

Body and desire of writing —diaries—

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Abstract

We started out as full-time teachers at the university. We are now separated by an ocean and the Caribbean Sea. One is in R.D., the other in MAD. This is the first time that we are working on a full-time basis as academics, so we are excited although we are more than thirty-five years old and, at that age, one does not harbor many illusions anymore as we have been told since childhood, “the flame of love and the fire of life go out with the years” or, at least, it should.

This is an attempt at displaced writing. As with any attempt, it probably contains in its initial gesture a certain propensity to fail, to settle in the pit of failure as a possibility of being. To be another writing that, although embedded within the academic sphere, denies and perverts the academic codes and imagines other types of writing permeated with bodies and desires. As an attempt, this draft intersperses, and puts in dialogue, different writing dimensions (romance, work, everyday life), and its *fabric* is produced by hands that desire, touch, caress, love, but which are now experienced in the distance and entangled in a writing precisely characterized by that geographical distance. Also, it engages with those many other ‘she’ whom we read and who accompany us.

We could say that we wrote this text with the aim of questioning the academic system and its normative writing, we could say that we wrote it to blame and shame the academic institutions that expel us, but that feeds on us, our precariousness, our hyper-productive rhythms and our desire —concealed and dressed in uniform— that beats and produces papers. What can be found in this text is that very desire —crude and free of any format.

Our last four-handed writing —the *Decalogue of ideas for a feminist school*— did not work out well, or maybe yes; it got a lot of attention and left an echo like a shout in a cave. We received many criticisms for it, anonymous, disembodied criticisms of our bodies which write, feel, dissent and imagine that writings, and the spaces in which these are produced, can be different, and, above all, can be shared with others.

Keywords

writing; diaries; desire; autobiography; academic.

BODIES TIMES NEW ROMAN

Registration material (We'd like to say 'work in progress' but we prefer 'unfinished project', one of many):

04/04/2018. I arrive in S.C. around 11 p.m. S. A.J. is waiting for me. She is dressed in all-white, or rather cream, from head to toe. She is smiling.

06/04/2018. I am late at the Department Board meeting. I come in and sit next to my group. My group includes the left-wing teachers, those who have fought within the movements of pedagogical renewal, those who decided to name the new meeting room of the department 'Sala Paulo Freire'. Almost everyone is about to retire. I don't know what I'm going to do when they go on retirement. When I arrive, J.J. laughs at my hair and tells me it looks like I just got off a motorcycle. I never tell him anything about his moustache, maybe I should.

05/04/2018. Together with one of my classmates, I am walking to the main entrance to the university campus when I am stopped by the guard. He tells me that there is a dress code within the premises, it applies to both students and teachers (he doesn't need to clarify that the generic terms refer here to the feminine form, we are the usual suspects). The code doesn't allow short skirts above the knee like the one I'm wearing. He's asking me to go and change.

I go back to the apartment where I'm staying, I can't find the right clothes in my suitcases, I finally find a change of clothes. I am now wearing a sleeveless blouse and black pants. The pants are ripped at the knee. I go back to the precinct; my colleagues and D. are waiting for me. As we are waiting to go out, I read a sign hanging on the front door stating the dress code. I look at my clothes, they don't comply with the code either.

08/04/2018. I live near the university. In the past, when I was only an associate, I didn't mind going out dressed in any particular way, I wasn't afraid to meet colleagues in the neighborhood. Now I'm starting to be afraid, I feel less free. The other day, while walking the dog, I met a group of teachers who were on their way to a nearby restaurant. I was wearing flip-flops and shorts. The women were dressed in white, cream or pastel colors, the men in brown, gray and black tones. I didn't notice many weird looks and I'm very good at noticing those, although surely there were some; as my mother says, it's impossible not to notice my hairy legs.

