

Wandering Feasts: Relational Orientations in Academic Writing

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Based on a number of PhD workshops called Wandering Feasts, in collaboration between Monash University and Design School Kolding, this article explores academic writing as both a mode and a method of inquiry. The article both points to and performs five creative-relational orientations to alternative academic writing: Performativity in challenging dominant ways of knowing and representing knowledge in the academy; emergence as mindfully holding open ideas of purpose and destination in favour of not-knowing; reciprocity in collectively creating charged encounters that spark new ways of knowing; improvisation in building social space where we felt comfortable jamming and givenness as a fundamental playfulness in which an academic community nurtures the courage to give-of ourselves. The article is in itself a manifestation of exploration writing in a playful and loosely defined process.

Keywords: writing, performativity, emergence, reciprocity, improvisation, givenness, playful.

Hello all,

We would like to invite you to participate in an online pilot workshop series to collectively explore sensory, embodied, creative and practice-based methods and modes of representation.

Starting in August 2021 and running over 4 x 3-hour Zoom sessions, this series of *Wandering Feasts* workshops will bring together PhD candidates from Monash's Emerging Technologies Research Lab (Australia) and Design for Play at Design School Kolding (Denmark) to experiment, share and advance our own research using playful methods and modes of representation. We will work together to develop a range of approaches that treat paradox, tension, ambiguity, messiness and uncertainty as generative rather than problematic.

This workshop is the first of a range of international collaborations we are developing to support and enhance PhD training - we really hope you can join us!

In fall 2021, scholars from Design School Kolding in Denmark and Monash University in Australia brought together 16 PhD students to experiment with genres in academic research and writing titled *Wandering Feasts*. The gathering was seeded by an earlier invitation by Helle Marie to Shanti to speak to Kolding PhD students, after which they knew they wanted to continue the conversation. The circle grew as Helle Marie invited Anne-Lene, and as Shanti invited Lisa, who invited Stacy. The organic generation of the group was simply based on each person inviting another who they enjoyed thinking with, and who they thought would welcome an exploratory exchange with their PhD students and each other. The email that opens this article communicates a sense of the collaborative and open-ended approach we adopted.

Whilst there was no overall plan to include particular disciplines or perspectives, the participants represented an interdisciplinary community rooted in design, play, geography, music and theatre and performance because of the academic leaders' orientations. We met on Zoom and used Miro.com to communicate, engage and reflect on a series of playful activities, some of which we had used before, and some of which emerged from the group's interests, including: "making a salad" as a conversation about research methods, "having a dialogue with a piece of paper" to reflect on design processes, and "affinity hunting" to generate embodied attunements to the unspoken and sensory dimensions of research practices. These activities were followed by writing sessions that focused on new forms and multiple modalities for sharing academic insights, dialogues and texts by "experimenting all the way" as Bang & Eriksen (2015) phrase it.

Being deeply involved in playful activities as a provocation to consider research methods and processes across disciplines created opportunities to write across modalities, to use forms and discourses outside traditional academia, and to be associated with others doing those exercises¹. Furthermore, the playful activities generated a social space which, according to the PhD students, eliminated the structures of hierarchy, power and logic that conditioned how they normally write.

In this article, we engage writing as both a mode and method of inquiry (Richardson & St Pierre 2005) and as a means of manifesting on the page the affects and effects of *Wandering Feasts*. We write playfully and curiously about our encounters and embodiments in search of the emergent, the unexpected and the unknown. We are in good company in seeking a break from the "the routines of representation" (Pollock, 1998, p. 75) in academic writing, joining those who take performative (Pollock, 1998; Pelias 2018), autoethnographic, autotheoretical and autofictional (Denzin, 2018; Holman Jones, 2016; Fournier, 2021; Dix, 2017; Zwartjes, 2019; Lévesque-Jalbert, 2020), fictocritical (Gibbs, 2005; Taussig, 2018) and affective (Berlant & Stewart, 2017; Stewart, 2007) approaches (among others) to both the doing and the representation of scholarship.

¹ We have all experienced how the academic tradition of writing is deeply rooted in habituated ways of not just writing, but also setting up meetings, planning content, making introductions and responding to one another [all of us].

In what follows, we seek to align the valence of the writing with the nature of the experience of working together. Instead of presenting a systematic or complete account of alternative approaches to academic writing, we allow ourselves to pay close attention to the unnoticeable but important aspects of making a trustworthy, fun and productive workspace online, across national borders and interdisciplinary fields. We continue the exploration of working-writing together in a playful way, not only applying writing as a way to document what we have done, but to keep the practice going.

Like the Wandering Feasts workshops, our writing enacts a “critical mode of affirmation” (rather than an evaluative mode of thinking and being)² that pays attention to “the forms and forces of moving bodies and events [and] invites experiments with description and with the conceptual” (Stewart, 2017, p. 197). In particular, this article develops five conceptual orientations to academic writing, each of which attune to the creative-relational aspects of doing scholarship—the encounters and embodiments that take us “beyond ourselves, into the other, into becoming other, into the more-than” (Wyatt, 2019, p. 43). These orientations are *performativity*, *emergence*, *reciprocity*, *improvisation* and *givenness*: Performativity in how we challenged dominant ways of knowing and representing that knowledge in the academy, focusing our attention on materialising here, on the page, Wandering Feasts as a play-ful community of doings and beings. Emergence as mindfully holding open ideas of purpose and destination in favour of not-knowing - this was an animating play-force of building ourselves as a community with common interests, even as we worked out what those interests were. Reciprocity in how we collectively created charged encounters that sparked new ways of knowing, doing, being and learning. Improvisation in

