



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://textjournal.scholasticahq.com/>

***Creative writing as nourishment: The political philosophy of
Corine Pelluchon applied to our field***

Julienne van Loon

To cite this article: van Loon, J. (2021). Creative writing as nourishment: The political philosophy of Corine Pelluchon applied to our field. *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses*, 25(1): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.52086/001c.23468>

RMIT University

Julienne van Loon

***Creative writing as nourishment: The political philosophy of
Corine Pelluchon applied to our field***

Abstract:

What if we thought of the creative writing discipline as part of a sustainable and sustaining urban or cosmo-political ecology that includes but is not limited to the university sector and the book industry? And what if we thought of creative writing practice and its resultant contribution (to knowledge, to arts practice, to the public good) as a means for sustaining an ethics of life? In this article, I draw on the work of political philosopher Corine Pelluchon, and in particular her recent work *Nourishment: A Philosophy of the Political Body* (2019), and apply her thinking to the kind of practice I (we) do on a daily basis. On the basis of a phenomenology of food and nourishment, Pelluchon's thinking shows us how freedom depends on the "love of life" and on sharing what nourishes others. She applies her thinking to political systems, reimagining them such that their core aim comes to sustain an ethics of life that is relevant to multiple lifeforms and that takes into account past, present and future generations. Her project is underpinned by her affirmative ethics, her insistence on "love of life" as a crucial consideration. Inspired by her applied philosophy, I wonder about the shifts in thinking that may arise if we consider the creative writing discipline through the lens of her phenomenology of nourishment. Pelluchon argues that "we are bound to others through our relationship to nourishment" and that relationship is "above all a relation of enjoyment" (p. 11). What if we consider creative writers as integral to fashioning and maintaining "the milieu from which we live today" (p. 13). On whom (or what), then, does the creative writer interdepend for nourishment, and how might a foregrounding of such interdependence shape and reshape an ethics of creative writing practice?

Biographical note:

Julienne van Loon is the author of *The Thinking Woman* (2019) and three novels, including The Australian/Vogel's Award-winning *Road Story* (2005). Her most recent work of fiction won the Griffith Review Novella Project VII prize and was published in *Griffith Review* 69. She is Co-director of the non/fictionLab research group at RMIT University and an Honorary Fellow in Writing with the University of Iowa.

Keywords: Corine Pelluchon, affirmative ethics, nourishment, phenomenology, creative writing

Introduction

What if we thought of the creative writing discipline as part of a sustainable and sustaining ecology that includes but is not limited to the university and the arts sectors? And what if we thought of creative writing practice and its resultant contribution (to knowledge, to arts practice, to the public good) as a means for sustaining an ethics of life? In this article, I draw on the work of political philosopher Corine Pelluchon, and in particular her recent work *Nourishment: A Philosophy of the Political Body* (2019). I apply her thinking to the kind of practice I (or we) do in and through Creative Writing on a daily basis. On the basis of a phenomenology of food and nourishment, Pelluchon's thinking shows us how freedom depends on the "love of life" and on sharing what nourishes others. Her project is underpinned by her affirmative ethics, her insistence on "love of life" as a crucial consideration. Inspired by her philosophy, both primary and political (or theoretical and applied), I wonder about the shifts in thinking that may arise if we consider creative writing practice through the lens of her phenomenology of nourishment and her advocacy of a notion she calls "radical sensing". Pelluchon argues that "we are bound to others through our relationship to nourishment" and that relationship is "above all a relation of enjoyment" (2019, p. 11). What if we consider creative writers and their practice as integral to fashioning and maintaining "the milieu from which we live today" (2019, p. 13)? On whom (or what), then, does the creative writer interdepend for nourishment, and how might a foregrounding of such interdependence shape and reshape an affirmative ethics of creative writing both as a practice and as a discipline? My article is in three main parts. I will look first at Pelluchon's philosophy of nourishment, then at creative writing practice as a form of radical sensing, and finally at applying Pelluchon's thinking on political systems to the discipline of Creative Writing. Along the way, I employ exercises as a method of calling to attention key aspects of my central argument, and also a way of inviting others to try on and try out – in an imaginative, reflective and speculative way – what Pelluchon's thinking could mean for our field. I also include an interlude – a polyvocal multi-authored "remix" – through which I hope to illustrate the relevance of Pelluchon's thinking on radical sensing to what it is that we do in creative writing.

