

Temporality lost: A feminist invitation to vertical writing that shakes the ground

Organization

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Abstract

Are we, as academics, stuck in a horizontal temporality, organised by the clock, that flattens our work, our words? In reading feminist work by Märta Tikkanen, Hélène Cixous, and others, a rupture strikes, establishing another temporality: vertical time. Is it possible, I ask, to learn from these authors and engage in academic writing in verticality? The answer is: Yes! Through an in-depth reading of special pieces, I see clearly that when we use our scholarly voice to write from within our vulnerabilities, it becomes possible to climb all the way up or dig ourselves deep down. In other words, we can ‘go deep’ in the sense of touching that which is most important, as well as finding ways to ‘fly high,’ through writing. This shows that writing and temporality are always already interweaved with each other because writing produces temporalities just as temporality at play produces writing. In this writing-temporality meshwork, there seems to be no set genre for vertical writing. Rather, it consists of a multitude of practices, written in the instant, from within the urgency of articulating that which matters.

Keywords

Feminist, organising, reading, temporality, vulnerability, writing

Troubling times

Early on
I hid my vulnerability
from you

Why would I want to hurt you

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by showing you
how much
you had hurt me

that way I managed to prevent
both you and me
from growing

(Märta Tikkanen, *The Love Story of the Century*, 1984: 66)

I am searching for *when* writing matters. Expressed this way, it is phrased as a question of temporality. Because, to write is to move and being moved in time. As my fingertips touch the keyboard, I move in thought, images are created and offered to the reader. Usually, the movement we are in, as well as the movement we create in academic writing, is horizontal in nature. Today we will proceed in another direction: from horizontality to verticality.

Horizontal, or chronological time, is comforting and well known. Generally, it is thought of as a line with a past that stretches to the left and an imagined future that springs to the right. Romantically put, this is life and temporality, interweaved in an on-going flow.

For long, academic work has been organised in line with horizontal time. Even 20 years ago, Höpfl (2000: 32) expressed her frustration at being stuck in an organisational matrix based on linear conceptions of time, with the words:

I am enslaved to the logic of organising and to practices which I observe do harm.

Likewise, Steyaert (2015: 163) asked in his quest to connect feminine writing with queer time, 'how it would be possible to break through heteronormative concepts of time and how to provide 'other' concepts and practices that can infiltrate and interrupt?'

Critics argued that the neoliberal transformation of universities has created empty, homogenous time with a shift in focus 'from content to counting' (Bränström Öhman, 2012: 28). Repeatedly we hear that this shift has produced isolating effects at the costs of engaged scholarship. When chronological, market-driven time governs academic work, the ability to predict consequences and possible research results is decisive for managing an academic career. Under these circumstances, we can never lose control of our direction or force forward (Meyerhoff et al., 2011). In terms of writing, we see how these horizontal forces of speed are inscribed in work practices such as predefined publishing formats, codes for coding, and institutionalised habits of referencing. As doctoral students are encouraged to attend publishing workshops where they learn the tricks of how to get published even before they have found out what they want to say, we naturally see conformity rather than imagination in much of published work. Differently put, as long as a piece of writing is expected to fill a gap – rather than create gaps through thought-provoking research that takes us by surprise – it is no wonder that much research passes by unrecognised.

One answer to why we are still stuck in these problematic practices, which Höpfl (2000) pointed out two decades ago, is because academia is an 'unashamedly gendered' milieu where a 'competitive ethos has taken over' (Lund and Tienari, 2018: 99). In order to survive in this setting, there is a need to be strong and write texts in which all forms of weakness are edited out. Needless to say, it is evident that sequential, horizontal forces influence academic writing to such an extent that it is difficult even to imagine it to be different.

Among colleagues and friends, I have seen what being in-between external demands to be productive for the sake of it and the internal drive to do good, 'for real,' does to us. What is striking is

that even when we engage in research projects close to our heart, that which is important is easily lost from sight during the course of writing. Being caught in the horizontal time regime, there is a risk that writing is performed ‘as a cognitive process [that] leads to harmonising instead of problematising, neutralising instead of contextualising, and generalising instead of specifying’ (Bränström Öhman, 2012: 34). Consequently, we see a growing amount of no(n)sense texts; texts lacking depth just as the horizontal arrow that symbolises this view of time. I am referring to what happens when writing becomes scripted, fragmented, flat, and disembodied. This shows that writing and temporality are always already interweaved with each other, as writing produces temporalities just as the temporality at play produces writing. In this writing–temporality meshwork, the form of text-work organised by the logic of the clock is what I will call horizontal writing.