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2002) termed this orientation to thinking and making *paranoid*; it is anticipatory, mimetic (committed to replication), supported by ‘strong’ (generalising, even totalising) and pessimistic theory determined to avoid surprise and pleasure. ‘Paranoid’ approaches to scholarship and academic writing are reductive and suspicious, aim to scale down inquiry and representation to the quantifiable by searching for negative effects, place faith in exposure and falsification and seek the “doable and teachable” (Stewart, 2017, p. 143). By contrast, reparative orientations seek pleasure, hold together contradiction, are interested in the local and specific, are invested in plenitude and amelioration and are motivated by love (Sedgwick, 2003). As an approach to academic writing, Wandering Feasts are both *constitutive*—they make us (we don’t make them) and *propositional*—they compose new worlds and relations. In this way, our writing constitutes and composes a queer and feminist refusal of traditional approaches to research and academic writing. This is something we elaborate below.

how we built a social space where we felt comfortable jamming, taking turns, listening and building on other's ideas while remaining open to the unforeseen. And givenness as a fundamental playfulness in which an academic community nurtures the courage to give—of ourselves, of our curiosities and unknowingness—without asking for anything in return.

In relation to this special issue on making and breaking genre conversations in academia, in the rest of this article we illustrate how it is possible to experiment with setting up an online academic workspace and scaffolding approaches to writing as the process develops. We do so by each addressing an orientation, and also by extending and bouncing off each other's accounts.

Performativity – Stacy Holman Jones

The invitation to come “collectively explore sensory, embodied, creative and practice-based methods and modes of representation” comes just as the 6th lockdown in Melbourne is announced. The invitation to come play is a thrilling prospect on the eve of yet another lockdown.

Through *Wandering Feasts*, we come together around our shared commitments to “to play³, to design, to work collaboratively, and to go along - to try things with as-yet-unknown outcomes and not-yet-explicit insights” as Shanti puts it. This coming together without defined outcomes and anticipated insights feels “a bit radical, maybe even naughty.” I wonder if it feels that way because while we don't yet know what we will discover or what that knowledge will tell us about practice or modes of representation, we *do* know who we want to engage with and how we want to play. Such necessary and appropriate uncertainty reminds me of what Dwight Conquergood says about dominant modes of knowing in the academy:

“knowing that,” and “knowing about.” This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print.

³ What Stacy is saying about play and design - it is important to add that I thought of the process as we were designing *for* play, setting up a way of being together which made playing possible. And a part of that setting was a space where “what if...” was possible, and it was enacted bodily, socially and through materials among all of us, not planning for others to play, but designing for everybody to be able to play. [Helle Marie].

This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: “knowing how,” and “knowing who.” This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things. (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146).

To focus on the active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection of coming to know in the thick of things is to focus on doing even when we don’t know what we are DOING. It is to focus on the performativity of the event as it unfolds. What a perspective-shifting idea. What a playful invitation!

Performativity challenges the very notion of a stable, coherent, choosing subject that precedes and directs our actions and movements in the world (Butler, 1990). A performativity of practice challenges a fixed, objective and paranoid process of inquiry and academic representation. It shows us how scholarship and knowledge production in the academy are effects of repeated acts “that harden into the appearance of something that has been there all along” (Salih, 2002, p. 58).



Figure 1: Reflections on lines of inquiry.

What are the repeated acts that harden around us? Around you? What doings become rote or worse, wear you down? Do us in?

We know these repetitions—they are cramped and coiled in our bodies after another day spent in front of the screen on Zoom.

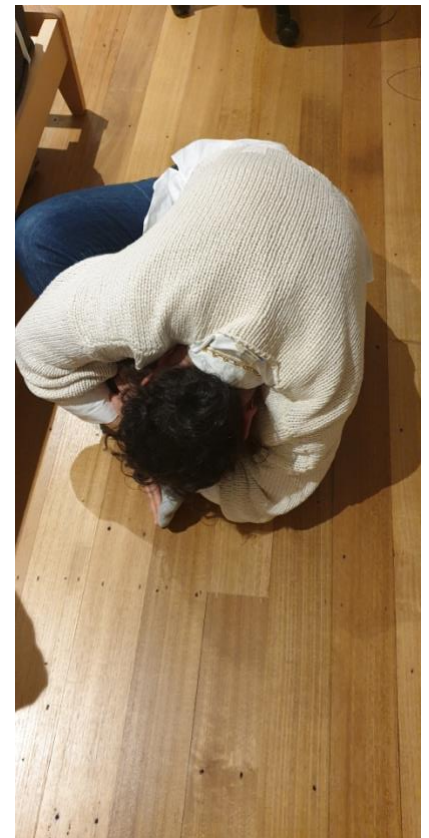


Figure 2, 3 and 4: Shanti's embodied a dialogue with/as a piece of paper.

They are the rush of anxieties that drive us into hiding after a hard meeting or harsh feedback on work we are trying to love into the world.

These repeated acts get us further away from—rather than closer to—the constitutive and body-full force of being together in the world. We know they do.

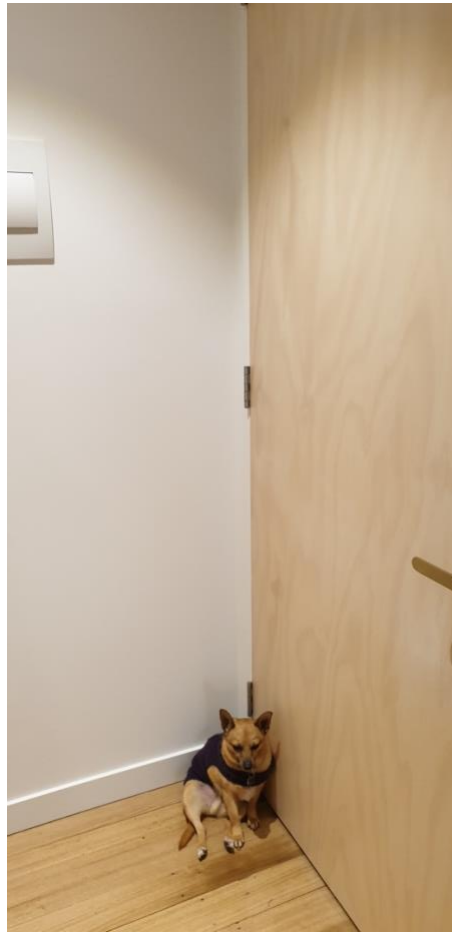


Figure 5: During a thunderstorm in Melbourne, Pedro performs the rush of anxieties and repeated acts that move us away from each other.

