

## *Conversation-as-Material — Towards an Aesthetic Approach to Phenomenological Writing Without Writing*

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Examples of the practice of *conversation-as-material* from each of the named collaborations — and an attempt to *show* the *practicing* of the practice in action — form the basis for this article. As such, this overall article comprises this written component or ‘essay’ and the ‘exposition’ of the practice itself using the ‘research catalogue’ - see <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/458217>

The relation between this written ‘essay’ and the exposition of practice presented on the research catalogue is intended as reciprocal and non-hierarchical — where the reader is invited to *move between*. At times, there will be specific invitations within this text for the reader to engage with the practice via individual hyperlinks. Alternatively, the reader could begin directly with an exploration of the practice exposition first prior to reading this text. Accordingly, the reader is invited to consider how their decision-making within the act of reading shapes and modulates the unfolding sense-making of the overall article.

*Conversation-as-material* is an artistic research practice that I have developed over the last decade within a series of collaborations including (1) *Re—* (with Rachel Lois Clapham, 2009 - 2012), (2) *The Italic I* (with Clare Thornton, 2012 - 2018) and (3) *Choreographic Figures: Deviations from the Line* (with Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil, 2014 - 2019). Within the practice of conversation-as-material, conversation is conceived less as a means for talking *about* practice, but rather as an aesthetic practice in-and-of itself, site and material for the construction of immanent, inter-subjective modes of verbal-linguistic sense-making emerging through different voices enmeshed in live exchange. Conversation-as-material is a collaborative practice for attempting to speak from *within* the experience of collaborative practice — it is a language-based practice that is attentive to, whilst attempting to make tangible, the live(d) experience of aesthetic co-creation. The practice involves an attempt to find a vocabulary for speaking *with*, *through* and *from* the lived experience of *practicing*, where linguistic content is not already known in advance, but rather emerges in and through a lived *working-with* of language.

Conversation-as-material involves the quest for a not-yet-known vocabulary generated synchronously to the live circumstances that it seeks to articulate — an infra-personal poetics co-produced through the dialogic process itself, revealed only in retrospect once recorded conversation has been transcribed, then distilled into a dense poetic form. As such, this practice comprises the quadripartite process of conversation, transcription, distillation and presentation — where each part requires the attention of a particular aesthetic, poetic, or perhaps even phenomenological, attitude or disposition.

The practice of conversation-as-material has evolved as a hybrid artistic research and art-writing approach, thus far, without formal correspondence with the wider context of phenomenology. As such, I do not want to now pretend that existing correspondence exists — to present (validate, justify, defend, retrospectively rationalize) the practice of conversation-as-material as if it had always and already been conceived within a phenomenological frame. Yet still, I intuit a relation, a commonality, between this practice and specific phenomenological methods or practices; and it is this intuition (hunch, sense, even suspicion) that creates the impetus

for the current enquiry. Certainly, this feels a little daunting, even a touch risky — for how much should one know of phenomenological method (in all of its diversity, divergence and deviation) before claiming commonality? How much is necessary? How much is *enough*? For this context, I aim to think-through or else think-with the practice of conversation-as-material afresh, to explore this approach to working with conversation as an aesthetic practice, potentially even as a practice of phenomenological writing. Or rather, I wish to consider — *how* are the commonalities and resonances between conversation-as-material as a language-based artistic research practice and phenomenological writing? This question, in turn, responds to a call: to explore existing and possible connections between two different sets of practices — phenomenological research practice and artistic research practice. Call as beckoning, as invitation, as provocation. Call and response — can I *answer* the call? Is that what is *called for*? My response is not one of answer or reply (known already in advance of writing), but rather to explore how the call *activates* thinking. How can I *think-with* the call? What does it *call forth*?

For those readers with time and inclination, the conversational transcripts presented in the research catalogue exposition can be read at length, revealing something of the nature and tone of the conversations themselves within the practice of conversation-as-material. In places, within this ‘essay’ text I also draw on specific fragments from the transcripts (which are shown in italics). However, my inclusion of the transcripts is more about *showing* a connection between transcript and textual distillation. As such, the invitation to the reader is to *glimpse* or *scan* rather than necessarily *read* the transcript material in its entirety. This invited practice of glimpsing / reading also connects with my wider interest in ‘reading as an aesthetic practice’ and the different poetics of attention therein (Cocker et al, 2020).

Indeed, it is not only the *question* of the call that calls, but also its invitation to explore the *format* of response ... to extend, to expand, towards the experimental. Mutual, reciprocal — not only what formats are constitutive for the practice (required or necessitated *by* the practice), but also, how might the potentialities of different formats enable the practice to be revealed, disclosed or else seen in different ways. The expanded format of this article has opened up new ways for me to show or reveal aspects of a practice that might otherwise have remained hidden or concealed, to *see* the practice afresh. It has enabled me to *show* (for the first time) the specific relation between the dialogic practice of conversation (through inclusion of transcript material) and resulting textual-poetic distillations. Accordingly, 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. In parallel to the text that you are now reading, there is also a ‘research catalogue exposition’ where for each of the above named collaborative projects I attempt to *show* the practice of conversation-as-material — the distillation of transcript into poetic text; moreover, how the format of textual presentation (the question of how the text operates visually, graphically, temporally, relationally, performatively) is also intrinsic 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. Rather, I propose each stage of the practice (conversation, transcription, distillation, presentation) as a discrete yet interconnected aesthetic research activity, each of which is capable of being imbued with a phenomenological attitude.