In class, even if I don't want to, we always end up talking about Descartes (and about Kant too). I suppose that's one of the many contradictions of my being philosopher, feminist, *bollera* and outsider. We are so imbued with this Cartesian dualism in our Western, Eurocentric culture —supposedly heir

to that Greek tradition we are taught as being the origin of philosophical thought— that Descartes becomes almost inevitable within the modernity of that tradition. We are writing this with Aníbal Quijano in mind (Quijano, 2000: 224) and his critical questioning of Eurocentric and colonial knowledge, heir precisely to Cartesian dualism, and the relations he established *between the body and the nonbody*. These problematic relations, defined in the West by the Christian religion, reach their highest legitimacy in that Cartesianism we have inherited, and in the primacy of a reason without body or, rather, at the expense of a repressed and exploited body, which in turn is made invisible in some cases, overexposed in others. Going back to the academic genre, it's easy to notice that a good part of it is written with that rational mind disconnected from the body. A body made invisible but still visible. As pointed out by Diego Posada Gómez (Posada Gómez, 2017: 4), the Cartesian writing can be understood as a *technology of the self*, to use Foucault's term, of which production consists precisely in the attempt of a disembodied self, which neither feels nor suffers... but simply writes.

In the meantime, we think of Marina Garcés, to whom we turn to in those same classes, and of philosophy conceived as writing, as creating some written fictions that we call concepts and that allow us to live, survive, exist, (re-)exist. In her understanding of ideas as *positions taken in the world* (Garcés, 2016: 33), in that being in the world through language; in the language, of which J. Butler (Butler, 1993) also talks about in a certain way, how not to understand her claim of bodies that matter in/from the language. And accompanied by them, we cannot help but ask ourselves what remains of this experience, of this body that lives through ideas that allow it to inhabit the world in very concrete ways, in a philosophical writing which, because of that very tradition, seems to have wanted to expel the body. But is any writing ever possible without the body that materializes and sustains it? Or it is rather one of the many modern fictions with which we live and in which we believe, even though it is impossible.

Let us return to Descartes and his dualism, to that mind in a body, and to his search for the pineal gland as a connection between the two, when that body was conceived as being so separate from that mind. We don't know if our symbolic frames have changed that much with respect to this dualism, what sense it can have if not to say on a daily basis "my body hurts". We've chewed it so much that we think we're talking without a body. Let's think of the denigration of the body within a certain hegemonic tradition, in which most of us have been educated; let's think about these philosophers about whom we don't know if they ate or cooked; we suppose they pooped, loved and felt desire, that they got angry and maybe cried sometimes. We also know that these philosophers were walking. A certain narrative tradition has disseminated that healthy image of the walking philosopher —how could we

not think, for instance, of Kant's famous walks, of his walking routines? And how not to do it with Rebecca Solnit's reading of the walk (Solnit, 2015) and her critique of that history of walking (philosophical or intellectual) that once again did not include those bodies for whom the walk is not the pleasant, reflective and solitary drift of the philosopher *flâneur*; for whom it is not even an appropriate or permitted activity. We always find it ironic, even amusing, that these philosophical walks are told in classrooms where the bodies remain so inactive and non-existent —highlighting how the Cartesian dualism goes through pedagogy as well. Perhaps in those classrooms, we can also understand the disenchantment of which Irit Rogoff talks about (Rogoff, 2017: 45) not as a protest, not as an opposition, not as a "form of resistance", but as specific logics or strategies situated from the perspective of failure and from those "weapons of the weak", which are used "to recategorize what looks like inaction, passivity and lack of resistance in terms of the practice of stalling the business of the dominant" (Halberstam, 2018: 98). And here, the dominant ones are academics, accreditors, professors, editors and reviewers.

In a critical dialogue with Descartes and his dualism, and with the philosophical writing of the nonbody —despite the prestigious tradition of the autobiographical genre from Rousseau to the current philosophy of the self— Marina Garcés and her critique of the academic paper, a paradigmatic example of the fictitious attempt to write without a body, as a *suffocation of philosophical thought* (Garcés, 2013). Remedios Zafra (Zafra, 2017) as well and her alter ego in *El entusiasmo*, that body made precarious by the academic world and by the mountains of papers and indexed magazines that, even so, and carried by her enthusiasm, she writes in tiny flats where the other bodies are not seen, but definitely heard, and in which the desire is expressed towards a body from one screen to another, towards a body that types and is seen through a webcam (as we are now). How can we not think that she is us, and we are her. And how not to think of our writings from those states of precariousness and those constant waits for what is about to come, so characteristic of our neoliberal postmodernity.