Corine Pelluchon's philosophy of nourishment

Corine Pelluchon begins her philosophy of nourishment with a statement that paraphrases 20th century philosopher Emmanuel Levinas: "in the beginning was hunger" (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 1). It's an important origin statement and the influence of Levinas looms large in Pelluchon's work. "At the root of a need there is not a lack, but on the contrary, a plenitude of being," wrote Levinas in 1933 (as cited in Goldstein 2010, p. 36), and "hunger reminds us of our strong, our positive bond to the world" (Goldstein 2010, p. 36). As someone who has nursed a newborn child at the breast, my own lived experience confirms this statement. The child is born hungry and the nourishment another gives that child is material and deeply,

positively inter-relational. It is not just life giving but life affirming for both bodies, an idea well understood in feminism (see, for example, Lee, 2016). We have all come into the world the same way. We have come in hungry and someone has (or more usually several others have) nourished us. Levinas's interest in materiality came out of the early work by Husserl on phenomenology but took the focus on corporeality one step further. Hunger, for Levinas, is central. It reminds us what it means to be in the world, to feel oneself in being. Ethics and relationality both begin here.

Corine Pelluchon extends the work of Levinas, for she too places the body as “the starting point of our experience” (2019, p. 1). With an approach she identifies as “a radical phenomenology of sensing” (2019, p. 352), her central argument is that if we recognise the world as food, “we affirm the nourishing character of the world” (2019, p. 28). It is a world that can never be fully constituted but, importantly, we are of that world. It constitutes us. “Levinas radically affirms the sensibility of the subject,” she writes, “underlining at once my dependence with respect to the world, and the generosity of this world that I constitute and in which I move” (2019, p. 29). For Pelluchon it is not so much that we eat in order to live. Rather, eating *is* living. More broadly, with an eye to our dependence on – and responsibility towards – an ecology, she states, “I nourish myself on these activities that make me live” (2019, p. 29).

Pelluchon was born in 1967. She completed her PhD at the Sorbonne in 2003. She won a national award for philosophy in France – the Hannah Arendt Award – in 2006, and, most recently, the Gunther Prize for Critical Thinking in Germany in 2020. She is a Professor of Philosophy at Paris-Est-Marne-La-Vallée in France and the author of *Leo Strauss and the Crisis of Rationalism* (2015). In France, she has been active in politics, in particular through her work on policy with the French Animalist Party. This policy work speaks to her interest in nonhuman others. Much of her thinking is born out of what my university and others like it call “real world” problems. For example, she taught philosophy for a substantial period at a US medical school, grappling with pressing questions of bioethics in the context of rapidly advancing medical technologies. As a political philosopher, Pelluchon is not content just sitting with primary philosophy and leaving it at that. She seeks to apply her work, to imagine what it might mean in practice, beyond theory.

She explains, here in her own words, her approach:

I work essentially in the area of political philosophy: how to deliberate on subjects that go far beyond the problem of the peaceful coexistence of freedoms and even of the equitable distribution of resources. In thinking about the changes in democratic institutions and political culture that could put ecology and the animal question at the heart of the Republic and allow for greater citizen participation in debates on bioethical issues, I am trying to redraft the social contract. The issue of justice for dependent persons, future generations, and other species must be rethought. ... This

conception is based on a primary philosophy. ...The second aspect of [my research] involves ontology, in that it questions subjectivity, which is no longer defined only by freedom, but presupposes a rigorously defined relationship among three cardinal concepts of what I call an ethics of vulnerability: autonomy, responsibility, and vulnerability. These categories, which have been reconfigured, require changing the way we think of ourselves and our relationship to others, including other living beings. (Pelluchon, 2020, November 14)

It is Pelluchon's book *Nourishment: A Philosophy of the Political Body* that I am particularly interested in here. The book was translated by Justin E. H. Smith and first published in English in 2019; the original French edition was published in 2015. I have taken a particular interest in the way in which Pelluchon applies her thinking to the renewal of democracy, reimagining a form of democracy she calls deliberative – and that we in Australia would more commonly call participatory – in that it requires regular discursive participation from its citizens such that the core aim becomes to sustain an ethics of life that is relevant to multiple lifeforms and that takes into account past, present and future generations.

I argue that because of her focus on a radical sensing, that is, on a phenomenology of nourishment, Corine Pelluchon's thinking is also highly relevant to creative writing practice. Here, phenomenology in practice helps us to get closer to vulnerability.

