Unhoming Pedagogies: Collaborative Wandering and Wondering with Literature

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Introduction

'Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions'.[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari trace habituated modes of enquiry rooted in destination, origin and purpose before denouncing these very measures of directionality. From our background in Literary Studies, this article engages with possibilities of a similar *unhoming*, from the perspective of critical pedagogy in UK Higher Education. The authors reflect on a set of shared practices within a Literary Studies classroom in 2018, in which our disciplinary and pedagogical norms were unsettled and displaced, rerouting our expectations about how and by whom knowledge is produced in the Humanities. This also stimulated a critique of the Humanist principles which have repeatedly informed our institutional learning and teaching practices, and structured their evaluation.

This article offers case studies from the interlaced experiences of three students, and a narrative frame that speaks from an entangled authorial perspective (a collaborative 'we' that includes students and 'teacher'). Like Deleuze and Guattari, we seek to depart from the necessity of proceeding along tethered trajectories. At the same time, we struggle against the material and discursive infrastructure of the discipline and the institution we occupy. We set out uncertainly, via a slippery, retrospective auto-

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[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Rhizome' in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 3-27 (p. 28).

ethnography of one particular undergraduate course module: 'Contemporary Literature'.[2] This is a third-year optional module at our university, studied by up to eighteen Literary Studies students per year. The module description proposes to 'raise questions about literature's role in the conflicted political present'. It also sets out to foster students' 'openness towards the unknowable in literature and its entangled relationships in the present'.

In practice, this involved students in questioning assumptions about the discipline of Literary Studies, and the pedagogical habits to which we are accustomed. Unsurprisingly, this drew the module's participants into uncertain territory, exposing norms of practice to criticism and rupture. Together, we consider what was opened up by this invitation towards disciplinary questioning and process challenging. At the same time, we situate these incitive and unruly aspects of the module in the context of the cultural and economic politics of the contemporary HE institution.

This article begins in the present of writing, setting out our critical and pedagogical underpinnings as researchers. It then traces the contexts through which the module took shape for us as uncertain participants, including its vulnerabilities and

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[2] For two quite different ways of rethinking educational auto-ethnography see Ben Knights's chapter on writing as 'pedagogic knowledge' in English Studies in *Pedagogic Criticism: Reconfiguring University English Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 216-19; and Katy Warfield's article on digital visual media and education 'Becoming Method(ologist): A Feminist Posthuman Autoethnography of the Becoming of a Posthuman Methodology', *PhEmaterialism: Response-able Research and Pedagogy, Special Issue: Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology,* 10.2–3 (2019), 147-72. For a first-person account of artistic video practice, see Amba Sayal-Bennett, 'Diffractive Analysis: Embodied Encounters in Contemporary Artistic Video Practice', *Tate Papers,* 29 (2018). https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/29/diffractive-analysis [accessed 12 August 2019].

limitations. Finally, it engages with what continues precariously to emerge; both through our conscious attempts to disrupt hierarchical modes of learning, and our unwitting activations of such practices. During the module, these included, though were not limited to: peer teaching performed by students (the co-curation of seminars), extra-disciplinary engagements with a range of medias, and the uncanny tangle of agencies that were involved in a summative assessment entitled the 'Contemporary Project'.

In collaboratively analysing these experiences, we have found ourselves making use of anti-Humanist theoretical approaches and writing praxes that tend to be more commonly deployed by scholars in the Social Sciences – especially Philosophy of Education – than by those in Literary Studies.[3] In particular, we take up the idea of intra-active education and scholarship, drawing on the influential neologism of 'intra-action' coined by feminist philosopher Karen Barad.[4] Intra-action pushes back against the familiar term *interaction*, which presumes that entities (say, student and teacher, or poem and reader) are discrete and pre-existing, and only secondarily come together to inter-act. Our intra-active pedagogy understands authors, students, teachers and researchers as part of an entangled, emergent and uncertain continuum. This flow of

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[3] See Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi, *Going Beyond the Theory/Practice and Discourse/Matter Divides in Early Childhood Education: Introducing an Intra-active Pedagogy* (Routledge, 2010); Karin Murris and Vivienne Bozalek, 'Diffraction and Response-able Reading of Texts: The Relational Ontologies of Barad and Deleuze', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 32.7 (2019), 872-86; *Literacies, Literature and Learning: Reading Classrooms Differently,* ed. by Karin Murris and Joanna Haynes, (Routledge, 2019); *Feminist Posthumanisms, New Materialisms and Education,* ed. by Jessica Ringrose, Katie Warfield and Shiva Zarabadi, (Routledge, 2018).

[4] Karen Barad, 'Intra-Actions,' Interview by Adam Kleinmann in *Mousse* 34.13 (2012), 76-81 (p. 77). See also Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

agencies gives rise to fleeting by-products such as individual identification. The shifting, difference-rich way in which we have penned this piece seeks to chafe against the customary rationalist terms in which literary educational research is often conducted, and the largely stable voice in which it is usually presented.