DIARIES

15/04/2018

*I miss you grabbing the back of my neck,
pulling my hair,
kissing me the moles I don't see.*

*I miss you telling me 'I love you',
many times a day,
biting me anxiously,*

and running my hand over your bite marks.

*I'm listening to Rebeca Lane
and I wonder when we'll dance together again.*

15/04/2018

*A name in Spain can have up to 18 characters
A short biography is 500 words and I'll send it to you in 5 minutes
Our opinion in 12 000 characters with spaces
A summary 300 words
An old text message is 170 letters
A tacky song is 8 words
I do not count the 'I love you'*

21/04/2018

*We spoke this morning. We were both naked —from screen to screen—
without touching us. That's our touch for now.*

21/04/2018

*I didn't know there were other people who loved each other. I thought we
were the only in love, no one else. I thought it was just something about
us.
I didn't see them in the street, I didn't realize before, I didn't notice. But
they are everywhere, on the subway, they also touch each other's ass, they
also kiss each other, they also look like they want to get home and make
love.*

24/04/2018

*As I was walking, I saw two women holding hands. I don't know if they
were lovers, but they were to me. I made up a story for them —how they
knew each other, how much they loved each other, what they were saying
to each other in whispers, what meant to them, in that Monument of
walking, something apparently so trivial as touching each other and going
hand in hand— and which in turn is so political and so full of desire. I
remembered Carmela Garcia and her project of Women in Love. I liked the
fact that those two women existed, if only for me. Telling their story to
myself, fantasizing about it, inventing it, perhaps, and making them exist
thanks to that. Now that I so need certain stories to exist, now that I so
need to exist myself.*

*When I was coming home, I saw two boys trying to cross a street. When
they were going to do it, on a road with a lot of traffic, one touched the
other, it was a slight touch, a sign to stop because a car was coming. And
again that touch, almost invisible, which in my opinion was full of desire*

among them. I imagined that touch contained many others. And I also made up a story for them.

I guess that each of those stories is also a story for us.

25/04/2018

I want to be Emily Dickinson

and plant my seeds with you somewhere off the coast of California

Or to be Butler and stick

my dildo up your ass hoping for an explosion of saliva

*Or to be Chantal Mouffe and talk to you about politics and political
to end up watching the sunset at our favorite spot*

25/04/2018

I am thinking of Draft for a Lovers' Dictionary (Wittig and Zeig, 1981), also written by two lovers, which we have read so many times together in bed. Of our recitation of the terms that they invent and that are dominated by a lesbian language, rewriting new grammatical stories. And of that grammar markedly not academic and full of body, of that desire to be in the language of which, in many ways, Butler speaks. I like the title, especially that status of attempt that characterizes every draft: something that is not yet fully said, that is trying to be said, that is in the process of being said or told, but that is already being written (and will be read).

You and I, almost as a tribute to them, have often played at writing our own dictionary as well. We have played at inventing meanings for those terms plagued with meaning, at filling with language what is already written by others, inventing new forms of saying oneself. Perhaps that is what lovers do: a new, yet old, attempt to occupy the language. Or at least those lovers who have no language to tell them, to give them existence. Those for whom, like you and me, like many others, language always represents a certain situation of foreignness and imposture. Linguistic reinvention —such a queer gesture— has also, in my opinion, much to do with our rebelliousness, our taking that name that others gave us. Like when your mom, or your friend from school, or your cousin, or your father, or your sister, asked you if you were a lesbian. And you knew then that there, just in that name, there was some call to exist, your possible existence, but also a lot of fear, curiosity, desire to be and fear to become. Such is our history with the proscribed terms. And since we are talking about appropriations, is perhaps this scattered list of proper names that we have been quoting our genealogical attempt of some writings, of some bodies, that occupied the

academic sphere and its languages in order to divert it? That's probably why we are quoting them.