But. Just as academic work tends to be organised along horizontal time, there are possibilities for ruptures, enabling a writing in vertical time. When we are not holding our breath, and locking our vulnerabilities in, they can become our strongest source of power allowing us to climb all the way up or dig ourselves deep down along the slope of that which touches us deeply. Put differently, this is how we can ‘go deep’ in the sense of associating with that which is most important to us as well as finding ways to ‘fly high’ and be connected to something bigger through writing. In her exploration of ‘vulnerable writing,’ Page (2017: 15) suggested that engagement with non-linear forms of temporality might help to interrogate ‘. . . the temporal relation between ethics and epistemology.’ In moving toward such a vulnerable ethics, even the smallest vertical movement can make a difference. Starting from within the flow of inhaling and exhaling, like the life-giving act that both breath and writing can be, provides an escape away ‘from academia’s dry scientific prose and an entry into writing’s life inspiring potential’ (Yoo, 2019a: 1). Such vertical writing is what I will explore here.

My search for another temporality was triggered by a personal need. Two and a half years ago my partner, the dad to our two daughters, wanted us to split up and move apart. As he uttered these words, my whole world, as I knew it, broke. When we lived together, we lived in some sort of open wholeness of time as a family. One of the consequences of this breakdown, which tore my life into a centrifugal chaos and at the same time a standstill, is that this wholeness of time was cracked into pieces.

Today I cannot spend as much time with my daughters as I want to, because an artificial order, chronologically organised, was inscribed into the family time. In this new time, the girls live every other week with me. A new rhythm was installed and I miss them tremendously when they are away. On a daily basis I am no longer there for dinners, laundry or mundane get-togethers with their friends. In their everyday, it is only every other week that they turn to me asking for their Spanish book for homework, why I moved their bike key or if they can get snacks for the afternoon. In order to not cry in despair as I see them pack their big bags on Sunday afternoon and we carry their things over to their father’s house, I make sure to be physically present but emotionally absent.

Being with them makes my life self-evident. The days without them feel like a waste of time. It creates a darkness to the point where it is difficult to breathe. I realised that I need another temporal orientation in my life. I am no longer willing to give my body over to the time of the market, a time described as a resource: a resource to manage as I have managed my family- and non-family life through entries in my calendar. I soon discovered that if I made my life ‘fully booked’ I almost did not have time to feel the pain, or anything else for that matter, as exhaustion kicked in. But where has the busy almanac brought me? Not even the concept of ‘lived time’ works because that feels like a version of chronological time that never manages to fully break free from the flattening structures of horizontal time. In need of a third perspective on time, Söderbäck (2012: 320), in her inquiry into ‘revolutionary time,’ offers a starting point:

Only as embodied beings do we have time.

How can I locate the temporality lost; the temporal movement that flows from within my body rather than something pushed on me, toward me, from the outside? As I decided to unlock my vulnerability in regards to my everyday temporal orientation, an inquiry toward another way of being was initiated. With that, my reading/writing started to change too.

. . . Now it is time
to scrap
our guilty conscience, sisters

Now we have
got to
allow ourselves

the disappointment
the anger
the rage
the hate

When we're done hating
we'll get up
and go

(Märta Tikkanen, *The Love Story of the Century*, 1984: 130)

Readings that shake the ground

My inquiry into another temporal orientation started in reading. As noted by Cixous (in Bolous Walker, 2017: 156), in her generous reading of the authors that move her, 'I am a reader before I write. Writing is for me born in reading.' I read these words by Cixous, about the inseparability between reading and writing, in Bolous Walker's (2017) book *Slow Philosophy: Reading against the Institution*. In learning about reading and temporality, my close study companion has been this book, where Bolous Walker ventures into reading as a sensuous and aesthetic experience. This involves an attentive reading that requires us to stop our everyday tendencies to interpret our surroundings and instead be quiet for a moment; a form of presence that 'indicates a bodily intensity where we sink into the world, open to the epiphany that the aesthetic experience can be' (Boulos Walker, 2017: 187). This is furthermore a reading guided by an openness toward literature so that the reading can come to you; I am referring to that which can happen when you allow the book to read you, at the same time as you read the book.

The two poems above are written by the author, journalist, and feminist Märta Tikkanen, born in Helsinki in 1935. It was not until I opened the purple book cover (I primarily read the Swedish edition, *Århundradets kärlekssaga*, published in 1978), that I remembered the book was a gift from my mother. Did she intuitively understand that this text would be of importance for me one day? This book read me deeply.

Märta Tikkanen did not become an author because there were things that she wanted to say. She wrote in order to survive. *The Love Story of the Century* (1984) consists of a cycle of poems that Tikkanen wrote about her life and, in particular, her relationship with her husband, the artist and author Henrik Tikkanen. The first poem reads:

At first it feels good
quite incredibly and tremendously good
that in spite of everything
there are also people who see
behind the façade
who know
and realize

But then everything
gets only more difficult

And the question comes:
Why don't you leave?