Before focusing on the specific practicing of conversation-as-material, I want to first situate this practice within my broader research enquiry. Conversation-as-material operates as a nameable research practice within the frame of my 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 ‘phenomenon of practice’, that is, an enquiry into, with and through the experiential *how-ness* of artistic (research) endeavor. Specifically, I am interested in the experience of ‘thinking-feeling-knowing’ as well as ‘not-knowing’ within artistic exploration. How is the being-in-the-midst of artistic-aesthetic thinking-in-action, the event of thinking-through-doing, or thinking with-and-through practice? My enquiry is not concerned so much with what is *produced* through practice (its terms of *artworks*), but rather the research object is the phenomenon of sense-making therein: *How* is the experience of that practice? How is that practice *experienced* or *felt*? My research focuses on attending to and seeking to give tangibility to the often hidden or undisclosed experiential aspects of practice: 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 is not about a revelation of a process as artistic *techné*, as the concrete skills, techniques or ways of doing things, but an attempt to attend to and become more attuned to that affective, prereflective realm of energies, emergences and intensities operating before, between and below the more readable or recognizable gestures of artistic practice. *Infra* — below. *Intra* — inside, within. *Inter* — between, amongst. I often collaborate with other artist-researchers on durational projects, where the studio-gallery or site-specific context becomes a live ‘laboratory’ for shared exploration. My enquiry proceeds through the experience of both *being within* and *being with* — often through a combination of participation and observation, accompanied by various dialogic and linguistic practices.

My enquiry involves 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, my guides have often been poets and writers. “Let me tell you” says writer Clarice Lispector (2014, p. 3), “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.” 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” (Lispector, 2014, p. 3). For writer-poet and philosopher, Hélène Cixous (1991, pp. 60 – 61), Lispector’s approach involves, “The lessons of calling, letting ourselves be called. The lessons of letting come, receiving.” Cixous (1991, p. 62) asserts 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*.” For Cixous (1991, p. 64), the task of “*How to bring forth claricely*” involves a 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.”

Cixous (1991, pp. 66) argues 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.” Indeed, Cixous (1998, p.139) writes of her own writing, “I do not what to see what is shown. I want to see what is secret. What is hidden amongst the visible.” Cixous’s act of ‘writing blind’, of glimpsing through language that which is fragile and fleeting, incipient and barely perceptible is practiced as a *quicken*ing: “*Quicken*ing. They have to be written to the quick, on the now. Live. All these scenes, all these events which only happen once. All the rebeginnings which are new beginnings ... If you do not grab them in the instant they pass, these pulsations that are lost forever” (Cixous, 1998, p.146). For Cixous (1991, 134), 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.” For writers like Cixous and Lispector, the act of writing, of searching for a language adequate to the challenge of describing prereflective experience or phenomenon, 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 that phenomenon or experience in its liveness, in its liveliness, to engage more deeply with the living of a given experience. As Cixous (1991, p.105) states, “I would like to write to what is living in life.” What emerges within these two practices is an approach that combines the principles of slowness and quickening, or as Cixous (1998, p. 144) states, the task is to, “Find the slowness inside the speed.” Provoked, even *called*, by writers such as Cixous and Lispector, the evolution of my own practice of conversation-as-material has involved an attempt to activate the coinciding of these two temporal modalities — the slowness within speed, the quick of the slow.

Now engaging with Max van Manen’s writing on phenomenological research methods, I am struck by the resonance and connection between Cixous’s and Lispector’s attitude and approach to writing (and indeed my own) and the concerns of phenomenological writing. For van Manen (2014, p. 27), “A phenomenological question explores what is given in moments of prereflective, prepredicative experiences — experiences as we live through them.” He states that the project of phenomenological writing involves attending to, “what is singular, subtle, or what can only be grasped with inventive and vocative means of reflective writing” (van Manen, 2014, p. 27). Like Cixous and Lispector, van Manen (2014, p. 34) is alert to the challenge of trying to capture the living instant of ‘now’ in language, stating that, “phenomenology is always aware that when we try to capture the ‘now’ of the living present in a oral or written description, then we are already too late.” Yet still, the process of phenomenological writing aims, as van Manen (2014, p. 240) describes, “to express the noncognitive, ineffable, and pathic aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomenon.” He argues that phenomenological writing involves the “aesthetic imperative” (van Manen, 2014, 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). For van Manen (2014, p. 45), “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.” Accordingly, “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” (van Manen, 2014, p. 46).