Pelluchon says:

The ethics of vulnerability first arose from thinking about the identity of patients suffering from degenerative diseases of the nervous system ... awareness of our fragility, as well as with the affirmation that responsibility – the ability we have to be concerned about others – is central to vulnerability. It is this conception of vulnerability as both fragility and strength, and the attempt to promote the integration of individuals in situations of vulnerability by effectuating a shift from ethics to justice, that distinguishes the ethics of vulnerability from the ethics of care and from social philosophies that are more concerned with the issue of domination. (Pelluchon, 2020, October 6)

The ethics of vulnerability is a key aspect of Pelluchon's philosophy of corporeality, which she supplements with her notion of "living from," a notion that takes the materiality of our existence seriously. Hunger, *oikos* (Greek for family, family property, and house, three interconnected but distinct concepts), space and time, place, and enjoyment are all crucial in Pelluchon's approach to reconfiguring not just subjectivity, but justice. The first step towards this is an immersion in the sensory world that emphasises both its "nutritive essence" and the generosity of others that enables our "living from".

Creative writing practice as “radical sensing”

Pelluchon’s thinking invites us to “get back into our bodies, feel the ground beneath our feet, experience the rhythm of the city” and in doing so “to grasp a truth that is often neglected by philosophies of representation” (2019, p. 352), that is, as Pelluchon puts it, that “I nourish myself on these activities that make me live” (2019, p. 29). She roots this thinking in a form of phenomenology she calls “radical sensing” (2019).

Phenomenology, for those not familiar with this particular term or tradition, is a branch of philosophy credited to the thinking of Edmund Husserl, an early 20th century European thinker whose work had a profound influence on many, probably most famously on the French existentialist movement championed by the likes of Simone de Beauvoir. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines phenomenology as:

The study of structures of consciousness experienced from the first-person point of view. ... Literally, phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience.....[At times] “phenomenology” is restricted to the characterization of sensory qualities [or] what it is like to have sensations of various kinds ... [But it can be] given a much wider range, addressing the meaning things have in our experience ... or “life-world”. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013)

Creative writing practice, I argue, can be considered to have a special relation to phenomenology, not just as method but as methodology. That is, in many ways, creative writers have been practising phenomenology from the get-go. Many of us are already experts at it, whether or not we identify or understand ourselves as its practitioners, whether or not we have stopped to actively consider the extent to which it influences our being in the world and the way in which we make sense of that existence. Consider, for example, the following task, a variation of which I have been encouraging myself and others to engage in as a form of limbering up as a writer for as long as I have been teaching writing. That is, close to 30 years:

Exercise 1: Radical sensing
<p>Sit down in a place you know well, a place that nourishes you (or if this is not possible right now, travel back to such a place in your memory). Sit quietly in that place and give yourself over completely to sensory observation. Now write down some answers to these questions:</p>

what are the sounds you can hear? Find the best language to describe such sounds, rather than just naming the source or labelling the sound, describe it as if to someone who has never heard it before. What is it like? For example, you might describe the high-pitched ting of the bell minor, the gentle white-noise of water flowing, the twitter of a willie wagtail, the outraged quack of a duck. Now switch your focus to smell. What can you smell? Describe it. What can you taste here, if anything? Describe it. Sitting here, what shapes, textures or forms of weight can your body feel? For example, I might describe the sensation of the damp grass beneath my seat, the brittle plastic pen in my hand, the smooth paper resting against my palm. And finally, what can you see? List and describe things only in your immediate field of vision as if to someone for whom this place might never be visible.

I am sure many scholars/practitioners of Creative Writing have completed this exercise, or a similar variation. I'm sure many teachers of creative writing have asked others to do it, too. I encourage those readers to think about the experience of this kind of practice and to think about how doing it has nourished you. Further, how has sharing it or adapting it to new writing to share with others, nourished those others? Here I am getting closer to a question at the heart of this article, that is, how can our writing as a creative practice (and product) nourish others? And from whom or what does our practice draw nourishment? It is not by coincidence that my own recent practice of the above exercise took me straight to the edge of the river that runs alongside my present home and to the remnant bushland there, its birdlife and wildlife, all of which has somehow escaped destruction despite being only a 45 minute walk from the city of Melbourne's General Post Office.