Innumerable times I've been
on my way

if this drinking bout isn't
the last
then I'll leave

if his malice affects
the children
then I'll leave

If he also starts to lie
then I'll leave

and if he ever uses force
on me
then I'll leave

when the children can no longer
take it
then I'll simply have to

And all of it happened
Still, I didn't leave

Why?

(Märta Tikkanen, *The Love Story of the Century*, 1984: 3)

To Tikkanen there is no other way than writing about that which is troubling her the most, including her husband's alcoholism, child abuse, rape, and mental instability. Rooted in ordinary situations and with the use of mundane language, she has a rare ability to write about the darkness, that which is burning, to touch the most sensitive. Her writing resonates deeply. Besides this

confessional book on her family life, Tikkanen's publication list is long and includes titles such as *Manrape* (1975), *The Darkness that Deepens Joy* (1981), and her debut book from 1970, *Now Tomorrow*, which she dedicated 'To my dishwasher of the brand Constructa'.¹

Her books are written from a distinctly feminine point of view; her vulnerable situation in writing *The Love Story of the Century* not only shines through in the topics she addressed but also gave her the form through which she wrote. In her marriage, it was always her husband's work, and his alcoholism, that came first and she constantly had to fight for some time by herself. As she could only steal moments here and there, often during the night when everyone else in the family was asleep and the household duties finalised, her minimalistic and straightforward style, written in the form of poems, emerged: 'I just threw things down in the little time I had.'² Thus, her powerful style did not come by elaborate choice. It emerged that way because that was the only possibility as she wrote from within the temporality of her life. At the same time, the temporal rupture where she could momentarily be free, created during the night writing, was absolutely needed for her to cope with her demanding situation.

In reading *The Love Story of the Century*, consisting of poems that circle downward page after page, the reading brings me further and further into her life-world. Even though I am not experiencing the same difficulties as she did, in reading about her hope and misery, it becomes a way of seeing myself, and others, through the text. I am fascinated by her strength to open the window and display her vulnerability. At the same time, she makes me upset; every moment she still had the possibility of breaking up with her husband, every moment she did not, could not?

The instant, and explorations of the lowest and the highest

Through her poetic effects, Tikkanen not only enables another direction of time, from horizontality to verticality, but a vertical journey that expands my universe. How can such a text be written? Hélène Cixous, the French feminist writer, philosopher, and poet, who has written extensively on her own writing process, provides some suggestions.

In Cixous's (1993) book, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, she descends through going to 'The school of the dead,' 'The school of dreams,' and 'The school of roots.' The ladder, as the title of her book indicates, is a literal metaphor for how '[t]he writers I love are *descenders*, explorers of the lowest and the deepest' (Cixous, 1993: 5, emphasis in original). Celebrating the power of literature where the author reaches the deepest place possible, she spells out 'two ways of climbing downward – by plunging into the earth and going deep into the sea – and neither is easy' (Cixous, 1993: 5). Descending, through writing, is a physical motion where 'the element resists: the earth and the sea offer resistance, as does language and thought' (Cixous, 1993: 5). Through going to the schools of death, dreams, and roots, she writes about those things that are almost too painful to write about, which is a writing toward 'the truth' because that is 'what writing *wants*'; a truth that is 'totally down below and a long way off' (Cixous, 1993: 6, emphasis in original). This way of writing is not effortless, and, '[g]iving oneself to writing means being in a position to do this work of digging, of unburying, and this entails a long period of apprenticeship, since it obviously means going to school' (Cixous, 1993: 6–7).

Cixous developed her own writing practices for a writing from within the forces of the instant. This includes scribbling down notes in the minute she sees something: 'I keep scores of little bits of paper, for I note at the top speed what presents itself all the time, in a café at a minigolf, while walking along the street, I have small notebooks in my pockets, I scribble on a paper napkin' (Sellers, 2004: vii). This scribbling of hundreds and hundreds of notes is part of her writing habit based on her 'belief in writing's ability to take us beyond the limitations of the self to a terrain where other understandings and perspectives come into view' (Sellers, 2004: viii).