Whilst applications of Baradian theory and practice flower across a range of anti-Humanist applications in Social Sciences and the Arts, they are rare in Literary Studies pedagogy.[5] Yet drawing on these practices helped us to behave undutifully toward structural logics which still tend to 'construct students [and tutors] as individual, rational actors'.[6] Both in the classroom and in our writing, we have been experimenting with unhoming the 'I' of customary narratives. We seek to 'replace . . . the unified, static, bounded and unwavering human subject with decentered, nomadic, multiple, incomplete, complex . . . subject(s) in the plural'.[7]

Simultaneously, we mobilise educational scholar Carol Taylor's influential concept of 'edu-crafting', which embraces classroom activities that involve physically making, handling and doing, rather than privileging the values of analysis and

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[5] See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Jayne Osgood and K. H. Robinson, *Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods: Generative Entanglements* (Bloomsbury, 2019); Ringrose, Warfield and Zarabadi (2018); Anna Hickey-Moody, Helen Palmer and Esther Sayers, 'Diffractive Pedagogies: Dancing across New Materialist Imaginaries', *Gender and Education*, 28.2 (2016), 213-29.

[6] Katie Strom and others, 'Editorial', *PhEmaterialism: Response-able Research and Pedagogy: Special Issue. Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology,* 10.2-3 (2019), 1-39 (p. 2). https://doi.org/10.7577/rerm.3649. See also Nathan Snaza and others, 'Toward a Posthumanist Education' in *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing,* 30.2 (2014), 39-55.

[7] Warfield, p. 148.

reflection.[8] Drawing on Taylor, we redescribe the performative power of material objects and artefacts in our education, focusing on the importance of doing and making together in literary learning contexts.

These thinkers have not only helped us tell a story about what has been at stake in the pedagogies we describe, but to narrate our tale in an uncustomary way – one that we hope Literary Studies scholars will find provoking, and also enabling. This set of parameters has also aided our attempt to unhome literary practices and undiscipline our vocabularies, both in and beyond classroom settings. We acknowledge that this is also an approach that presents problems. If we engaged in vulnerable, collaborative modes of knowing, these have been enabled and compromised by our disciplinary and institutional positionings. (One example is the institutional funding without which we would not have been able to pen this article!)[9] In writing up we have become increasingly alert to our socio-intellectual, material and financial enmeshment within the space of the university.

A Tangle of Tales: Co-authoring in the Humanities

In authoring this analysis, we faced the limitations of rationalist research praxis. How can a writing process that seeks intellectually to situate our reconfigurations of dominant practices of knowing also be unhomed? To what extent does taking a

reflective distance obscure as well as reveal those understandings that are still unfolding and tangled together? We have encountered drawbacks in marshalling the familiar structures of academic writing to narrate our experiences. For example, the three case studies in this article were initially the accounts of particular students who had taken the module – Sophie, Debs and Jas respectively. These stories were then substantially edited and revised as part of collaborative dialogue between the authors facilitated via google.doc.[10]

After experimenting with numerous writing voices, we proposed that each case study would identify an author by name, but denaturalise the impression of unitary individual experience by deploying an awkward plural first-person pronoun: *iii*. We have adopted this from the work of early childhood educational philosopher, Karin Murris, who uses the pronoun to challenge Humanist practices and discourses: '*iii* is a proposal to help bring about a different way of being, doing, and thinking'; it 'troubles the very nature of one-ness, two-ness, three-ness'.[11] Murris warns this 'might chafe at first, much like a new pair of shoes'.[12] Less chafing by far, the frame of our article was

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[10] See note 2. Also see Jayne Osgood, Carol Taylor, et al., 'Conferencing Otherwise: A Feminist New Materialist Writing Experiment' in *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* (2020), in which 'the storying practices presented in this paper were made possible by the vital materialism . . . of a shared google.doc.'

[11] Karin Murris, 'The Posthuman Child: *iii*' in *Philosophy of Childhood Today: Exploring the Boundaries*, ed. by David Kennedy and Brock Bahler (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017) pp. 185-97 (p. 194).

[12] Ibid., pp. 194-95. For us too, the chafing nature of this pronoun choice helps unsettle the idea that, as Murris puts it, the individual 'human is in charge of knowledge production and meaning making through language and discourses'. 'The use of the capitalized "I" . . . does not do justice to an ontology that assumes that there are "no

co-written and co-edited from the beginning, so it is narrated from a more customary first-person collective 'we'. Suffice to say, in the process of writing, we grew increasingly alert to the pitfalls of imposing fixed agencies and locations on experiences, and deliberately strayed from our disciplinary writing habits. We found ourselves wandering without an absolutely defined sense of destination, or of what, exactly, a destination *is*.

We were hoping to do justice to some of what we had strayed from during the module, too. First, the prevalent form of the singly-authored student essay. (It is worth observing that in Literary Studies the academic article is also very often a solo act of authorship.) Second, we deviated from another common disciplinary focus: the idea of the literary text as single-handed output; that of, say, 'Ted Hughes' or 'Alice Oswald'. Poems and novels still tend to be analysed as if they were produced in isolation, rather than drawing together agencies and multi-disciplinary techniques (as do both Hughes and Oswald). In contrast, in this article, we explore how knowledge in Literary Studies HE comes about through unplotted and unresolved wanderings. We track this process through collaborative writing, reading and teaching activities. We also ask: to what extent have others embraced collaborative and ongoing ways of knowing in Literary Studies HE? And could such techniques be developed more widely across the disciplines, through engaging with literature in its widest applications?

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individual independently existing entities or agents that pre-exist their acting upon one another"'. Murris is quoting Barad, 'Intra-actions', 77. The quotation about shoes is taken from Lenz-Taguchi, p. 64.

