

Chapter 7

Rampant texts and potted plants. Place- and material-based writing and the transformation of academic authorship

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Abstract

The phenomenon examined in this article is the social practice (Reckwitz, 2020; 2002) of writing place- and material-based texts in academic contexts. We find the background for this example of reflective practice research in the wonder or the “experience of discrepancy” (Lindseth, 2017): Why does knowing of, reading, or getting a writing exercise to write place- and material-based texts foster a motivation to write, even for the academic writer in an academic situation? The wonder was informed by trying out the practice of writing place- and material-based texts with a group of PhD students: could this type of writing be used pedagogically to provide the scholar with a resource not only for motivation for writing but also for transformation as an individual and scholar? Through practical and critical reflections on the practice the article gets closer to a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of place- and material-based writing as a discourse, social practice, and form of rhetoric.

Keywords

Placed-based writing, material-based writing, reflective practice, practice theory

Introduction

I was truly inspired by reading a small black book with poor photography on the front page. As I started reading the book, I realized that the picture

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was of a plant growing wildly out of a ventilation canal on an American university campus, a shot taken by the author herself. The motive clearly reminded her of the fact that she shared a real world with her students and that her obligations as a university teacher in academic writing was to empower the students to live their lives in this world. Framing the picture was the title *Transforming Ethos. Place and the Material in Rhetoric and Writing*, printed in yellow font with classical serifs, and under the picture was the name Roseanne Carlo (2020), the author. The book appeared personal, modern and classical at the same time, and of course speaking to me with all the buzzwords of my small world of academic interests: place, material, rhetoric, writing, ethos and – the one making me most curious – *transforming*². I was motivated by this book, not just to read on and reflect, but to *write myself* as well as *to try out the prescribed writing practices of place-and material-based writing with my own students*. And I did.

After reading Carlo's book, I was supposed to write a review of it, but following the example set by the writing style and the content of the book, I wrote about the book *and* myself – my own places and things (Brinch, 2021). For example, the aquarium with the fish staring at me found its way into the text together with the view out of the window and me longing for the land of my youth on the other side of the sea. I did not expect any feedback on my review, so I was surprised when a master's student from another university wrote that she found comfort in reading the text, that it had confirmed the very reason she was engaged in rhetoric and intellectual work at all, and that she had been reminded of the fact that rhetorical power, agency and empowerment can be found in the individual and start with the personal experience. What was going on here?

So far, this introduction reveals what the Norwegian scholar Anders Lindseth calls an *experience of discrepancy* (“diskrepanserfaring”) (2017, p. 247) because I imagined that certain texts had a different impact on their readers than expected. What is important for this chapter is what I did *after* writing the book review and turning my further actions into an example of *reflective practice research* (Lindseth, 2017; McGuirk, 2017). I decided to bring the phenomenon – the newfound motivational chain of inspiration to write place- and material-based texts – into my practice as a university teacher to examine it further. I asked myself if it would be possible to recreate the motivation for writing in a pedagogical setting in higher

² See chapter 2 of this book where Johan Lövgren explore identity development in higher education and chapter 12 where Sebastian Rehnman writes about reflective writing under the title “Writing expressively for one’s well-being: partly constituting oneself through self-reflection.”

education, even with young scholars in their (sometimes anxious) thriving for becoming researchers and academic authors. The idea of using a writing exercise to encourage participants to write a place- and material-based essay for the participants on a PhD course was born. My pedagogical practice as a course leader had to change to open a space for this new kind of writing practice. The change would be experimental testing of the hypothesis that *scholars, by using place- and material-based writing, would write texts that are more transformative for themselves and more engaging, even transformative, for others.*

This chapter has already started a hermeneutic-phenomenological *slow reading backwards* to the phenomenon of inspiration from Carlo's place- and material-based academic text: "By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences." (Ricœur, 1991, p. 110). A slow reading backwards is a hermeneutic reading where you examine the horizons that are established in the texts and by the texts in the practice, and this method is supposed to shed light on the phenomenon (Ricœur, 2008). The unfolding chapter will consist of the first two steps of *concrete* and *critical* reflections, following Lindseth's suggestions, before continuing to the third step of *theoretical* reflections (Lindseth, 2017; 2020). This means that the chapter twines two threads that intertwine and make the text: reflective practical research fostered by the experience of discrepancy, which made me reflect concretely and critically when trying out place- and material-based writing with PhD students, and a theoretical and methodological reflection raised by this example, asking how place- and material-based writing can be understood as a phenomenon in scholarly practice.