When Susan Sellers (2004) read some of the notes in her preparation of *Hélène Cixous: The Writing Notebooks*, she was taken by the verticality in Cixous's handwriting. This is a verticality not only metaphorically speaking, but also in the way some of the notes appeared on paper. In a conversation included in the book, Sellers addressed this:

That was something that struck me as I was working through the notebook material: it's almost as if there are different handwritings. [. . .] Some of the writing seems to want to go almost against the grain of the lines, vertically instead of horizontally. (Sellers 2004: 118)

Cixous responded:

It is absolutely like that, and I don't choose it of course, it is decided by the substance of what is happening in my mind. It happens like that, as if it were a volcano spitting lava, and the shape of it, the appearance of the matter, the way it is disposed on the page, is decided by the spirit of it, which is something I don't calculate. (Sellers, 2004: 118)

Cixous gives herself over to a vertical writing in the moment. Like Tikkanen, the night is a particularly rich moment for her when she can scribble down what the unconscious body wants to express: 'When I close my eyes the passage opens, the dark gorge, I descend. [. . .] There is no more genre. I become a thing with pricked-up ears. Night becomes a verb. I night' (Cixous, 2003: 115). At night-time she writes from within the open air that makes it possible to write 'deep down in my body, further down, behind thought' (Cixous, 1993: 118). In the morning, in the flash moment between being awake and at sleep, she harvests what her night dreams have offered her (Helin, 2019).

The explicit formulation of vertical temporality, however, I got from Gaston Bachelard. He is known for his work in philosophy of science and his call for 'epistemological breaks' necessary for scientific thought. Besides this, he is acknowledged for his phenomenological approach to dreaming, poetics, and imagination. From long walks in the Champagne countryside where he lived, as well as from reading poetry, slowly, he elaborated on how our engagement with the earth, wind, fire, and air enable different kinds of imaginations in images that can make us fly high and dig deep. In his essay on temporality, *Intuition of the Instant*, Bachelard (2013: 6) firmly proposed:

Time has but one reality, the reality of the instant. [. . .] Although time will no doubt be reborn, it must first die.

To him, every instant is suspended between two voids. An instant will always die, making every moment unique, with no history or future, as 'the instant imposes itself all in one blow, completely' (Bachelard, 2013: 15). Whereas horizontal time is unfolding and continuous, this is time as disruptive and discontinuous. Thereby, time, as we usually know it, disappears and we can start to imagine something else on the threshold of being:

The aim is verticality as depth or height [. . .] and it is this vertical time that the poet discovers when he rejects horizontal time – namely the becoming of others, the becoming of life, the becoming of the world. (Bachelard, 2013: 58–59)

One characteristic of the vertical moment is that it awakes our inherent ambivalence; that is, furthermore, how vertical time is connected to sensing simultaneities. Thus, vertical time is not one-dimensional. It can in no way be calculated or measured. It is the time of complexity and multitude, which is why it can house contradictory feelings that makes us cry in laughter or smile with regret:

‘instead of masculine vigorous time which thrusts forth and conquers, instead of gentle submissive time which weeps and regrets, we have the androgynous instant’ (Bachelard, 2013: 59). A vertical moment; a moment of being human where opposing forces of darkness and light meet.

Vertical time is anchored in the body. Time is no longer something pushed toward us and for us to manage. It is rather a force experienced within us. This time, what Bachelard (2013: 59) also referred to as ‘poetic time,’ is the time of the living, ‘it moves, it proves, it invites, it consoles – it is astonishing and familiar’ at the same time. To watch a bird flying, to read a poem, or making the first cup of morning tea, there is no limit to that which can touch us in our vulnerability, enabling us to ‘take off’ vertically in time. Importantly, beginnings are always born in the instant, because the new occurs instantaneously. Even if the new comes into being after a long process of thinking it appears suddenly, and ‘[o]nly what happens suddenly can truly surprise me; and what surprises me arises suddenly’ (Casey, 2003: 120).

Reading Bachelard’s radical belief in time’s true reality as being in the instant offers hope, maybe there is a different way of experiencing time after all? But, is it possible, really, to think time without a horizontal line where life unfolds in a ceaseless process of becoming? Yes, definitely, Bachelard (2013) would respond. And, he would add in frustration, that it is Bergson’s and others’ work on time as a flow – duration – that provides us with false understanding of time’s true capacity.³ Due to these philosophers, we have established habits to think this way, as well as lost our capacity to pay attention to that which happens to us in the moment, which makes us believe in time as continuous. He further emphasised that our writing and talking have contributed to this way of thinking since language is littered with words such as ‘for a long time,’ ‘meanwhile,’ and ‘during.’ In this way ‘[d]uration is ingrained in our grammar’ because ‘words are indeed there before thought, before our efforts renew thought’ (Bachelard, 2013: 23).

