleshed out through further repeating the three-fold process of performance, documentation and conversation.

Central to the enquiry of *The Italic I* is an attempt to develop a poetic mode of linguistic expression that embodies rather than describes the live experience that it seeks to articulate, the quest for a not-yet-known vocabulary generated synchronously to the live circumstances that it seeks to articulate. What happens if talking about practice is no

² The italicized extracts in this section of the article are condensed distillations comprising fragments of transcript material from a series of conversations between Cocker and Thornton. The full transcript materials can be encountered within the research exposition forming part of this article here — <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1515404>

longer an event of explication, but is instead performed in the same key as doing?

There is a commitment to a certain kind of embodied investigative act, and to a linguistic poetic investigation of language that together are spurs or tools or provocations for activating a kind of embodied thinking [...] It is difficult to write about, which is why we are producing the writing through speaking. There is something to do with producing writing without having written it. Knowing that it will come. It is coming from somewhere else in the body. Or it is not coming in the same way as if you were trying to write. It is definitely coming from a different experience [...] It is coming from a felt experience of being, working with the body ... feeling its kind of pathetic limitations ... and irritating blockages [...] Piecing things together. The body makes phrases [...] Language comes out in fits and starts ... as a method. Like gestures, exploratory gestures [...] almost bypassing what the mind thinks. There is something in the form of the language originating from speech, from conversation — there is an embodied rhythm to it which is different to the rhythm of something that is purely written [...] I cannot produce a rhythm like this if I were to try to write it [...] So when you read it ... the thing about reading is that you inhabit it, you re-inhabit it with the rhythm, and especially if you speak it aloud, you really re-inhabit the rhythm.

Within this enquiry, an attempt is made to transform the perceived difficulty of ‘putting into words’ from a problem into a provocation. It can be difficult to shape experience into words, language can often seem too stiff or rigid; or else perhaps, rather like the body, language may also need to be stretched and flexed. The enquiry asks: why would one not want to stretch, cultivate one’s agility in speech as much as action, nurture one’s endurance for working out with words? How might language be exercised akin to lungs and limbs?

Within *The Italic I*, conversation-as-material unfolds through a heightened sense of embodied awareness, being willing (receptive) rather than willed, trusting and being open to the process, welcoming of the unplanned for.

We are talking about conation and endeavor ... it is the finding of the name or the striving that is the active part or the part that is meaningful and not always the acquisition of the name. So our process of trying to find the names or trying to produce a vocabulary is itself enacting the things that we are trying to articulate.

Conation — a sense of desire and of volition, to try, to set oneself in motion. Endeavor — effort taken to achieve or attain something. Yet within the practice of conversation-as-material, it appears that it is the striving, searching or even wrestling to generate a vocabulary that gives the experience of conversation its shared significance, rather than the event of arriving at the goal of the ‘right words’, the acquisition or attaining of the name. Pushing at the edges or the limits; this achieving and letting go — a reaching towards. Stretching — muscular, bodily. The practice of conversation-as-material is not about saying what is already known and certain, but rather it is a practice for attempting to lean into the unknown, for allowing speaking to emerge in its uncertainty and unsureness. How do you get beyond what you already know? How do you lean over the edge of the known? How is it to allow oneself to inhabit a space of wordlessness? How does it feel to

be lost for words? To speak before fully knowing what it is that you are going to say — conversation-as-material is a practice of attempting to think *through* speaking. Single words, partial phrases, half sentences, thought fragments. To allow for vulnerability and embarrassment, the experience of struggling with, of stumbling and falling over one's words.