In focusing attention toward affinities and paradoxes, we stop making statements and looking for answers. We set aside work—as knowledge production, as ‘making progress’ on the way to completion (of a PhD or a research project) — and take up play as performative. Play as performative materialises affinities and atmospheres, resonances and reciprocations, given and gifts. In play, we give away our time, our curiosities and ourselves—gestures we *could* claim as ours (alone), as Helle Marie writes below. But we don’t. Instead, our coming together materialises *us* as a play-ful community of doings and beings. We engage in the repeated norms of workshop (gathering together in space-time to engage in conversation and

activity) and the performance of workshopping (doing by wandering and feasting). We do workshopping with (a) difference⁴.

I'm thinking again of Shanti's as-yet unknown and the not-yet explicit. Lisa says our coming together as learners both giddy and grateful is a gift of reciprocity that is—or can be—forever in circulation. She says becoming together as learners (and not academics and research candidates) is an “unspoken choice” that is hiding in plain sight. Anne-Lene writes that our improvising on what we don't speak about, know, or see—the “unforeseen, unexpected and sudden”—is central to the exploratory work space and uncertain process we've created.

Writing of Jacques Lacan's ‘threshold of the visible world’ (Lacan, 1977, p. 3), which he conceptualised as an “empty space or gap” between self and other, subject and object, knower and known, Kelly Oliver asks us to re-consider the visible as a threshold to *relation*. She writes: “What we cannot see . . . are the elements that connect us” (Oliver, 2001, p. 190). She encourages us to map the unimagined connections in our artistic and scholarly conversations (Holman Jones, 2014, p. 89). What connects us—even when we don't know exactly what we are doing—is our commitment to cross the thresholds of our respective ways of seeing (as designers, musicians and theatre makers, as academics and research candidates, as givers and receivers) create “new joint practices of sharing and writing in academia”, in the unforeseen space of play, as Anne-Lene Sand puts it.

⁴ And maybe it actually doesn't matter if we come curious, happy or somehow ‘ready to play’. What matters is that we show up - and that we perhaps ‘fake it till we make it’ - that we perform the playfulness until we enter the creative flow state where ideas, feelings and bodies start to spark and connect in new ways. [Shanti]



Figure 6: Zoom as a mixed contact zone for the playful and the performative.

One of the most surprising discoveries I made in our Wandering Feasts gatherings was how these joining practices of writing and sharing the unforeseen happens at—and because of—(a) distance.

It happens in the distance between Denmark and Melbourne, the distance between rushing out and staying put, the distance between being in person and gathering online. It happens in the distance between design, play, music and theatre performance. And it happens in distance as the constitutive act that makes a world “charged with affect. . . a mixed-use contact zone in an ongoing state of transition” (Stewart, 2017, p. 194).

It happens in the playful and performative invitation to make becoming manifest by doing.

Emergence - Shanti Sumartojo

The first time we met as a group was in August 2021. The early spring evenings in Melbourne were slowly getting longer, but the long COVID lockdowns that we had endured meant the promise of better weather and brighter sunshine felt like the clement conditions couldn't be trusted.

But still, we had agreed to do something together, me and Lisa, Stacy, Helle Marie and Anne-Lene, even if it was not quite clear in my mind what exactly we were doing. It was not a ‘normal’ research process, with clearly articulated aims or a project design determined in advance - as Anne-Lene reflects, there was a traditional model of academic research hovering in the background, a framework against which we found ourselves evaluating whether what we were doing was ‘proper academic work’, which for me was a somewhat soulless transaction between time invested and value gained. This ambiguity went along with the lack of an explicit goal or planned output - but instead we were trying to hold space for something to *emerge*, a strongly scaffolded lack of direction, as Lisa puts it. This both worked against my productivist instincts to account for my time in terms justifiable to the academic industry, and felt like a minor form of resistance to those strictures. Isn’t play sometimes transgressive, a middle finger up to the normal rules and routines we work by?

However, we did have shared conceptual commitments: to play, to design, to work collaboratively, and to go along - to try things with as-yet-unknown outcomes and not-yet-explicit insights. This in itself felt a bit radical, maybe even naughty⁵. How could I justify the time, I asked myself? I trusted that something interesting would happen, but at the end of a long day, in the evening flicker of a laptop screen, it was only my commitment to the people and curiosity about the process that saw me click the Zoom link and enter the morning light in offices and homes on the other side of the world.

What were we DOING?

It is only in hindsight that the whole story can be told, the endings connected to the beginnings; that insight can be extracted, composed from disparate parts; that a framework can be thought through and papers written. But this is not how it *happened*. Instead, even the

⁵ And I know from play research that often the dark side of play is the most difficult to design for in an educational context, even though it is often the most powerful one as a driver for passion, intensity and meaningfulness [Helle Marie]

name emerged, the titling and defining of what we were doing made, tested, accreted as each idea sparked multiple others.