Both Cixous and Bachelard make use of the subversive capacity of the French language to break free from habits of thinking and talking, often through the use of poetic language. Here, poetry, is not referred to in a literal sense, but rather should be understood from a wider perspective drawing on the etymological meaning of *poiesis* – meaning to make with our full body – since it ‘is about hearing and feeling as well as crafting and shaping’ (Kearney, 2014: xix). Poetry is also a powerful invitation to take off in verticality:

Flying is woman’s gesture – flying in language and making it fly. (Cixous, 1976: 887)

Cixous and Bachelard offer different resources in the inquiry into another temporality where the aim is not only to propose a different direction of time, but also to emphasise the embodied experience of a time that opens up; a time that houses a sense of vertical expansion. Bachelard explicates the meaning and understanding of the notion ‘vertical time’ and Cixous adds richness through her elaborate formulations on how she writes her way downward in the instant. Reading them together, I can start to see how vertical time and writing can be merged into forms of vertical writing. The question becomes: does this form of writing have a place in academia today?

When not to write is not an option

Writing practices that resist the flattening of horizontal temporalities at play raise fundamental questions about how we tend to think of academic writing. This questioning is at the heart of feminist writing methodologies in general, and the ‘methodological fragilities’ involved in ‘vulnerable writing,’ in particular (Page, 2017: 15). Livholts (2012: 3) suggested that just as we actively think of the methods we are using, we should also ask ourselves, ‘what forms of writing does the research question demand?’ Inherent in this question is the call for a plurality, and she continued, ‘what forms of writing were excluded by the way in which you were taught that your research question should be

written about?’ (Livholts, 2012: 3). Likewise, do we need different forms of ‘scriptologies’? In the words of Rhodes (2019: 31), ‘just as methods and methodologies are many, each one suitable for different problems and questions, should that plurality not naturally extend to writing?’ Is that when we will find texts written by scholars daring to write from within about that which is emotional, fleshy, messy, and dirty, to write about ‘the real life’? (Huopalaïnen and Satama, 2019: 18).

Next, I introduce three texts published in academic outlets that in different ways have offered me deep, vertical, reading experiences. I include them because they resonated with me and they made me want to return to the pages and re-read many times. Resonance is here understood as a text with the ‘ability to evoke images, memories and emotions’ (Meier and Wegener, 2017: 194). They seemed to be written by the unprotected body – written without a layer of skin that protects – which produces a special kind of bare vulnerability (Brewis and Williams, 2019). To my understanding, they emerge from different forms of scriptologies, showcasing the potentiality of academic writing that creates a rupture in horizontal time: ‘a temporal stasis in which spacetime matters shift’ (Ulmer, 2017: 7).

In the first piece, the journal article ‘Splitting the World Open: Writing stories of Mourning and Loss,’ Linda Henderson and Alison Black (2018) wrote about their experiences of being brought up with family shame, one of them having a father that was convicted of sexual abuse and the other a brother with HIV/AIDS. As they wrote together, they got the strength to spell out what could not have been said, but at least it is written. Through using a combination of different forms of writing, such as e-mails to each other, poems, and stories, they invite the reader into their friendship that deepened as they collaboratively shared their memories and wrote this piece together. Linda Henderson and Alison Black (2018) begin as a ‘we’:

And so, we speak-write into spaces that have remained silent for too long. We begin to split open the cracks. As with a palimpsest, we find ourselves picking at the surface, its layers of words and images, to re-member how things were, what they became, and what they are becoming. We scrape away the covering skin and look again, perceive again the traces and elements of the ghostly presents, elements embedded beneath the surface, elements embedded in tightly wound and wounded cores. (p. 262)

Later on, they shift to expressions of ‘I’:

I remember the trial and what followed.

The verdict is guilty. The subsequent media frenzy frightening. The subsequent silence from the people in my life deafening. People don’t know what to say. Even people I loved. People I thought loved me. Shame has gagged them. (Alison, p. 264)

... He has gone. It is true. He has gone forever. My brother, my friend, my protector, my confidant, mentor, place of solace and of laughter. He has gone. Forever. (Linda, p. 265)

Throughout their upbringing, these were family traumas that they had to hide, no matter what. The fear of the mundane question: ‘Do you have any brothers and sisters Linda?’ In reading I am not only drawn into what this must have meant to them, but also what it feels like to eventually find someone to share one’s difficult life experiences with. Through writing this piece together a particular form of writing-friendship emerged:

the methodology of collaborative writing and storying is producing spaces of trust-tenderness-friendship as we uncover our experiences of descent, and our being in dark-hidden places. (Linda Henderson and Alison Black, 2018, p. 265)

As a reader I can follow how their friendship evolved and how they appreciated receiving each other's pieces throughout the writing process. Through this deep writing, things started to shift, 'shame is slowly and carefully being challenged, and we are permitting deep, dark secrets to be excavated and given light, air and space' (p. 267). This text was written when not to write was no longer an option, because there 'is a burning need to bring to life the ghostly presents that haunt and linger' (p. 262), and, in that way, '[w]e are letting go of things that once held us down' (p. 268). As their joint vertical time rises, they are no longer prepared to let their history dictate who they are, enabling them to open up to something new on the other side. Their presence resonates. Moving across the interplay of voices and their generosity in sharing how the text developed, I was drawn into their writing process to the extent that it eventually felt like I was there, writing this piece with them.