Concrete and critical reflections of place- and material-based writing in the education of PhD students

The experience of discrepancy

Reading backwards and grasping the original *experience of discrepancy* (Lindseth, 2017) require that I slow down and re-experience my original thinking. I already had the impression that certain texts often have a deep impact on their readers, namely texts or text fragments based on life-writing such as letters, memories, self-biographies, or fiction based on the author's own life. What was the secret of the chain reaction of wanting-to-write-essayistic-texts-about-places-and-things-by-knowing-about-the-phenomenon? Was it because it opened a space to include your own

perspective as a clear “I” in the text? Or was it the inspiration of the loose, essayistic form? My intuitive answer was that it is part of the reason, but not all. Was it because of the autobiographical approach? No, it is even more than that. Could it be because of the specific stories about and reflections on places and things that mean something to the writer? Yes, but there is still more. Is it because we as readers understand that these places and things are co-constructive of the identity of the academic subject? Yes. Is it because we want to explore our own places and things with the purpose of understanding more about our own identities and transformations? Yes, we want to write texts like this because they are explorative and create transformations for us as subjects.

The questions and answers in the previous section are intuitive and reflect my own prejudice (fore-judgement) more than telling the truth about the phenomenon unveiled. On the other hand, my questions are asked and precipitately answered based on knowledge already present for me – or rather, *in me*. This is the practical knowledge based on my development of the craft of writing (*techné*) and the *phronetic* knowledge about what is good and clever to do when writing and with the texts produced. This practical knowledge comes together with the *epistemic* knowledge I have about theories of creative non-fiction writing practices – textual creativity, style, and rhetoric (Jørgensen & Askeland, 2019; Jørgensen, 2019; Jørgensen, 2020)³. The questions just asked above are examples of the *concrete reflections* of what knowledge the experience of discrepancy reveals. Concrete reflection is originally Paul Ricœur’s conceptualisation (Lindseth 2017, p. 353) of the process of dwelling on the grasping of the phenomenon as we proceed with our semiotic approach. We must then turn to the next step and become *critical reflective* of what is going on in this process of semiotic grasping in the process of understanding the phenomenon, and finally, we can turn to *theoretical reflection* and explore if we find some general truth in the specific. In the following section, I will discuss the phenomenon of place- and material-based writing in the education of scholars in terms of the first two kinds of reflections, the concrete and the critical.

The experiences of a course leader

The essayistic, autobiographical writing that Roseanne Carlo speaks of as a valuable pedagogical resource in higher education is rhetorical, but not in the way we usually think about rhetoric:

³ The author Iben Brinch changed her name from Iben Brinch Jørgensen in 2021.

This kind of writing is hard to assess with a rubric—it's not the writing of logos; rather it centers ethos and pathos. When we write from a perspective of inquiry and openness, we dive into what we don't now, what we can't express, and we must work through that scariness and vulnerability. Writing with inquiry at its center traces where we've been, what we've thought, how we've felt rather than stripping all this away by coming to the point of announcing our arrivals. (Carlo, 2020, p. 7)

Carlo has a chapter – “For an Affective, Embodied, Place-Based Writing Curriculum” on how she practiced this kind of writing with her students at the Writing Program at CUNY, College of Staten Island. First, she made writing exercises that would make the students write about the places of their life-worlds: the campus, their homes, their neighbourhood and city. This was educational in a specific direction: “When students learn to articulate their places and see themselves as members of communities, their education becomes more meaningful to them.” (p. 139). Eventually, they should write directly about housing for authentic audiences and publish it in the local media. These exercises had the purpose of creating civic engagement and a sense of belonging in the world. The other chapters of Carlo's book are theoretical chapters discussing place- and material-based writing. The most remarkable, though, are the passages containing Carlo's own stories about her places and things. And why is that? Because she establishes a clear character or voice – a textual ethos – in the book, using a stylistic form of first-person focalization, description, narration, scenes, and dialogues. Her writing practice makes her experiences authentic and therefore trustworthy. Along these passages, Carlo also argues for the pedagogical and transformative potential of the writing practice, and by that, her book is persuasive and motivating for trying out both writing and teaching this way.

