



Writing through the Body: Political, Personal, Practical

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Writing through the Body: Political, Personal, Practical

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Introduction

What does it mean to write 'through the body'? How does the materiality of your body, your perceptions and responses, affect who you are as a writer, what is important for you to write about and how you go about writing? And how can you bring more of your embodied knowing – your hunches and gut feel, your tastes and senses – to your research, writing it in ways that are vivid and enlivening for you and your readers? In this chapter we explore these questions and argue that attending to the memories, emotions and physically anchored learning that bodies carry enables researchers to learn 'that which was unknowable and unimaginable' using more conventional writing formats (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005: 963). We believe, and venture here, that writing through the body is a political act for a researchers, one that is particularly suitable for qualitative researchers who often seek to give voice to the overlooked but crucial subjectively experienced meanings of phenomena.

We also aim to be practical – not to lose our bodies and your bodily responses under a weight of theorizing. We faced a conundrum in writing this chapter. While a handbook contribution is expected to provide an extensive theoretical and research review, our focus and our own experience demanded that we write this chapter differently. We have sought not just to write *about* 'writing through the body' but to place our bodies and our feel for your likely bodily responses front and centre *in the way* that we have written. We'd like to invite you – we can't control your reaction so it's really just an invitation – to read this chapter with your body as well as your mind.

The following anecdote from Donna's experience provides an example of the kind of bodily intelligence we'll be exploring in the chapter:

One of my PhD students, Chris, was having enormous difficulties writing up his thesis. Although he had done the fieldwork and delved into the literature to understand where his study was positioned theoretically, whenever he sat down to write he just couldn't get started. 'I have to have the whole argument in my head before I start writing it,' he explained, 'and I just don't know the whole argument yet. I have to keep thinking about it.' Although I encouraged him to just 'start writing', months went by and all he produced were scratchings and incoherent paragraphs. It was only when the deadline for his registration began to loom that something shifted for him. 'With the pressure of the deadline, I suddenly realised I just HAD to start writing. And the strangest thing began to happen.... the more I wrote the more I began to understand what I wanted to write. It happened that way round – by writing I understood what I wanted to write, rather than the way I thought it worked – knowing what to write and then scribing it down'.

Chris had assumed, as many of us do, that he had to 'know' what he knew before writing. But this way of understanding writing, as something that follows rather than precedes or accompanies knowing, ignores how the physical act of writing itself provokes sense-making. It is often only through the physical motion of engaging hands and fingers with the mental 'ideas' that what we know is able to take form in written words. Empowering ourselves to write well includes listening to our bodies and what they know about what we are trying to say.

So, what bodies are these – poised at computers on opposite sides of the world, writing this chapter? We are two women academics who share an interest in leadership, as well as yoga and physicality. Amanda is Australian with ancestors from Northern Europe. Shortish and with a history of feeling a bit overlooked, her sense is that she needed to be bigger or more provocative to be heard. This possibly explains some of her subsequent behaviour and her career, which has often involved challenging conventional notions of leadership. Donna is American by birth and British by naturalization and of African American, Native American, French and German heritage. Making her home in a different country, she is particularly sensitive to the way in which culture impacts on what is deemed 'important'. Understanding knowledge as situated, contingent and based on who is in power has been a lived reality of her life. Perhaps as a result of her own situated-ness, she has a reputation for requiring her students to reflect on 'how' they know, as well as 'what' they know.

One of the many things that drew the two of us together was a belief in the potentially redemptive qualities of the physical and the sensuous. We believe people, including researchers, are at their most empowered and inventive when feeling connected to the delights, pleasures, surprises and frustrations of being a physical as well as mental body. Let's test that idea out by inviting you to 'check in' with your own body, wherever, and however it is right now:

Take a moment to notice how you feel at this moment. Are you feeling sluggish, or do you feel awake and curious? Where do you most 'feel' your body? For instance, are you most aware of tension in your jaw – or instead are you aware of a general feeling of warmth or coldness in your limbs? Take a moment to notice your belly. What are the sensations there? How are your chest, ribs and heart areas feeling? Note any awareness you might have of tightness or heaviness. Are you clenching your jaw or hunching your shoulders? Just notice those impressions without deciding they are good or bad, right or wrong. Tapping into the wisdom of the body requires listening to it in all its states, rather than judging the way it is.

Enjoy a slow, luxurious breath in. Notice your chest rising, or even your abdomen expanding if your breath travels down into the lower regions of your chest cavity. Breathe out, noticing if you've made any judgements about yourself, your breath or our instructions. Hunch up your shoulders and let them fall, adding a sigh as you breathe out. Notice your posture – is there anything you can do to put your body at greater ease? How do you feel as a result of bringing your attention to your body in these ways?