Their text reminds me of the piece 'My mother is mentally retarded,' written by Carol Rambo Ronai (1996). As the chapter starts, the author introduces her mother with, what can at first be read as rather harmless anecdotes, 'One Thanksgiving she locked the entire family out of the house because, as she puts it, "Everyone is ignoring me"' (p. 109). It did not stay there, however, her home was everything but a safe space for a young girl:

So she proceeded to beat me with even more vigor and conviction. I was taking fists to the head, to the stomach, and to the sides. I did not try to get away, nor did I put much effort into trying to block her punches and slaps. I was on fire with a righteous fury. I knew I had called. I knew I was right and she was wrong, and I knew she was beating me for no reason. (p. 123)

Even as we get to know that other grownup people surrounded Carol, the support and care were not there: 'The entire time I lived with my grandmother, she never cuddled me, comforted, nor offered affection' (p. 112). Her father was part of the abuse:

My mother stood nearby as he grabbed my small arm, practically pulling it out of the socket. 'No,' I said, planting my feet and pulling away, 'I don't want to.' 'You know you like it' he said, pulling me toward the bed. 'I don't like it today,' I said, flinging all my weight in the opposite direction in an effort to counterbalance his pulling on me. If I put up enough resistance, sometimes he would give up, regarding the whole matter as not worth the effort. This time the strategy wasn't working. . . (p. 113)

In writing this text and returning to her upbringing with her mother, Carol shares a large number of memories that she weaves together in a story of what it was like for her growing up under these painful circumstances. Through a patchwork of different memories – stories of her everyday life as she grew – I as a reader felt the persistent ambivalence between her love of her mother and her anger at what she had to cope with:

I look at what I just wrote. All of it is true, yet I haven't told you the worst of it. I am disgusted that this creature, Suzanne, is my mother. She is horrifying, vile, potentially defective genetic material, someone I or my child might take after. (p. 117)

The stories are detailed, built around a non-linear temporality, including memories from the flesh of a young girl struggling in her everyday life, a worried woman thinking of her own possibilities of being a mother, and an academic sharing insights. Written this way, her 'layered account' opens a window to a world normally hidden from me. The text is not explaining, it springs out of the bare experience of growing up with her special mother and a sexually abusing father. In

reading, I can start to imagine what it would be like to be her. The stories span an entire life, but because of the way it was composed, I got to feel it all in one, fragile moment. Was it written in one breath?

Alison Pullen's (2018) journal article, 'Writing as Labiaplasty,' speaks about women's writing from the body:

There has been much talk of women's writing, body writing and even leaky writing as an activist project, but how can we progress writing as embodied, feminine, if we don't have the language to talk of women's bodies? (p. 124)

Usually, feminine writing is addressed in abstract and philosophical terms. This is something different. In making the vertical move, from writing from the lips 'up here' to writing from the lips 'down there,' Pullen addresses how writing norms and mainstream writing practices are excluding the female body. She spells out the lack of proper language for writing from the body, and, as a countermove, she uses concrete words for what this does to us. In this way, she speaks directly to me as a reader, enlightening what is otherwise hidden:

You don't want to read about the blood that drips down my leg, the pungent odour of being sexually aroused, the gashes and scars of childbirth, the grey hair, the skin imperfections that develop in the Sydney heat. In redressing this abjection, we need to talk about vulvas, vaginas, labia. (p. 125)

Writing from her anger and vulnerability, in an act of embodied activism, Pullen wrote this text in one stretch. She refused to edit, she explained in the reflection that followed, because she wanted to keep the pre-reflexive nature of the text. This feeling of a text that is raw – born out of the urge to say exactly these things and using the language required – is reinforced by the different styles in which words are displayed on the page: capital letters, bold, different font sizes, and some words appears in a vertical list. Through these acts she resists the demand for academic conformity. Her strength to write something like this, in the suspended moment when everything else had to be on hold, resonates. At the same time, her fragility is there and, in closing, we reach the bottom, as the uncensored implication of writing as labiaplasty is articulated:

Writing as labiaplasty then mutates women's writing and it renders women mute. Suggestively, I end: Where is she? (p. 126)

Being moved

To introduce texts that shake my ground is always a risky project. My descriptions can never do justice to these texts or to my reading experiences. In reading I am 'with' the text, in writing it becomes a representation 'about.' Magic lost. I am also aware of the fact that I have discussed/analyzed/described these pieces in ways that were most probably not intended by the authors as I have dressed them up in a language game different from the origin of their work. That was, of course, never my intention. This was an attempt to bring the abstract idea of 'vertical writing' to life by showcasing particular reading experiences because I sincerely appreciate the vertical qualities of these vulnerable texts; texts that invite reading experiences beyond nonsequential forms of time. However, in order to appreciate the rupturing qualities of these texts, maybe it would have been better to just say: read!