Conversation as a Linguistic Fall

Within *The Italic I*, conversation-as-material is activated as a way of somehow attempting to enact or evoke something of the experience that it seeks to describe, or for extending the experiential sense of the research focus, that is, falling as a motif for shedding light on the lived and live experience of artistic process and collaborative co-creation. The enquiry asks: How might the act of conversation itself echo the arc of falling? Through the process of conversation, how might it be possible to practice linguistic or even cognitive falls, searching for a language adequate to the task of communicating the experience of falling, *through* falling? Akin to the body repeatedly falling, language might be generated from within fall-like circumstances, words pressured until they begin to arc and fold. Over and over, turned up and inside out, language can be rolled around in the mouth until it starts to yield or give.

This turning over of words and of language ... working against impulse ... Searching for the underside of certain terms in order to bring them to life in a different way ... Rolling on the tongue ... and the letting go... The sense of this release of language from itself [...] In the poetic there is a gesture in which language falls from itself or falls out of conventional use, falls away from habitual meanings into a different use [...] Revolve – from volvere, to roll or wind [...] from re- back again, volvere — to roll [...] Etymologically, to turn to or towards something, to turn around something, roll or roll back [...] This turning over — and the parallels between thinking and falling [...] The processes are similar in the flexing and the turning over. Con-verse — turn around with, together bend. Bend and bind have an etymological connection in terms of making a commitment to. We are bound together. Bent or bend — to yield, submit or give in, but also this connection to being resolved to. Some of these words have a lightness to them which makes them feel freer to the reading, more able for others to get into it and digest [...] Colloquial language can be good for rupturing academic language — those turns of phrase. They ventilate, they 'let up'.

Within *The Italic I*, the capacity for “tracing etymological sources” (van Manen, 1984, p. 52), “searching for idiomatic phrases” (p. 54) and looking for synonyms, becomes activated in the very moment of conversation itself. An attempt is made to “ventilate language”, to liberate words from being stuck or stale. Ventilate — to winnow or fan, to agitate or set in motion. Make holes in. Supply with fresh air. Exploring the etymological origins of words emerging in and through the process of conversation attempts towards a specific mode of con-versing, of turning over (language) together, playing with and bending language. At times, an attempt is made to exhaust certain words — turning words over and over, up and inside out, in search of unexpected meanings beyond habitual or given understanding. Exhaust — to draw out all that is essential yet

also to drain of strength, empty or make weak, fatigue. Exhaustion is a way of tiring out the tried-and-tested such that something else might then emerge, where habit is fatigued so as to release its hold, weakened or disempowered. Fatigue — to drive to the point of break down, to crack or split, yet with an origin in the root *agere* ‘to set in motion’. To break down in order to re-activate or set in motion — the act of splitting language etymologically into its component parts might enable possibilities for playful reorganization and recombination; etymological investigation conceived as an aesthetic-poetic practice. Moreover, within *The Italic I*, the shared attempt is to strive for a condition of exhaustion and elasticity in word and thought, stepping off or away from the stability of fixed subject positions towards the fluid process of co-production, intermingling of one another’s word and thought. Indeed, an inter-subjective — even infra-subjective vocabulary — seems to emerge only after what one (as the singular speaking subject) wanted to say is exhausted or used up. Such a practice requires patience, the forbearance to stick at something, see it through. Through practice, an attempt is made to move beyond what one already knows. Here perhaps, the notion of exhaustion, of exhausting what one already knows, might somehow resonate with van Manen’s (2014) articulation of the *epoché*, as an attempt to explicate or even exorcize various preunderstandings, theoretical frameworks or even personal inclinations that would “prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through” (p. 224).

Conversation-as-material attends to the vocabulary emerging in the fragile thresholds of speech formation — the incipient moments of language on the cusp of articulation, the points where language begins to break down, exhausted. In the live-ness of conversation, words can often slip and spill into existence, as thought is conjured in the event of its utterance, verbalized at the point of thinking leaning into the unknown. Certainly, the specific rhythm of conversation produces a different shape and texture of textual articulation compared to that of conventional writing. Bodily lettering: the tasting of words, language caress of the tongue, phonemes felt against lips, exhaled on the breath. Significantly, the cadence or rhythmic pacing of conversation — its pitch and intonation, the tempo of speech — can often be of rising and falling, of dipping and peaking. Excited acceleration. Hesitation. Deliberation. Syncopation. Abbreviation. Words dropped. Omissions. Repetitions. Sentence incompleteness. Disregard for punctuation. Hurried utterance. Syllabic glides and slurs. Reflecting on the ‘vitality affects’ within unscripted spontaneous conversation, psychologist Stern (2010) suggests that:

in the imprecise, messy, hit-and-miss work to find the ‘right words’ to communicate what one wishes [...] Emergent properties form. New linkages are created, tentatively accepted, revised, rejected, reintroduced in a different form, and moved with all the other creative products of the intention-unfolding process [...] It is a process that can rush forward, hesitate, stop, restart gently (pp. 122–124).

Or as LaBelle (2014) observes, “At times, speech runs over itself. Words twist and tense under pressure, tripped up by inertia, or with urgency ... to produce slippages, ruptures and even nonsensical outpourings” (p. 61).

In the process of transcribing and then distilling the conversation, an attempt is made to retain something of the original cadence, alongside the potential for slip or switch in tense, inflection, imperative or mood. Within *The Italic I*, the gradual process of distilling the transcript material towards a poetic text for describing the arc of falling involves a two-fold process: (1) the gathering or clustering of those thought fragments, phrases and words gleaned from the transcript that resonated with the already identified thematic titles; (2) intensifying or even densifying the language to heighten the sense of rhythm and repetition. For van Manen (2014):

the invocative method intensifies philological aspects of the text so that words intensify their sense and sensuous sensibility [...] Invocative words become infected or contaminated by the meaning of other words to which they stand in alliterative or repetitive relation” (p. 260).

Van Manen (2014) notes that, “repetition in text tends to appeal to our embodied sensibility [...] Repetition of sensed qualities, through devices such as alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and internal rhyme, contribute to an acoustic richness, an audible imagery to the text” (p. 260). The act of concentrating the extended conversation transcripts towards dense segments of prose-poetry somehow makes it more possible to linger in and extend the phases of falling in ways that the photographic documents did not fully allow, facilitating a return to those states not possible to articulate in the action itself. The density and intensity of the language, with its strongly embedded or incarnated meaning (van Manen, 2014, p. 45), perhaps has the capacity to slow down the process of reading for the reader. This sense of the reactivation of the text has been further amplified within performance lectures where the original visual documents have been presented alongside readings of the textual distillation. Indeed, beyond attending to the vocative dimension of the text itself, *The Italic I* involved experimentation with multiple modes of presentation: book-works and artists’ pages where visual documents are presented alongside the poetic-textual distillation, which in turn, is graphically configured to evoke the arc of the fall; alongside installations, moving image and web-based text-works where the visually unfolds in time (See exposition <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1106540>). Van Manen (2016) observes that, “certain meaning is better expressed through *how* one writes than in *what* one writes [...] So that attentiveness to form is also attentiveness to content” (pp. 130–131). Here, how might artistic approaches expand and amplify the notion of the vocative through heightened attention to the form, format and even performativity of (textual) presentation?

Choreo-graphic Figures — Figuring and Figures

Within the collaborative artistic research project *Choreo-graphic Figures* with artist Nikolaus Gansterer and choreographer Mariella Greil, the practice of conversation-as-material is activated as part of a wider attempt to give tangibility to those forms of ‘thinking-feeling-knowing’ produced within collaborative exchange, specifically between the lines of choreography, drawing, and writing. The shared enquiry focuses on the unfolding processes of decision-making and dynamic movements of ‘sense-making’ within collaborative artistic practice by asking: How might one articulate the instability and mutability of the flows and forces — especially within collaborative exploration —

without ‘fixing’ what is inherently dynamic and contingent as a literal sign? What systems of experimentation and notation might be developed for becoming better attuned to this often hidden or undisclosed aspect of the creative process, for sharing the experience with (and communicating the experience to) others? *Choreo-graphic Figures* unfolds through a series of intensive ‘method labs’ where the researchers come together (with invited guests) geographically in one place — in a studio-rehearsal space usually for a period of weeks at a time — to engage in a process of live exploration involving various studio-based improvisatory and performative practices.