So, how can the act of writing be developed as an poetic-aesthetic research practice, committed to giving tangibility whilst remaining in fidelity to the prereflective, prepredicative aspects of experience? How can one attend to writing’s emergence, where content is not already known or pre-determined in advance, but rather emerges live or synchronous to the situation that it seeks to articulate or give expression to? My own response has involved the evolution of a practice of writing *without* writing — or rather, the development of an approach to writing that proceeds first through the dialogic interplay of spoken word, that is only subsequently distilled into written text. The process of conversation-as-material involves the gradual revelation of a poetic-aesthetic, perhaps even phenomenological, mode of textual expression that *speaks from* the experience of collaborative practice as manifest within and through conversation. Conversation — from *con-* meaning ‘with, together’, and *versare*, ‘to turn, bend’. *Conversare* — to turn about, turn about with. Conversation-as-material is a practice of collaborative, inter-subjective writing — a *writing-with* that unfolds through different voices ‘turning about’ together. In this sense, it is important to differentiate this practice from that of interview. There is no researcher / researched dichotomy. The process involves the co-production of immanent linguistic sense-making, where the conversational focus or research questions are not always known at the outset, not necessarily defined in advance, but rather emerge often in-and-through the practice itself.

Within the ‘research exposition’ component of this article, I show/present ten individual transcripts and separate poetic distillations from these three collaborations. See <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/458217>

Parallel to outlining how the practice of conversation-as-material was activated within each of the named collaborations, I invite the reader to take time to explore the actual practice itself within research catalogue.

As stated at the outset, this article focuses on three different artistic research collaborations within which I have activated the practice of conversation-as-material, as a way of bringing into reflective awareness some aspect of the live and lived, yet often hidden or undisclosed, experience of collaborative practice and process. For example, the collaboration *Re—* (with Rachel Lois Clapham) sheds light on the inceptual aspect of writing, focusing on how the new, the unexpected or unplanned for opens up within the process of writing, alongside engaging with the relation between the performing of writing (writing as verb) and its document (writing as noun). *The Italic I* (with Clare

Thornton) explores the experience of aesthetic collaboration through an investigation of the arc of falling (from the known, the certain, from a stable subject position), involving the generation of a poetic lexicon for describing sixteen moments or episodes within that arc. *Choreographic Figures: Deviations from the Line* (with Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil) focuses on recognizing and naming various elemental, empathetic and transformative ‘figures’ within the process of collaborative exploration. In what follows, I discuss how the practice of conversation-as-material is activated in each of these collaborations, considering the potential resonance and commonality with the wider project of phenomenology.

Initiated in 2009, *Re—* was a collaboration between myself, a writer-artist, and writer-curator Rachel Lois Clapham, pressing on two art-writing practices coming together to

explore the process and performativity of working with language. *Re—* comprised a series of performance lectures, which in different ways engaged with the endeavor of writing-as-practice, the event of collaboration, and the labour of making the work itself. The textual ‘scripts’ for these various performance lectures were 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 these performance lecture scripts. The ‘content’ of our performance lectures was generated through conversation, folded back upon itself 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 process unfolded as follows —

- (1) Conversation: We would engage in a period of framed conversation within which we would touch upon or ‘turn over’ together some aspect of the experience of writing;
- (2) Transcription: The conversation was transcribed verbatim, with special attention

At this point, you, the reader, are invited to engage with the practice of conversation-as-material within *Re—* which is available here: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/458217/576>

There are three different iterations of *Re—* presented, corresponding to three different performance lecture contexts. Each iteration of *Re—* is shown through the evolution of transcript material, the process of distillation/editing of that material into the textual performance script, alongside documentation of the performance lecture itself.

You can also access each of these iterations directly:

*Re—* (1): This is the initial context where the practice of conversation-as-material was first developed for generating the content of a performance lecture (2009-2010) — where the focus is on ‘not knowing’ and the conditions of inceptual thinking within writing. See <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1103001>

*Re—* (2): The second iteration of the practice of conversation-as-material (2010) focused on the ‘where’ of writing, considering the relation between the performing of writing and document of the written. See <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1102963>

*Re—* (3): The third iteration of this practice considers the relation of ‘waiting for something to happen’ and ‘making something happen’ within the process of writing-thinking, receptivity to the forces of accident, chance and distraction as ways for inviting in the unexpected. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1103048>

paid to noting the peripheral and the incidental, those parts of conversation that could have gone unnoticed, or that functioned as asides; (3) Distillation: The transcribed conversation was distilled in two ways — my own process of editing involved compressing the conversation towards a series of poetic textual fragments, whilst Rachel Lois distilled the conversation into a set of visual-performative micro-gestures and drawings for diagramming towards those parts of dialogic exchange that existed beyond words, affirmation of conversation’s sensible, affective potentiality; (4) Presentation: The two distillations (textual and visual-diagrammatic) were later reassembled as a live performance reading — two practices sit side-by-side, their means restricted to broken fragments from earlier conversations and mute utterances of a finger pointing, nails pink; a spoken text of dislocated phrases; a diagram drawn; the space of breath.