I wondered if I could start a meaningful learning process for a group of PhD students. Could they find any kind of motivation by trying out place- and material-based writing? Could they be convinced to use this kind of writing in their academic writing practice? Would they connect more strongly to their own writing process or texts? Would they experience a transformation of ethos – of character – while writing? Would they see writing as a learning resource for themselves as researchers, academic authors, and university teachers? The PhD course was already planned when I started wondering. To proceed to action, I had to get the other course leader, a colleague, on board this silent ship setting out for El Dorado. When he was loaded, the next step was to find room for the writing practice in our teaching practice. I realized that I had to make the implementation almost invisible so as not to take any focus away from the students

reading the course literature, participating in the discussions, and writing their course essays as planned.

The course was a five-day course in March and April 2020 with the title “Pedagogical resources and learning processes” – ideal for legitimizing trying out writing as a learning resource and process of learning (also see Brinch, 2023). The course was digital because of the pandemic lockdown. Helped by the situation, we had room for self-study in the afternoons after the lectures. I suggested making a “writing task” for each afternoon, and my colleague agreed. I composed an exercise during the day with lectures and discussions and introduced it to the students before ending the online part of the course. In practice, I wrote drafts for the exercise and mailed them or sent them in the Zoom chat to my colleague for his consent. Before the very first course day, I created a writing log for each student – with their own name in the title – on the digital learning platform, inviting them to post reflective texts, questions, or wonderings. Before meeting at the seminar, they should post a presentation of themselves and their PhD project on the writing log. After this they posted the texts from the daily writing exercises, and on one day the task included commenting on the writing logs of two other participants.

I introduced the students to Carlos’s book and the thoughts about place- and material-based writing in one of the first lectures together with theories of writing as a resource for thinking and researching. The planned writing practice was pedagogically and theoretically framed by that. But I did not have the courage to make more than one writing exercise that was place- and material-based. Why? In a moment of (self-)critical reflection, I guess there were several reasons: as mentioned, I did not want to steal the focus or distract the students from the main purpose of the course, and – a little embarrassing to admit – I did not want to expose myself as being in a state of wonder and not in a state of clear, epistemic knowledge based on research. Thus, the most important was that I was afraid of doing damage to the students if it turned out that they later – after using this kind of writing practice – would be met with rejection and devaluation from peers, supervisors, reviewers, and conference audiences. As you can see, the reasons had something to do with the writing practice within other practices and a lot to do with my own experiences with academic authorship. I decided on two approaches for my pedagogical practice: First, to just briefly lift the veil of the potential of this kind of writing practice, I only made one writing exercise on one single day, asking for place- and material-based writing. In the exercise, I actually made the exercise an alternative so that the students could choose to write a traditional reflective text on a theoretical question instead. Second, I created the exercise so that the students

would reflect on this kind of writing as a *pedagogical resource*; they would then be connecting the place- and material-based writing with a reflection on one of the central concepts of the course. All twelve students chose the alternative of writing a place- and material-based essay, which was surprising for me in the situation. But when I reflect on it now, it is actually the first confirmation of the appeal of the phenomenon of writing such texts, not because you have read another place- and material-based text like Carlo's text, *but because the very idea of writing such a text is motivating*. The exercise sounded like this:

Alternative 2 (first A, then B): A. Take a walk in your neighbourhood (could also be indoors or in your garden) and take a few pictures of both large-scale and small-scale views and objects. B. Write a short text (could be a photo essay, including some of your photos) based on the walk and the pictures with this question in mind: "How can experience of place be a pedagogical resource for me?". Post (at least part of) the text on your personal writing log on Canvas.

By creating the exercise and exposing the students to it, I created a rhetorical discourse, forcing the students into a responding role in a way that called for them to subjectively position themselves as writing persons in time and space. Together with widening out the perspective on the phenomenon, the student's texts created validation by getting more experiences from other perspectives and other learning processes.

If you have not guessed it yet, my story till now consists of concrete – and some critical – reflections on my experience of discrepancy. Lindseth says that the only way to *dwell* on the experience of discrepancy is to *tell* : "We must tell how it reveals itself in concrete situations" (Lindseth, 2017, p. 247, my translation). According to Lindseth, we must retell and rewrite until we find that our story is true enough for its purpose, which reminds me of Clifford Geertz's concept of *thick descriptions* as deeply reflective writing (Geertz, 2017).

The students' writing

What did the students write? And how can we understand more of the place- and material-based writing as a phenomenon and a writing practice through their texts? The eleven texts analysed here reflect on three different places: the working station at home, the living space at home and view out of the window, and the surrounding nature and cultural landscape seen when walking. The things described follow the same pattern, and (almost) everyone had both small-scale pictures and pictures of views: a PC/Mac, books, the living room, the dog, natural landscapes, trees, tracks in snow,

railways, pathways. Many of the students have pictures of plants, either indoor plants or outdoor plants. It was early spring at the time they authored their essays, and the season was a resource in the learning process because of the blooming or renewal that it reminded them of.