Involving your body in simple practices like those described above opens the door to an embodied way of reading and writing. Increasing amounts of research from diverse sources – from philosophers and phenomenologists, feminist and critical theorists, scholars of the creative and performing arts as well as neuroscientific researchers – suggest that bodies play crucial but neglected roles in apprehending the world and in linguistically and cognitively mediated processes of sense-making (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011; Meriläinen et al., 2015). For example, phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1968) and cognitive scientists such as Francisco Varela (1993) insist that ‘the body’s way of knowing the world is primary, prior to cognition’s role in selecting and interpreting’ (Ladkin, 2013: 325). As psychoanalytically informed theorists also show, bodies and bodily responses offer ways of tuning into what is noticed less consciously, those dimensions of experience that our self-appointed rational or polite minds may censor at cost to our deeper understanding (see for example Vachhani, 2012). Embodied ways of sensing and understanding are indispensable in enabling us to focus attention; to find ‘flow’ or a state of absorption and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); and to uncover deeper understanding and wisdom.

In line with these understandings, we encourage you to stay ‘in your body’ as you read this chapter. Notice how your breath changes when reading certain sections. Be aware of paragraphs which result in feelings of tiredness or disinterest, and others that quicken your pulse. What can your own bodily reactions teach you about the rhythm and shape of writing that enlivens? How might you put what you experience into your own practice as a qualitative researcher?

As well as exploring such practical dimensions, the chapter begins by delving into the political agenda behind omitting the body and its wisdom from so much academic writing. We believe that consciously engaging the body in the process of conducting research and writing is a political act particularly appropriate in undertaking qualitatively based research. Interrogating why so much academic writing is disembodied and the purposes this serves is a good platform from which to encourage you to consider disrupting those conventions. In the second section of the chapter we offer our own narratives and experiments with consciously ‘writing through the body’. Rather than suggesting our experiences provide recipes for approaching this territory, we wish to tempt or provoke you into exploring your own opportunities and challenges in inviting your body in. The third part of the chapter is devoted to describing some practical activities both ‘on’ and ‘off’ the page, practices you might already engage in for other purposes but which we hope will help you change the way you think about and approach your research and writing practice.

The Political: Disrupting the Apparent Erasure of Bodies in Academic Writing

Why have bodies been omitted from academic writing and what are the consequences of that omission? To begin to answer these questions, let’s consider the features of privileged management and organizational writing; the kind you read in the *Academy of Management Journal* and other high-status, high rejection rate journals where most researchers aspire to publish. A primary criterion for the validity of such text is that

authors and their bodies, with all their prejudices and predilections, are expunged from the text. Conventions concerning the 'proper structure' for journal articles, rules concerning referencing and substantiating claims, serve to constrain the writing into a predictable form. Even journals with a reputation or mandate to challenge and critique conventional management knowledge are often surprisingly un-experimental when it comes to the writing. Though there are, of course, exceptions, bodies are largely uncommon subjects of managerial research, and researchers' bodies and sensory responses seldom appear in their written accounts.

These omissions are not accidental. The 'standardization' of academic writing is an act of power. Keeping writing cerebral and governed by restrictive norms of form and vocabulary are mechanisms through which power and authority stay in the hands of editorial and other gatekeepers. They are the processes by which a discursive political economy is erected, policing what is written into discourse and how. Although it can be argued that such norms were established to maintain clarity and transparency for other researchers to comprehend, and perhaps replicate, much contemporary academic writing no longer meets these criteria. Rather, these taken for granted academic conventions of writing often involve loss: of vividness, of immediacy, of embodied responses among writers and readers.

You might find yourself thinking that the loss of such vividness is a small price to pay in order to achieve the hallmark of 'good' academic research: objectivity. Joining many qualitative researchers, we want to disrupt the taken for granted view that academic knowing is objective and expressed as a 'voice from nowhere'. We write this chapter from the perspective that all knowledge is situated and mediated through our physical forms. For qualitative or interpretive researchers especially, 'there is no place to stand outside of the social world that allows a view of truth unmediated by human language and embeddedness in circumstance' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012: 98). Writing – its form, content and absences as well as presences – is shaped by cultural and disciplinary forces which themselves limit what can be known. Knowledge systems exert discipline over their members about how new claims to authority are made. As academics, our role is not just to be bound by, and dutifully reproduce, such systems. It is to critique and challenge them, to experiment with radically different discourses and ways of writing (Richardson, 1997). Further though, the act of writing itself can be understood as a method of inquiry. The writing *is* the mode of inquiry, and how we engage with the body as we write determines what we find as researchers (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2009). For example, our bodily sense of what is important may encourage us to not leave out what we don't understand: thus 'not flinching from where the writing takes one emotionally or spiritually' (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005: 965).