In thinking about creative writing as phenomenological practice, I am thinking too of Pelluchon's ethics of vulnerability – the core of her primary philosophy recalling vulnerability as both fragility and strength. I am reminded here of the work in literary studies on philosophies of mind, for example, the idea that we read fiction or poetry in order to grasp a sense of one another's experiences, or in other words to gain insight into the vulnerability and/or "lifeworld" experience of others (see, for example, Anderson, Felski & Moi, 2020).

Francesca Rendle-Short in a recent paper in *TEXT* meditates helpfully on creative writing as a practice. She writes:

Practice is the *carrying out*, the way/s of doing something, repeated exercise or performance, such as, in simple terms, weekly choir practice or Auslan lessons or walking; a period of time to give to something ... You put *into* practice – there is movement, direction, action, a change of state ... Practise *practice* as both verb and noun, from the Old French *practiser* or medieval Latin *practizare*, which is an alteration of *practicare* 'perform, carry out'. *Practi-care*: where there is always and must be *care* (related etymologically through Old High German to grief and lament:

chara). Where there is also a sense of renewal and change, optimism; the practice of care to make things better. (Rendle-Short, 2020, p.3-4)

I am particularly interested here in creative writing practice as an embodied practice, a practice for and with and in response to cohabitation, a practice attentive to autonomy, vulnerability and responsibility, a practice attentive to hunger and to the pleasure of being, of sensing, of loving, with and amongst others. “Existence is not only individual ... it is also collective” writes Pelluchon (2019, p. 343). Here I wonder, is creative writing uniquely placed to represent “the thickness of human experience” (2019, p. 343)?

I want to explore an answer to this question via a creative interlude. I draw here on the voices of Australian writers responding to the Covid-19 enforced lockdown during 2020 with some lines from the work of Pelluchon and her philosophy of nourishment. The writers’ voices are all excerpts from *The Incompleteness Book*, edited by Julia Prendergast, Shane Strange and Jen Web (2020) and first published in a *TEXT* Special issue of the same name in October 2020. The excerpts from Pelluchon are all from her book, *Nourishment: A Philosophy of the Political Body* (2019). I’d like readers to consider this creative practice-based interlude as an experiment in what Pelluchon identifies as “radical sensing”.

*

Interlude: “Being with things and others: An immersion in the sensible world.”

“We are together and apart, reaching out to touch the surface between us, impermeable yet changing, unsure how we seem to each other” (Green, 2020, p. 47).

“Sunlight bakes her naked toes, and she is content” (Fogarty, 2020, p. 40).

“He picks a rock for me, pressing it into my hand. I toss it into the air a couple of times. It’s the size of a peach but flatter” (Giles, 2020, p. 44).

“Sensations allow me to orient myself in the world of knowledge and to know ... what I love” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 29).

“The bones of fish read like a braille on the shore. You can feel how they fit each other’s absence ... how a rib combs a spine’s space, how a tail, a frill of cartilage, fans a missing fin” (Newton, 2020, p. 104).

“Remember to love / the world. Love / the wailing, rolling world; / the air; the wildness / of wind” (Drummond, 2020, p. 37).

“We are never alone, since ... the existence of human beings, past present and future, and of other living beings, is a part of ourselves” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 355).

“As he spoke, I walked around the carpark, following the cracks in the asphalt, as I often did ...” (Driscoll, 2020, p. 36).

“I wonder if we will find enough flowers / to fill our bellies / to last through winter” (Pearce, 2020, p. 105).

“So cold here, in drenched hair, blindly swaying ... / beside a river the colour of ice, you’ll become the horse’s body – spine, all muscles, fetlocks sparking ease – scramble to standing, every coated inch in life” (Pont, 2020, p. 107).

“The phenomenon of nourishment ... places aesthetics at the heart of ethics, while also rehabilitating the pathic dimension of feeling that is being-with-others-and-with-the-world” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 349).

“In the evenings, as I rock my son to sleep, I watch from my lounge room windows as the metro trains pass. They still run on schedule, every half hour, but the lighted carriages sliding through the darkness are all empty” (Finlayson, 2020, p. 38).

“From waking up to waking up / I don’t feel any better or anything else / I started drinking 1 tablet x 2 / morning and evening. I drink on the day / I use the liver” (Shu, 2020, pp. 125–126).

“A migraine so jasmine that it clings to the cortex” (Shankar, 2020, p. 121).

“The idea is to make quality become a discriminating criterion in our world and that it replaces the obsession with quantity” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 27).

