

Writing Without Writing: Conversation As Material

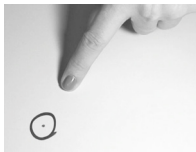
Emma Cocker

In order to progress we have to ... just go with the idea.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

(T)his is (a) space which is generative and I don't quite know what that is (but) [...]



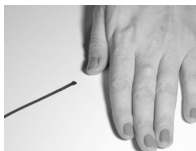
if I have a hope for it ... it is that something *not* known, or not previously known is somehow produced [...] Ultimately it is a question of form [...] *and* (of) an endeavour.⁽⁶⁾



(T)o build in spaces that are more speculative you have to build in spaces that are more speculative.

(B)etween proposition and response [...] some sort of pattern of not knowing.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

Possibilities escalate in terms of what it is capable of and how different meanings are produced [...] There is a definite play.

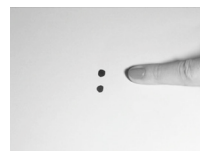


(S)omething is being diagrammed towards [...] A gesture is drawn in advance of knowing what it enables.⁽⁷⁾



(T)he active spaces of the work are the places [...] where I am not *quite* sure what is happening.⁽⁹⁴⁾

It is ultimately speculative which isn't to say *not definite*. (They) are trying to say something, but not [...] enough to *know* what they are saying.



The thing that is *not* being said [...] is where the work comes from. (It) reveals itself in the shadow of what is being consciously produced.

(T)he points (where) a decision is made ... to *do* something. It is (o)nly ever an accumulation of [...] decisions.

(T)here is a repeating structure, but [...] how do you have change within that?⁽⁵¹⁾ (H)ow do you repeat *without* repeating (?)



(W)e are in the territory (between) what we have already done and the possibility of what ... might be.⁽⁴⁸⁾

(T)here is a blindness (:); a grasping or a groping.

Sample 1

Re —
A collaboration with Rachel
Lois Clapham.
Extract from performance script.

Conversation-as-material is a practice of 'writing without writing' that I have developed over a period of years through a series of artistic research collaborations: (1) *Re* — (with Rachel Lois Clapham); (2) *The Italic I* (with Clare Thornton), and (3) *Choreographic Figures: Deviations from the Line* (with Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil). Within this approach, conversation is conceived not only as a means for reflecting on practice, but also as a generative and productive practice in-and-of-itself, both site and material for the construction of inter-subjective and immanent modes of linguistic 'sense-making'. For each of the above named collaborative projects, a 'sample' extract is presented in the form of an artists' page, alongside reflection on the evolution of the method itself.

Re — is a collaboration between myself, Emma Cocker and Rachel Lois Clapham that presses on two writers and two writing practices coming together, focusing on the tension between the visible / invisible, or public / private states of not knowing within the performed act of writing. *Re* — comprised a series of performance lectures, the 'scripts' for which we generated through conversation undertaken for reflecting together on the endeavour of writing-as-practice, the event of collaboration, the labour of making the work itself. The conversation was subsequently transcribed verbatim, attention paid to noting the peripheral and the incidental, those parts of conversation that could have gone unnoticed or that functioned as asides. The process of conversation-as-material involves the quest for a not-yet-known vocabulary emerging synchronous to the live circumstances that it seeks to articulate. Here, meaning does not exist prior to the event of utterance; rather it is co-produced through the dialogic process of conversation itself; moreover, is often only discernible in retrospect once the conversation has been transcribed, distilled. Transcribed conversation is compressed towards a vocabulary of poetic fragments, alongside the development of an emergent system of micro-gestures diagramming towards those parts of dialogic exchange that exist *beyond* words, affirmation of conversation's sensible, affective potentiality. Reassembled as a live performance reading — two practices sit side-by-side, their means restricted to broken fragments from earlier conversations and mute utterances of a finger pointing, nails pink; a spoken text of dislocated phrases; a diagram drawn; the space of breath. Within *Re* — reflection on the process of making does not come after the fact, but rather becomes folded into the material of the work itself. An attempt is made to trouble the normative chronology within practice, collapsing the distinction — perhaps even the perceived hierarchy — between preparation, performance, documentation and reflection.