I re-read poems we wrote to each other a long time ago. In that attempt of writing to create a present, to return to the body. In our making a language that is our own, that makes us exist, that gives us presence in a world that, more often than we think, does not like us. Now that I am so non-existent here, I am more than ever in need of that language that makes us exist, of that desire to be a letter and to invent ourselves in and with the language. In one of the folders on my desktop, I find those terms_for a new dictionary:

that searching for names

*—terms, possibly empty and willing to be occupied—
that welcome us
and in a dictionary*

*—so limited, with their definitions, their uses, their legitimate meanings—
that is not made for us
[you and I aren't in it]*

04/06/2018

Today I had an idea that I'd like to tell you about, but I can't because you're not here. We can continue the "Decalogue of ideas for a feminist school" with "Vindications for a feminist academic world". We could also call it "Decalogue of ideas for a feminist academic world", a sequel-ish title but with a certain attractiveness. I liked the fact that the Decalogue would reopen some important debates, such as the use of playgrounds during breaks, the presence of women in the curriculum or the censorship of writers markedly macho writers such as Neruda, Reverte or Marias. While our friends told us that the ideas of the Decalogue were basic, the abc of feminism applied to education, the press denounced us as the new inquisition. I never told you but for a few weeks I was afraid that one of those macho guys who were insulting us online would appear in the faculty office and shoot me or punch my face.

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05/04/2018. In the car D. explains to me the reasons behind the dress code. In the institution, future teachers are taught norms and values about proper behavior, about their role and function as teachers. One of these rules is how to learn to dress properly. I wonder who I am now. I am thinking of my bitch manifesto. Did the bitch stop being a bitch and become a traitor to her species? Is that what happened?

I'm not a lesbian here either.

26/05/2018. Today I am due to attend an institutional event. To be honest, I feel uneasy and out-of-place at such events. M. nevertheless is completely comfortable. During the coffee break everyone talks to everyone, they are building relationships that will open them doors. I don't talk to anyone, I go out on the stairs and drink my coffee alone looking at the street and thinking that all my life has been partly like this. If it were not for the activism, the arts and the lesbian-friendly places, I would have thought that I am a person without any type of interest or skill in social relationships, but this is not the case. When I want to, I can perfectly relate to other people and enjoy it. My issue is with the academic world.

06/04/2018. I can hear various comments from my colleagues about the dress code and, in particular, about my outfit. We are going to the beach, and I am wearing a bikini. On Friday I was told that for the trip I could be dressed in a less formal way (i.e. showing something of my body). I am riddled with mosquito bites, they seem to be the only ones, ignorant of any code, insisting on the fact that I am still a body. "As long as you're dressed like this, they'll keep stinging you", says mockingly one of my companions. I'm wearing shorts and a sleeveless shirt. He keeps making comments —joking (or so he thinks) about the inadequacy of my clothing.

With all this, how can I not think of bell hooks (hooks, 1994), and of that text that we read so many times along with others, in which she speaks of those teachers always dressed in the same clothes, with their corduroy trousers and their tweed jacket, as a mock parody of the *nonbody*, of that Cartesian reason, or of that disembodied philosopher whose writing is intended to be a writing without a body. How can we fail to recognize in them the figure of the intellectual, of the writer, against whom we fight, on a daily basis, as bodies that we are, so visible and hypervisibilized, so alive and desiring, so mournful and angry.

Every morning I look at myself in the mirror, wondering if my clothes will pass the control I am silently subjected to at the door. Every morning I metamorphose into the legitimate teacher with her blouse and pants. Every morning I am him, and I am, and I am not me.