Our journey is one which engages with education as transpersonal and emergent – as 'intra-agential', to apply Karen Barad's neologism.[13] Such an orientation in itself is not new in our discipline (although the combined student-and-staff perspective is unorthodox). The Literary Studies classroom is, as critical pedagogy helpfully emphasises, a nexus of colliding, vulnerable, contradictory and baffling engagements.[14] Ben Knights observes, the identity of a student or tutor or text is 'hesitant, non-linear, tentative' and 'pedagogy is itself a boundary practice, entwined in a constant process of negotiation across borders'.[15] Nor is it a recent recognition that teaching literature, in practice, challenges 'the myth that individuals are autonomous thinkers and actors' which rests on a 'mistaken . . . conduit view of language'.[16] Nevertheless, the vulnerability in play in the classroom is not usually sustained in the ways pedagogical practices are narrated, analysed, and evaluated. Nor does the wonder of the literature seminar room seep into the language of marking criteria, assessment rubrics or teaching excellence.

[13] Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs* 28.3 (2003), 801-831 (p. 822).

[14] See Robert Eaglestone, *Doing English: A Guide for Literature Students*, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2000); Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (Continuum, 2011); Ben Knights, *Pedagogic Criticism: Reconfiguring University English Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[15] Ben Knights, 'Pedagogic Criticism: An Introduction' in *English: Shared Futures*, ed. by Robert Eaglestone and Gail Marshall (Boydell and Brewer, 2018), pp. 40-50 (pp. 44-49). These are complex borders, being material and conceptual, political and economic. Critical pedagogy often foregrounds the complex power relations within its knowledge and data-gathering processes, including its institutional, (trans)disciplinary and socio-cultural HE contexts. See Mary Breuing, 'Problematizing Critical Pedagogy', *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy,* 3.3 (2011), 2-23.

[16] C.A. Bowers, *Perspectives on the Ideas of Gregory Bateson: Ecological Intelligence, and Educational Reforms* (Eugene, OR: Eco-Justice Press, 2011).

In their co-authored article 'Encounters With Writing: Becoming', Zapata, Kuby and Thiel urge their readers to challenge Humanism within the university, by harnessing literature as a space of entangled encounters. An important aspect of the discipline of Literary Studies – at least as it has been understood and practiced since Modernism – is its recognition that readers and writers are 'both produced and producing, both material and discursive, with neither preceding the other'.[17] It has become commonplace to recognise the author as *becoming* through textual creation, as well as to see the teacher as *becoming* in the act of teaching, as part of a reciprocal dialogue with texts and students.[18] Indeed, literary learning spaces are often held to be powerfully unpredictable, porous and emergent.[19]

Reflection, however, is not the same as implementation. On the one hand, you would be hard-pressed to find a Literary Studies tutor who insisted that knowledge was a one-way street: literary knowledge is not *produced* by academics and authors and passively *absorbed* by students. 'For me, the ultimate hell . . . is textualized in the image

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[17] Angie Zapata, Candace R. Kuby, and Jaye Johnson Thiel, 'Encounters With Writing: Becoming-With Posthumanist Ethics', *Journal of Literacy Research*, 50.4 (2018), 478–501 (p. 479). See also Eaglestone 78-82: 'The conventional way of understanding a text as "what the author intended" makes a number of questionable assumptions about meaning. . . [W]e all read differently, and even authors can only offer an interpretation of their own texts. There is no one fixed meaning to be found' (p. 82).

[18] Stanley Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', in *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane Tompkins (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-100. See Robert Gregory's more humorous description: 'when it comes to teaching, many faculty members operate . . . flying by the seat of their pants and guiding themselves primarily by instinct or by repeating whatever worked yesterday', in 'Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Teacherly Ethos', *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture,* 1:1 (2001), 69-89 (p. 73).

[19] Giroux, p. 124-125.

of a brilliant instructor explicating a poem before a class of stupefied students' writes Robert Scholes.[20] On the other hand, Humanist values are common to many institutional assessment criteria (originality, clarity of thought, excellence), as well as visible in classroom practices, such as the routine 'delivery' of literature teaching via lectures and discussion-based seminars. Terms like delivery and excellence do not help students and tutors to value a creative, relational, playful praxis.

In pedagogical reflection, it is also immensely difficult to shift emphasis away from the rationalising authorial voice. This 'I' often assumes the authority of the tutor-critic: 'I see clearly now. . . I see how teaching can help theory',[21] 'Throughout this book I have argued that texts are always interpreted and open to different interpretations'.[22] In co-authoring our paper we wondered: how could we undiscipline ourselves from the tools and pronouns of meta-discursive reflection? Was it possible to write, act and speak with our vulnerability and uncertainty exposed? And to what extent could we find voices for things that often cannot be heard in instrumentalising and rationalising educational cultures?

Educational Strategies: Our Practices in the 21C Institution

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[20] Robert Scholes, *Textual Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 25. But Scholes continues: 'Our job is *not* to intimidate students . . . it is to show them the codes upon which all textual production depends' (pp. 24-25).

[21] Scholes, p. ix.

[22] Eaglestone, p. 78.

Robert Serpell lays out two popular Western metaphors for Higher Education practices: education as growth and education as journey.[23] For Serpell, these metaphors 'fail . . . to afford adequate recognition to the agency of the student'.[24] In the second metaphor 'the student is a traveller, the teacher is a guide . . . and the curriculum is a map or route'.[25] The curriculum does not foster curiosity in the student about the existence of potential and untrammelled academic territories; the teacher already has a pre-determined course along which to direct the student. In this view, HE is presented as a pre-existing, well-trodden path that students follow, guided by previous expertise. The unhoming radical agency of students does not fit within these parameters.