Folding of Attention
— a heightened subjectivity

Not disorientation but a shift in orientation. Elemental transformation. Composition. Composure. Compose. Fall into an arrangement. Going inward. Turned backward. Inverted. Inversion — to turn or change; turn inside out, to fold. To turn around on an axis; revolve — from *volvere*, to roll or wind. Turn over, rolling on the tongue; the release of language from itself.

Gravity/Levity
— striking the right balances

Hand striking the floor, marking time. Push and pull; lag or drag. Tempering — to calm, to modify its properties. Restraint has positive force, a necessary tension. Keeping form, one foot on the ground. Anchoring, maintaining the equilibrium. Retaining the lightness, bring to ground without weight.

Breathless
— ventilating the idea

Decompress. Distill. Cooling down but not towards resolution. Maybe it is useful to bring in fermata, the inverted arc ... extended beyond normal duration. Beyond sustaining a note. Considered pause, return or realignment.

To tune, to make tones available to different keys. Temper. Temperate. Temporal. Repeat the heating and cooling, softening and solidifying of language. Molten flex. Changes in temperature — plunge to cool, desire to distill, regroup. Melt it down again. Avoid the snap back into brittle form.

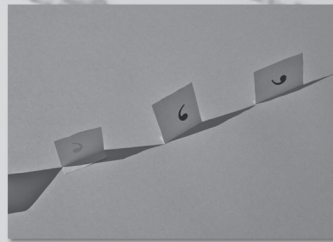
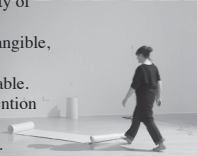
Binaries mark out the pitch within which to play, enables the curves to happen, something to work against. Goading us. Hot/cold. Liquid/solid. Soft/hard. Doing/ thinking. Attending to the interval — as an active space, against the desires of habit.

Sample 2

The Italic I
A collaboration with
Clare Thornton.
Extract from artists' publication.

The Italic I is a collaboration with Clare Thornton, for exploring the states of potential made possible through purposefully surrendering to the event of a repeated fall. Alongside performance and its documents, our enquiry has involved the construction of a poetic lexicon generated through the 'free-fall' of conversational exchange, for reflecting on the interior complexity of falling that its visual expression can only intimate towards. Together in conversation we seek to practise linguistic or even cognitive falls, searching for a language adequate to the task of articulating the experience of falling *through* falling. We ask: what happens if talking about practice is no longer an event of explication, but instead performed in the same key as doing? We aim towards a condition of exhaustion and elasticity in word and thought, stepping off or away from the stability of fixed subject positions towards the fluid process of co-production, intermingling of one another's word and thought. Akin to the body repeatedly falling, language can be generated from within fall-like circumstances, words pressured until they begin to arc and fold. Over and over, turned up and inside out, language can be rolled around in the mouth until it starts to yield or give. In the live-ness of conversation, words can often slip and spill into existence; thought conjured in the live event of its utterance, verbalised at the point of thinking leaning into the unknown. The specific rhythm of conversation produces a different shape and texture of textual articulation compared to that of conventional writing, a form of writing *without* writing. Significantly, its cadence or rhythmic pacing — its pitch and intonation, the tempo of speech — can often be of rising and falling, dipping and peaking. Excited acceleration. Hesitation. Deliberation. Syncopation. Abbreviation. Words dropped. Omissions. Repetitions. Sentence incompleteness. Disregard for punctuation. Hurried utterance. Syllabic glides and slurs. By transcribing and distilling our conversation towards a working lexicon for reflecting on the arc of falling, our intent was to retain something of the original cadence, alongside the potential for slip or switch in tense, inflection, imperative or mood. We recognise that it can be difficult to shape experience into words, language can sometimes seem too stiff or rigid; like the body it also needs to be stretched and flexed. Yet, for us, this perceived difficulty of 'putting into words' is transformed from problem into provocation. We ask: why would one not want to stretch, cultivate one's agility in speech as much as action, nurture one's endurance for working out with words? How might language be exercised akin to lungs and limbs? Conversational sparring enables a form of thinking and articulation beyond what is often conceivable on one's own; it is a means for drawing, forcing — even forging — language into being, a practice of *poesis* as much as of poetics.