“It’s great to be here. The birds sing in the morning. The coffee is fresh. My love nestles like a cloud into my arm” (Strange, 2020, p. 130).

“You can’t slam the doors in my house. My dad put these rubber strips on all the doorframes so you can’t slam them with any kind of panache” (Sherwood, 2020, p. 123).

“Then the farewell kiss by your car, the chill air priming my hunger for the heat in your lips, your skin. All I could think of was seeing you again” (Walker, 2020, p. 138).

“Remembering the time last year when I was driving with my brother in the front seat and my parents and son in the back seat, and Robyn’s ‘Dancing on My Own’ came on Spotify, and

my brother and I sang along to the whole song, and when we air-drummed the bit before the final chorus I looked in the rear-view and saw my dad looking at us and smiling with a look of peace and pride on his face like we were strange but wonderful beings” (McFarlane, 2020, pp. 81–82).

*

I reflect on this interlude in the first instance by pointing out that the creative writing quoted from here might easily be cast as a set of responses to the “radical sensing” exercise I have already posed. This focus on sensory experience is, not exclusively but to a large degree, what we do in our field in and through practice. We affirm (not always, but often) “the nourishing character of the world” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 28); so often “we get back into our bodies, feel the ground beneath our feet” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 352) and in doing so transport our readers there too; we are attentive, not exclusively, but very often, to “the sensory qualities of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling” and to “what it is like to have sensations of various kinds” as well as to “the meaning things have in our experience” (as the aforementioned Stanford definition of phenomenology described). So, when a philosopher like Corine Pelluchon says, “I nourish myself on these activities that make me live” we (creative writers) have already considerable experience in understanding how that might work. Our observation skills are a crucial part of our artform. Further, in being-with-others-and-with-the-world, we help others to understand it too. When Corine Pelluchon calls – urgently because politically – for “a deepening of our awareness ... our consciousness of belonging to a common world” and suggests that “consciousness of interconnectedness” can “create joy and gratitude” because of its capacity to underline “an enlargement of the self that acknowledges interaction with all other forms of life” creative writers know what to do (Pelluchon, 2020, October 6). We know how to produce, and elicit from others, work that is attentive to those principles. We know that the work we can do in and through “radical sensing”, by which I mean deeply attentive sensing and finding the words to best express that lived experience, is powerful and that it has the capacity to motivate and to move others.

I now offer a second exercise. It is in the mode of reflective practice, another method we are no strangers to in the field of creative writing:

Exercise 2: Questions about creative writing practice
Is my pleasure in creative writing practice attributable to some degree to a practice of “radical sensing”? Is my creative writing practice method, to some degree, phenomenological? How does my creative writing practice, when based to a large degree on the sensory experience of

being in the world, affirm in me a “love of life”? How does it underline or emphasise my vulnerability in being in the world? How does it underline or emphasise my experience of “living from”? Further, how might this form of practice nourish others?

I encourage readers to do this reflective exercise. It is an exercise in thinking with and alongside Corine Pelluchon’s ideas on philosophies of nourishment. It is not a quest to master or even (necessarily) to interrogate her philosophy. Rather, it is an exercise about reflecting on our own creative writing practice through the lens of Pelluchon’s thinking.

“Love of life”: Creative writing as affirmative ethics

In the final part of this article, I turn to a consideration of the shifts in thinking that may arise if we consider the creative writing discipline through the lens of Pelluchon’s phenomenology of nourishment. How might we – and others – draw nourishment from academic Creative Writing (which I capitalise here to denote its status as a formal discipline)? How might we reconsider teaching and research training in Creative Writing so that we are thinking not so much about our discipline within an institution based on transactional forms of exchange – you pay the fee and follow instructions, do the work, I deem you as worthy of a pass OR I carry out the work as described in my position description in exchange for an hourly dollar fee – but rather as a project underpinned by Pelluchon’s notion of affirmative ethics, her insistence on “love of life” as the central and most crucial consideration in everything we do.