Central to this enquiry into the ‘knowing-feeling-thinking’ of artistic process is the recognition and subsequent attempt to give articulation to the reciprocal relation between the *event of figuring* and the *emergence of figures*. The term *figuring* is used for describing those small yet transformative energies, emergences and experiential shifts which operate before, between and beneath the more readable gestures of artistic practice, that are often hard to discern but which ultimately shape or steer the evolving action. Figuring refers to the perception of indeterminate affective intensities felt as a field of forces — minor revelations or epiphanies, unbidden openings: those risings that give way to emergence. The event of figuring is recognized as a qualitative shift; as an awareness that ‘something is happening’ within the process of collaborative artistic exploration, perceptible at the level of intensity or felt sense. In parallel, the term *figure* is used for describing the point at which the indeterminate or undifferentiated awareness of ‘something happening’ (figuring) becomes recognizable and qualified through a name.³ During the process of ‘live exploration’ and over a period of years, it was possible to recognize and qualify various shifts in vitality or intensity, which are named as specific figures. Some of the proposed figures can be recognized experientially as particular moments within the unfolding arc of artistic endeavor — for example, as the felt sense of beginning (Figure of Clearing and Emptying Out) or for drawing towards resolution (Figure of Temporary Closing). Other figures emerge through attending to the ethics of collaboration, and the sensitivities and sensibilities of *being-with*. For example, the Empathetic Figures relate closely the specific experience of collaborative co-creation, reflecting the transitions and shifts in felt sense from the intensity of being-with one to the many, or rather from the experience of the one (that is already the many) to the multitude.

Though not explicitly named as such, *Choreo-graphic Figures* could be conceived as a phenomenological enquiry undertaken through artistic-aesthetic means. However, for this context, the aim is not to explore the entirety of the project through its potential resonance and commonality with phenomenological practices, but rather to focus on how conversation-as-material operated therein. At the outset of the project, the practice of conversation-as-material was activated somewhat speculatively, even a little indiscriminately, where many of the project’s conversations were recorded and then subsequently transcribed: during the three-year period of the project, there were over 150 hours of recorded conversation resulting in over 300,000 words of transcript. This transcript material was subsequently used in various ways within the project: (1) Revisited as a way of discerning and clarifying the conceptual-theoretical direction of the

³ The relation of the event of *figuring* and the emergence of *figures* is further conceptualized by Cocker, Gansterer and Greil in the chapter ‘Figuring > < Figure’ (2017, pp. 70–79).

unfolding enquiry; (2) ‘Mined’ using specific key words such as ‘how’ (Cocker, Gansterer and Greil, 2017, pp. 63–67), ‘when’ (pp. 249–253), or ‘where’ (pp. 309–313) in order to identify questions emerging within the enquiry; and (3) Approached as a material to be worked-with as part of the live exploration process. In parallel, various other experimental ‘practices of conversation’ were also developed and directly activated within the process of live exploration (Cocker, Gansterer and Greil, 2017, pp. 154–161). Now on reflection, these various examples of working with conversation are not to be understood as expressions of the practice of conversation-as-material in the terms outlined within this article. For example, many of the recorded conversations were oriented more towards talking reflectively about the experience of practicing together — giving feedback, making recommendations, offering judgments or engaging in a discursive or theoretical exchange. It is this dimension of conversation that the practice of conversation-as-material tries to suspend, hold back or otherwise bracket against. In these terms (though not fully recognized until now), some aspect of *epoché* is activated within the practice of conversation-as-material, without which it loses its potential for resonance with the phenomenological attitude.