Step one: We don't know what we are doing, or where we are going. But, like Solnit's notion of purposefully getting lost (Solnit, 2000) - we are *wandering*. As Lisa says, this was scaffolding to allow us to somehow arrive somewhere (or to again be found) but it was very important to hold open any idea of where we would arrive, and this not-knowing was an animating play-force that enabled the conventional student-teacher hierarchies to loosen and for the five of us to enjoy the journey together. Stacy puts it so beautifully: we coalesced as a 'play-ful community of doings and beings', and it reminded her of another of Solnit's insights:

Musing takes place in a kind of meadowlands of the imagination, a part of the imagination that has not yet been plowed, developed, or put to any immediately practical use...time spent there is not work time, yet without that time the mind becomes sterile, dull, domesticated. The fight for free space — for wilderness and public space — must be accompanied by a fight for free time to spend wandering in that space (Solnit, 2000, p. 289).

Step two: We are sharing with each other, each bringing something to the collective table, not knowing how it will combine with the other things. We could have kept these things off the table, as Helle Marie says, we could have chosen to share other things, things that told other stories. How did each person select their contributions, and what meanings did they take on in relation to the other images on the table? It is a rich table, covered with fascinating and mysterious offerings, each a gift from someone with a different perspective. Delicious! We are at a *feast* (see Figure 7).

unfolds”. Emergence⁶ here relied on our own sense of ourselves as inquisitive and creative individuals, and how we performed that creativity, but not in a laboured or pre-determined way, but by responding to and reflecting on each other’s accounts and thoughts. We were each engaged in a common project ‘to cast my experience in ways that can join with yours, so that we can - in a sense - travel the same paths, and in doing so, make meaning together’ (Ingold, 2017, p. 4). From this effort, what we were DOING continually emerged, through conversation, activity, consideration and reflection, all aimed at a general direction, but without a planned route or explicit destination. The DOING was nothing more and nothing less than an ongoing agreement that we would, together, make, talk, laugh, listen, wander, feast - and just see what happened. Writing this article is a form of continuation of the ‘incomplete un-whole story’ (in Stacy’s words) of *Wandering Feasts*, a story that continues to emerge and move forward, a doing that continues to happen.

Reciprocity – Lisa Grocott

My screen is a canvas of faces. I am in a Zoom breakout room. I have been here before. Yet, the atmosphere is not one of a meeting. True, this is work and these are colleagues but there is no agenda and no declared objectives. People are talking over each other yet the feeling is one of being respectfully listened to. We are just animated in conversation. We share, gesticulate, laugh⁷, nod, protest and laugh some more. It is a gathering of colleagues (again, definitely not a meeting) and I am engaged and present. More importantly I am not being taught but I am learning⁸.

⁶ We understand the emergence of *Wandering Feasts* in the *what* (were we doing?) as relational—complex, contingent and open-ended. We also write into the *where* of emergence, focussing on *Wandering Feasts* as a place where the relationality and potentiality of working differently together ‘takes place.’ as Marijn Nieuwenhuis (2016) puts it (p. 313).

⁷ The laugh is an important part of the playful attitude, I would state, when we are together because we want to be together and for the sake of that, searching for ways to laugh. As Goffman pointed out in his framing analysis exploring play - it can happen anywhere, and with great play mates even in academia. Laughter because a way **to answer** in our staying playful together. [Helle Marie]

⁸ Not being taught contrasts multiple dimensions of academic work. Not being taught but learning is a paradox since academic work often is scaffolded within a well-defined aim and seldomly unpredictability is treated as something with potential. [Anne-Lene]

This breakout is a stolen moment in the middle of a three hour Zoom session. We are five academics hosting an exchange with doctoral candidates from performance studies, design and play. For now, the research candidates are in their own digital bubbles and for 15 minutes it is just us five. The norm in this situation might have us default to discussing the session objectives, progress or logistics. Yet, that is not how we have come to use the gift of this space. In creating a learning ethos grounded in emergence and improvisation we have greedily, gratefully allowed this space (or chosen this time) to be about our own becoming. Hiding in plain sight is our unspoken choice to position ourselves as learners: to undertake the same activities as the students and to come together and learn from each other. Did we make this decision explicitly? I don't recall. It seems that from day one we recognised in the performative gestures and the playful activities a chance for this learning exchange to not just be for the students but for us too⁹.

Behind the scenes we made conscious decisions that put in place the preconditions that invited us to not subjugate our own learning over others. In not shaping the feast around learning outcomes, in not predetermining where each session would end and in not positioning ourselves as experts, we signaled to those gathered that we were in this together. We very intentionally created ways to come together across hemispheres and disciplines. It might be a necessary paradox that the lack of direction was strongly scaffolded? We wanted people to experience being lost, yet we wanted them to know the feeling of being found. The fleeting monthly meetings were designed with care to embrace uncertainty and promote serendipitous moments of connection¹⁰. Why then am I bemused that in this breakout I am wondrous, animated and giddy. Why am I surprised that when I put my computer to sleep at the end of the long evening, I do not feel spent?

⁹ These 'stolen moments' were a relief from the familiar productivist treadmill, which in the midst of COVID lockdowns in Melbourne seemed particularly ludicrous to me. A playful sensibility, a feeling of transgressing the norms of intellectual engagement, the pleasure of getting to know fascinating new people, slipping out of the strictures of so-called expertise, to be naive, to not - know - what better foundations on which to build something worth DOING? [Shanti]

¹⁰ I'm struck by the interplay and entanglement of conscious decisions, setting preconditions, strongly scaffolding and intentionality and how these conditions are achieved in what we don't do—in not subjugating, shaping, or predetermining. The push-pull of structure and play is how we come together, embrace uncertainty and improvise. [Stacy]

As I seek words to describe the emotions and atmosphere I sense in this breakout room, I pull out to see what we have created. In bracketing this care-full container we have designed I recognise that I am disciplined at noticing how we have charged the encounter. Drawing on our collective expertise we designed a playful, performative space for conceptual exchange. The activities and the facilitation braided together to invite new ways of gathering so we might learn together differently.