Each iteration of *Re—* and the resulting performance lecture addressed different aspects of the writing experience, where the process of writing is itself conceived as a collaboration *with-writing*. For this context, returning to the transcripts afresh, I notice how we were also turning over a language for describing the nascent practice of conversation-as-material in its specificity. Towards nearness, towards how-ness, wrestling or struggling to articulate: *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 us wrestling with the practice of practicing. 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.*

*A sense of circling the object of enquiry rather than locating it directly: [...] 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. The work circles, tries to think through [...] The finger ... circles the point but ... what is it circling ... There is a sense of purpose without it really knowing what it is [...] This notion of groping for something that you never get towards [...] 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 was started.*

*The necessity of indirectness: I would be careful 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. Working away but not away from [...] 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 [...] 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 [...] There is a blindness, a grasping or a groping towards language [...] It creates a kind of focus, or pressure point, but it is just to the edge of that, 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 — not being too hurried, teasing a way forward and letting something wave towards you.*

*The importance of the frame, the bracketing of the conversation as a holding space for the unknown: 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. And I don't quite know what that is, and I would hope ... if I have a hope for it ... 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*

*[...] Yet, the closer you get ... you get closer but you don't necessarily get any more [...] So the words come, and in their own time. And often they come slower than you want ... Come on. Come on, words, come on ... You give in the sense that you yield. It is a form of surrender.*

By revisiting the transcripts it becomes evident that our attempt to get close or *near* to the *how-ness* of the experience of practice, of practicing, was not achieved through directness of approach, through focused questions identified in advance. Indeed, the sense of hesitation, the circling and indirectness appear to be critical tactics within the practice of conversation-as-material. As psychiatrist Jan H. van den Berg (2021, p. 41) 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.*" I am also curious if and how the indirect aspect of the practice might somehow resonate with van Manen's account of 'originary reduction' and the potential for *inceptual* insights therein. For van Manen (2014, p. 237), "*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.*" He argues 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 state of active-passivity" (van Manen, 2014, p. 238). Van Manen (2014, p. 239) elaborates that, "The challenge for inceptual or original thought is to find nonconceptual and nontheoretical access to the realm where understandings are evoked through more indirect, poetic, and vocative means. It requires on the part of the researcher patience and a willingness to surrender to the grace of serendipity, even if that means to be frustrated and exasperated when phenomenological insights just do not seem to come."

Counter-intuitively, the practice of conversation-as-material seeks to create a frame or the conditions for the unexpected to arise, for inviting inceptual thought. In this sense, the practice needs to be differentiated from "conversational talk" in general. So how is the nature of this conversational talk and how does it differ from other types of talking together? Or alternatively, how does the aesthetic practice of conversation actualize or amplify the potentiality of conversation for inceptual thought? The aesthetic approach to conversation within conversation-as-material involves a heightened sense of embodied awareness, being willing (receptive) rather than willed, trusting and being open to the process, welcoming of the unplanned for. The practice of conversation-as-material attempts to mirror something of the phenomenal experience that it seeks to describe. Within the collaboration *Re—*, the nascent practice of conversation-as-material evolved as a way of attempting to find a shared vocabulary for describing the inceptual experience of writing, by effectively creating a frame or the conditions wherein the potential for inceptual thinking (with and through that phenomenon) might emerge. For van Manen (2014, p. 238), whilst the inceptual thought comes unbidden, it "does not happen in an area where we are not residing." Conversation-as-material creates the conditions for dwelling or residing (an



archaic meaning of conversation is the “place where one lives or dwells”.) *Conversari* — to live, dwell, live with, to keep company with.

Reflecting on conversation, van den Berg (2021, p. 39) observes that, “Speaking is *explicating*, a *setting apart*. And because this *setting apart*, this separating of aspects of the world takes place in a contact with the other — this *setting apart* is *conversant*, *con* (together) *verse* (line, draw, express, poetic.) Conversation is together expressing a shared world. In other words, conversation is the shaping of togetherness.” Van Manen (2021, 48) 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.” *Conversare* — ‘to turn about, turn about with’. Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s (2012, p. 52) reflections on inceptual thinking, van Manen (2014, p. 237) 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.” The moments of inceptual thinking within conversation-as-material *happen* through the encounter with the twist and turn of another’s thoughts, or more specifically, with and through the ‘turning’ of conversation itself. This is less about the voicing of an individual speaking subject, but rather about co-creating an attentional field within which inceptual insights might emerge. Significantly, this is not only to do with the agencies of the speakers for as van Manen (2016, p. 98) states, “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.”

The process 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. Indeed, flashes of inceptual thinking are not always possible to discern in the moment of their utterance. It is only through the process of transcription that certain insights are revealed. It is through the coupling of the immediacy of spoken conversational language (the potential of conversation for ‘catching’ inceptive thought on the cusp of articulation), with the slow process of transcription and distillation that this practice aims to get closer to Cixous’s “slowness inside the speed”. Transcription can be a way of retrospectively attending to the tentative vibrations of thought in conversation, those instances of speech that were disappearing even as they were coming into being. This might include attending to the phatic and affective aspects of dialogue, where as artist, writer and theorist Brandon LaBelle (2014, p. 133) observes, speech is “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.” More specifically, it is only through the aesthetic distillation of the transcript that certain insights become gradually revealed, through the subtractive paring back and removal of words to leave behind only what most shines forth, rings most true. Here, the distillation is not about arriving at evocative anecdotal fragments but rather involves what van Manen (2014, p. 260) describes as the ‘invocative method’ of *intensification*, an “intensification of language that resembles the

thickening and compressing effect of poetry.” (p. 290). This ‘invocative’ aspect of the practice is developed further in *The Italic I*.

