



**Arthro-coda: poetic notes (re)forming Patti Lather's "Top ten+ list: (re)thinking ontology in (post) qualitative research"**

Citation of the final article:

McKnight, Lucinda 2018, Arthro-coda: poetic notes (re)forming Patti Lather's "Top ten+ list: (re)thinking ontology in (post) qualitative research", *Cultural studies - critical methodologies*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 202-215.

**This is the accepted manuscript.**

©2017, SAGE Publications.

Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

The final published version of this article is available from:

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1532708617704454>

Downloaded from DRO:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30090242>

**Arthro-coda: Poetic Notes (re)forming Patti Lather’s “Top Ten+ List: Lessons from the  
Ontological Turn”**

The author would like to acknowledge the breaths shared with colleagues Amanda Keddie, Tim Corcoran, Catherine Beavis, Daphne Teo, Kim Davies, Ruth Arber, Robin Bellingham, Andrea Nolan, Sue Bennett, Deb Ollis and Joanne O’Mara, as well as the non-human bodies participating in the many readings and meetings at which this poem started forming.

Lucinda McKnight

Lecturer in Education

Deakin University

221 Burwood Highway

Burwood 3125

Email: [l.mcknight@deakin.edu.au](mailto:l.mcknight@deakin.edu.au)

Ph. 61 3 92517428

## **Arthro-coda: Poetic Notes (re)forming Patti Lather's "Top Ten+ List: Lessons from the Ontological Turn"**

### **Abstract**

This poem forms a diffraction of Patti Lather's article listing ten learnings from the ontological turn. This work is intended to be read alongside Lather's original article, so the reader can appreciate how poetry and prose form and entangle reciprocally. Ostensibly coalescing as notes from a face-to-face, simultaneously video conferenced meeting to discuss Lather's list, this poem pulls together fragments from multiple intra-actions and pushes meaning apart, as do the human and other speakers it calls into being. It avoids dramatic claims to making a difference, but suggests an infinitesimal, insect-antennae shift via the ways it may brush against the reader's skin and increase awareness of the more-than-human. This may even activate a tiny wriggle-release from a stuck place. Lather's list emerges through the narrows of poetic inquiry as changed, alternatively accessible, more intensely affective, yet still resonant with her advice and spiky with further, many-legged, tangential questions.

**Keywords:** poetry, ontology, post-qualitative, feminism, methodologies, new materialism, posthumanism

**Arthro-coda: Poetic Notes (re)forming Patti Lather's "Top Ten+ List: Lessons from the  
Ontological Turn"**

**10. Things talk back**

Door code, key pad, touch screen

dial up, Master Volume (pleased to meet you, sir)

finger tap, pixel rap

camera zoom, frame splice

human split, autopsy-turvy.

And we've only

just begun.

Microphone- that's Martin

speaking.

Lean in

gadget bling

landfill, overspill.

Three stories below

steel strut, concrete slab

ancient earth

DNA turf

Welcome to Country.

There is soil on our shoes.

Who's joined the meeting?

## 9. Body-ology

Blood tongue, hot air

$C_6H_{12}O_6+$

$6CO_2+6H_2O\rightarrow$

Salt tear, theory smear, oh dear

vertebra

sore back, sore heart

vein meat, take a seat

hamstring, hip flexor

ever better.

Did Darwin never dream

that humans would

become machines?

Gas exchange, lung slung, voice

stream, stutter, flutter, stammer

code up laughs

code up sighs

code up me

in protocol H.263

for ISDN.

Scrambled eggs, scattered sperm, kidneys, corneas...

did anyone see, hear, touch, smell, taste the tear in the cow's eye, before

we all got

mixed up

in the ether?

## 8. Folds

OK, so folds not splits.

The machine announces:

Descartes has joined the meeting.

Spinoza has joined the meeting.

Nietzsche has joined the meeting.

Freud has joined the meeting.

Lacan has joined the meeting.

Marx has joined the meeting.

Call a translator.

That won't help. Binary code can't fix

this tangled mess.

By the way

this is beginning to feel like...

A boys' club?

Yes, no... an i n c a l c u l a b l e

meeting.

Does that even matter?

## **7. On fighting gravity**

We came for

the networking

opportunities.

We didn't know

we would be networking with

cockroaches, fists, dirt, sheep, frequencies

all calling each other

into being.

We thought

therefore we were.

Not any more.

We thought

some things mattered more than others.

Not any more.

Just wondering

if we anthropomorphise

our new contacts

is that ok

or just

another human way of knowing the world?