For Pelluchon, the environmental crisis calls for a genuine rethink of the social contract. In moral and political philosophy, the social contract is the political order, or the theory underpinning the model that is in place for maintaining some of the rights and freedoms of individual humans and giving up others, so as to protect or maintain some kind of social order. For Pelluchon, placing hunger and “love of life” centrally requires significant changes in the way we think about purpose and the public or common good. It requires that we rethink questions of justice and questions about the purpose of a civil government and our relation to it. Representative democracy, influenced dramatically by the powerful forces of global capitalism, is looking unhealthy worldwide (see, for example, Applebaum, 2020). Further, the Earth is at stake. Capitalism, as Karl Marx has said, gets into everything, even the air we breathe (qtd. in Cudd and Holmstrom, 2013). It is significant that Pelluchon is a philosopher who has written extensively on animal studies, a fact that places her among a group of peers attentive to post-humanism, the Anthropocene, and new materialism (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016; Ingold, 2010). “The liberalisation of the market,” she writes, “which transforms living beings into manufactured products and merchandise, seems to pull humanity into an irreversible current” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 350).

Her intention, then, is “to illuminate this anchoring of human beings in the materiality of their existence, by providing theoretical tools that may serve as a starting point for a philosophy of corporeality and of ‘living from’ that refers to our daily actions, but at the same time, has meaning on the ethical, political and cosmopolitical levels” (Pelluchon, 2019, p. 350). “Cosmopolitical” here, put simply, means globally political. Pelluchon seeks to illuminate; therefore, “a path from a competition-based democracy to a deliberative democracy”. And she does this by associating “political constructivism with a radical phenomenology of sensing” (p. 351).

To sense radically is to place this notion of “living from” and “love of life” centrally in the way we observe and then think about sensory experience. It is to acknowledge that we live on account of others and that we constitute the world, while the world also constitutes us. We are both in it and of it. To the extent that we are separate or autonomous, that separateness is contingent. Nevertheless, autonomy is important too, because it refuses to let us off the hook. Our democratic institutions require us to take responsibility as autonomous subjects, to get involved, not just to vote but to monitor and engage with systems of power, to think deeply about how they impact on what it is to live, and what it is to “live from”.

I am inventing not answers but another set of questions. I ask, for example, on whom (or what) then, does the creative writing research student or academic, or indeed the independent writer at large in the wider world, interdepend for nourishment. And further, how might a foregrounding of such interdependence shape and reshape an ethics of creative writing teaching, research and practice, into a kind of disciplinary ethics?

There are many more specific questions to consider. For example, if we think about Creative Writing as a political body embedded in the “ecosystem” of the academy, how do we nourish the broader “common world” in and through those students who may never become published authors, but who nevertheless leave our courses armed with skills and knowledge they may not have developed otherwise? How are those skills and practices we’ve developed in our graduates attentive to “love of life”? And how might those skills and practices as well as ways-of-being-and-knowing influence and shape the ecologies those graduates inhabit post-degree? How can their expertise in Creative Writing fashion things not just today, but tomorrow and beyond? What is their legacy? This long view of time is strongly foregrounded in Pelluchon’s ethics.

I want to focus now on Australian Creative Writing doctoral graduates and the question of nourishment, especially in terms of the way in which our highly trained specialists go on to nourish the milieu from which we live. I take as my case study examples, Terri-Ann White and Ania Walwicz. White was an early PhD graduate at Curtin University. She published a fiction work *Theodore and Brina* (2001) out of her PhD thesis. At an Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) conference some years ago in Adelaide, I remember attending a paper White gave on the difficulty of teaching creative writing while

maintaining one's own writing practice, later published in *TEXT* (1998). White's experience was that the creative energy required of her in and through teaching others prevented her from continuing with her own practice. Not long afterwards she stopped teaching, and she went on to direct a vibrant humanities research centre at University of Western Australia (UWA), the Institute of Advanced Studies, before becoming the publisher at UWA Press. There, her work to nourish the whole ecosystem of Australian writing, through supporting literature whose value was often other than economic has been sustained and extraordinary. A second example is Ania Walwicz, whose PhD thesis at Deakin won the Alfred Deakin medal in 2017 and was published as the experimental prose title *Horse* in 2018 (incidentally by UWA Press). Why did her doctorate win the Alfred Deakin medal? Looking holistically at the way Walwicz lived and worked, we might consider that she taught creative writing in the vocational education program at RMIT for 30 years. Stephanie Holt, who taught alongside her for 17 years, said:

Ania's influence on her students was profound. ... Once in her classroom, there was little instruction, but wide-ranging ruminations on art and literature, opportunities to read and write, kindness and encouragement, and an exhilarating freedom to experiment. (Holt cited in in *Books and Publishing*, 2020)