*The Italic I* is an artistic research collaboration with artist Clare Thornton which explores the event of surrendering to a repeated fall, slowed and extended through the use of both language and the lens. Parallel to capturing the event of a repeated fall through performance and its documents, our collaborative activity involved the production of a textual lexicon for reflecting on the different episodes within falling, generated through the ‘free-fall’ of conversation. We were trying to get close to the experience or feeling of the fall *as force* rather than *as form*; moreover, the fall was approached as a motif for reflecting (indirectly) on the experience of collaborative, aesthetic exploration. *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.* Our vocabulary for describing the diagonality and tilt of falling was also a way of: *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. We were, Trying to get close to a way of reflecting on lived experience ... and what it means to be [...] 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.*

At this point, you are invited to engage with the practice of conversation-as-material as it is activated within *The Italic I*. See <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1106540>

The research exposition shows how the transcript material was distilled/edited into a poetic lexicon for describing the arc of falling, which in turn has been presented in various ways including as artists’ bookwork, wall text, moving image, installation, and as a text-based online work.

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 then gradually distilled towards our working vocabulary. We focused on the ‘becoming’ of falling (to fall — a verb, a process-oriented operation), reflecting on the interior complexity of falling — the capacities, temporalities and affective dimension therein — which visual expression can only hint towards. In the first year of our collaboration we were able to discern sixteen overlapping categories, titles or even ‘themes’ for exploring the arc of falling which were then ‘fleshed

out’ through subsequent conversations: *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.* Whilst dialogue often took place directly following the live performance of falling itself (Thornton falling, Cocker observing and diagramming), we also met some time after the event using the performance document and the titles of the lexicon as provocation (more about the overall practice can be found here — Cocker and Thornton, 2014, 2016, 2018). The

lexicon, an exercise in naming — each name a call through which to conjure a corresponding language, to summon up, invoke.

We asked: how can we develop a poetic mode of linguistic expression that embodies rather than describes the live experience that it seeks to articulate? What happens if talking about practice is no longer an event of explication, but is instead performed in the same key as doing? We recognized that it can be difficult to shape experience into words, language can sometimes seem too stiff or rigid, like the body it also needs to be stretched and flexed. Yet, for us, this perceived difficulty of ‘putting into words’ was transformed from problem into provocation. We asked: 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?

*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 practice of conversation-as-material is not about saying what you *already know* and are certain about, but rather it is a practice for leaning into the unknown, allowing speaking to emerge in all of its uncertainty and un-sureness. To speak before fully knowing what it is that you are going to say — thinking *through* speaking. Speaking in single words, partial phrases, half sentences, and thought fragments. Allowing for vulnerability and embarrassment — for wrestling with, stumbling and falling over one’s words.

Within *The Italic I*, the practice of conversation-as-material attempted to somehow enact or evoke something of the experience that it sought to describe. We asked: how might the act of conversation itself echo the arc of falling? Like our practicing of the fall, our conversations were framed, undertaken as a specific exercise within a time-bound period — usually between one and three hours — allocated only for this purpose. We conversed until it no longer felt generative, until we needed to stop. Together in conversation we seek to practice linguistic or even cognitive falls, searching for a language adequate to the task of articulating the experience of falling *through* falling. *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.* Akin to the body repeatedly falling, language can 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 [...] Revolver — turn,*

*roll back, from re- back again, volvere — to roll [...] Etymology is interesting — 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.*

For van Manen (1984, p.53), “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.” Echoing this aspect of van Manen’s ‘methodological outline’ for practicing phenomenological writing, our process of conversation-as-material involved tracing etymological sources, looking for synonyms, searching for idiomatic phrases. *Certain words like ‘bent’ or ‘attitude’ have many readings. So it is like a stance. An attitude. But it also means a propensity towards ... Bend and bind have an etymological connection in terms of making a commitment to. We are bound together. Bent or bend — to yield or submit or give in, but also this connection to being resolved to. (S)ome of the 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, the ‘let up’.* In the liveliness of conversation, words can often slip and spill into existence; thought conjured in the event of its utterance, verbalised at the point of thinking leaning into the unknown. Within *The Italic I* our shared intent was 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 — emerges only *after* what one wanted to say has been exhausted or used up. 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. 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. I wonder if this dimension of exhaustion, of exhausting what one already knows, might somehow resonate with van Manen’s articulation of ‘hermeneutic epoché-reduction’, the attempt to explicate or even exorcise various preunderstandings, theoretical frameworks or even personal inclinations that would in van Manen’s terms (2014, p. 224), “prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through.”

By transcribing and then distilling our conversation towards a working lexicon for reflecting on the arc of falling, our intent was to retain something of the original cadence, alongside the potential for slip or switch in tense, inflection, imperative or mood. Certainly, the specific rhythm of conversation produces a different shape and texture of textual articulation compared to that of conventional writing. Significantly, the cadence or rhythmic pacing of conversation — its pitch and intonation, the tempo of speech — can often be of rising and falling, dipping and peaking. Excited acceleration. Hesitation. Deliberation. Syncopation. Abbreviation. Words dropped. Omissions. Repetitions. Sentence incompleteness. Disregard for punctuation. Hurried utterance. Syllabic glides and slurs. As LaBelle (2014, p. 61) argues, “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.” Pushing at the edges or the limits. This achieving and letting go — a reaching towards. Stretching — muscular, bodily. *The body makes phrases [...] Language comes out in fits and starts ... as a method. Like gestures, exploratory gestures [...]*

*almost bypassing what the mind thinks.* Bodily lettering: the tasting of words, language caress of the tongue, phonemes felt against lips, exhaled on the breath. *(T)here 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.* Reflecting on the ‘vitality affects’ within unscripted spontaneous conversation, psychologist Daniel Stern (2010, pp. 122 -124) argues 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.”