The forthcoming critical reflection is based on a close reading of one of the texts⁴. It is an interpretation of the *praxis* of the place- and material-based writing practice in an academic rhetorical situation. The interpretation is based on “Maria’s” photo essay from her tour around her own house. “Elisabeth” comments on the text. As you will see, the mental flowering and new beginnings are metaphorically thematized, but the confusion and despair are also reflected on.

Maria’s essay: Today I had a hard time formulating my thoughts after the seminar. There were so many different aspects that I found relevant for my research project, but I got some type of a writer’s block. So, I found myself talking to myself instead of writing, reflecting on meaning-making through language and what happens to learning when the social processes are more online these days. The computer has become a tool not only for me to use for writing or searching for information, but also a tool that gives me the opportunity to discuss concepts with others or hear other people’s interpretations of what I myself wrote or said – opportunities to create meaning and to learn. So I took a picture of my desk and “home office” and then as I looked at it, I saw other things that reminded me of what I need to do when I “get stuck” in my reflections. I was reminded of my own experiences of learning through objects around me to take a break and do something else for the evening. And that it is a good thing to get frustrated in learning sometimes and have the patience to wait it out – you never know what it gives in the end. Here are some of the other things that helped me this afternoon [four photographs]. Books from different courses that reminded me of some other learning situations and frustrated discussions about learning and teaching with colleagues and friends. Pictures from a sailing adventure some years ago. And the flowers I saw when taking a walk to clear my head – a sign of spring and maybe more...

Elisabeth’s comment: I have reflected on many of the same things that you bring up in this post. After these lectures, I have felt like my head is going to explode. There is so much to take in and reflect upon that it has been difficult to put it down in words. So I am planning on using the strategy that you mention – take

⁴ For a comparative analysis of the topics in all the texts see Brinch 2023.

a break from it and see if things are clearer in a few days. I have some ideas for my course essay, and I hope they might develop in my subconscious. I also find it useful to talk issues through with myself sometimes, just like you say. I am so envious that you have flowers in your neighborhood now! I haven't seen any yet, but hopefully they will pop up soon! :)

My first, and idiosyncratic, reading of Maria's text makes it clear for me that I, as her teacher, have put her in the current situation of a course day that had been heavily loaded. Her frustrations hit me as a negative evaluation and made me want to change the architecture of the course or do something differently for future students in other courses. I find myself reading the other essays, searching for a similar critique, and I do find other logs with descriptions of feelings of thronging thoughts, but not as overwhelmingly paralyzing as it appears to be for Maria. I could have interpreted Maria's text as a rampant critique of the course, but that would not be an adequate reading and would not bring me to a greater understanding of the practice of this kind of reflective place- and material-based writing. I must see the text as a wild plant in the ventilation canal.

Then it strikes me that Maria has found gold for herself without knowing it: She has found coping strategies – involving writing reflectingly – for future writing blocks and feelings of overwhelming knowledge production in herself. These are “learning resources” that can come to matter for her somewhere in her future professional life as a writing scholar. It is through an interpretation of how the text develops that I make this hypothesis: Maria writes about her confusion and that she had a writer's block, but the writing block seems to have vaporized while her conceptualization of the PC as a learning resource has taken form – by writing about it! In the short text, it even shows that she interacts with her own figuration of things in a reflective, hermeneutic process: she takes pictures and then sees something new about her thinking by watching them in a circular process of seeing the importance of places and things in her transformative process.

Elisabeth's comment shows that she, by reading Marias's text, explores future actions for coping with learning and becoming herself. What strikes me as not so good – leading the two of them away from El Dorado – is that neither of them realizes that the “talking to themselves” has only become visible for themselves and the other because they have *written about it*. It is through the text and publishing for peers that the thoughts become resources for themselves and others. In this case, Maria's thoughts made Elisabeth surer of her own thoughts and resources for learning and developing professionally. Unfortunately, Elisabeth is surer of *not* wanting to write down her thoughts and continuing to think by writing. And then we have the

plants: Both Maria and Elisabeth identify with the growing processes of the potted and wild plants. The situated and living plants seem to become tangible reflections of the persons' scholarly growth and motivational reminders of perpetual transformations.