## 6. The new canon

Women we call

by first names

lemons, muscles, goats

water levels, skin

cockroaches

tree roots and computers

will all gleefully

and responsibly

ruin

each other's knowledge.

We get it. We love it! We liked the ruins, even when they were just words.

[Rattle, BAM... menacing thump!]

What's that? Vitruvian Man, Gravity Man, Canon Man is banging

on that bloody door.

Run! Seep! Disconnect! Disperse!

He will pull

us all

back to earth.

It's only Row– she's just

a bit late. Problem

synching data

in schedules.

## **5. Invent don't critique**

I would

rest my case

on the stuck place.

But now I don't

know where

to find it.

#### **4. The feeling fix**

We are fatigued

with affective inflation.

We are tired

of social justice.

Exhale and slump

all chair-stuck, glummed-down

discoid jelly bulge.

And yet

our skin prickles when

we read.

Even our thumping human hearts can't

prevent

that face punch in the kitchen

that throat slit in the slaughterhouse.

We're all cows to Vitruvian man!

Anthropocene

wet dream.

In the audience

yeast screams.

So is the best

we can hope for

a brush

with solidarity?

### **3. Insect theory**

Hang ten on the edge

of this tectonic plate

ready to surf change

But it ain't going nowhere fast.

Change is back home

under the fridge

behind the pipes

in the wall

cavities

in the insect undercommons.

Anonymous, cellular, invisible

repeating, replicating, vast

indivisible

incremental

more than mental.

Once I put a cup

on a cockroach and

watched it move

all around the kitchen.

Change as subliminal scurry

a mini commotion

in a teacup.

What twitches, in this meeting?

## **2. More than a mirror**

Hunch, peck, poke

Lap top dogs

[I'll just quickly answer

this one email]

Screen glass selving

fine hair halos

blur our out/lines.

Hunker down, roll back

avoid the eye

on the wall.

Yeeoow! Her volume is too, too...

Push pull

Speaker cone

pumps us full

of speaker waves.

Ricochet

tricksy play.

Cilia

seal me up.

What am I

if accuracy is not

a sign of virtue?

## 1. New Educational Policy Directions.

Hi ACARA<sup>1</sup>

It's The Invertebrate University here.

We're calling to request

LUMPY MESSY MULTIPLE MORE THAN HUMAN WILD PROFUSE EVERYDAY

UNINTENDED FLUID MATERIAL policy

from now on.

Hey, everyone...

they hung up.

Sounded like

Vitruvian man again. He gets around.

But don't give up.

Those words, those CAPS, those black lines

though

are cockroach legs now

stroking his beautiful mind

crawling out of his beautiful ears

and his beautiful nose

prickling his beautiful skin. Arms outstretched, he can't even

flick us off.

And one fine day, he will realise...

how noble humanism is and save the world (only maybe not the cockroaches).

Traitor!

You can't blame me for gravity.

Is that failure?

## **0. The end point**

But there is no end point

You never

get away from it.

I think you can

get away with it.

It's all gone

over my head.

Mating with Big Data?

Aren't they the enemy?

I don't know

if I want this game.

What would strange

research even be?

Clock, tick, blink, schedule ding

chairs pushed/push back

ethics pushed/push back

ecologies pushed/push back.

Busy humans have

to go

zip up those neat, tight manskins

glorious, imperious

impervious (except to cockroaches)

drawn and measured by godartistman hand.

Press Hang up.

Hang up on a science that is worthy of the whole world.

This is so scary.

## Notes

### 1. Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority

#### Afterword

This afterword brings the humanist “I” author back into play. This article and the poet writing it have been forming with all the rooms and bodies I’ve ever sat in/with/by for meetings. It was only, however, when I was listening to Maggie MacLure and Rick Dolphijn speak in one of our university meeting rooms that I began to become aware, tangentially, of the flickering fluorescent lights above and the way they blanch my colleagues’ skin, and later, the way they co-compose all our blood counts (Landesberg & Quatrala, 1996). With meeting memories pushing and changing every day, I began the reading suggested by the speakers and those lights, reading and reading and reading, as post qualitative scholars advise (St Pierre, Jackson & Mazzei, 2016) until my pixelscreeneyes were heavy.

I read and discussed Lather’s article at yet another meeting with the poem continuing to form simultaneously; these practices of readingcomposingarticulatinginsitting are mutual, with research poetry not just another form of representation mirroring an object prose text.