Different explorations of form, format and even performativity of textual presentation within *The Italic* I are shown through documentation presented within the research exposition available here - <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1106540>

The gradual process of distilling the transcript material towards a poetic textual lexicon for describing the arc of falling involved a two fold process: the gathering or clustering of those thought fragments, phrases and words gleaned from the transcript that resonated with the already identified thematic titles; alongside intensifying or even densifying the language to heighten the sense of rhythm and repetition. For van Manen (2014, p. 260), “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.” He argues 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” (van Manen, 2014, p. 260). The act of concentrating the extended conversational transcripts towards dense segments of prose-poetry allowed us 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. Likewise, we hope that the density and intensity of the language, with its strongly embedded or incarnated meaning (van Manen, 2014, p. 45), serves to slow down the process of reading for the reader. *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 out aloud, you really re-inhabit the rhythm.* This sense of the reactivation of the text has been further amplified within performance lectures where we have presented the visual documents alongside a reading of the textual distillation. Indeed, beyond attending to the vocative dimension of the text itself, we have also experimented 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. Van Manen (2016, pp.130 – 131) argues 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.” It is perhaps through its attentiveness to the form, format and even performativity of (textual) presentation that artistic approaches might expand the notion of the vocative.

This aspect of the practice of conversation-as-material is developed further within the research project *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*. This is an artistic research collaboration between myself, artist Nikolaus Gansterer and choreographer Mariella Greil for exploring those forms of ‘thinking-feeling-knowing’ produced within collaborative exchange, specifically between the lines of choreography, drawing, and writing. Along the research journey, we worked closely with critical interlocutors Alex Arteaga, Christine De Smedt and Lilia Mestre; guest collaborators Werner Moebius and Jörg Piringer; video-grapher Victor Jaschke, who generated much of the photographic and video documentation of the project, and artist and designer Simona Koch. Central to our enquiry was an attempt to find ways of better understanding the *how-ness* — the qualitative-processual, aesthetic-epistemological, and ethico-empathetic dynamics — within the process of artistic exploration. Our shared research enquiry focused on the unfolding processes of decision-making and dynamic movements of ‘sense-making’ within collaborative artistic practice by asking: How can we 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? How can we develop systems of experimentation and notation for becoming better attuned to this often hidden or undisclosed aspect of the creative process, and moreover, for sharing the experience with (and communicating to) others? The project unfolded through a series of intensive ‘method labs’ where we would 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.

Our research enquiry into the ‘knowing-feeling-thinking’ within artistic process focused on the reciprocal relation between the event of *figuring* and the emergence of *figures*. We use the term *figuring* to describe 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. We use the term *figure* to describe the point at which the indeterminate or undifferentiated awareness of ‘something happening’ (*figuring*) becomes recognizable and qualified through a name. Through the process of ‘live exploration’ we were able to recognize and qualify different shifts in vitality, intensity or affordance, which we have named as specific *figures*. Some of the proposed *figures* can be recognized experientially as particular moments within the unfolding arc of artistic endeavour – for example, the process of beginning (*Figure of Clearing and Emptying Out*), of generating energy in the midst of (*Figure of Spiralling Momentum*), or for drawing towards resolution (*Figure of Temporary Closing*). Other figures draw attention to the ethics of collaboration, the sensitivities and sensibilities of *being-with*. For example, the *Empathetic Figures* — *Figure of Vibrating Affinity*, *Figure of Wavering Convergence*, *Figure of Consonance / Dissonance* — articulate a shift from the experienced 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 we never named it as such, *Choreo-graphic Figures* can be conceived as a phenomenological enquiry undertaken through artistic-aesthetic means. However, for this context, I do not want to explore the entirety of the project through its potential resonance and commonality with phenomenological method, but rather want to focus

on how the specific practice of conversation-as-material operated therein. At the outset of the project, the practice-of-conversation was activated rather speculatively, even somewhat indiscriminately, where we were recording almost all of our conversations, which were then subsequently transcribed. During the project, I

Though not the practice of conversation-as-material as I am describing it within this article, some of these different uses of the transcript material are presented in the research exposition here: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1157216>

A list of some of the 'how' questions that we gleaned from the transcript can be found here - <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/462390/538272>

transcribed over 150 hours of recorded conversation resulting in over 300,000 words of transcript. This transcript material was used in various ways: (1) Revisited as a way of discerning and clarifying the conceptual-theoretical direction of our unfolding enquiry (Cocker et al, 2017); (2) 'Mined' using specific key words such as 'how', 'when', 'where' or even '?' in order to identify questions emerging within our enquiry (Cocker et al, pp. 66 – 67, pp. 252 – 253; pp. 313 – 314); (3) Approached as a material to be *worked-with* as part of the live exploration process. Additionally, we also developed a number of experimental practices of

conversation, which were directly activated within the process of live exploration (Cocker et al, pp. 154 – 161). Now on reflection, I do not think that these various examples of working with conversation are expressions of conversation-as-material in the terms that I am now attempting to outline. 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. In fact, it is this dimension of conversation that the practice of conversation-as-material seeks to suspend, hold back or otherwise bracket against. In these terms (though I did not fully recognize it until now), the principle of *epoché* is integral to the practice of conversation-as-material, without which it loses its potential for resonance with the phenomenological attitude.