Changing the writing practice in the education of scholars?

Through retrospective story telling in autobiographical form, the scholar can become aware of the emotions and attitudes that he or she has constructed and maybe will reconstruct in new educational or professional situations. For this purpose, writing a journal can be useful as part of the practice:

Making this knowledge, emotion and attitude explicit allows them to be examined and related constructively to new learning. A journal is an ideal vehicle for this exercise since it can provide present and anticipated future contexts alongside working in the past and it can provide the opportunities to return to past experiences on many different occasions. (Moon, 2006, p.74)

To write about one's thoughts and memories of the profession that you are striving to make a part of yourself might be enlightening for everyone – including the PhD student transforming into a researcher, lecturer, and author.

As I mentioned, I created a writing log for each student, and my experience was that this choice was rather central to the experiences that the students had with all the different texts, including the place- and material-based texts. Central here was the fact that they had a semi-public audience with each other and the course leaders. The fact that the writing logs were semi-public made the texts less idiosyncratic in their reflexivity, on the one hand, and more consensus-seeking and, by that, constrained by the context of the broader academic writing practice, on the other. Because the course was online, the learning platform turned into *the shared place* for performing for all of us – as subjects, professionals, and developing-professionals. The places for educational processes have an impact as places, and by their materiality for the practices, so do digital places and the homes where the students were situated while practicing (Schatzki, 2021). The situation made the writing log and the interaction between the students commenting on each other's texts much more important because it was *the place* of interaction together with the online lectures and discussions during the five days. The self-presentations made on each writing log had much more to say for the creation and development of ethos – as

a trustworthy person and textual voice – than they would have if we had interacted physically.

As far as I know, it is not common to use learning journals (see Moon, 2006) – or writing logs – in the education of PhD students. Often, the PhD courses are short and arranged so that the students have great freedom to choose from a reading list and form their course essays purposefully with their final thesis in mind. It is far more common to use reflective writing in education, like teacher education, that involves working within asymmetric power relations and seeks to develop a reflective metalanguage about the practice. Thus, using a writing journal will strengthen any student’s “transformative agency” (Lund & Vestøl, 2020) because it gives her a resource that makes her own process visible and traceable for herself and empowers her to make informed changes.

Using a writing log would, in my eyes, give the participants in the PhD course a valuable and central resource that they could draw upon in the very situation that the course created for them and maybe somewhere in their future practice as scholars “when it matters” to them, as Gert Biesta says (Biesta, 2022, p. 75). But to make them realize the potential of the learning journal for *themselves as selves*, they had to write something that mattered there and then. And that was why the exercise had to include personal places and things: Where you are, what you do, what you see, and what you think matters now. The writing researcher Jennifer A. Moon discusses the connectedness of the development of self and the development of self as a professional: “Because most journal-writing draws expression or exploration of emotion and attitude into the ‘open’ in writing, it has the potential to link personal and professional education and development” (Moon, 2006, p. 72). Moon even seems to have the same link as Carlo in her book on transforming ethos, namely that developing self as a subject and character and developing a present self in the text are interconnected: “In the context of the development of self as a professional, a number of writers talk of the development of ‘voice’” (Moon, 2006, 72), the development of confidence (p. 73), and the development into “professionals” (p. 73). In the last one – becoming a professional – the element of reflexivity (the self-reflections) can be absent, and the “coherent presentation” is the most important to make the audience sense a present subject in the text (p. 73). The *writing log* about how the writing proceeds, stops, flows, etc. is a form of learning journal and a resource, especially for the transformation of *scholarly authorship*. Maria’s text was a writing log – though unintentionally so – about the influences of places and things in her scholarly processes of manifesting learning in text.

A theory of place- and material-based academic writing

The writing as a social practice

In my view, both my own review of Carlo's book and the students' essays became *poiesis* (making) and *praxis* (action) – which is *not* possible according to Aristotle's theory:

... action and making are different kinds of thing, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing, the end cannot be other than the act itself. (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140 b 1-5, citation from Balaban 1990, s. 185)