However, there are moments within the *Choreo-graphic Figures* project where conversation-as-material is specifically activated, where it might resonate with certain phenomenological research practices but perhaps differently from the two previous examples of collaboration discussed. Unlike the indirect approach of conversation-as-material in the previous collaborations, within *Choreo-graphic Figures* the practice is more direct. Yet, this is not to say that the practice had gained clarity or had ‘improved’, but rather that the mode of reflection itself is of a different kind.

LINK TO PRACTICE: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1515407>

Conversation-as-material is activated towards the end of the *Choreo-graphic Figures* project when an attempt is made to identify a linguistic vocabulary for describing the nine ‘figures’ already recognized and named during the three-year enquiry. At this point, there is already a strong experiential, felt sense of each figure (a sense of the figure at an embodied, pre-reflective, pre-linguistic, non-conceptual, pathic level), emerging from the direct experience of these figures through the live and lived process of the preceding years of artistic exploration. There is also an extensive archive of photographic materials, video footage, drawings-diagrams to draw upon, as well as each researcher’s notebooks and embodied knowledge of those figures. Still, how might the practice of conversation-as-material be developed to give tangibility, whilst also remaining in fidelity, to the pre-reflective aspects of these various figures? Before beginning the practice of conversation-as-material, significant time is taken for tuning into the chosen figure (as the named object of enquiry) — by looking back at notes and sketches, or by noting / drawing / diagramming. Drawing on these various re-collective supports, a series of framed conversations is undertaken together (over several days) for generating the descriptions for each of the figures. A separate conversation is engaged for each figure — the conversations themselves are relatively short if intense (around 30–45 minutes for each figure).

Following the process of conversation, each recording is transcribed, and each transcript then annotated or marked by each person, for identifying those fragments of

recorded speech which felt most resonant or rang most true for describing the phenomenon in question. These collectively marked texts are subsequently edited towards a dense poetic distillation, for example, here shown through an extract from description of the *Figure of Clearing and Emptying Out* which attempts to give expression to the live experience of ‘beginning’ within artistic practice research (but which in turn might also resonate with aspects of the *epoché*):

To make clear — it is not concerned with clarity of sense [...] A making clean, but more than operational [...] Exorcising — a means of letting go. Of the histories, stories, associations of certain materials, of spaces, the self — not only of visible things but also the invisible. Emptying of pre-existing function and content, meaning and memory. Evacuate. Vacate. Vacancy — a precondition of availability. Empty to make available, un-occupy. Ridding of utility, a practice of forgetting, disassociation so as not to repeat the same. Energetic awareness: ritual process of purification [...] Dis-association. Dis-tinction. Dis-tinguish. There is a decision — a split, a cut, a cleaving [...] With the cut a clearing — event of separation, like empty brackets. An opening, un-closing, disclosure — clearing and emptying so something might show itself, become unconcealed. Release and anticipation: creating the conditions for the not-yet-arisen, the potential for something new. Dis-charging energy — to return to zero; establish a new ground. Preparatory gestures. Re-sharpening. Marking a new beginning. Marked by readiness, re-set in order to begin again (Cocker, Gansterer & Greil, 2017, p. 92).

Within the collaboration *Choreo-graphic Figures*, the practice of conversation-as-material becomes oriented more towards arriving at a vocabulary for expressing both the *what-ness* and *how-ness* of different named ‘figures’, by differentiating the particular essence and ‘mode of being’ for each distinct figure. This involves a process of inter-subjective corroboration where each researcher draws on their own lived and felt experience of different manifestations of each figure; checking those experiences against each other, as well as in relation to the already emerging descriptors for that figure, whilst also trying to further evolve a poetic, vocative language capable of evoking-invoking that figure for others. For van Manen (2014):

the *eidōs* of a phenomenon are the invariations that make ‘something’ what it is and without which it could not be what it is. The *eidōs* is a phenomenological universal that can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon [...] A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience (p. 229).