Why might writing through the body be especially suited to qualitative research? As this volume shows, qualitative research is interested in capturing, reflecting and inspecting the subjectively and sensuously experienced world of organizations. It often problematizes the supposed gaps between researcher and researched in that qualitative researchers' interpretations of the research field are formed by their interests, past experiences and intuitions in more marked ways than quantitatively based researchers, who test research hypotheses from a distance. 'Themes' which arise from data sets are often grounded in bodily based recognitions of patterns or 'felt' disruptions in what one is analysing. Suggesting that data can be 'objectively' ordered is a remnant from the positivistic paradigm and an assumption ill-suited to most qualitative research.

Feminist theorists have also exposed the gender politics that have often underpinned academic writing. Some have argued that what presents itself as objective writing is actually what has been privileged as masculine writing. In this view, writing has always had a body – a manly one. For example, Jane Hindman observes that ‘academic writing is masculinist: represented and taught as if it were coherent, methodologically sound, articulate, consistent, democratic (or at least impartial and consensual) and most importantly, rational’ (2002: 98). Prescriptions for good writing have reflected notions of embodied masculinity: forceful, spare, muscular. In contrast, bad writing is often viewed as excessive, inappropriately intimate or confessional.

As counterpoints to masculine, disembodied accounts, feminist writers also offer extensive and rich experimentations in ‘writing through the body’ (Metcalf, 2003). Concerned with how male-centric modes of theorising ‘disappear’ women’s experiences, their embodied identities and sexualities, women writers and researchers have advocated palpably different relationships between body and consciousness, text and knowledge. For example, in Beverly Metcalf’s exploration of Sylvia Plath’s poetry and Luce Irigaray’s writing, ‘the body of the writer plays an important role in the textual product’ (2003: 6). Putting the body into the writing is a form of productive resistance, creating new textual spaces to explore typically masked aspects of feminine consciousness, eros and sensuality.

So Why Don't Researchers Experiment with Writing Differently?

The obvious response is that for the most part, universities, employers, journal editorial boards, supervisors, only value one legitimated form of writing. People who are junior in academia have to emulate the rules. They don’t have power to disrupt established norms, or so the argument often goes. But Foucault’s work shows us that we all have power, indeed, disturbing norms of writing or writing in innovative ways may be one of the ways we can resist oppression and create greater freedoms for others through our writing (see also Grey & Sinclair, 2006).

Our hunch is that a deeper reason why researchers often collude with disembodied, normative writing is to do with securing identity. Our selves are constructed through writing, and, especially for researchers, learning to write is a means of performing a validated self (Ivanic, 1998). According to this view, one of the main tasks for a research student is learning the language sufficiently well to sound authoritative. Through writing within the dominant discourse, fears about one’s value are allayed or at least deferred. By obeying writing rules, a future is made knowable and one’s position in it more secure.

What is the alternative to constructing one’s identity by staying within these traditional forms? Educator Jane Gallop suggests that in order to make our writing mat(t)er(ial) ‘we must gesture to our bodies, and our lives’ (1988: 4). This can be accomplished, she suggests, by marking our bodies’ presence, calling to the surface associations my thinking process passes through, such as those connected with my gender, race, class or sexual orientation as I write. This is a process of ‘self authorizing’, bringing the truth of embodied knowing to what is written. Amanda remembers the excitement when she first encountered Gallop’s writing, a paper entitled ‘The Teacher’s Breasts’ (1995). As she relates in the next section of this chapter, it was one of a few

pieces of writing that recognized the body not as a bystander, but as author, disrupter and transformer of academic knowledge.

What's going on in your body now? Sit back now and move your gaze to something external like the view out the window. Allow your shoulders to drop and the body to be as comfortable and relaxed as it can be at the moment. As you read the sections above about writing, power and identity, how has your body reacted to different sections? Have you felt a slight quickening of the breath and alertness of posture as some ideas and sentences 'hit home' or resonate with your own experience? Alternatively, which paragraphs have been met with a numbing of bodily response – perhaps as others work is referenced and our writing has obeyed conventional academic norms? Tune into what your body might be telling you about your appetite for the next section.