Read, and maybe you will also find that such a reading can create a form of attention that surrenders current concerns of 'calculative thinking,' allowing a moment of 'authentic connection'

through reading/writing where we are changed, ‘literally transformed – from one existential state to another’ (Bolous Walker, 2017: 155).

This is in stark contrast to the reading experiences offered by texts written from within horizontal temporalities. When we are stuck in horizontal organising, all we can work with is speed; to read and write slower or quicker. In this rat race, what is published tends to be based on ‘hurried, mechanical, assembly-line writing’ (Ulmer, 2017: 201). By necessity, machine-like writing makes it almost impossible to create the connections needed between ourselves and the texts we write. Thereby, it is difficult to contribute meaningfully and authentically to academic conversations.

At the same time, there are possibilities for temporal discontinuities that smash horizontal time up and dig out a writing space in vertical time. Here, speed is no longer the only option, as we can move in a multitude of temporal directions, in ‘a sense of spaciousness, of expanding and suspended time’ (Yoo, 2019b: 192). As we have seen, there is no set genre for vertical writing. This is rather a writing in a plurality of shapes and forms. Importantly, it is not a writing that can be labelled ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ As O’Shea (2019) explained, good writing generally attends to the requirements of a well-presented narrative with a coherent and logical whole. Here, that is not the point:

If I am a bad writer so be it, I am not ashamed to be one, it, like being transgender, non-binary and dysphoric is what I am. This is not a story, it is my little life. (O’Shea, 2019: 48)

As one of the reviewers to this text rightly pointed out, several of the texts discussed here are written in the tradition of ‘evocative autoethnography.’ As a reader, I feel the authors’ difficulty in articulating these words, and some of these texts almost cannot be written, but therefore have to be written. In yet other texts, I sense how they have been written easily, as the author has released the control function and let the writing flow like a fountain. Irrespectively, these are texts written from within ‘an intimacy with the living world’ through a thinking/feeling/reading/writing *in* movement (Cancienne and Snowber, 2003: 238), a digging deeper and higher toward that which will never be fully settled. These texts contain a form of vulnerable writing where the writer offers ‘performative interpretations that transform the things that they interpret’ (Gherardi, 2019: 754). Importantly, it is corporal writing that alludes to an ‘opening up of the body that is not neatly weaved – breaking the seals of the containers that constrain us’ (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008: 255). Furthermore, as Katila (2019: 138) explained in her autoethnographic piece of becoming a mother, these are the texts written when ‘[w]riting was the only way to formulate the highly emotional and embodied experience in detail and to grasp the affective intensities of the fleeting, yet memorable moments.’

I find it difficult to express in words how much I appreciate reading texts that offer vertical reading experiences; texts that I feel the author has written for the urgency of articulating that which matters. In her gratitude toward those that dare name from what they suffer, bell hooks (1991: 11) wrote:

I am grateful to the many women and men who dare to create theory from the location of pain and struggle, who courageously expose wounds to give us their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys. Their work is liberatory.

I share these special texts with students, engaged in ‘untimely reading’ (Bolous Walker, 2017), as we sit together in a seminar room and read aloud sentence by sentence. Roughly speaking, a full day of joint reading takes us through twenty to twenty five pages, which means we have to be utterly selective in what we read. If we were to use the language of horizontal time, we would say that reading this way is time consuming. As Bolous Walker (2017: 154) wrote: ‘authentic reading is a slow practice or exercise of attention.’ She sure is right; this is a reading that cannot be rushed

through. But, as we try to break up the horizontal organisation, clock-time is not the primary measurement stick used. When students respond, as one of them spontaneously did in a course about research methods: ‘This makes me feel like I have read for the first time at the university,’ then I am confident we are spending our time wisely.

Together

Tikkanen never left her husband. At one point she was actually going to but he became sick with leukaemia and she decided to stay. Twenty years after he passed away, she returned to write about her marriage with the book *Two: Scenes from an Artist's Marriage* (Tikkanen, 2004). It ends with the words: ‘I miss him often. Not for a moment have I wished him back.’⁴

With these two sentences, Tikkanen weaves temporality and life together. Through her books, she has, and will continue to, contribute to the understanding of the conditions for being a (writing) woman. Besides writing, she brings her texts to life through public events where she engages in readings and talks, thereby establishing a feeling of community among her readers.