He notes that, “Every nameable or recognizable experience seems to acquire an identity that makes it potentially distinguishable from other experiences” (van Manen, 2014, p. 35). Within this specific activation of the practice of conversation-as-material, the attention of the conversation was focused more on the *whatness* of a given phenomenon (of a particular figure) as well as on its ontology, or in van Manen’s terms (2014), “the mode or ways of being that belong to or are proper to something” (p. 231). Within *Choreo-graphic Figures*, this task involves trying to be as precise as possible about the invariant

quality of each figure, including comparing and differentiating one figure from another. For example, through the process of conversation-as-material, it becomes possible to differentiate in language the felt sense of the *Figure of Vibrating Affinity*, which describes the specific sensitivities of, “Shared intimacy of the one-to-one, between I *and* other [...] Magnetic coupling: bond of strong attraction within a wider field of forces. Attunement intensity, hone to the frequencies of a body beyond oneself” (Cocker, Gansterer & Greil, 2017, p. 184), from the *Figure of Wavering Convergence*, which reveals the subtle change in relational dynamics within collaboration as dyad shifts towards triad through the:

introduction of a third, *another* other. Another presence brings its own call of attention — expansion of relations beyond the duo, beyond the stability of a single coupling. Shared vibrations felt in togetherness, now unsettled. Unstable triad — the third creates imbalance, disrupts. Within the dynamic of a trio, in facing towards, the inescapable event also of *facing away*, gesture of turning *from* [...] The ethical dilemma of being-in-relation, of collaboration with more-than-one. (Cocker, Gansterer & Greil, 2017, p. 192).

Conversation as Collaborative Co-creation

The capacity of the practice of conversation-as-material for bringing into close, reflective awareness the live and lived, yet often hidden or undisclosed, experience of artistic collaborative practice and process, appears especially possible partly because some dimension of collaborative co-creation is somehow enacted or enlivened within the practice itself. Conversation-as-material appears to provide access to, or a way of getting in touch, or remaining in touch, experientially with the phenomena that it seeks to describe. Conversation-as-material is both a practice *for* giving linguistic tangibility to the lived experience of collaborative co-creation, and a practice *of* collaborative co-creation. It is a practice that attempts to activate a form of thinking beyond what is conceivable on one’s own. As van Manen (2016) reflects in relation to conversation, “What appears unspeakable or ineffable one moment may be captured, however, incomplete, in language the next moment [...] In conversations ... we catch ourselves saying, writing or thinking something with an eloquence that comes as a surprise” (p. 114). Catch — to take hold or capture, fasten or grasp. However, here it perhaps seems less that ‘we’ are able to catch or grasp the ineffable in language, but rather that we are ourselves caught speaking a language that seems to come from a place beyond our individual grasp or reach.

Conversation-as-material is not conceived as a process of exchange, the communication of ideas and thoughts already formed and ready in waiting, all too often merely a monologue performed in the proximity of another. For Merleau-Ponty (1968):

A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I *was* not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself *followed* in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me” (p. 13).

Hearing the words cast or thrown back by another may enable a movement beyond what was already known — as if it were the uttered word itself that drew, gave access to or guided the emerging thought and not that thought precedes the word. As Blanchot (1993) suggests (changes to the original in italics):

For it was as though what *she* said in the first person as an ‘I’ had been expressed anew by *her* as ‘other’ [autrui] and as though *she* had thus been carried into the very unknown of *her* thought: where *her* thought, without being altered, becomes absolutely other [l’autre]” (p. 341).

Within the process of conversation-as-material the *othering* of one’s words, that then opens up or carries one over into some unknown aspect of thinking, might happen through the process of conversation itself where one’s words are ‘cast back by the other’, but also through the process of transcription and distillation where the individual’s words become separated from the singular speaking ‘I’, perhaps taking on a significance or resonance that did not always appear to be present at the time of utterance. At times, it might seem that the willful *I-ness* of the speaking subject gets in the way or blocks access to an unknown part of thought, and that the process of conversation somehow helps to dislodge or bypass this *I-ness* so that unknown thought may then appear.