**THE DIARY OF DESIRE WRITTEN IN TIMES NEW ROMAN.
PRACTICES FOR A DEVIATION**

Decalogue of ideas for a feminist academic world

Part one: Vindications on the subject of articles and other publications

We already warned that this was an attempt, a draft prior to something. Also that, as an attempt, it already contained in its expression a certain tendency to fail. But we are interested in failure, we are accustomed to it, we carry the weight of many failures on our shoulders. We are interested in what failure makes possible, in what it may imply, in terms of “the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable” (Halberstam, 2018: 98) and because by failing we can imagine “other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (Halberstam, 2018:98) that escape the logics and narratives of success in which we are educated. Failure interests us as a political form of resistance, as a possibility of identification and articulation of a “we” from the feeling, from the perspective of feeling, desire, frustration, and loss. Therefore, to conceive a possible dialogue between two such opposing forms of writing —the diary and the academic paper— may already be a failed attempt at writing.

We, the rare, lesbian, deviant, slut, pervert ones who populate, and give life to, the academic institutions, call for the following:

The first person of the plural in the form of our writings. Because we wrote them ourselves and it is therefore important to name ourselves.

We have been thinking for weeks about this article, how and from which stance to write it. About doing it together, now that we are so far away from each other, about writing from the standpoint of our desire. About whether two diaries, shared from exile, can be rewritten for a public audience, about their sharing with others, unrelated to our correspondence, and whether that act can dislocate, or rather relocate, those private and intimate writings into a perverted academic genre. At least, that is the intention. After waiting for a few weeks, the texts arrive on a rainy day, in cities that are strange to us and where it is difficult for us to exist, meaning that it is difficult for us to breathe. It arrives after nights of insomnia, prolonged precariousness, loneliness.

With the intention of bringing the body into the writing, we have shared fragments of our diaries. We are aware that this is nothing new.

[We share journal entries. We write because we think that, in the distance, it is a way of touching each other, of caressing each other, of fucking each other. When we meet again, certainly before this article is published, the whole diary will be for the other. For whom it was always destined from the beginning. For us the diary looks like another way to love each other, to find our own language and to build a living reality in this academic sphere in which we are fake bodies of certain fictions].

We are interested in the diary because there is no body dissimulation in it. Because in the diary, the body is present and it makes itself present. Because compared to the academic paper, which “speaks from an un-affected subjectivity” (Posadas Gómez, 2017: 5) —we would rather say dis-embodied, the diary is body and desire. Because if, with the paper, it is possible “to pretend the body was uninvolved, that it remained mute and still while the mind thought” (Leigh Foster, 2013: 12) and wrote, the diary is the writing of the body. In doing so, it reveals that the “the act of writing is a physical labor” (Leigh Foster, 2013: 20), corporal, marked by desire, but also by tiredness, sadness, precariousness, exhaustion, age. Because if the academic paper is the writing of a subject, the diary is the writing of a body. Because a diary is the opposite of an academic article. It is the first person, it is doubt, it is the present self, it is the knowledge that experience gives us. And, here, doubt has political potentiality because it confronts correct speech, knowledge, truths and know-how; it is content with not knowing, not being sure, it is a whisper that faces ‘the configuration of power’ (León, 2018) in voice and language. It’s all our fears, it’s something you write and read next to bed. Personal reflections made from the body. And to speak from the perspective of the body is to speak as the characters of Virginie Despentes (Despentes, 2016, 2017 and 2018) speak after having snorted a lot of coke. It is to speak about how you got up, what you did that day, what you think about work, what you fuck, what you eat, what you are researching, about your family, about what you’d like to do if everything goes well, about the annoyances you did not dare to name but you will maybe write on paper

The free structure of the articles. We understand that an article is a literary creation. Thus, not all articles must follow the IMRaD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) structure.