Learning our lessons from the ontological turn is always material-discursive and happens with human and non-human embodiment, although the journal article tends to pretend otherwise (see Lather’s Lesson 10). By reading poem and prose through each other, as Barad (2007) proposes, readers may experience theory differently and be reminded of the multiple material “resources” its creation/dissemination requires, entities elided in humanist and discursive regimes.

## References

I break with American Psychological Association (APA) format by including reference entries that are not cited in the creative academic work above. These works, however, are important conceptual fragments of the poetic assemblage; their words, images and volumes are material-figural densities (Lather 2016) that are continuing to form through this poetry.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe half-way: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. London: Duke University Press.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. London: Duke University Press.

Bennett, J. (2010). A vitalist stopover on the way to a new materialism. In D. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency and politics* (pp. 47-69). London: Duke University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Coole, D. (2010). The inertia of matter and the generativity of flesh. In D. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency and politics* (pp. 92-115). London: Duke University Press.

Coole, D., & Frost, S. (2010). Introducing the new materialisms. In D. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency and politics* (pp. 1-43). London: Duke University Press.

De Freitas, E., & Curinga, M. x. (2015). New materialist approaches to the study of language and identity: Assembling the posthuman subject. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 45(3), 249-265.

De Freitas, E., & Sinclair, N. (2013). New materialist ontologies in mathematics education: the body in/of mathematics. *Education Studies in Mathematics*, 83(3), 453-470.

Denzin, N. (2014). Reading and writing the experimental text. In M. H. Jacobsen, M. S. Drake, K. Keohane, & A. Petersen (Eds.), *Imaginative methodologies in the social*

- sciences: Creativity, poetics and rhetoric in social research* (pp. 93-107). Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- Gaztambide-Fernandez, R. (2015). Thinking beyond the human. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 45(3), 245-248.
- Jackson, A., & Mazzei, L. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research*. New York: Routledge.
- Landesberg, A., & Quatralo, L. (1996). see angel touch. In D. Coleman, E. Danze, & C. Henderson (Eds.), *Architecture and feminism* (pp. 60-71). New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Lather, P. (2013). Methodology 21: What do we do in the afterward? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 634-645.
- Lather, P. (2016). Top ten+ list: (Re)thinking ontology in (post)qualitative research. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 16(2), 125-131. doi 10.1177/1532708616634734
- MacLure, M. (2013). Researching without representation: Language and materiality in post qualitative methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 658-667.
- Mazzei, L. A. (2013). A voice without organs: Interviewing in post humanist research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 732-740.
- McKnight, L. (2016). Swimming lessons: Learning, new materialisms, posthumanism and post qualitative research emerge through a pool poem. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. doi:10.1080/15505170.2016.1220875
- McKnight, L., Bullock, O., & Todd, R. (2016). Whiteout: Writing collaborative online poetry as inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*. doi:10.1177/1077800416673664
- Moten, F., & Harney, S. (2004). The university and the undercommons. *Social Text* 79, 22(2), 101-115.

- Pedersen, H. (2013). Follow the judas sheep: Materialising post-qualitative methodology in zooethnographic space. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 717-731.
- Prendergast, M. (2009). Introduction: The phenomena of poetry in research. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. xix-xlii). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Roosth, S. (2009). Screaming yeast; Sonocytology, cytoplasmic milieus, and cellular subjectivities. *Critical Inquiry* (35), 332-350.
- Snaza, N., & Weaver, J. (2015). Education and the posthumanist turn. In N. Snaza & J. Weaver (Eds.), *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.
- St Pierre, E. A. (2011). Post qualitative research: The critique and the coming after. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 611-625). CA: SAGE.
- St Pierre, E. A. (2011). Refusing human being in humanist qualitative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative Inquiry and Global Crises* (pp. 40-55). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- St Pierre, E. A. (2012). Another postmodern report on knowledge: positivism and its others. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 15(4), 483-503.
- St Pierre, E. A. (2013). The posts continue: Becoming. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 646-657.
- St Pierre, E. A. (2014). *Post qualitative inquiry: Keynote lecture*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education/New Zealand Association for

Research in Education, Brisbane. <http://www.aare.edu.au/publications-database.php/9609/post-qualitative-inquiry>

St Pierre, E. A., Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. (2016). New empiricisms and new materialisms: Conditions for new inquiry. *Cultural Studies <=>Critical Methodologies*, 16(2), 99-110. doi:10.1177/1532708616638694

St Pierre, E. A., & Lather, P. (2013). Post qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 629-633.

Van der Tuin, I., & Dolphijn, R. (2010). The transversality of new materialism. *Women: A Cultural Review*, 21(2), 153-171.