Jacinda Woodhead, a former student, wrote in *Overland*:

Every class with Ania was an experience. ... If you were looking for a manual on "how to write a short story" and detailed feedback on your writing, you had come to the wrong place. ... She was transgressive, but innocent; searing, but vulnerable; urgent, yet entirely playful and indulgent. ... My first publication in *Overland* was a short story I wrote in her class. (Woodhead, Strahan and Laird, 2020)

Clare Strahan, another former student, reflects that "she was essential to my reinvention as a writer. ... I needed Ania's art-for-art's-sake permission to keep up my courage" (Woodhead, Strahan and Laird, 2020). Considering these comments, I wonder about the ecology created by Walwicz as a teacher and how it influenced and nourished both her own practice and the practice of others.

Extrapolating from these particular and extraordinary examples, I offer a third and final exercise, this one perhaps more speculative than reflective. This exercise is aimed specifically at creative writers who are researcher/scholar/practitioners within the academy.

Exercise 3: Questions about the Creative Writing discipline

How does my involvement in the Creative Writing discipline nourish me? How have I been nourished by those in the Creative Writing discipline who have come before me? How will the work I do today in and through Creative Writing nourish others in the future? How might I situate Creative Writing in relation to the common world? What responsibilities (if any) does Creative Writing have to country? What responsibilities (if any) does Creative Writing have to democracy? How is Creative Writing me and not me? How am I responsible for what goes on in Creative Writing? What is Creative Writing's impact on the vulnerability of others? Is my practice of sensing in and through Creative Writing radical? Is Creative Writing immune to challenge and revision? Is Creative Writing nourishment? If Creative Writing can be thought of as a form of nourishment, how might that nourishment be shared?

Conclusion

I began this article by introducing the political philosophy and ontology of Corine Pelluchon's philosophy of nourishment. I applied her ideas to Creative Writing practice, considering the latter as a form of radical sensing and contemplating the experienced creative writing practitioners as established experts in this form of phenomenology. Finally, I looked at some of the questions Pelluchon's political philosophy might raise for those of us working in Creative Writing as an academic discipline.

In summary, Pelluchon asks us to consider that "to live" is to "situate one's actions in relation to the common world." For Pelluchon, to live is "to live for" and to "affirm being towards life" (2019, p. 347). Going back to Levinas, and to the idea of taking vulnerability seriously, I have sought to question our capacity to change the "goals" of Creative Writing as theory and practice; to think more fully about Levinas's notion of a "good soup" – a nourishing elixir that does not reduce ecology to its environmental dimension, but considers the broader "food of life" (air, light, spectacles, labour, ideas, sleep and so on), to imagine this "good soup" for our practice and our discipline and in imagining, and therefore, to glimpse the possibility of calling it into being. I have asked who amongst us might be hungry for Creative Writing and/or the desire to do creative writing as a form of radical sensing?

Levinas was fond of quoting the rabbi Israel Salantr, who said "the material needs of my neighbour are my spiritual needs." And yet he acknowledged that paradoxically, we are often "not astonished enough" when we register the cry of that hungry neighbour, not astonished enough to encourage us to share what we have. (Goldstein 2010, p. 35)

I wonder what we have in our soup. What do we have?

I contend that the sorts of questions I am raising here are timely because of (1) the crisis of higher education, (2) the crisis of the arts sector, (3) the global crisis of democracy, and (4)

the challenge of sustaining life in comfortable terms for all life forms on our planet in a manner that acknowledges and responds to the challenge of the Anthropocene era. They are timely because a re-orientation towards “love of life” – including the nonhuman forms of life – is a crucial shift in thinking in the face of both climate change and global hunger. “We are in this together” should not be a mantra that disappears from the public conscience with reduced cases of Covid-19 in Australia. It is incumbent upon those of us in Creative Writing to go on thinking. Indeed, we need to go on radically sensing too, and not be shy about foregrounding our expertise in forms of knowledge and understanding peculiar to that phenomenological practice.

I love reading philosophy. It enables me to zoom out – to get a bird’s-eye view rather than simply labouring away in the dark and in isolation to hit the next performance target in order to keep my job. I love creative writing practice. It enables me to make sense of the world in which I live. I recognise radical sensing – in and through the hunger to write and the way I practise practice (noun and verb) – as important to the way I experience the world and to my quest to share and contemplate that experience with and alongside others. Though I am immersed in and increasingly responsible for Creative Writing in the academy, I never forget this radical sensing aspect of the practice I am here to teach and research. And my relation to the academy is not and has never been comfortable.