Trying to avoid nemesis saying that Aristotle was not right, I want to open the door for the possibility that place- and material-based writing is making and action at the same time, meaning that the author seeks both the transformative power of the writing process and the transformative power of the realized text – for others, for changing our shared surroundings. To this, I add that this making/action is not just realized by discourse or symbolic signs but also by *doing*, in the use of certain places and things. By this, I point to writing as not just a personal enterprise but a *social practice*. The German socialist and practice theorist Andreas Reckwitz defines a social practice as “doings” and “sayings” that “present themselves first and foremost as certain regular bodily activities.” (Reckwitz 2002, p. 211). What we call institutions or schools within the academic field is then “nothing more than nexuses and sequences of social practices”. This means that we can recognize a practice by the repetitive bodily activities “in which certain forms of understanding are expressed”. In the practice, we *use* things and places – we even use things, like computers and the internet, to transcend time and place. In this respect, “[c]ertain things act, so to speak, as ‘resources’ which enable and constrain the specificity of a practice” (Reckwitz, p. 212). In the case of Maria's example, this aspect became clear: the situatedness at home, because of the pandemic situation, made the homely surroundings like potted plants and bookshelves act together with the technical devices and software for interaction with other academics. The use of the home and its surroundings, as well as the understanding of how they could be used, was performed bodily, expressed bodily (using places and “things”) and written in words.

In this last section of the chapter, you will find the third kind of reflection, *the theoretical reflection*, which supplements the concrete and critical reflections in the former sections while lifting the perspective on the writing practice into a more general reflection. I begin with a conceptualization

of what I consider to be the “matter” – or concrete phenomenon – that place- and material-based writing creates (and that can be a resource to others). I see three aspects that the making/action of writing place-and material-based essayistic texts create within the academic field:

1. *A discourse about places and things* that *conceptualizes* the places and things as well as reveals the *relations* that the writer has to them personally, socially, and culturally. The discourse could also *deconstruct* existing conceptualizations and understandings of the writer’s person or individual biography or the social, cultural, and collective meanings of places and things.
2. *A rhetoric* that opens a space *for identification (or division) for the reader*: The reader consciously or less consciously engages because of either the discourse about places and things or because of the practice of life-writing that the text points to. The reader is confirmed, inspired, urged, tempted, and provoked to “re-act” by producing her own rhetoric, for example, by writing a similar text.
3. *A social practice* where the particular writing practice and the texts activate, reflect, represent, and evolve *knowledge* of how places and things can be resources for transformations of the scholarly writer (as a person or a professional and as a distinct, stylistic voice in the text).

These three aspects overlap and intertwine, but in the following, I will discuss them consecutively.

A discourse about places and things

Writing may be the way to understand our own knowledge production and development as scholars (Menary, 2007). Ricœur points to the nature of writing like this:

Indeed, writing opens up new and original resources for discourse. Thanks to writing, discourse acquires a threefold semantic autonomy: in relation to the speaker’s intention, to its reception by its original audience and to the economic, social, and cultural circumstances of its production. It is in this sense that writing tears itself free of the limits of face-to-face dialogue and becomes the condition for discourse itself *becoming-text*. It is to hermeneutics that falls the task of exploring the implications of this becoming-text for the work of interpretation. (Ricœur, 2008, p.17)

What does this mean? It means that writing has a transformative potential in that it “opens up new and original resources for discourse” for the writer, for the reader and for the shared circumstances of writing,

reading and interpretation. It also means that to understand writing as a transformative practice, we must interpret what writing *does* when it talks about experiences:

The text creates a distance between the author and the original experience by transforming what was lived through to something examined. The story becomes ‘experience-as-objectified’. This distanciation produced by the text can be understood as an epoché in the sense that it establishes a reflective space that allows the experience to emerge as theme. (McGuirk, 2017, 129).

James McGuirk, professor of philosophy, suggests in this cited article about reflective practice research that we must see the stories *as stories* in the research narratives (McGuirk, 2017, p. 128).

Academic writing is a form of practice within other practices of research, and the two layers of practice have a dialectic relation in the creation of the novel on one side and in the limitations of thoughts on the other. The paradox in the reflective practice research is that the only way of doing the core action of reflection is by writing, and you will never be able to have a transparent text where the text itself does not co-construct the understanding. Another problem is that it is difficult to see where the experience begins and ends since it is constructed also by the writing about it in the process. This again points to the fact that writing practices within different epochs of research and across disciplines can create different thinking – meaning different ways of knowledge production – and with that follows validation and devaluation of different forms of writing and texts. It also means that the discourse about places and things will never be perfectly adequate, and the research on social practices and the use of materials will never be finished. Research on writing as social practice means to “occupy an analytical standpoint” and to “delimit and thematize” it (McGuirk, 2017, p. 118, 121). The only way we can do this is “to seek the text itself, on the one hand, the internal dynamics that govern the structuring of the work and, on the other hand, the power that the work possesses to project itself outside itself and to give birth to a world that would truly be the “thing” referred to by the text (Ricœur, 2008, p. 17). In other words, we must do hermeneutical interpretation of the text in its context, and if the writing itself is the phenomenon we want to know more about, it is the writing in the practice that is the centre of exploration.