Conversation-as-material is not only a practice for attempting to speak of and from the lived experience of being-in-relation within collaboration: it is also an ethical, relational practice in and of itself. For philosopher Noë (2015), conversation involves the “complicated activity of listening, thinking, paying attention, doing and undergoing, most of which happens spontaneously, without deliberate control [...] conversation is a fundamental mechanism of relationship building and joint living” (pp. 6–7). Following Stern (2010), conversation may be conceived as a practice of “interactional synchrony” involving a process of “affect attunement” between speaker and listener (p. 51), a “communicative musicality based on the coupling of vitality dynamics between people” (p. 53). In some senses, the practice of conversation-as-material described within this article — alongside the etymological references to conversation upon which this article draws — might appear to understate that conversation is a practice of listening as much as of speaking together (or of con-versing). However, the transcription phase within the practice of conversation-as-material involves slow and sustaining listening, which in turn, draws attention to the significance of listening within the overall practice. As a (aesthetic) practice in its own right, the act of transcription might offer the researcher an intimate way for attending very closely, repeatedly, to the unfolding dynamics of conversation. The practice described in this article has involved transcribing hundreds of thousands of words from the practicing of conversation-as-material. By listening to recorded conversation over and over through the process of transcription, one hears the nuances of language, of another’s perspective, that are sometimes indiscernible in the moment. Certain patterns or habits become revealed — interruptive tendencies within conversation, those moments when one person’s words cut across another’s unfinished sentence. What does the practice of conversation-as-material show up about our ways of being together, our habits and tendencies in relation to others?

The process of transcription may allow for certain insights or revelations not always recognizable in the event of conversation itself — for example, noticing how the

fluid ‘falling into another’s words’ which seemed so integral to the improvisatory dynamic of conversation-as-material with native English-speaking collaborators, might become less possible, even undesirable, in other cultural contexts, where in its eagerness it might also serve to block the process of thinking together, filling the gap or silence too hastily, too urgently. Further possibilities of enquiry open up through the process of listening to and transcribing conversation: How does the speed and rhythm of conversation shape the nature of thinking therein — when does conversation appear too fast or too slow for thinking to emerge? How is the non-linguistic within the event of conversation? How does silence play a role? How is the difference between silence and listening? How does the role of interruption shape the process of collective thinking, how does it inhibit? How is it to speak/think without interruption? How is it to speak/think with the presence of a witness? How might one prepare for the interplay of speaking, thinking, listening and silence/spacing that conversation involves? For LaBelle (2014):

the listening that I’m after is one of deep affordance, enabling through both its dedications and its distractions a potentiality for what may come, and for what we may do or say. I’d suggest that to listen is to adopt a position of *not knowing*; it is to stand *in wait* for the event, for the voice that may come ... In this regard, listening is an unsettling of boundaries—what draws me forward, away from what I know (pp. ix–x).

How might the practice of conversation-as-material evolve as the emphasis shifts more towards the act of listening as an aesthetic practice, and in turn, what might this reveal of the relation between listening and a phenomenological attitude? How might allowing space for silence or for *not-speaking* operate as a precondition that enables space for what would remain otherwise unspoken? These questions extend the enquiry beyond the scope of this current article, and towards the future evolution of the practice of conversation-as-material.⁴

Towards Mutual Transformation

Whilst this article reflects on the common quadripartite process involved in conversation-as-material through reference to three named collaborations, it becomes evident that there is no single approach to the practice; rather, it has the capacity to be activated contingent to each context of enquiry. Indeed, beyond looking for commonalities between different iterations of the practice, this article attempts to explore the possible resonance, affinities, and scope for mutual transformation between conversation-as-material as a language-based artistic research practice and phenomenological research practices, specifically phenomenological writing. The article focuses on the evolution of conversation-as-material, where for over a decade it has developed as a language-based artistic research practice for bringing into tentative reflection some of the more hidden or undisclosed aspects of artistic-aesthetic exploration, especially of collaborative co-creation. Conversation-as-material shifts the