The Personal: Our Experiences of Bringing our Bodies to Research and Writing

Bodies and embodied responses are, we have suggested above, important subjects of study in organizational research, but further, can act as agents of creativity and innovation in understanding and writing our findings. In fascinating research exploring investment bankers' relationships with their bodies, Alexandra Michel shows that while bankers' minds are terrifyingly willing subjects of organizational socialization and norms, 'the body cannot be socialized completely' (2011: 325). Michel's findings confirm that bodily responses can override the otherwise slavish tendencies of our minds to conform. Further, bankers who listened and paid attention to bodily responses, including breakdown, performed better over the long term. These individuals were assessed as being more creative and flexible in their roles, less prone to 'melt-downs' and generally rated as being more successful. Michel recommends future research explore 'sensitizing individuals to the body's creativity' (2011: 357).

That bodies and physicality could open up new understandings of leadership was a possibility that Donna and her co-editor, Steve Taylor, were keen to explore in their edited collection *The Physicality of Leadership: Gesture, Entanglement, Taboo, Possibilities* (Ladkin & Taylor, 2014). Chapters in the book reveal that rather than being passive carriers of understanding and knowledge, bodies are inextricably entwined with the enactment of leadership. For instance, Mary Phillips's (2014) account of Star Trek Captain Jean-Luc Picard's suppressed sexuality in contrast to the Borg Queen's blatant eroticism highlights the 'taboo' territory of sexual dynamics in the workplace, which Bathurst and Messervy's subsequent chapter explores in the real-life example of Bill Clinton's US presidency (Bathurst & Messervy, 2014).

Donna and Steve also sought to encourage ways of writing *about* physicality that enabled it to be 'experienced as more than a "concept" but as a kinaesthetic apprehension' (Ladkin & Taylor, 2014: 5). In her own chapter 'In through the nose, out through the mouth', Donna tells the story of her coaching work with an accounting executive, which partially involved helping him breathe differently. The chapter includes some of Donna's

notes after coaching, which describe her observations about and responses to his hunched posture, averted gaze and hesitant voice. As she writes about him and her own responses, as well as intermittently directly addressing the reader, her writing itself helps to create somatic connections: we slow down and breathe more deeply, we feel the pressures of workplaces and then the tenderness and care that is required for us all to survive them. Similarly, and in another very moving chapter, 'Open your heart', Steve writes about his experience inviting students to open their heart in exercising leadership. His writing – in both its content and the way he writes with spare prose – helps us feel the students' fear and courage that are inevitably part of opening our hearts. The writing itself resists playing the 'status games' that so often get in the way.

Amanda's writing about bodies in leadership commenced with her observation of the paradox of the visibility of leader bodies being largely invisible in research writing (Sinclair, 2005a; see also Ladkin, 2013). Bodies seemed to matter in leadership but were not written about in research. The capacity to physically dominate – to be tall, athletic or to have an imposing voice – gave certain male leaders an edge. Many women and minority leaders struggled to deliver this 'look' of leadership. She initially wanted to simply write *about* this – the presence and power of bodies in leadership but their absence from leadership scholarship. As she did so, however, her intent and approach *in* the writing changed – from writing conventionally about the body and its absence to becoming more experimental. Reflecting on her writing journey, Amanda can discern phases through which her writing migrated from a more cognitive approach of making intellectual sense of what she was researching, to wanting her own bodily sensations and those of potential readers to guide her, as she describes below.

Phase 1: My own body as a problem: In this initial stage, my body in relation to writing felt like an obstacle to be overcome. My body couldn't be tied to the desk long enough to write. I never had enough time away from childcare and domestic responsibilities to satisfy the academic ideal of the researcher. I fitted in bits of writing around other roles and identities, being opportunistic in what I wrote and finding publication opportunities where I could.

Phase 2: Noticing and drawing attention to bodies in my writing about leadership: While researching the absence of women in leadership, I noticed and began writing about how men's bodies were often pivotal to the herculean construction of male leadership. Yet that herculean construction was invisible. Meanwhile, women and other leaders who did not conform to the able-bodied, white heterosexual stereotype of tall manliness were subject to a barrage of advice. I began documenting the ways women leaders hide, de-sexualise, maternalise, masculinise or make benign their bodies. I became more alert to the 'clothing rules' women learned: only one piece of 'statement' jewellery, minimal cleavage, navy suits not red, heel heights neither too tall (seductress) nor flat (lesbian). Women were told they should worry about how they look but shouldn't look like they are worrying about how they look; to do so would appear self-obsessed or narcissistic.