Similarly, Taylor and Harris-Evans propose that the transition from school to university traditionally positions 'students as being on a forward-moving conveyor-belt punctuated by critical incidents'.[26] Students are often envisaged as passive consumers of pre-packaged knowledge. They have somewhere to get to, and the job of HE is to conduct them there directly. Conveyor-belt pedagogy neither values nor accommodates the multidirectional knowledge-flows between students and lecturers. Authority is assumed to be going in one direction, as Serpell would object. In his view, the transition from university to the workplace is figured as another well-greased part in the

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[23] Robert Serpell, 'Bridging between orthodox Western higher education practices and an African sociocultural context', *Comparative Education,* 43.1 (2007), 23-51 (p. 24).

[24] Ibid., p. 25.

[25] Ibid., p. 25.

[26] Carol Taylor and J. Harris-Evans, 'Reconceptualising Transition to Higher Education with Deleuze and Guattari', *Studies in Higher Education,* 43.7 (2018), 1254-1267 (p. 1256). https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1242567

production line. It is now de rigueur that 'a university curriculum should include projects that require students to engage in learning activities outside the walls of the academy' because this is 'a way of smoothing the transition from college to industry'[27].

Observing some of these issues in HE, the 2017 *NMC Horizon Report* points to a possible remedy, which lies in recognising that students are part of *maker culture*: 'rather than being regarded as mere participants . . . the embedding of maker culture . . . has made [students] active contributors to the knowledge eco-system'.[28] Many Universities in the UK linguistically acknowledge a demand for student-staff reciprocity in their educational strategies. Our own, for example, sets out a link between its being an 'ambitious, strongly inter-disciplinary, international university', and its claim that, 'at the heart of our approach is a strong supportive partnership between staff and students'.[29] A recent Education Strategy 'sets out our plans for future excellence in this challenging international environment', by taking heed of 'innovative' global methods and business partnerships, and by involving students in such partnerships.

On a semantic level, such narratives present the ideal University as an institution which is eager to dissolve boundaries between educator and educated in order to produce a collaborative, student-led research hub. Yet such ideals are not always visible on the ground. They are hard to implement in large-scale first-year lectures, in which information is often expected to move from a single lecturer to a hundred-strong

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[27] Serpell, p. 24.

[28] Becker S. Adams and others, *NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition* (The New Media Consortium, 2017), p. 6.

[29] 'Education Strategy 2014-2020', www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/academicservices/educationenhancement/educationstrategy/pdfs/Website_Education_Strategy_2014Final.pdf

audience of predominantly silent, note-taking students. Even undergraduate seminars

tend not to be spaces in which students engage reciprocally in knowledge creation with

staff or feel responsible for the curation of the educative space. The *NMC Horizon*

Report observes that 'institutions continue to be challenged to generate these

opportunities in spaces and with paradigms that still lean on traditional practises'.[30] So,

practically speaking, how might students and staff imagine an alternative educative

praxis geared around the power of their creative partnership? And are these alternatives

to traditional forms of praxis more desirable, dynamic or engaging? In the following

sections, we consider the case of our module 'Contemporary Literature' against the

aforementioned official statements about education, student-staff collaboration, and the

lived reality of the contemporary HE environment.

Shaky and Leaky: Adventures with the Disciplines

Carol Taylor writes that 'one of the hallmarks of the development of universities has

been the arrangement of knowledge into autonomous subjects and disciplines, each with

their own integrity and distinctiveness'.[31] However, during the Contemporary Literature

module, the apparent autonomy of literary study was repeatedly perforated and

hybridised. A familiar description of such teaching would be 'interdisciplinary'[32]. But to

claim modular interdisciplinarity – or even educational boundary-crossing – would

encourage the impression that literary study could be discrete from other, autonomous

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[30] Becker S. Adams and others, p. 6.

[31] 'Adventures', p. 374.

[32] Knights refers to literary pedagogy as a 'boundary practice'; teaching involves handling 'a fine mesh of networks' ('An Introduction', p. 49).

extra-literary disciplines, and that it was unusual for literary practice to reach 'beyond' itself.

Barad has observed that the term *inter* misleadingly 'presumes the prior existence of independent entities'.[33] We characterise our pedagogical engagement as *intra*-active, where worldliness exists in all our literary doings. Naturally, a grounding in literary study had prepared us to treat works of literature as 'dynamic . . . reconfigurings' and '(re)articulations',[34] but how could we also articulate our narrating researcher-selves and our critical pedagogies in this light? In writing this piece, we became increasingly aware that the coherent voice of literary authority we had been trained to assume was a meeting point of unfixed and uncertain forces. No single discipline had instructed us how to analyse and record the way our practiced understandings and our learned subject horizons shook.

Donna Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledges' help elaborate the kind of struggles we underwent.[35] Haraway's term refers to knowledge that is specific to a given situation; one which accounts for the shaky agency of the producer of knowledge and the object of study. In *How Like a Leaf*, Haraway describes a process of 'diffraction' which involves flagging up the myriad ways in which the 'I' that records and observes is 'not a static relationality but a doing'.[36] Diffractive methodologies are recording processes that have largely been developed in response to the paucity of

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[33] 'Performativity', p. 815.