The inherent movement of the body sets the line in motion. Breathing into the instable line. Stretch of attention: attempt to reach towards. Between the line of the drawn mark and line of the body: physical contact without physical contact, touching without touching. A strange arc begins: experience of exclusion, sitting on the periphery. Witnessing intensity: following and leading, reciprocity. Attempted rapprochement. More nuanced reach through the extension of affect into shadow. Shadow: product of both self and world, an ambiguous 'I'. Between the physicality of a body, its environment and the light: a meeting point, place of encounter. Between the physical and the virtual, the corporeality of the shadow: bodily yet intangible, ephemeral yet still graspable. A level of intention at the limit of the shadow. Attention – field of immaterial embodiment extended into space, a milieu into which to operate. Movement of a thought and the movement of a body: symbiotic intimacy. Touch has contour, creates a field of energy. Wavering convergence. Like air flows or oceanic currents, upwelling of wind, downwelling of water. Arising of liquids, of emotion, building up or gathering strength. Downward movement of fluid: of the sea, the atmosphere, depths of the earth. Cartography of currents and flows, surges and swellings, deepening: the dynamic of how things emerge.



Sample 3

Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line

A collaboration with Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil.
Extract from a performance score.

Choreo—graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line is a collaborative artistic research project with artist Nikolaus Gansterer and choreographer Mariella Greil (working alongside invited interlocutors Alex Arteaga, Christine De Smedt and Lilia Mestre, and guest collaborators Werner Möbius and Jörg Piringer). Our shared research enquiry explores the dynamic movements of ‘sense-making’ within collaborative artistic practice especially between the lines of drawing, writing and choreography; seeking to develop forms of performativity and notation (*choreo—graphic figures*) for making tangible this often hidden, undisclosed aspect of the creative process. Through live exploration we seek to give tangible articulation to the register of vitality forces and affects (which we call *figuring*) operating before, between and beneath the more readable gestures of artistic practice. We ask: *How do you attend to the thing that isn't visible? What other realms are there to find? Resonance. Reverberation. Tremulous vibration. It is sometimes hard to see the relatively imperceptible — this quivering edge when something is happening. Magnifying the minor. Starting to look nearer or closer. What we move when we move; there is tone and velocity and rhythm, like changes of state.* Our enquiry unfolds through the interweaving of different fields of shared practice: *Practices of Attention*: sensory heightening and somatic hyper-sensitising for cultivating qualities of perceptual awareness and alertness, for practising readiness and receptivity; *Aesthetic Investigation*: designated period of time for working intensively together towards the embodied production of sensual knowledge, generated through live processes of artistic experimentation; *Practices of Conversation*: conversation-as-material used for generating a form of embodied language emerging from the enmeshing of our different voices in live exchange, involving the production of an inter-subjective, interdisciplinary language that is both subjective *and* impersonal. Within this project, conversation-as-material is used as the source from which to tentatively distill a working vocabulary for articulating aspects of our enquiry (presented here as italicised text in addition to the artists' page). Moreover, as Daniel Stern reflects, unscripted, spontaneous speech is itself a vitality field, which requires physical as well as mental movement, where there is a kind of “imprecise, messy, hit-and-miss work to find the ‘right words’ to communicate what one wishes.”¹ *Almost like divination, the phrasing is coming, but you cannot grasp it: full of ellipses and swirls. Seeking a language immanent to what we are doing. Naming the unnamable. Calling — more like an invocation. Precise vagueness. Babbling — wilderness, unrestrained.* Increasingly, the transcribed conversations have been used more explicitly within our process of artistic exploration itself, as both a textual script and a physical material with which to further experiment: conversation-as-material aerated through the performative ‘ventilating of words’ as a live event.

1. Daniel Stern, *Forms of Vitality*, (Oxford University Press, 2010), p.122.