Phase 3: Advocating for attention to bodies in research: Acknowledging the different 'body rules' for male and female leaders, I was also keen to research the positive contributions of bodies, and care for the bodies of others, in leadership. For example, in 'Body possibilities in leadership'

(Sinclair, 2005a), I wanted to show bodies not just as problems but potentially a key enabler of good leadership. Following the work of feminist scholars, I also wrote about bodies in management teaching, suggesting that learning might be enhanced with an embodied pedagogy (Sinclair, 2005b; see also Bell & Sinclair 2014).

Phase 4: Experimenting with ways of writing about bodies that were not theoretical, but that resonated with people's experiences of being bodies: Accessing academic scholarship on bodies, I found much of it – well – disembodied! I embarked on a range of experiments trying to capture more of the body in the writing. In the first of these, 'Placing self' (Sinclair, 2010), each page of the article contained an upper section or 'top self' and a lower section or 'bottom self', following a device used by novelist J.M. Coetzee (2007). While the 'top' text was written in the voice and language of academic discourse, the 'bottom' text gave voice to the more child-like, censored and needy part of me. My argument was that leaders benefit from reflexive identity work, mapping feelings, doubts and vulnerabilities that are expressed bodily rather than cognitively. I wanted to try and demonstrate it in the writing as well as write about it. Writing that piece felt exposing. Although the editor, David Collinson, was encouraging, I can't escape the feeling that other readers were embarrassed, at least made awkwardly silent, by it.

Phase 5: Further experimentation: writing the stream of embodied perceptions and sensations that are an unspoken part of leadership: From my own experience and from working with leaders, I knew there was an embodied subtext of experience and self-talk that accompanies leaders wherever they are: 'I am so tired I don't know how I am going to stay awake for this evening meeting', 'that dodgy knee is agony when I sit for long periods in those chairs', 'how does person X continue to project so perky and confident an image when his marriage is going down the toilet?' In 'A material dean' (Sinclair, 2013), I wanted to capture the viscosity and immediacy of this stream of embodied reactions – the humour, petulance, gut reactions interwoven with enacting leadership, but which are rarely acknowledged. I hoped the reader would tune into their own embodied reactions; to have their stomach turn as they read about the formal dinner where the fish was slightly off and to re-experience similar occasions where the food matches the indigestible tone of the event. My own Dean wanted to read this article and requested a copy (perhaps to check it wasn't slanderous). To his credit, he admitted he could relate to the feeling of his heart sinking as he walked into a meeting and hearing a particular strident voice holding forth.

Phase 6: Putting the censored body and its sensations into an account of leadership to exemplify how bodies are part of constructing a convincing leadership persona: In 'On knees, breasts and being fully human in leadership' (Sinclair, 2014), I wanted to go even further in bringing the body's contribution to enacting leadership into focus. Using the occasion of an interview for the CEO position of a large construction company, I aimed to capture in the writing moment-by-moment, physically anchored feelings for the main characters (2 CEO candidates and the company founder). For each, their bodies were the carriers for history and memories, vulnerabilities and fears. I was

also, as with 'A material dean', trying to engage the reader, to make it hard for them not to think about their own painful knee or embarrassment about aspects of their body. I wanted to invite from the reader their bodily experiences of previous interviews where the job requires a performance of leadership which is a long way – for most of us – from doubt-ridden, embodied feelings of inadequacy. After reading the piece a colleague volunteered that it had prompted him immediately to remember his discomfort walking after damaging one of his feet, and the implications of this on his confidence and capacity to travel and do his job. It is that kind of recognition of how the body is foundational to the experience of 'doing leadership' which I'd hoped the chapter would foster.

Phase 7: Encouraging mindfulness and the value of 'being present in the moment' in the practice of research, writing and leadership: Over the past ten years or so, I have begun researching and writing about mindfulness and especially its application in leadership. My interest in mindfulness has grown out of my yoga and meditation practice. Though it began – and is often positioned as – a practice on the edge of my work to help gain perspective and relieve stress, I realized that mindfulness might be more fruitfully practised at the heart of how we are in our day-to-day being of work and leadership. Initially, my interest in mindfulness, I think, struck many as being opposed to my interest in bodies. It is commonly thought that the body becomes irrelevant when one is being 'mindful'. However, it is the body, its sensations and the breath that are the most common and reliable ways to access mindfulness or awareness of the present moment. Conveying how this works through writing is difficult. I found that the usual language and discourses of academic writing just didn't work. I found myself sabotaged by my internal critic labelling me 'confessional' or criticizing me in the voice of colleagues: 'too personal' and 'where's the evidence?' The writing had to be different. I had to allow other forms of authority to be present. I had to allow the writing to come from a different place in me: sensations, gut and heart. I know by my body's response when a patch of writing is flaccid or predictable. There is a tingle of excitement when it's not. What feels right in the writing is what feels fresh, beguiling (I can never use 'beguiling' without remembering my mother – it was a favourite of hers). What feels right in the writing is what is worth pausing for, savouring. What words might land in a place where the reader can feel it, act on it, be lifted, sustained or moved by it? These are embodied responses that I am seeking to value in writing.