Each session has called for personal introspection, a playful exploration of how our research and ourselves engage with our past and future in the present. Each feast begins with us going around the metaphoric picnic blanket and sharing an image or insight to the Miro board. This humble gesture became the way we performed that we are here and we are listening. In the first week, we went clockwise around the blanket. Each of us stumbled through the not-knowingness of the invitation to place something, anything down and talk to it. Over time the impulse to sound prepared and clever gave over to the open invitation to trace a connection to something already said or to shamelessly own an improvised response in real time. Less earnest and more playful, we began to disrupt the formality of moving from person to person, and instead jumped around the board. The person who finished sharing would express their curiosity to learn more about an image on the board. With this new rhythm came a different engagement. In erasing the cognitive distraction and social anxiety that can come with knowing your turn is coming, people were now able to be present. Whose would be chosen next? How would curiosity be framed? And of course, the framing of the invitation shifted how a person answered. In physically placing these subjective, partial, personal insights on to the metaphoric picnic blanket we created a reciprocal space for sharing what we wanted to reveal.

There is a reciprocity baked into how new ways of knowing, doing, being and learning are set alight. As the affinity seeds are scattered to the wind, we trust that they take flight and land when the terrain is tilled and ready. Indigenous languages often have a dual first-person pronoun, which Tyson Yunkaporta translates to English as “us-two.” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 22). There is in the connective force of us-two sharing the opportunity to be heard by others even when you are the one listening. For many Indigenous peoples, the value of a gift is based on the reciprocal exchange of giving and receiving. Robin Kimmerer

in *Braiding Sweetgrass* describes the gift as forever being in circulation (2020). As I say goodnight to people, I have only digitally feasted with I turn again to wonder how we created a Zoom home free of detachment and fatigue. Across time zones—somehow—the connection holds. The reciprocity¹¹ of learning with and from each other circulates. The students are with us and us with them. We are energised by the full gallery of faces. Not just our faces, our whole knowing/doing/being selves.

I sense in the lightness, a gratitude, a resonant connection. I am online and yet I am present.

Improvisation – Anne-Lene Sand

During one feast we invite the PhD candidates to a joint exploration on ethics in research as one theme related to methodology. We want to expand our notion on ethics and foster a dialogue which touches upon a type of ethics, which seldom is provided space in academia. But how do we actually invite people to reflect and write about ethical dimensions, which are difficult to talk about, on Zoom, across continents, time zones, within an academic culture and without putting the PhD candidates in a vulnerable situation? We could have structured the feast in a classical academic way: presenting ourselves, an aim, a text and discussing it, but instead the feast was organised through improvisational structures and opened up through a playful and slightly silly invitation¹². Playful in the sense that Helle Marie and I used the Voice Changer app (voice of a male robot) in order to play with the idea of discussing ethics anonymously or having the courage to generate openness about sensitive ethical questions. All participants brought a photo resembling an ethical reflection and read a paper by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) on ethically important moments. Furthermore, playing with a

¹¹ Reciprocity can also be understood as a refusal of settler colonial (and colonizing) approaches to research; Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014) write that refusal in research makes “visible invisibilized limits, containments, and seizures that research already stakes out,” (p. 225), a “redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned,” (p. 239) including generating, expanding and championing “representational territories that colonial knowledge endeavours to settle, enclose,[and] domesticate” (p. 242).

¹² Stacy mentions the tendency within academia where people almost search for people to make mistakes. How does that cultural tendency influence the practice of writing? [Anne-Lene]

serious academic topic raised a curiosity towards how we can generate a safe space for ethically sensitive subjects within academia.

It was fun recording the introduction with the voice of a robot and at the same time I felt silly. I recall thinking: is this appropriate? How will the others respond to this untraditional academic way of opening and dealing with a serious topic?¹³ But thinking back on the other feasts: the loose space, the atmosphere and the playful practices pushed my questionings about a radical genre aside and the playful approach in the foreground. In similarity to Lisa's reflections on 'being taught', we scaffolded an improvisational space which generated a social space where we felt comfortable: jamming, taking turns, trying to understand each other's sound and carefully building upon others' tunes and beats.

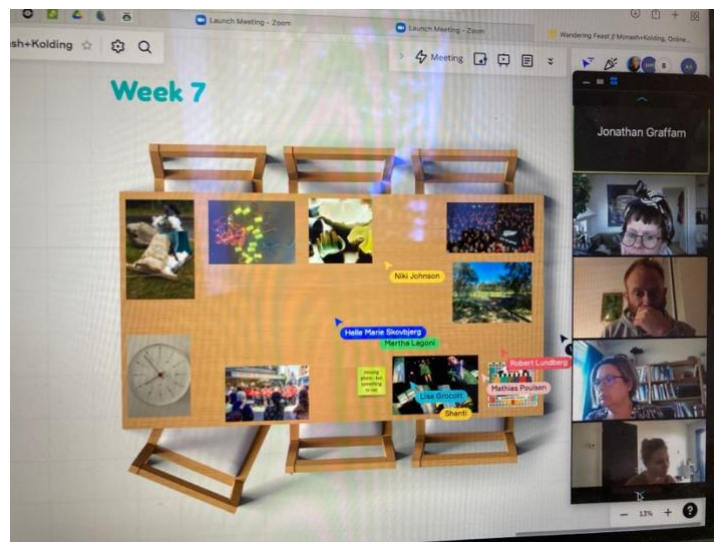


Figure 8: A screenshot of the feast on ethics. The table with uploaded photographs, which somehow were related to an ethical consideration.