In changing academia from within, we cannot underestimate the need for such community-building activities – safe inquiry spaces – offering resistance in solidarity. In ‘Writing as Labiaplasty,’ Pullen acknowledged the power of our communities in the creation of an ethics of vulnerability. This is a community where her text:

... acts as a small episode of resistance in the communities of women who work, often invisibly, to create safe spaces to work, live and write, and developing different ways of working and caring for others in the university. (Pullen, 2018: 128)

I first wrote the ideas articulated here for a workshop about academic writing as an embodied, sensuous, and identity-related activity.⁵ There, I felt, the transformative strength of being with colleagues who, with care for others, persist in asking difficult questions about how to write texts that make a difference, even though there are no immediate answers. There, we also shared moments where we could have conversations ‘for real,’ as we searched for ways to express what needs to be said. Being together, ‘being vulnerable with each other in the present’ is a generative resource (Bansel et al., 2020: 3). Moments like these allow for a much needed pause from that which otherwise governs our work and it gives hope for a future in academia where our vulnerable positions do not scare us off, as we keep searching for ways of writing from within our full bodies.

The publishing apparatus is located at the core of our community-building activities. Writing this text, I was fortunate to be assigned to an associate editor who did not push hard, but initiated an ethics of care. In the editorial letter s/he had written: ‘... as you will see your reviewers offer their reading of your text (and of you). ... I will not direct your paper as an associate editor, but rather, would like to see you engage with their reading.’ And the three reviewers had certainly engaged with this text, with intellectual rigour and an open mind. Two of the reviewers explicitly addressed the difficulty in breaking with traditional practices of reviewing. One of them wrote: ‘While writing, would I be able to throw away the traditions that I carry with me; those based upon horizontal time? I do my best’. The other reviewer wanted to ‘... write to you in solidarity, as a feminist academic concerned about our practices of writing’. Imagine if we would encounter such generous and respectful review processes more often. Then, we would not have to limit our capacity to express ourselves because we are (rightly) afraid of the written violence that review processes can be, particularly when our writing makes us exposed. In Woolf’s (2016: 9) essay about how to read, she suggested to hold back the critical eye at first, because, if we criticise at first, ‘you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read. But if you open

your mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turns of the first sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other.' Has the time come for a review system that does not dictate or teach, but instead invites and evokes?

Finalising this text, I am in no way finished searching for another temporality. I am still struggling with the every other week rhythm. During the most desperate time I had a sore throat and bad cold for 9 months. No cure worked and the cough did not diminish. This is when I started writing; these words are written directly from my wounded throat. I have written this in relation to other people's words that have touched me deeply.

One of the reviewers kindly asked if I would be ready to share some of my own words, written in despair. The only thing I can offer as a response, for the time being, is that I am sorry, but I am not there yet. What I have jotted down in my notebook, for instance that evening when we went for dinner to celebrate my oldest daughter's birthday and afterwards, I dropped her off at her dad's place while I returned back to my house, these wounded words are, so far, loosely coupled sentences written in Swedish. I am not brave enough to put these words into full sentences and articulate these things aloud. Feeling my own limitation makes me acknowledge even more those who can, and dare, to do so. Furthermore, what becomes clear, is that, unlike horizontal writing that can be planned by scheduling, vertical writing cannot be forced into existence.

Yet, I can share what I have learnt from scribbling down these loose ends. I have learnt that this temporal quest is not about searching for agency and mastering of time; rather, it is about how to give myself over to the inherent forces in time. To not rush over but try to stay, even though it hurts. But where can I stay and feel at home? One of the reviewers asked: your 'writing body is anchored somewhere. Where is this writing? Is it at home? Away from home? Does it require the familiar or the strange?' It was not until I read these questions that I realised I have written almost all of this in my kitchen, at my kitchen table, surrounded by piles of books, papers, my notebook, for some strange reason my calendar, my pink glittering pen case, the local newspaper from yesterday because I have not yet picked up today's paper, the case for my glasses, and most of the time with a big cup of black tea. This may be the best worst place to be in this homecoming-writing-process. Unhomeliness is usually connected to space; I seek a home in time, in a process where '[w]e indeed build in time, as we build in space' (Bachelard, 2013: 30). Writing at my kitchen table, it has been possible to gently ask the text: What word would you suggest to come next, and, at this point in time, where can this word bring me?

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Notes

1. My translation from Swedish.
2. Interview with Märta Tikkanen, <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/1382033>
3. In his book, *Intuition of the instant*, Bachelard (2013) explicitly spells out his critique toward Bergson's conception of time as duration.
4. My translation from Swedish.
5. Gender, Work and Organization: Workshop on Writing, Hanken School of Economics & University of Lapland, Helsinki, Finland, 6-7 June, 2019.

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