[34] 'Performativity', p. 818.

[35] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies,* 14.3 (1988), 575–99 (p. 575).

[36] Donna Haraway, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (Routledge, 2000), p. 803, emphasis added.

practices of critique and reflection, which are grounded in a representational paradigm that encourages a disinterested, view-from-nowhere perspective on the part of the authoritative researching subject.[37] Both in the learning and research writing contexts, we questioned the subject as a singular point of knowledge. This has made us do educational research anew, using a different language from that to which we were accustomed.

In the literary seminar room too, textual criticism often demands a particular sort of reflective distance to be placed between the individuals performing the analysis and the materials under study. In years one and two of our Literary Studies degree, weeks had often been dedicated to a particular text and a particular theory. This produced the impression that theory functions as a static plane upon which texts can be compared. But in the Contemporary Literature module, something else was taking place.

Contemporary Literature did not encourage students disinterestedly to apply theories to texts. It also resisted pairings of text and theory. Each week was titled thematically, such as 'Ali Smith: Sexuality and Structure' or 'South Africa: Mapping Resistance'. However, we considered these themes (such as mapping resistance) in the light of readings from previous weeks on this module, earlier years of our degree programmes, and in relation to events outside institutional life. This built up a rhizomatic understanding of literature, in which, 'any point . . . can be connected to anything other, and must be'.[38] The module became a porous space of encounters,

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[37] Vivienne Bozalek and Michalinos Zembylas, 'Diffraction or Reflection? Sketching the Contours of Two Methodologies in Educational Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 30.2 (2017), 111-127 (pp. 111-14).

[38] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 7.

across and within knowledge forms. Knowledge was an ongoing process, not a static deliverable.

In one instance, students worked with torn out scraps from recent magazines, seemingly unrelated to the literature under study, which they tried to connect with quotations from literary texts that had been circulating in the seminar room. Physically handling these torn strips and tracing their links with poems, advertisements, film, life writing, bodies, theories, and more, resembled Taylor's concept of 'edu-crafting'.[39] Taylor defines this as a version of *craftivism*: a 'movement which uses craft for critical thinking, questioning and considered creative activism'.[40] Taylor applies craftivism to education to propose the value of 'bodies, things and concepts in motion'[41]. Craftivist learning 'destabilizes student assessment by provoking the production of things and objects not just written assignments'.[42]

In seminars, collaging magazine cut outs, making palimpsests, drawing, moving around the room and taking part in group projects assembled on A3 sugar paper meant that popular culture, theory, novels, random objects in the room, and our bodies revealed themselves as entangled in particular intra-actions (see Fig. 1). As such, the supposed boundaries between disciplinary knowledges and knowledge practices leaked. Such techniques also denaturalised the tired binary of theory/practice. The porosity of literary phenomena shifted students' perception of theory away from the traditional

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[39] Carol A. Taylor, 'Edu-crafting a Cacophonous Ecology: Posthumanist Research Practices for Education' in *Posthumanist Research Practices in Education*, ed. by Carol Taylor and Christina Hughes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) pp. 5-24 (p. 20).

[40] Ibid., p. 20.

[41] Ibid., p. 20.

[42] Ibid., p. 21.

notion that it is something that is 'applied'. Now, theory was *doing*; a way of wonderingly practicing together: 'a joyously messy process of differential patterns of matterings'.[43]

[Insert Fig. 1 here]

Figure 1. Contemporary Literature students 'edu-crafting' with Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Photo by Natalie Pollard, 2018.

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[43] Taylor, 'Adventures', p. 375.

Case Study 1:

Sophie: The Co-curated Seminar

These 'differential patterns of matterings' became especially palpable in a weekly seminar leading activity designed and run by students, which replaced more explicitly orthodox student presentations. In previous experiences of traditional student presentations, knowledge was almost always showcased (monovocally) and transferred (unidirectionally) from those assuming the role of presenter to those acting as audience. The process follows predictable Humanist models of knowledge transfer, which imagine knowledge to be static, and which contain little collaborative interplay. In contrast, the Contemporary Literature module required students to occupy multiple roles. We moved between the positions of teacher and taught, presenter and audience, as we took it in turns to inspire peer learning. In seminars, students did this in organising small task-based learning groups and polyvocal whole-room activities. These were not always entirely successful! But this was in itself important. In learning how to teach one another – and how not to – ideas, agencies and authorities were in a state of flux, as part of collaborative praxis.

During my seminar leading session, *iii* designed an activity that *iii* hoped would encourage my fellow students to engage with uncanny materials that were not part of the core literary readings that week, but which *iii* felt were entangled with them. The set reading was a 2008 short story collection called *The First Person and Other Stories*, by the UK-based author Ali Smith. The collection presents an uncanny double of family life. *iii* brought to the seminar group examples of *unheimlich* domestic photography from Francesca Woodman's contributions to the 1972 exhibition *Womanhouse*. Both artists use their work to interrogate the nuclear family and women's domestic roles. *iii*

asked students to consider, in pairs, two questions. In what ways did Woodman's photographs and Smith's short stories use comparable techniques? How far were the uncanny images used by the two artists entangled? Working across media, students explored the boundaries between the two disciplines, and discussed the points of commonality and difference. In Rosi Braidotti's nomadic terminology, this allowed us to see the texts as 'enact[ing] a flow of positions, a crossing of boundaries; an overflowing into a plenitude of affects'.[44] The class discussion involved a diffractive reading, in which students tested out new ways of coming-to-know. Learning together how to *read* photographs, we engaged with materials that were both extra-curricular and extra-disciplinary. Someone then asked: why stop here with photographs? We began to make collages from photographs and extra-disciplinary texts, experimenting with the openness of the course materials to 'overlap' and 'cross[…] boundaries' (see Fig. 2). The activity enabled a view of education as a rhizomatic, diffractive process that has no beginning or end; that can be entered at any point.