The feasts were organised in a certain type of way. Entering the feasts, we bring to the table a photograph related to the theme. By choosing photographs and not people, we shift focus

¹³ But an 'opening' is exactly what this unexpected intervention provided! Listening to the bizarrely transformed voices, I was struck by how this change gave the rest of us permission to approach this well-trammeled topic with a new vulnerability. It was akin to Lisa's identification of reciprocity - by giving us this creative prompt, you changed the rules of the game, granting everyone else creative licence. [Shanti]

from the individual in academia to the academic theme. It is a way to establish an exploratory work space and at the same time deal with an uncertain work process. DOING together. But how? The latin word *improvisus* refers to the unforeseen, unexpected and sudden. But improvisation should not just be understood as a practice of spontaneity (Pløger, Førde and Sand, 2021). As repetition within performance, improvisation relies on structures, repetition and rules¹⁴, which we provided for through: continuous use of the Miro board, picnic tables, photographs as opening dialogues, practical research stories, shorter thematic talks from the organisers, shifting between break out rooms and plenum conversations and writing practice narratives.

Improvisation also happens in how we as organisers are open to the unforeseen.



Figure 9: Shanti's mother's couch on Zoom.

¹⁴ Improvisation requires a flexible and changing—plastic—approach to these structures, repetitions, and rules; in other words, improvising means we don't learn and apply a skill or orientation to doing research or academic writing "once and for all" (Bertinetto & Bertram, 2020). We also actively tried to 'unlearn' familiar, even 'perfected' ways of doing research; so much so that unlearning served as "a conscious and explicit artistic resource" (Bertinetto & Bertram, 2020) in our work together.

During the feast I say that it is time for a five-minute break. Shanti, who is in Portland on a family visit, where it is midnight, says: “*Okay then I will just take a five-minute nap.*” We see her falling in slow motion and disappearing sideways out of the Zoom screen and towards the floor. I laugh. People laugh. I am a bit surprised and that makes me laugh more.

We all allow ourselves to laugh^{15, 16}.

Small improvisational acts happening frequently during the feasts and in retrospect I see how these types of social acts are important to what we did together as a way to approach academic themes through reciprocity, reflexive conversations and play.

According to David Brown (2006), improvisation is a re-disciplining of the body and the musician obstructs continuing beats and learns to perform differently. Working through play and improvisation in academia confronts an established disciplined way of working and writing. During the feasts I sense a specific way of doing and writing sneaking up upon me - trying to force me to do and write within a certain genre. During the feasts, dialogues and processes of writing I confront myself with this paradoxical dilemma and force myself to engage with a re-disciplined, an un-discipline and a new-disciplined way of writing. Lisa described this paradox as a strongly scaffolded lack of direction.

As emphasised by Stacy and Lisa, we do together, we do *us* through new forms of reciprocal knowledge production. As within improvisational practices composing happens in situ, by sensing movement and tunes of the others (Brown, 2006, p. 45). To improvise means not only to be able to move outside the pattern, but to be critical of it. Provocative competence¹⁷ through improvisation is a skill that means challenging conventional forms of practice, searching for unknown terrain and experimenting on the shores of the unknown

¹⁵ If I relate this to play research and the mood perspective (Skovbjerg, 2021), playing in this situation is possible because somebody is answering *with* laughter to Shanti’s playful act. The answer and somebody answering other people’s whim, getting back with another one. [Helle Marie]

¹⁶ Laughter is about play here - and also it is about how humour makes us vulnerable but was also enabled in this case by feeling safe. Is laughter a route to affinity (Mason 2018)? Does it spark a more potent connection, one that exceeds words? [Shanti]

¹⁷ I am the queen of footnotes: I just have to add to Lisa’s point about the provocation that an important power of a play community is the ability to exceed the established practices, and for the community to expect and accept those exceedings. Acceptances are established by another provocation if we follow research on play. If nobody is laughing when somebody is making a joke, another joke will not follow. The rhythm of play is this back and forward as Gunvor Løkken states [Helle Marie]

(Steinsholt and Sommerro, 2006, p. 18). Can improvisation generate new joint practices of sharing and writing in academia?

During the feast, the following comment was written in the Zoom chat function by one of the PhD candidates:

I am especially intrigued by everything that can't be predicted or controlled, the things we can't write up nicely in a paper to pretend we have "covered all the bases" and ticked all the boxes. I somehow always end up making a mess of things - now I feel like talking about "messy ethics", all the stuff we're not aware of, all the mistakes we make in the field, our own inattention - things that are hard to write about, because it demonstrates our own inadequacy and vulnerability, and it contradicts at least some academic ideals and expectations. What I take from today is an intention to insist on messy ethics, to insist on talking and writing about it on an ongoing basis. Thanks! (Mathias Poulsen, PhD-candidate, Design school Kolding, Denmark).

According to Mathias, "something" triggered the eagerness to DO in a certain way and talk about certain uncertainties. Is it a new modus operandi - a way of working within academia that Mathias points toward? That "something" is not a coincidence, but emerges through reciprocity, improvisational performance, playing, doing, and daring. A process which has been developed over time - from feast to feast - but with an outcome that is clear and strong looking back. Within organisational improvisation this is called retrospective sense-making (Barrette, 1996), and maybe following what emerges and making sense afterwards is what academia needs in order to develop new genres of writing.

Share, care, dare: Givenness as a playful approach – Helle Marie Skovbjerg

Every time I am going to meet for the Feasts, I feel that I am going to give something to someone or to something, and I do not know what it is, and at the same time I also hope for something that is given to me, and I do not know what it is.

The German philosopher Fröbel (2008) speaks of play materials as gifts. That is, the things that we play with in the game, we must consider as gifts. There are materials that can help to evoke the play - as Fröbel points out, the ball, the cylinder¹⁸ and the cone - that have these play gift qualities. The materials are exchanged between the players, and they have a special power to bring players together, but also to evoke all that is commonly human in those players.