Still, there were moments within the *Choreo-graphic Figures* project where conversation-as-material was specifically activated, and in a manner that resonates with phenomenological research practices differently from the two previous examples of collaboration discussed. We used the practice towards the end of the project for trying to identify a linguistic vocabulary for describing the nine 'figures' already recognized and named during our three-year enquiry. We had been engaging these figures in and through artistic exploration over a sustained period, so had a strong felt sense of each figure (a sense of the figure at an embodied, prereflective, prelinguistic, non-conceptual, pathic level). We also had an extensive archive of photographic materials, video footage, drawings-diagrams, as well as our own notebooks and embodied knowledges of those figures. Before conversing, we would take time to tune into the chosen figure (the object of our enquiry) — this involved looking back at notes and sketches, or by noting / drawing / diagramming. Drawing on these various re-collective supports, we engaged in a series of framed conversations (taking place over several days) for generating the descriptions for each of the figures. We engaged in a separate conversation for each figure — the conversations themselves were relatively short if intense (around 30-45 minutes for each figure). Unlike the indirect, hesitating, exhaustive approach of conversation-as-material in the previous collaborations, here the practice was much more focused and direct. Yet, this is not to say that the practice had gained clarity or had 'improved', but rather that the mode of reflection (even reduction) itself was of a different *kind*.

You are invited to engage with how conversation-as-material is activated within *Choreo-graphic Figures*:  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/458217/617>

The process of conversation-as-material is shown for six different figures. Each example shows through the evolution of transcript material into the textual distillation, alongside documentation of how that textual material has been presented as part of a wider multimodal assemblage of audio-visual-diagrammatic materials which we call a 'choreographic figure' (meaning more than one mode of inscription). You can also access each of these examples directly using the individual links below:

(1) *Figure of Clearing + Emptying Out*:  
We recognize this figure as the experience of 'beginning', opening or 'clearing the ground in readiness' within the arc of artistic-aesthetic exploration?  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1080344>

(2) *Figure of Spiralling Momentum*:  
We recognize this figure as the dynamic experience of generating energy or fresh momentum after a lull in activity.  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1081777>

(3) *Figure of Temporary Closing*:  
We recognize this figure as the experience of cessation within the arc of artistic-aesthetic exploration.  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1081790>

(4) *Figure of Vibrating Affinity*:  
We recognize this figure as the experienced intensity of 'vibrating' attunement with another within the shared field of collaborative exploration.  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1081796>

(5) *Figure of Wavering Convergence*:  
We recognize this figure as the dynamic of constantly *shifting* attention and connection experienced within a triadic model of collaboration, where the intensity of the one-to-one relation becomes unsettled by the presence of a third attractor/distractor.  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1081800>

(6) *Figure of Consonance/Dissonance*:  
We recognize this figure as the dynamic of connection, disconnection and reconnection with others within a wider field of collaborative activity.  
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/458216/1081804>

Within this activation of the practice of conversation-as-material, the attitude of conversation appears to resonate with aspects of both 'eidetic reduction' (focusing on the *eidos* or *whatness* of a given phenomenon) and 'ontological reduction' (concerned with "explicating the mode or ways of being that belong to or are proper to something" (van Manen, 2014, p. 231). For van Manen (2014, p. 229), eidetic reduction "seeks to describe *what* shows itself in experience or consciousness and *how* something shows itself. The eidetic reduction focuses on what is distinct or unique in a phenomenon." Van Manen (2014, p. 229) states that, "the *eidos* of a phenomenon are the invariations that make 'something' what it is and without which it could not be what it is. The *eidos* 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." He argues that, "Every nameable or recognizable experience seems to acquire an identity that makes it potentially distinguishable from other experiences. We could single out any of these moments (micro-moments and macro-moments) that we just named and asks, 'What is that experience like?' " (van Manen, 2014, p. 35). Accordingly, for van Manen (2014, p. 230), "The eidetic reduction is particularly accomplished by comparing the phenomenon with other related but different phenomena." Our conversations were oriented to arriving at a vocabulary for expressing both the *what-ness* and *how-ness* of a specific figure, its particular essence and 'mode of being'. This involved trying to be precise about the invariant quality of each figure, moreover, by differentiating one figure from another. We engaged in a process of intersubjective corroboration where we each drew on our 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.