[Insert Fig. 2 here]

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[44] Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Polity, 2006), p. 189.
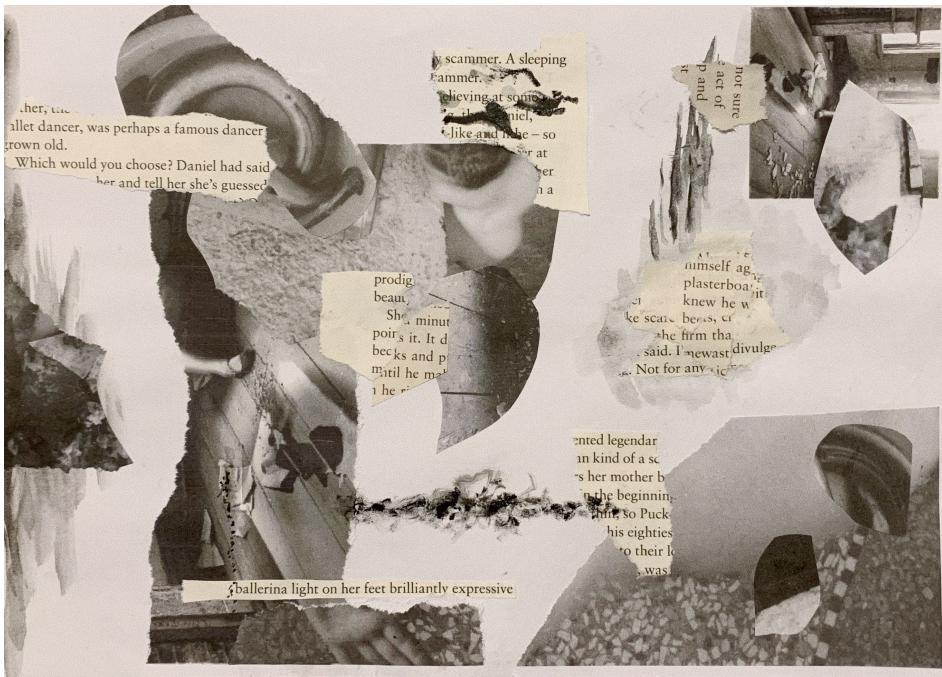
Figure 2. 'Collaborative Student Collage (2018). Photo by Deborah Ashfield.

Additionally, the seminar leading broke down conventional student/lecturer hierarchies. It mimicked the 'acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system' of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome', in that two students took it in turns to co-curate the first twenty minutes of the seminar.[45] *iii* was experimenting with the educational dynamics of the room, without the lecturer's intervention. This anti-hierarchical teaching experimented with what *iii* am tempted to describe as pedagogical flat ontology: it 'makes no distinction between the types of things that exist but treats all equally'.[46]

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[45] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 21.

[46] Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, Or, What It's Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis: MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 17.

A comparable anti-hierarchical effect was created in breaking the fourth wall of the classroom. In one instance, the lecturer drew attention to the problems of the module's own syllabus (which was not presented as correct, given or even representative). We were asked whether we felt it was misleading that our syllabus described one week as focusing on 'South African' writers. This issue arose with particular prominence because a number of the literary figures under study that week – amongst them J. M. Coetzee and Zoe Wicomb – had relocated to conduct their careers in the UK and Australia. How would we imagine describing things more accurately?

A constant questioning of the structure and politics of disciplinary conventions – especially those of the module – involved students in treating HE syllabi and pedagogies as partial and political, not as given. This was not so much education that we were *receiving*, but rather – because it was under our constant challenge and revision – it was education that we were crucial in *performing and changing*.

Case Study 2

Debs: Assessments: Projecting, Throwing Forth

One of the module's summative assessments, the Contemporary Project, is likewise worth unpicking as a model for diffractive encounters. Alerting students to the blurry parameters of the literary curriculum, it invited a focus on the extra-disciplinary agencies of the texts under study. The Project rubric called for student engagement with the 'live art, culture and politics of the contemporary era', and shifted pedagogical practices beyond the set text and published page. It encouraged students to stray into the tangible, broader fields of the biosphere, technology, culture, politics and across media. It involved connecting live events students had attended with their learning on the module.

The Project invited responses in the form of three short, written tasks, each of 1,000 words. Even this proposed format was resistant to more customary Literary Studies assessment structures (i.e. the long analytical, comparative essay). Instead, a range of engagements was possible. One task called for student analysis of course texts in the light of their own creative writing and self-critique. Another invited literary non-fictional writing reflecting on work experiences beyond the University, whether paid or voluntary. Some tasks asked students to conduct reviews of digital literature, or gallery exhibitions, or scientific talks or live performances they had attended. Others involved interviewing a creative practitioner or public figure and finding links between the transcript and our modular study.