The academic article, as a product of the subject who writes, and not of the body, is formatted based on formal standards that have to reflect that subjectivity (objective, scientific, academic) of which it is a product; its legitimization and knowledge, its status of truth worthy of being transmitted between specialized circles, are precisely assured by the fulfillment of those standards applied to the form of writing that give it credibility. For this reason, the diary, the poetic form, that way of not knowing how to say something in academic terms, is discarded to the marginal circuits of knowledge. Because they allow the body and its

precariousness to be seen, because in the unveiling of the intimate, “the vulnerability of bodies and their interdependence with respect to other bodies” is also revealed (Pérez and Montoya, 2018:11). Thus, if the academic paper is a paradigmatic example of the university as a hyperproductive centre and its market logics, the writing from the body can only be placed on its margins as the non-productive, as neither academic nor systematic knowledge whose writing has difficulty to fit in.

The elimination of the double-blind peer review as we do not consider it an appropriate methodology to review an article. Instead of it, we call for an council of female experts who would assess the articles with the intention of improving them and helping the authors in their writing by means of a horizontal and face-to-face dialogue.

We shall include one of the comments by one of our evaluators. We find it on the margin of the page, we read it, and we imagine who she is. She is probably doing the same exercise with us while reading this paper and trying to evaluate it. The forced disappearance of the bodies that write and of those reading and evaluating. [Author:

Comment 1: These comments are an attempt to review a text introducing body and desire. Review it *from* the body. How to review from the body and, *at the same time*, from the standpoint of anonymity? How to evaluate a text that is body and that is desire? What legitimacy? These comments are an unwanted intrusion for this format, it is not that horizontal dialogue that I/we would like, which is not possible in this methodology so non-corporeal. I am a red shadow in the margin. This is also an attempt (draft/failure) to write/review from the perspective of the body, hidden on the computer in my office, without my boss seeing me, adding these hours to other projects that I extend, because in my house it’s too hot —my body sweats, because I don’t have money to buy another laptop and mine doesn’t work anymore, because I get paid so little in the office that I don’t think they deserve anything else.]

The aesthetic freedom of our academic articles, including the possibility of using different colors, shapes and sizes in what we write. This open aesthetics will lead to contents that are more dynamic and surprising.

With a scientific objective and linked to certain narratives of truth and argumentation, academic writing has ceased to be a “creative practice of knowledge” (Rogoff, 2017): 45) to become a legitimizing practice of truth. To this

end, that writing has ceased to be a visual narrative and has become a conceptual discourse, the aesthetics of which are marked by style and citation rules, by texts written in Times New Roman and Arial 12. On the other hand, the diary, as desiring corporal writing, comes for us from a search, from a need to find —creative— ways of narrating ourselves. Even though we are very conscious of that open gap, of that wound created between the language we need to tell ourselves, and what is really left unsaid in it, due to the impossibility of saying it. We bring, therefore, a phrase from Cavell (Cavell, 2017:16), which we feminize, in yet another gesture of perversion of our writing, *living as it were in exile from our words, not in a sure position from which to mean what we say*. It is impossible to read her without thinking that this is exactly the process of any writing and almost of any saying, that attempt at saying that falls short, that reveals a friction, but also a separation between what we wanted to say and what we said. Between what we wanted to write, and what was finally written. The discouragement, but also the imaginative possibility of writing, and its configuration as a corporal image.

LAST INAPPROPRIATE GESTURE OF TWO WRITING BODIES

Our diaries are a bit perverted because they knew that if they behaved well they could be eligible to get published in a high-impact magazine. They are perverted and speak from within, that is why they are attractive, proud and close to the truth. Our diaries manage to engage with the academic institutions from the perspective of the body. Although the academic world may turn its back on us —due to the proudness of our gaze. We are used to it.

Perhaps the academic sphere and its writings are not prepared for useless poetic gestures of dissenting bodies. Maybe it happily feeds on us and on our “incessant writing, publishing, presenting your work everywhere, applying for any type of call for papers” (Ávila, Ayala y García, 2018: 59)

In our pride, almost as one more gesture of that “queer art of failure” (Halberstam, 2018:108), we like to think that thanks to the diary, we can laugh at the academic world and, at the same time, use it like parasites. Like those little bitches we like to be. We are staying. We believe that our presence alone, with our hair, with our necklines, with our violence and our aggressiveness, is revolutionary and possible. And it’s there for them to look at us, even if they don’t like us.

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