I find it interesting to dwell on the idea of gifts as something fundamental about being in a context where I am - we are - together for playfulness, hoping for playfulness. And that is the importance of giving something to “the play”, something that you yourself could have kept, because it is in the generous act that “the play” can be made possible. And that one can hope that the others also give something to “the play” that they themselves could have kept,¹⁹ without being able to claim it. Share, take care. We share because we care about “the play”, and we give bravely, for we do not know whether the others will accept, nor whether we will get anything back. This metaphor seems to be crucial for the playful togetherness that we were together during a number of PhD workshops.

We used the share, care, dare metaphor as a playful way of thinking to frame our togetherness - as a dinner table - which we called a feast, where everyone brought something to the table.

¹⁸ They are the structures that open up the space for play as doing and becoming. [Stacy]

¹⁹ Tangent warning! 'Could have' (and should have, would have), which are 'past tense modal verbs' or “modals of lost opportunities [that] work like a grammatical time machine. The simple past just tells what happened. Past modals tell what could have, would have, and should have happened” (Learning English). I am thinking about Shanti’s writing in 'hindsight' or telling the whole story and not being how it happened. I like the move the 'could have kept' makes--here, it isn't a model of lost opportunities, but instead a model of playful possibilities. We're not writing a feast 'time machine' about what happened in the past but doing our playful togetherness now, on the page. It's even better than 'future perfect' tense where we tell what will happen in the future--we create 'legacies' of giving in the now. Grammar nerd tangent finished. [Stacy]

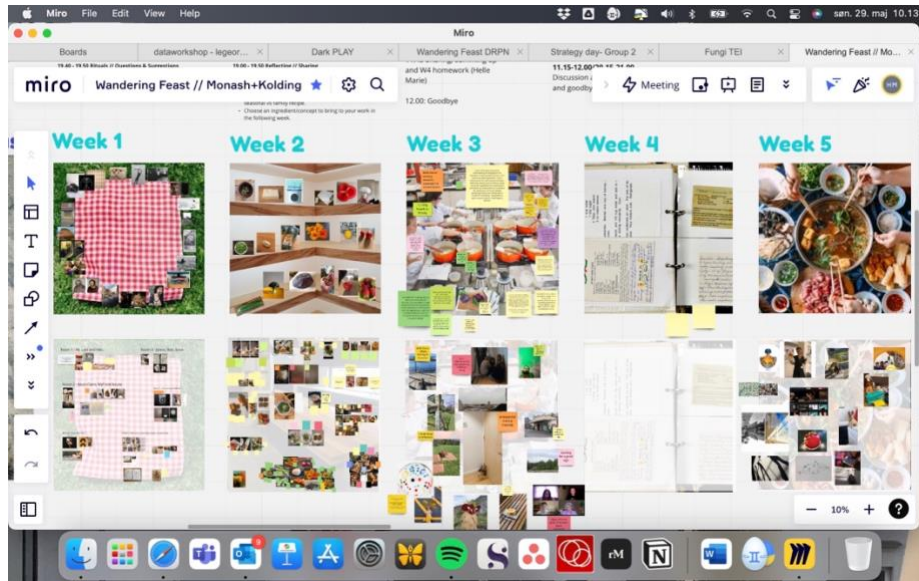


Figure 10: A picture of the 5th feast with the PhD candidates and the organisers' visual contributions.

We shared photos

We shared stories

We shared a salad

And we gave something that we ourselves could have kept.

And maybe you think: but according to Marcel Mauss (2001) giving a gift to somebody is coded with expectation and codes for receiving, filled with power relations and positionings, exclusion processes. Did we share in order to have, to show, to position ourselves? It made me think. As stated before, the playful attitude and environment was present as a way for us to be together, improvising and performing. Playing also has power structures, Mauss would probably say, but also, I would say, it is possible with great playmates to play around with those power structures, positionings and codes, and I think we made it possible to give, receive and share, playing with those codes of *how*.

I remember that during one planning session, Shanti suggested another photo sharing at Feast IIII - we had many of those - and I replied that I was happy to share another photo,

“Helle Marie Skovbjerg”, I said: “you are NOT allowed to share another photo of Pedro (Shanti’s dog). Now it is enough!” And everybody was laughing. And at the Feast itself, Shanti said that she had been told she was not allowed to share another photo of Pedro, and everybody was laughing again. Shanti shared a photo of Pedro at every feast, and even if she wasn't supposed to, she did it anyway. Lisa then reminded me that another person actually ended up sharing a photo of Pedro anyway at the Feast where Shanti had been told she should not²⁰. This teasing around, the givenness and sharing made it possible to explore the codes of givenness within the group in a way that was playing with the codes as a part of establishing them²¹, as Anne-Lene also points to.

When a PhD student makes a salad, shares the salad with the rest of the group and talks about how it relates to fundamental methodological issues in the PhD project, it turns out that this is not merely sharing a salad, but as the French philosopher Marion puts it, there is a connection between giving and giving oneself: 'that everything that shows itself must first give itself' (Marion, 2013). That generosity, Fröbel emphasizes, is precisely a condition of opportunity for “the play” to become possible.

As stated by Lars after he made his salad:

In the back of my mind remembering and longing for the sensation of dancing without Zoom, Miro board and salad ingredients. I had a feeling, a desire for destroying something. I didn't plan ahead but just started cutting one of the ingredients into small pieces and ended up cutting them all. Looking at the small pieces of food suddenly something made sense. Being able to transform something – being able to warm up your body or mind ready to interact.