The Project was divided into four sections, titled Visits, Creative Responses, Comparisons, and Interactions. In particular, the prompt to encounter an environment as a *visitor* – whether that environment takes the form of a museum, a digital platform, a reading, a rock pool, a lecture, or a performance – stimulated my curiosity. How would *iii* engage, as a student of literature, through an untaught lens, with these unconventional, unorthodox sorts of texts? And how far would these experiences be in conversation with the other texts on the module?

[Insert Fig. 3 here]

Figure 3. Alicja Kwade: WeltenLinie. 2017. Powder-coated steel, mirror, stone, bronze, aluminium, wood, petrified wood. Hayward Gallery, London. © Alicja Kwade, courtesy 303 Gallery, New York, Installation view © Hayward Gallery, London, 2018, © Mark Blower.

My answer considered the ecological implications of minimalism in a multi-medial sculpture created by Polish-German artist Alicja Kwade (see Fig. 3). *iii* considered how the minimalist ecologies displayed in Kwade's sculpture resonated with those in a fictional text by Italian author, Italo Calvino: *Invisible Cities* (1972). Reading Kwade's sculpture through an ecocritical lens, and considering it in the light of Calvino's geopolitical prose, demanded a particular resistance to 'boundary-specific practices'.[47] It also necessitated my engagement with the intertwined agencies of

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[47] Serpil Opperman, 'From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism', *Relations*, 4.1 (2016), 23-37 (p. 27).

'environmental relations, perviousness of . . . boundaries, and social-ecological-scientific networks within which humans and nonhumans, knowledge practices, and material phenomena' intra-act.[48] As a reading and studying subject of literature and art, *iii* was 'deeply enmeshed' with what *iii* analysed.[49]

Such literary practices reveal the permeability of the disciplinary binaries between literature and visual art, and also between artistic and ecological politics. They also point to the spatial, material and theoretical entanglements between *iii* (as human) Kwade's installation (as sculpture), and Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (as literary text). This encouraged my diffractive reading of the module texts, of artistic and political media, and of the nonhuman phenomena which give rise to these.

This form of assessment enabled new understandings of our curricular texts by inviting engagements beyond the page, and thus began to initiate small, intra-active cuts into our disciplinary learning. However, this format still leaves the potential to be developed further. Because the Project invited explicitly written responses, it restricted otherwise embodied forms of intra-disciplinary thought and response. If actively encouraged, such responses may have the potential to open up far more playful and curious encounters between modular and extra-modular texts.

Case Study 3

Jas: Assessment as Curriculum Rewriting

Another section of the Project was listed as 'Interactions'. One of the questions in this section asked students to design their own original module curriculum for Contemporary Literature. This comprised an annotated week-by-week primary reading

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[48] Ibid., p. 32.

[49] Ibid., p. 26.

list, a list of key further readings, and a brief analytical justification. The assessment rubric seemed to invite a self-conscious, critical justification of the pedagogical choices made, as well as an expanded alertness to what could constitute Contemporary Literature.

This activity resembled the other Project tasks insofar as it prompted student engagement with the agencies of live art, culture, politics and nonhuman forms. But it also specified students' socio-critical engagement with pedagogical ethics in curriculum design:

> Why do we need to study these texts, with these secondary resources, in this way, today? What is pedagogically and socially important about the readings you have selected, and the way that students will explore them? Please engage with quoted secondary resources in the field of teaching theory/pedagogy and/or editorial theory in your argument.

This rubric was more explicit in encouraging students to identify their own creative role in pedagogical production. It invited alertness to their co-authorship of the educative space. In doing this part of the assessment, entanglements became clear between the act of *taking* a module and that of *taking responsibility* for it. Pedagogy was not pre-shaped by lecturers for students to absorb. Rather pedagogy was now performed by students; a performance which *iii* would now undertake with the needs of others in mind – not just the need to get a good degree result!

iii had been inspired by the way that Contemporary Literature enabled students to engage much more widely with the literary, which included numerous kinds of sources, materials, sites, and creative agencies. A literary work wasn't just borne from one all-powerful human. *iii* wanted to curate a module plan which also acknowledged that the creator of a curriculum – like the tutor of a module – was far from a single-handed authoritative source. The students of my envisaged module would learn not only

from the texts *iii* selected, but the contexts *iii* did not control. These would include the vulnerable physical realities of our environment – so open to threat and change – and the institutional organisation of bodies, space, equipment, privilege, power. They would include our university's compliance with recognised processes of knowledge dissemination and assessment; its need to maintain its place in the sector; its inclusions and exclusions; its tutors' and students' willingness to fall into line with the strategic metadiscourses generated as mission statements, education strategies and so on. At the same time, in doing this task, *iii* was (perhaps for the first time?) performing a critical pedagogical act from the supposedly empowered position of teacher-convener. *iii* was creating a module and considering and justifying my selection of texts, teaching practices and overall design. This was an uncanny authority to inhabit.

Part of what *iii* hoped my module could create was a safe educative space where Literary Studies students would work with diverse objects and be able to *do* diffractions. Students would engage with a range of materials and experiment with what emerged. My proposed module was called 'Diffractive Encounters: Human Flow and Transitionality', a title that arose from my own undergraduate readings of Jacob Edmond's article 'Diffracted Waves and World Literature'[50] and radical artist Ai Weiwei's visual essay *Human Flow.*[51] Edmond uses the term 'diffractive iteration' to propose a less Humanist method of encountering world literature which 'demands a consideration of matter, medium, history and culture as dynamic interactive and intra-active processes', and which is alert to its own 'interference patterns'.[52] *iii* planned for students taking my proposed module to consider, week by week, a range of such global

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[50] Jacob Edmond, 'Diffracted Waves and World Literature', *Parallax,* 20.3 (2014), 245-257.