I am at home in it/I am not at home in it. Please circle. Skip.

I am vulnerable to and within and for this system. I am responsible for, to and within this system. What is the nature of my contract? What is my gift? How do I share with others? How do I affirm a being-towards-life? I want to go on asking, for to me these remain important questions.

Notes

This article was first presented as a keynote address at the annual conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, Griffith University, November 2020.

References

- Anderson, A., Felski, R., & Moi, T. (2020). *Character: Three inquiries in literary studies*. University of Chicago Press.
- Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of democracy*. Doubleday.
- Books and Publishing*. (2020, October 14). Vale Ania Walwicz.
<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2020/10/14/157959/vale-ania-walwicz>

- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Polity.
- Cudd, A. E. & N. Holmstrom. (2013). *Capitalism for and against: A feminist debate*. Cambridge University Press.
- Driscoll, O. (2020). Caring for. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 36). Recent Work Press.
- Drummond, W. (2020). Note to self (in novel times). In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 37). Recent Work Press.
- Fogarty, C. (2020). Isolation tip #54: Talk to a God you don't believe in. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 40). Recent Work Press.
- Finlayson, K. (2020). The great pause. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 38–39). Recent Work Press.
- Goldstein, D. (2010). Emmanuel Levinas and the ontology of eating. *Gastronomica*, 10(3), pp. 34–44. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2010.10.3.34>
- Green, S. (2020). Screen/mirror. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 47). Recent Work Press.
- Giles, S. (2020). For the splash. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 45). Recent Work Press.
- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble*. Duke University Press.
- Ingold, T. (2000). *The perception of the environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. Routledge.
- Lee, R. (2016). Feeding the hungry other: Levinas, breastfeeding and the politics of hunger. *Hypatia*, 21(2), (pp. 259–274). <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12249>
- McFarlane, E. (2020). Bullet point list of activities that cheer me as a sentient human in 2020. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 81–82). Recent Work Press.
- Newton, C. (2020). Bone beds (i). In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 104). Recent Work Press.
- Pearce, S. (2020). April. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 105). Recent Work Press.
- Pelluchon, C. (2015). *Leo Strauss and the crisis of nationalism* (R. Howse, Trans). SUNY Press.

- Pelluchon, C. (2019). *Nourishment: A philosophy of the political body* (J. E. H. Smith, Trans). Bloomsbury.
- Pelluchon, C. (2020, October 6). *20/20 Philosophers: Corine Pelluchon*. [Video]. New York University. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpKaMtTJCKg>
- Pelluchon, C. (2020, November 14). *Corine Pelluchon: Ethics and political philosophy*. Retrieved 14 November 2020. http://corine-pelluchon.fr/?page_id=543
- Pont, A. (2020). Watching Tarkovsky (9 cuts). In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 107–108). Recent Work Press.
- Rendle-Short, F. (2020). ‘Tissue of making’ in practice led research. *TEXT*, 24(2), 1-17. <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct20/rendleshort.pdf>
- Shankar, R. (2020). Latin for life. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 121–122). Recent Work Press.
- Sherwood, Barry. (2020). The camel’s back. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 123–124). Recent Work Press.
- Shu, EJ. (2020). Machine translated. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 125–126). Recent Work Press.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2013, 16 December). Phenomenology. In *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved 14 November 2020, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>
- Strange, S. (2020). Traps for the newly relocated. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (pp. 130–131). Recent Work Press.
- Prendergast, J., Strange, S. & Webb, J. (Eds.). (2020). *The incompleteness book*. Recent Work Press.
- Walker, A. (2020). Taking time. In J. Prendergast, S. Strange & J. Webb (Eds.), *The incompleteness book* (p. 138). Recent Work Press.
- Walwicz, A. (2018). *Horse*. University of Western Australia Press.
- White, T-A. (2001). *Theodore and Brina*. Fremantle Press.
- White, T-A. (1998). The joys of the writing class. *TEXT*, 2(1). <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april98/white.htm>

Woodhead, J., Strahan, C. & Laird, B. (2020, October 6). When someone great is gone: Remembering Ania Walwicz. *Overland*. <https://overland.org.au/2020/10/when-someone-great-is-gone-remembering-ania-walwicz/>