The dialectics between what we *say* – or write – and what we *become* was pointed out by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (2009): We create our society, its culture and rules and must then seek to change or improve our character to live with it, by it and in it (see p. 251-273).

Thoughts and emotions shape and nurture experiences with the material world. One way of becoming conscious of the nature of one's thoughts, as well as the flow, volatility and depths of emotions, is by writing about this world. The writing opens a space for introspection and, over time, also a source for seeing patterns – for example of who we become as scholars by our practices and use of materials, including books, texts, devices, etc. – all that we understand as resources in our enterprise. At the same time, writing is a way of thinking: it organizes themes, it structures, it establishes connections and perspectives, and it creates a pace and rhythm in our bodily actions through the making of letters and words, typing, punctuation, questioning and answering. Writing filters our experiences due to this bodily doing, as do the discourse and writing practice that we find ourselves in. All of these are constraints in the situation that we write within. Eventually, the text itself becomes part of what leads us in one direction and not another, creating an understanding of the experiences we write about and a logos pointing out how to proceed with the exploration. We even create a way the text should be read – we make a model reader, as Umberto Eco called it, and we create a reflection of ourselves in the form of the author's voice. Both creations are constructions and shape our next step of writing and, therefore, thinking and researching.

A rhetoric of identification

In a rhetorical perspective, place- and material-based texts function due to *identification*. A reader's identification (Burke, 1969) with the *substance represented* in a text could be an identification with the conceptualizations of the places and things (what they "are"), with the quality of sensing and perceiving places and things, or with how one can relate to spatial surroundings and materiality existentially, emotionally, socially, and culturally. For example, I strongly identified with the rampant plants on the front page of Carlo's book, as well as with Carlo's bodily experience with her campus and the emotions of a need for change in the writing pedagogy. One might also think that some discourses about places and things do not create identification but *division*, for example, if someone unjustly (in the eyes of the audience) claims a piece of land to legitimize a later invasion (Burke, 1969, p. 22). When it comes to identification, a reader can identify with "the power that the work possesses to project itself outside itself" (Ricoeur, 2008, p. 17) – meaning the power of the text as *textual substance*. This involves an understanding of the power of the writing practice for knowledge production qua the story telling, descriptions, exemplification, text structure or rhetorical style dwelling on places and things. It also implies a recognition of another person's (the author's) use of writing as a resource

to transform themselves into textual subjects that can act rhetorically. One can identify with the agency that the writing gives, so to speak. In the identification process the reader “loses herself”: “As reader, I find myself only by losing myself. Reading introduces me into the imaginative variations of the ego (...). For the metamorphosis of the ego...implies a moment of distancing in the relation of self to itself; hence understanding is as much disappropriation as appropriation” (Ricœur, 2008, p. 85). It is in the losing of oneself in the other’s text that one can find motivation for trying out the same route. Maybe we saw a glimpse of such an identification in Elisabeth’s comment on Maria’s text. This is why reading can strengthen your scholarly agency too.

Together with these different forms of identification (or divisions) the rhetoric of a place- and material-based text has the power of “*consubstantiality*”. The American rhetorician Kenneth Burke writes about consubstantiality as a form of identification that makes the individual identify with something or someone (by themselves or others), and yet the individual is not the same but different from what it is identified with. Burke explains his theory like this: “For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life in an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Burke, 1969, p. 21). This explains the lust for writing your *own* text about *your own* places and things when you have experienced another’s practice of this kind of writing: You act together with them based on an identification with the substance and the textual substance as a resource, but you want to find your unique approach that can extend the matter of places and things to you in your transformation. At the same time, the consubstantiating actions seem to create groups – or social practices – based on two different ways of expressing interest in the substances: either they practice a discourse of validation of places and things and the personal, social, and cultural relations to them, or they share the understanding of the writing practice and texts produced as valuable for knowledge production and as transformative resources. And some, like me, consubstantiate with both, resulting in a book essay about my own places and things, a promotion of Carlo’s book, and ideas about writing such texts.