Embodied responses are always worth noticing – if not following – in writing. The body provides clues about whether a piece of writing feels true or 'felt' (Ladkin, 2013). Our bodies also encourage us to take the reader's perspective and put a value not just on imparting ideas but doing so in ways that surprise or energize. Life is too short to condemn others to boring writing. It is too short for our own hard-won research to remain un-read. So, how might we write with, from and through the body?

The Practical and Physical: Ways of Writing with the Body

Why don't you have a bit of a stretch now? If you are sitting and it's possible to, get up and raise your

arms as high or as wide as they will go. As yoga practitioners, both of us recommend the benefits of stretching for life in general, not just for writing. As an embodied practice for writing, stretching and consciously breathing allows the blood to more freely circulate and facilitates the moving of oxygen around the system. Such breathing and stretching creates a virtuous circle, in which you can be more alive and also be more sensitive to what is enlivening you. Best of all, stretching can be done wherever you are. When you've returned your attention to this page, notice how your body is now feeling.

In this final section of the chapter we offer some practical suggestions concerning *how* you can write through the body. Though not a definitive list, they are practices and activities which have changed and (we hope) helped our writing.

Practices on the Page

In the contemporary context, it would be more accurate to title this section 'Practices on the screen' rather than 'Practices on the page', as so much academic writing now takes place directly on to computer screens through keyboards rather than on to material paper. (Indeed, this chapter is taking shape on a computer screen in Australia and one in the UK.) However, let's stay with the page for a moment, and notice the impact of its materiality on the writing process. In fact, let's experiment with a key 'practice on the page' right now.

Freefall writing

Find an actual piece of paper and a writing implement – a pen or a pencil. Also, find a way of setting a time limit of 5 to 10 minutes. Write at the top of the sheet of paper, 'I remember...'. Start the timer and now just WRITE whatever is prompted by those words, for 5, 7 or 10 minutes. It is very important that as you write you don't stop and edit what you've written. Don't go back to correct grammatical mistakes or spelling. For whatever time you have set yourself, just write. If you can't figure out what more you want to say in relation to the theme, 'I remember', just write, 'I can't think of anything more I want to say' and the embodied feelings around that until something else arises.

After your allotted time of writing in this way, reflect on your experience.

- How was it different from your experience of writing through a computer keyboard?
- Did you notice any changes in your breathing, your posture or body as you wrote in this way?
- What did you notice about what you wrote, itself? Did this process take you to places you had not anticipated?

A number of authors who teach creative writing, such as Natalie Goldberg (2005), Judy Reeves (2010) and Barbara Turner-Vesselago (2013), advocate the benefits of writing directly onto material paper. Among other advantages of this practice, handwriting establishes a different rhythm than the staccato action of typing through a keyboard. It may feel more fluid or more awkward. Either is good, potentially inviting something

different from you or from a different place in you. For some, handwriting can evoke childhood, or a sense of not being good at something. For others it can feel unruly, disruptive or freer. Julia Cameron describes this necessary stage in writing as the 'suicide of "nice" self' (1994: 7). Handwriting and the instruction not to go back and correct what you have written allows what you are writing to move forward uninhibited by critical voices requiring you to 'get things right'. When typing it is tempting to start correcting and perfecting, but this usually results in writing which stays safe and predictable. Instead, write fast, longhand. Use up all the paper, draw and squiggle if you like. Don't be tidy. Don't pause to edit. Go 'fear-ward' (Goldberg, 2005). If you feel your heart in your mouth or your stomach churning, keep writing.

This activity, known as 'Freefall Writing', is a bodily based practice Donna uses frequently, especially when she is writing an article and is not sure what needs to be said next. As she describes it:

In those instances I write 'What this article is trying to say is ...' at the top of the page and allow myself to write. I frequently discover a kernel of insight that I just can't unearth by 'thinking' about what I want to say. The bodily process of writing seems to allow things I don't 'know' rationally to emerge. Additionally, the longer I keep 'writing freefall', the quality of the material invariably improves. In my experience, a good deal of 'garbage' gets vented in the first three or four minutes of writing – all of the things I think I 'should say', or 'should know' – but the real gems come after those first few minutes. So setting your timer for ten, rather than five minutes – or for twenty, rather than ten minutes, can be very beneficial. Don't worry if while you are writing there is a critical voice haranguing you to stop because what you are doing is a waste of time. In my experience, I certainly waste enough time staring at an empty screen or wrestling the 'perfect sentence' to the page (or screen) when I'm writing 'normally'. Ten or twenty minutes of freefall writing is rarely a 'waste of time'; it is much more likely to be a liberation.