The practice-of-conversation — activated in these different named collaborations — has the capacity to contribute to the wider project of phenomenological writing through the generation of poetic descriptions



for speaking *from* and *with* the lived experience of artistic practice, of practicing. Conversation-as-material is presented as a linguistic means for bringing into reflection some of the more hidden or undisclosed aspects of aesthetic, and especially collaborative, exploration: the inceptual dimension of *working-with* writing; the experience of collaboration explored through the arc of a ‘fall’ from what is known or certain; the elemental arc of beginning, continuing and ending experienced within creative activity, or the experience of empathetic attunement with another, within a triadic relation, or within a wider field of collaborative interactions. The practice shifts the focus from conversation as an object of phenomenological enquiry to it becoming the very method of enquiry. Within the practice of conversation-as-material, conversation is not conceived simply as 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. Rather it is a practice that enables a form of thinking and articulation beyond what is often conceivable on one’s own. As van Manen (2016, p. 114) states, “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.” Indeed, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 13), “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.” Or as Maurice Blanchot (1993, p. 341) suggests (my changes 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].” These various reflections on the phenomenon of conversation enable me to better understand its potential as part of an artistic (perhaps even phenomenological) research practice, specifically in relation to its capacity for *indirectness*, for inviting inceptual thinking beyond what one already knows, activated in and through the ‘turning about together’ of conversation.

However, I have increasingly recognized that my own articulations of the practice of conversation-as-material — and indeed many reflections on, and even etymological accounts of, conversation upon which I have drawn — tend to understate that conversation is a practice of listening as much as of *speaking together* (con-versing). The phase of transcription within the process of conversation-as-material is a practice of 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 has enabled me to attend very closely, repeatedly, to the unfolding dynamics — indeed to the *ethico-aesthetic* dimensions — of conversation. For over ten years, I have personally transcribed hundreds of thousands of words from the practicing of conversation-as-material. At times, I have been called to attend to my own interruptive tendencies within conversation, painfully transcribing as my own words cut across another’s unfinished sentence. Or maybe, I have noticed how the fluid ‘falling into another’s words’, which seemed so integral to the practice of conversation-as-material with fellow native English-speaking collaborators (in *Re—* and *The Italic I*), seemed to be less possible or even undesirable in other cultural contexts. Moreover, listening to and transcribing conversation *creates* its own a field of enquiry: How does conversation enable thinking, especially inceptual thinking? How does the speed and rhythm of conversation shape the nature of thinking therein

— when is conversation too fast or slow to think? 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? How is the non-linguistic within conversation? How does silence play a role? How is the difference between silence and listening? How is the difference between speaking 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 do we prepare for conversation — for the interplay of speaking, thinking, listening and silence/spacing that conversation involves? For LaBelle (2014, pp. ix – x), “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.” How might the practice of conversation-as-material evolve were the emphasis to shift more towards the act of listening as an aesthetic practice?

There is no single approach to conversation-as-material; rather, it has the capacity to be activated in ways particular to each context of enquiry. In this article, I have attempted to explore some of the commonalities and resonances between the practice of conversation-as-material and phenomenological research, specifically phenomenological writing. But still I wonder, how might this lead to the possibility of mutual transformation, how might each field of practice extend the scope of the other? Specifically, within the research catalogue exposition I have endeavored to show how the various textual distillations from the conversation-as-material 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. How is the vocative and pathic meaning of language informed by different modes of format and presentation? My assertion is that the vocative potential of language is not only generated through the words themselves but also by how they are presented or shown. Accordingly, 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 et al, 2011), performance-writing (Allsop, 1999; Hall, 2007; Pollock, 1998) or site-writing (Rendell, 2010) practices?

Certainly, the quest to capture the embodied, experiential dimension of enquiry through language is a perennial challenge for both artistic research and phenomenology. Artistic research theorist Henk Borgdorff (2011, p. 60) asks, “Is it possible to achieve a linguistic-conceptual articulation of the embedded, enacted and embodied content of artistic research?” Indeed, what is at stake in the bringing into speech, into language, of those artistic experiences that are often prereflective, non-cognitive, that are habitually undisclosed or concealed? This is not to disqualify, override or otherwise invalidate the non-linguistic dimension of artistic practice. However, 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. As philosopher Clive Cazeaux (2017, p. 77) states, “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.” In these terms, writing is seen as 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 resistance to language. Here, writing is often conceived as part of the cognitive activity of explaining, rationalizing, positioning, arguing; all too often considered as somehow *synonymous with theory*, with theorizing, conceptualizing, contextualizing, for reflecting *on* or *about* practice through the prism of existing theories and concepts.

The influence of phenomenological writing provides a wider research context for considering the project of certain 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 prereflective, non-cognitive experience of practice. Indeed, as van Manen (2014, p.65), makes clear, the “abstemious” function of the *époché* 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,” that “prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through” (2014, p. 224). Could the influence of the phenomenological *époché* enable the decoupling of writing from theory within artistic research? Here, 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. The abstemious function of the *époché* is intended to guard against that which *prevents* something from being seen — and there are times when the lens of theory serves to sharpen or bring something into clearer view. Still, research writing is not *only* theoretical writing, and phenomenological practice provides advocacy for *how else* writing could operate in research terms. Could the philological method of the vocative offer insights into how artistic research writing might operate in non-cognitive as much as cognitive terms, through the poetic and pathic potentiality of language? Rather than conceiving writing as an obstacle or as a problem, how might the influence of phenomenological approaches encourage the artistic researcher — in the words of philosopher and media-theorist Dieter Mersch (2015, p. 10) — to rise “to the challenge of nevertheless finding words to say the unsayable.” Indeed, as Mersch (2017, p. 122) states, rather than “talking about art”, how might writing practise the “more careful and gentle ‘of’ which merely dares to touch.”

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