A social practice of writing

Paul Ricœur has a theory of the triple mimetic function of the texts in terms of *pre-figuration*, *con-figuration*, and *re-figuration* (McGuirk, 2017, p. 131; Ricœur, 1984). We might see the contours of the phenomenon by following these functions backwards: The *refiguration* is the act of reading and interpretation and points to the potential future action of the reader,

writing herself: “Interpretation has a futural aspect, in the sense that it concerns what can be as much as what is or what has been.” (McGuirk, 2017, p. 132). Thus, the motivation for writing is based on the author’s *configuring* text – the making of the text. The creation of the texts is the scene and spectacle of the storytelling, where the author develops an ethos while playing out a writing practice. The reader must identify – consubstantiate – with the text production so that they can enter a similar scene and perform in a similar way using this writing practice. But to be really motivated to write place- and material-based texts, the reader must find interest in the past experiences that made the author able to write in the first place. The reader must identify with the necessity of seeking similar *prefigurative* experiences with places and things. One could say that the reader must recognize both the writing practice and the previous experiences with places and things as resources to understand the transformative agency of writing *and* to be able to make these resources matter for themselves.

Acts of “valorization” and “de-valorization” (Reckwitz 2020, p. 52) of places and things as resources for transformation and scholarly improvement are a central part of the development of this particular writing practice. Reckwitz says this about the connection between practices, knowledge, and resources. “When human agents have developed certain forms of know-how concerning certain things, these things “materialize” or “incorporate” this knowledge *within the practice* (...). Things are “materialized understandings”, and only as materialized understandings can they act as resources” (Reckwitz 2002, p. 212). On the other hand, the materiality of places and things influences, as Hegel pointed out, the practices and the very existence of a practice. This last point is very important for the writing practice of place – and material-based writing. The practice is influenced by the materiality of many places – the subject’s individual places of importance from his or her life, the home space and its surroundings (especially important in the case described), and the campus or other study/working/writing places and their surroundings. The understanding of the materiality, emotionally as well, is continually at stake in the rhetorical process of identification by the reader. This means that the materiality influences the practice both directly and indirectly in a complex ongoing process. If one seeks social change, as Carlo did for her students and their communities, by practicing this kind of writing, it is not just up to the discursive and rhetorical texts but also the places and things themselves. So, the rampant plants must be taken into account too because they influence the practice. They make a university teacher react – photograph them, write about them, put them on the front page – and the reader to identify. We must not just write about places and things but change them as well in

the ongoing practice. Places and things can be actively used in this way: Pot a plant while writing an essay, watch the growth, and write about what it does to your transformation and what kind of resource it is for you.

Conclusive remarks while leaning into reflective practice research

By the concrete and critical reflection on the use of place- and material-based writing for the PhD students, I see that what I describe is not solely a chain of wanting-to-write-essayistic-texts-about-places-and-things-by-knowing-about-the-phenomenon. The students were not exposed to a text as I was to Carlo's text, they had a general introduction and a writing exercise. Maybe the absence of a text made the process of consubstantiality even more powerful? The motivation for writing might not just be created by reading and being inspired by other's texts; it can also be activated by opening up for the specific practice and by the shared situation and its shared places and things. And maybe something else was going on: Maybe the students doing this writing exercise re-activated earlier readings of place- and material-based texts, personal essays, or photo essays? Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and polyglossia would support that idea (Bakhtin, 1986). Inspiration and motivation do not (only) come from texts just read or lectures just listened to; they are also activated by social and educational practices and by processes of association and remembering. What seems as important for my practice as a course leader on a PhD course is that the writing exercises were framed pedagogically so that the students realized that they were going to write reflective texts and publish the texts for each other. This coloured their texts in the absence of an inspirational text. When they commented on each other's texts, they created an actual chain of transformation while consubstantially practicing the writing practice and making the texts rhetorical while seeking identification.

My experiences recounted in this chapter seem to say that reflective writing should be public to some degree – for peers and teachers at least – to become texts for identification, consubstantiality, and the development of scholarly authorship. But I must add that even a personal learning journal might have been transformative too since all reflective writing – even just written for yourself – always already has yourself as a reader and because you still work stylistically with your voice. You are the audience in the near and far future and in different shapes as self and professional self. By reflection on your writing, with or without an audience, you can transform your writing practice to become the open and curious scholar

you want to be. By writing about places and things, you can create a discourse and a rhetoric as well as perform a writing practice for making the real world matter for scholars and scholarly practices – it might lead to transformations for yourself and for other identifying individuals and research fields.

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