Stream of consciousness writing

As well as 'freefall writing', others, such as Julia Cameron (1995), advocate the benefits of starting each day with 'stream of consciousness' writing. Cameron calls these 'Morning Pages', and they are the equivalent of morning stretches for writers. Like freefall writing, they are done in longhand without stopping to correct or edit what has been written for a certain period of time or over a certain number of pages (Cameron suggests three). Unlike freefall writing, they are not focused on a particular topic, but instead aim to capture a less processed version of 'where you are' as you are writing them.

Sometimes writing stream of consciousness or freefall with the non-dominant hand can reveal new insights and directions for writing. In the *The Power of Your Other Hand* (2001), Lucia Capacchione describes how one's non-dominant hand can unmask insights the body knows, but which the mind inhibits from arising. Although, or perhaps because, slower, non-dominant hand writing is less at the mercy of the rational mind, insights become available which one doesn't rationally 'know' well enough to be able to articulate in writing.

Both of these practices recognize the entanglement of body and mind in the writing process. They frequently

tap into unconscious knowledge and understandings held in the body which the rational mind cannot access by just churning around itself. The physical practice of moving the hand across the page (rather than tapping into a keyboard) often allows a different, less censored part of us to be expressed. After a session of 'freefall writing' or 'morning pages', Donna often finds herself reflecting, 'I never knew I knew that!' For Amanda, handwriting often invites a more transgressive or courageous voice – the one that says 'dare I say that?'

'Sketchbooks' and journaling

As an another 'on the page' practice, Amanda always has handwritten notebooks 'on the go' which contain a mixture of reflections and notes about things she is reading, writing or planning. These notebooks are dated and she refers back to them when writing or doing research. They have a loose index on the front page where she lists what's in them – a key reference she made notes about, a set of teaching experiences or an article she was preparing at the time. In writing this chapter, Amanda went back through these notebooks and found quotes, sources and reflections about writing that helped her surface her own and others' prior wisdom about writing with bodies. In her research of composers, Donna found many musicians carried these 'sketchbooks'. Beethoven, for example, used to put everything into them: shopping lists, accounts, oh, and the odd bar of the Eroica Symphony!

What is it that is useful about these physical books with their handwriting, rather than a laptop? First, they each have a particular colour and 'look' which is an aid to remembering what is in them and why one bundle of insights, memories and experiences might be relevant to current writing. Second, the books can be written anywhere: in bed, the park, at the beach or on the train. They can be carried easily and they have a looser shape and feel that lends itself to recipes being added or reminders or observations that have no special status as 'work'. They don't have to 'earn their keep' as significant but can be sketchy and inconsequential.

Both of us also incorporate journaling (ideally in longhand) in our leadership teaching. In the 10-week MBA Leadership subject that Amanda teaches, students are encouraged to write in journals that are for their eyes only. While for students the idea of writing by hand about what's going on is often seen as a bit wacky or self-indulgent, the best response is not with argument but with the encouragement to treat longhand writing as simply a case study in trying something novel. They are invited to notice any defences or discomfort that may arise and if something different emerges on the page.

Allowing the body into the writing in the ways described above can enable some filters of the rational mind to be bypassed. Embodied knowing can often be 'taboo', a reservoir of less polite and more unruly desires, emotions or truths. But it also knows what 'matters', and in this way can fuel writing of power, whether that writing is for the academy or for wider audiences.

Further, and depending on what kind of writing we are engaged in, body practices like those described here can enable greater creativity and freedom. For example, studies of improvisation by jazz musicians suggest that in order to be creative we need to find ways of turning down the volume of the critical, evaluative parts of our brain that say 'you can't do that' or 'that sounded terrible, you are making a fool of yourself!' The way in

which good musicians give themselves permission to experiment is to be in their bodies and to feel the flow and pulse of music. Similarly, for other composers and visual and performing artists who value spontaneity, the challenge is to get out of their heads and allow their senses to guide them.

Now, you may be quietly – or not so quietly – grumbling to yourself there's no room for all this creativity and longhand in academic research! The next section offers suggestions for activities which will support a more embodied approach to writing, however disembodied your field of research is or committed you are to your customary way of writing.