²⁰ This makes me reflect that I shared photos of Pedro as an invitation to play, or as a material to help invoke play, as you say. Good dog! [Shanti]

²¹ And I remember the first Feast. We were about to get to know each other, and at the first break out room, one of the PhD students suggested a 7-minute break out, and Shanti joked with the relation between time and Danes. “It is not a break out - it is a 7-minutes break out room”, she laughed. The daring teasing as a way to give something of yourself and improvise the codes of giving, even though it could be filled with risk as we did not know each other that well [Helle Marie]

The feeling of the desire to destroy is not a conversation that I have very often in academia, but in this case, Lars shared this feeling with the rest of the group, showing something about himself. In our workshops, the gift, the sharing, became a central practice that made it possible to give not only to the play community, but also give something of ourselves that we could have kept. So, we created legacies that we gave and received and in that way the play community nurtured a courage to give, without demanding to get anything in return.

Conclusions

Initially planned as a series of four workshops, our *Wandering Feasts* continue. Rather than returning to well-worn and often lonely academic writing practices, we keep coming back to our playful space and multimodal ways of thinking, working and communicating. We have developed five conceptual orientations to academic writing, each of which emphasise creative-relational aspects of doing scholarship and academic writing: *performativity, emergence, reciprocity, improvisation and givenness*. We have illustrated how each orientation has an important role in making a relational online space, interdisciplinary academic dialogue and writing process between us as scholars and 16 PhD candidates from Monash University and Kolding Design School. We have paid close attention to the often unnoticeable but important aspects of making a trustworthy, fun and productive workspace in academia - online and across borders and disciplines. The process has been exploratory and therefore this article takes its departure in our felt experiences of working and writing through a playful and loosely defined process.

In this article we reflect on emergence as an orientation to *Wandering Feasts* and also enact it in our approach to this article, which we see as a continuation of the workshops. Our performatively layered approach to writing this article afforded us a space in which to conjure the freedom and surprise of *Wandering Feasts* on the page and to respond to each other's accounts. We trusted the improvised, giving and reciprocal process to allow insights to rise to the surface of our writing encounters. Using a playful attitude in academic writing, practices-initiated insights where we gave something of ourselves, even though we did not predict or agree in advance on something specific to give or get. This allowed the emergence of new insights about academic writing that included the affective ebbs and flows of pleasure,

frustration, realisation, and more that infuse all writing, but that is usually not the explicit focus of such labor.

Using the notion of improvisation in academic writing contributes with a possibility to work within defined structures and at the same time allow for things to emerge and let people explore and scaffold their own type of writing. We have illustrated how social improvisational acts can both be gathering and provocative and challenge traditional ways of writing. Often writing academically is done through a well-defined aim, but we emphasise how retrospective sensemaking can be useful within academic writing, as within improvisational practices.

Exploring methods and modes of working and writing that move outside the academy's conventional and hierarchical "routines of representation" (Pollock, 1998 p 75) helps us write and share the creative-relational encounters of *Wandering Feasts*. Paying careful and loving attention to performativity, emergence, reciprocity, improvisation and givenness (among other things) helps us—and all of those who seek to actively stray from the 'beaten track' of academic writing—to affirm and celebrate all we might otherwise miss: the unimagined connections, how people carefully build upon others' tunes and beats, and the way everyone bringing something to the table makes play possible.

Email in-between feasts

"Hi Stacy

Just a quick note to say how much I enjoyed the session you led last night. I am still reflecting on it and why it made such an impact on me.

I am struggling to find a language to express the value of our WF (*Wandering Feast*, ed) experiment. I feel it is significant but am not sure how to squeeze it into an academic productivist framework. It resists this!

I suppose I am proud of what we have collectively made, and how we have made it gradually and gently - I hope that September will be a chance for us to all think about this together and in person :)"

Best,
Shanti

Reply from Lisa the(delete the):

"I share this image not for circulation but because it warmed my heart to see how lit up Lotte was by the experience. Made me think of how it would be an interesting visual assignment to closely observe people's emotions in WF and capture their embodied reactions rather than words for the value of what we are all doing together.

And yes Stacy — you definitely created some magic :-)"(Delete ") From Lisa."

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Stacy Holman Jones is a researcher, educator, writer and director in the Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music and Performance at Monash University, Australia. Her research focuses on performance as socially, culturally, and politically resistive and transformative activity. She has published more than 100 articles, book chapters, reviews, and editorials and has authored, co-authored and edited 13 books, many of which practice personal, creative and otherwise off the beaten track writing. Her work and friendship with Lisa Grocott has redoubled her commitment to writing otherwise and toward the unforeseen. This commitment has been strengthened to the power of four with this collaboration with new friends and colleagues Shanti Sumartojo, Anne-Lene Sand and Helle-Marie Skovbjerg.

Anne-Lene Sand is associate professor in the Lab for Play and Design at Designschool Kolding, Denmark. She has a special interest in design anthropology and is positioned to develop a field of applied design and pedagogy She researches how children play and youth improvise with social, material and spatial forms. She is engaged in methodological development and discussions on ethics and design. Her fieldworks in urban space made her

capable of navigating within uncertain terrain and explore alternative social orientations. During her friendship with Helle Marie Skovbjerg, she learned to initiate and choose academic collaborations which are enjoyable.

Helle Marie Skovbjerg is a play professor in LAB Design for Play, Design School Kolding, Denmark. She is particularly interested in creating new concepts and theories about play through design, and then applying them to designing for play. It has become the mood perspective on play. Her research practices are deeply rooted in the embodiment of play and practices of play. She believes that research relations are about sharing, caring and daring - together, building routines and experiences together, just as having good play mates. She is dreaming about a dog for joining her and her play mates on her play journey, and Pedro – Shanti’s dog is doing a great job for holding on to that dream.

Shanti Sumartojo is a researcher in the Emerging Technologies Research Lab and the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at Monash University, Australia. She researches how people experience design and technology in their everyday contexts, which is starting to include experimenting with methodologies, forms of representation and approaches to bodily thinking. She is nourished by learning, thinking and writing with others - including the co-authors of this paper.