[51] *Human Flow*, dir. by Ai Weiwei (Participant Media, 2017).

[52] Edmond, pp. 246-47.

'interference patterns' and literature's relationships with them. By setting up diffractive pedagogic encounters with literary flux, transitionality and global circulation, *iii* hoped that students would become attentive to the complex materialities at play in the study of literature. *iii* selected primary texts that palpably intra-acted with (so-called) secondary and tertiary materials from across the world and across media, seeking to unhome assumptions about the autonomy of Literary Studies and the discrete agencies of its students and teachers. Perhaps this would be enough to signal the play of nonhuman and human agencies giving rise to 'our' texts and environments?

Doing this task provoked my desire to subvert hierarchical learning models and instrumentalising approaches to literature and its assessment. *iii* wanted to create a structure in which students would find themselves engaged by very different kinds of works; a structure that would make it possible to steer away from reflex assumptions about what was permitted and from normative knowledge protocols. However, what also became clear was that this was a difficult task with its own vexations and contradictions.

Whilst my proposed module attempted to shake up habituated praxis for its imagined students, the structural constraint of a week-by-week plan also necessitated a subcategorization of areas of thought. Additionally, in describing this Project task as a *module plan* – a familiar structure to students of literature – the plan remained very human-centric. Had the tutor's rubric been set up differently, *iii* might have gone much further in acknowledging the nonhuman agencies that give rise to the construction of Literary Studies as a discipline and subject of study.

Nevertheless, this curriculum-redesigning task emulated in microcosm what might be taken forward more broadly in HE to help inspire anti-Humanist assessment practices. At least *iii* had found myself, as an undergraduate, actively questioning my

Humanist, hierarchical understandings of what counted as knowledge acquisition and display. Rather than automatically accepting and conforming to the norms of curricula, assessment, and institutional power, *iii* was now using the assessment process to test out ways of interfering with – unhoming – the protocols of knowledge acquisition to which *iii* had until now often unwittingly submitted.

Emergings: Undutiful Potentialities

In a 2018 article, Carol Taylor muses briefly on an imaginative HE pedagogical model, characterised by 'patchiness'.[53] Taylor's small series of 'what happens if[s]' – hypothetical musings on methods of 'doing' learning in the HE environment – begins to make small, speculative, intra-active 'cuts' into the anthropocentric HE model.[54] This process allows for 'patchiness' to occur, as opposed to imposing a specific narrative of progress. The process leans back into the very system from which it creates a diversion.

As we have collaboratively penned this article, we have become increasingly alert to the problems involved in conducting pedagogic reflections which assume a human agency that works intentionally and alone. In writing, we are still part of everything that happened; entangled across multiple spaces and times. We have not wished to take a unitary position of distance and hindsight from the module or from our earlier experiences as uncertain, finding-our-feet participants. However, it has not been easy to steer our writing from simply 'representing' what we thought our intentions were. Part of what we hope to do is show the dynamics of knowledge as the patchy and contradictory group intra-actions we had practiced. This has involved struggling to

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[53] 'Adventures', p. 373.

[54] Ibid., p. 374.

unlearn our drive to focus on the rational self-expression of researcher and participants, tutor and students.

In practice, this means the article disrupts the narrative coherence of its analytic account. The effect on the figures under study – who are also those teaching and learning, writing and researching – results in a tangle of voices, authorities and perspectives. This prevents a reader's easy identification with the subjects of the piece (tutor and students). In this way, our writing is likely to draw readers' attention to the complexities of navigating their way through it.

Both our classroom-based activities and our collaborative writing practices have changed our relations with each other, as well as with disciplinary protocol, and with the materials at hand. Throughout, we encouraged each other in unhabituated and undisciplinary ways of engaging with literature. This helped us foster new ways of appreciating that what we learned did not originate from our selves. It arose from the intra-action of the elements in our educational flight paths: literary texts, institutional space, desire, the graphic and plastic arts, the politics and economics of classroom design, language hierarchies, our drawings and printed pages, theoretical discourse, our bodies, university strategies, anxiety about our future careers, advertising, and much more.

Working in this way has enabled us to form new material insights into pedagogic practices and research writing modes. Our paper has been produced by a tangle of agents, most obviously the named co-authors of this article, but also the entire cohort taking the Contemporary Literature module and its previous participants, as well as the literary texts, theories and many diverse extra-modular materials that comprised our fray. For this reason, this paper has raised questions regarding what – as well as who – is responsible for generating knowledge. It has prompted us to consider the active

role that material forces play within the process of literary education and its theorisation.

What we have produced – knowledge? a provisional model of experimental practice? – is contingent and collaborative. Our methodology seeks to enable embodiment and materiality, uncertainty and wonder to be integrated into educational and research processes. Our hope is that this offers glimpses into and provocations about the undutiful potentialities of pedagogic criticism. We also hope it can unlock the potential for creative literary pedagogical engagements to find resonance in wider HE contexts, including beyond the Humanities. At the same time, the process of working together has been highly challenging and humbling. We remain curious about the ways in which we were steered by textual encounters, as well as unhomed by an intra-agential awareness, which continually gives rise to us and our educative encounters.[55]