Practices off the Page

Noticing embodied responses

What excites and enlivens your body when you are not writing? One of the important aspects of writing from the body is to take clues about important subjects for research from wider experiences that move or surprise you. This was the impetus for an article Donna wrote: 'Leading beautifully: How mastery, congruence and purpose create the aesthetic of embodied leadership practice' (Ladkin, 2008). She describes:

While attending a concert in which Bobby McFerrin was interacting with the audience, I became aware of just how engaged I was – and how engaged the other 5000 people in the Royal Albert Hall also seemed to be. McFerrin had a mostly middle class, white, British crowd clapping and stomping their feet in a most uncharacteristic way! This experience was the impetus for a subsequent body of work exploring the aesthetic dimension of leadership, and the body's role in both producing and experiencing charismatic leadership (Ladkin, 2006) and authentic leadership (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). The point here is that during every day experiences, our bodies are telling us what enlivens us, as well as what puts us to sleep.

Moving, stretching, walking

Writing can be deeply claustrophobic where, for example, on the fifteenth draft you find yourself back writing the identical sentence you jettisoned three versions ago. Among the best antidotes to 'stuckness' is to do something physical. It doesn't have to be elaborate to deliver benefits: try hunching your shoulders up and releasing them, slowly turning your head from side to side while consciously breathing, or clenching and relaxing your jaw. Simple physical 'moves' help 'move' our writing: by helping us connect to feelings we had missed; by permitting ourselves more looseness and freedom; or by reminding us of the 'big picture' of our lives, appreciative of having the space and opportunity to write.

This kind of embodied writing engagement is also fostered by attending to the sights, sounds, smells and feelings evoked by the physical world. What is your way of re-connecting to your materiality and that of the world around you? For Donna it is walking. Attending to the walk – the colours of trees and flowers, the sounds of grumbling truck engines or chattering birds, the smells of cut grass, the feel of the feet as they

reliably convey us across a field – is crucial. The rhythm of walking itself, as well as the way it brings you into contact with the wider world in its intricacies, offers inspiration and perspective when I'm feeling 'locked in' as a writer. While walking, Donna advises not to consciously 'think' about the writing. The benefits are in walking rather than using it as a way of just taking the whirring mind 'out', where it can whirl in the presence of fresh air.

Sometimes tearing oneself away from the writing can feel hard. In editing this chapter, Amanda has come to precisely this point here, saying 'If I just have 10 more minutes with this I should be able to work out the perfect form of words here!' More often than not the 10 minutes turn into 30 and the piece is no further forward. Immersing oneself in something physical is the necessary circuit breaker. For Amanda, this might also be a walk, or going for a bike ride or a swim if it's summer. Alternatively, it may be pulling a few weeds out of the garden, digging over the compost or having a conversation with her chooks (who don't care about writing but have other wisdom to share).

The important point is that writing which is alive, vivid and inspirational is informed by body-based sensitivity and apprehension. Inviting the body into writing happens both in the act of writing itself, and in the ways we move, breathe and notice when we aren't typing on a keyboard or holding pen in hand.

You, Your Body and Your Writing

Those of you reading this chapter (and having made it this far) will probably have absorbed – or had drummed into you – norms and conventions about how (academic) writing *should* be done. Our desire has been to unsettle those assumptions and to encourage you to engage with the intelligence of the body as well as the mind. There are many ways of writing with, from and through the body and we hope some of our examples inspire you to notice and experiment with your own bodily processes in writing.

Catching the wisdom of embodied knowing and bringing it into words on the page is not an easy achievement. Frequently, in the writing of this chapter, we have said to one another, 'but how do we convey that visceral notion in words?' Writing the 'body' of this chapter has itself been an embodied process, despite the fact that our bodies are separated by thousands of miles. Our own bodies have infused the writing, enabling each of us to help the other see, and sometimes ditch, 'naturalisms of style and attitude' that too often don't add much (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005: 975). We've let go a lot of footnotes. We've jettisoned a lot of capital 'R' research, guessing that you probably do lots of reading of that kind of writing already. Our own embodied tunings have prompted us to shorten sentences, remove adjectives, to de-clutter and be direct. As we swapped drafts, we invited the other 'body' to 'kill our darlings' – the ideas and bits of writing that we had become rather attached to but which turned out to be not so original or useful. Perhaps we should have killed more!

We know, and we know you know, the temptations of reproducing the customary discourses and disembodied languages of your disciplines. You may get published! But there are enough examples of embodied writing

that, one way or another, have won audiences, and equally importantly, have elicited deeper insight, even thrill and enjoyment. Good writing – powerful or surprising writing that has the capacity to change the reader's understanding of the world – comes from writing daringly through our bodies.

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