⁴ The listening dimension of the practice of conversation-as-material is developed further within the collaboration *Dorsal Practices* (initiated 2021) with Katrina Brown. See <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1311616/1405689>

focus from conversation as an object of phenomenological enquiry to it becoming the very method of enquiry. The practice might contribute to the wider project of phenomenological writing through the generation of poetic descriptions for speaking from *within* the live and lived experience of artistic practice and process, specifically of collaborative co-creation. Within this article, the attempt to think-through or else think-with the practice of conversation-as-material afresh through a more phenomenologically-oriented lens, has helped to reveal how the practice of conversation-as-material is specifically attuned to the task of speaking from within the experience of collaborative artistic exploration, partly because it demonstrates a capacity for extending the experience of, or for enacting or bringing to life aspects of, the phenomenon that it seeks to describe. Rather than speaking *about* the phenomena that it takes as its focus, conversation-as-material emerges *as* a practice of collaborative co-creation, of co-emergent sense-making, capable of giving linguistic tangibility to the live and lived experience of collaborative co-creation.

Within the Research Catalogue exposition component of this article an attempt is made show the practice of conversation-as-material as it has been practiced, including how various textual distillations from the practice have been presented visually, graphically, temporally, relationally, performatively — through artists' book-works, performance lectures, moving-image installations, or multimodal assemblages of audio-visual-textual materials. These different modes of presentation explore how spatial and material approaches to writing shape and modify the experience of a given text — whether in relation to the use of font; format/layout; the relation of text to image, sound, or film; the positioning of words on and off the page, or in other spatial configurations. Could the influence of artistic research practices invite further questioning in relation to how the vocative and pathic meaning of language might become further enabled, enacted, or even amplified by different modes of format and presentation? How might the vocative potential of language be not only generated through the words themselves but also by how they are presented or shown? In turn, how might the scope of phenomenological writing be extended through the further influence, combination or even hybridization of approaches from within language-based artistic research, as well as wider art-writing (Fusco and Lomax, 2011), performance-writing (Allsop, 1999; Hall, 2007; Pollock, 1998) or site-writing (Rendell, 2010) practices?

By creating a dialogue between a singular language-based artistic research practice and the wider project of phenomenological writing, this article invites further reflection on *how else* writing could be developed within the context of both artistic and phenomenological research practices. The philological method of the vocative may offer insights into how artistic research writing could operate in non-cognitive as much as cognitive terms, through the poetic and pathic potentiality of language. In parallel, the influence of the phenomenological *epoché* has potential for opening up new ways for conceiving the relation of theory and writing, perhaps even inviting the possibility of decoupling theory from writing within artistic research. For van Manen (2014) the “abstemious” function of the *epoché*, within phenomenological method actively seeks to suspend, hold back, bracket, or otherwise “guard against the effects and assumptions induced by theory, science, concepts, values, polemical discourses, and the taken-for-granted prejudices of common sense in everyday life” (p. 65), that “prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through” (p. 224). The abstemious

function of the *epoché* is for guarding against that which *prevents* something from being seen. Here then, to decouple writing and theory is not to discredit or undervalue the role of theory within artistic research, but rather to clarify that writing and theory are not always correspondent. In considering the relation between a singular language-based artistic research practice (conversation-as-material) and the wider context of phenomenological writing, this article attempts to contribute to the ongoing project of language-based approaches within the field of artistic research that are not concerned with theorization as such, but with finding a mode of linguistic expression adequate to (vivid, yet also subtle enough for) the task of speaking with and from (rather than about or on behalf of) the pre-reflective, non-cognitive experience of artistic process and practice, particularly of collaborative co-creation.

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