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Dark practices of writing: Disuniting intuition from the unknown as "free-range possibility"

Abstract:
Intuition occupies a privileged position in the practices of western creative writers that often conceals and perpetuates hegemonic power relations. We argue that these relations are the product of a powerful rhetoric linking intuition to an external and transcendental origin. While the language used to describe intuition is historically and culturally contingent, it is frequently associated with terms like *unknown*, *mysterious*, *divine* and *darkness.* To set the scene for our focus on the emergence of Practice-Led Research (PLR), we briefly survey earlier theories of intuition. Reviving the connection between intuition and transcendentalism, Graeme Sullivan (2009) proposes that PLR creates new knowledge through writing that moves from the unknown – configured as "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (p. 48) – into the known. Alongside other PLR scholars, Sullivan merges intuition with the project of connecting the creative arts to the knowledge-production imperatives of academia. This article focuses on how the introduction of a largely uninterrogated version of intuition into PLR threatens its social justice value. Countering this, Hélène Cixous' reading of the writer's relationship with darkness inspires an alternative approach to intuition, which actively disrupts the hegemonic power relations and associated oppressive discourses sustained by transcendentalism.

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Keywords:
Darkness, Hélène Cixous, intuition, practice-led research, transcendentalism

Contesting intuition as transcendentalism

Creative writers frequently credit intuition as the catalyst for their writing and incorporate it into their identity as a writer without necessarily giving the matter much thought. This omits the linkage of intuition within certain western practices of art to a transcendental origin typically described with reference to the *unknown*, *mysterious*, *divine* or *darkness*. Our article unpacks the association of intuition with the transcendental space of the unknown that visual artist, art theorist and educator Graeme Sullivan self-defeatingly defines as "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (2009, p. 48). The problem with defining the unknown as a transcendent domain of liberal proportions is that it enables – and simultaneously disguises – the hegemonic power relations of writing that have the potential to manifest as oppressive discourses (for example, neoliberalism, colonialism and/or phallogocentrism). We are not arguing that intuition should be jettisoned as a driver of creativity, rather that rethinking the circumstances of intuition's production allows us, in turn, to address what is actually happening when writers tarry with the unknown – or the mysterious, divine or darkness – as part of their (intuitive) writing practice.

The project of theorising Practice-Led Research (PLR), including creative writing production, has been greatly advanced by Sullivan's work on the relationship between the known and the unknown. Sullivan is not a creative writer but in this article we demonstrate how his theories of PLR have multidisciplinary application across the creative arts, specifically in creative writing. This is one of the factors that makes him a key influencer in PLR scholarship [1]. Working with a conceptual vocabulary that privileges "serendipity and intuition" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48), Sullivan deploys the concept of the unknown as the springboard for knowledge production:

> What is of interest to practice-led researchers, however, is the possibility of new knowledge that may be generated by moving from a stance more accurately seen to move from the 'unknown to the known' whereby imaginative leaps are made into what we don't know as this can lead to critical insights that can change what we do know. (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48)

Sullivan prepares the ground for this strong statement about intuition in earlier moments of his oeuvre. In 2001 he credits "thinking" with the quality of "[embracing] what is known and unknown" (Sullivan, 2001, p. 2). Then, in 2006, he comments that "oftentimes what is known can limit the possibility of what is not and this requires a creative act to see things from a new view" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 20). Again, in 2010, he proposes that "the nature of art practice as research is that it is a creative and critical process that accepts that knowledge and understanding continually change, methods are flexible, and outcomes are often unanticipated, yet possibilities are opened up for revealing what we don't know as a means to challenge what we do know" (Sullivan, 2010a, p. 99). Finally, in 2010, he backs up his 2009 statement, making the point that:

> Conventional research in general proceeds from the known to the unknown, yet it is important to acknowledge the benefit of inquiry that moves in the other direction – from the unknown to the known – for fresh perspectives as much as prior knowledge are determinants in creating and constructing new knowledge. (Sullivan, 2010b, p. 100)

We agree with Sullivan's argument that "it is productive to explore creative possibilities that are informed by, but not captive to, existing frameworks of knowledge" (2009, p. 48). However, his suggestion that creative writers produce their texts through an exploitation of the unknown as a transcendental domain throws into stark relief the principal problem with the practice of intuition: how it enables yet conceals the latent hegemonic power relations of writing. This comes about because two ways of relating to the unknown appear to be in tension here. There is a difference between tarrying with the unknown only to avoid capture by "existing frameworks of knowledge" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48) and deliberately positioning oneself in relationship to the unknown such that it operates as the external transcendental origin of intuition positioned in a sharp binary opposition with the known.

To this extent, with respect to the second form of the writer's relation to the unknown, we are interrogating the slippage Sullivan seems to tolerate in his work between "the unknown" and, as quoted above, "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48). Sullivan contrasts this "open landscape" with what he terms – speaking of the known – "a closed geography of well-trodden pathways" (p. 48). Taken together, these phrases emphasise the remoteness of the unknown from "existing frameworks of knowledge" (p. 48). By remoteness we mean exhibiting no footprints or traces of prior knowledge. Relating to such an "open landscape" (p. 48) would seem to position the artist-researcher vis-à-vis a space where their exploration of "creative possibilities" precisely lacks the capacity to be informed in even the most minimal degree by "existing frameworks of knowledge" (p. 48). Sullivan's assumption that any geography or landscape can be entirely devoid of constraints, which appear in his (somewhat stretched) metaphor as "well-trodden pathways" (p.48), is a chief concern of this article. As we will be suggesting, the unknown – which is traditionally associated with darkness, in contrast to the known in its association with light – is always already, to an extent, trodden by discourses.

This article briefly surveys several historical approaches to intuition by thinkers and creative writers and produces a taxonomy of terms associated with the origins of intuition, which include the unknown, mysterious, divine and, most significantly for our argument, darkness. Our survey prepares the ground for a critique of PLR scholarship that probes its attachment to the residue of earlier practices and notions of intuition. Shifting thereafter to a more theoretical approach, we further critique Sullivan's work and that of other PLR researchers, before arguing that Hélène Cixous's perspective on darkness and writing practice is a salutary corrective to the tendency among contemporary writers to treat intuition as sourced in the unknown, figured as a transcendental "open landscape of free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48).

Cixous's version of creative practice sustains comparison with intuition to the extent that the production of writing depends upon an interplay with the reserve energies of a space that she

calls darkness and which is logically prior to the production of writing. However, Cixous diverges from Sullivan's view of intuition to the extent that this space, while dark, is not transcendental, nor is it unmarked by pre-existing strands and powers of language or what we might call discourse. We view Cixous's intervention as a direct critique of what we argue are the phallogocentric underpinnings of intuition and writing. Ellen K. Feder and Emily Zakin unpack the etymology of this term:

> With the concept of phallogocentrism, Derrida implicates logocentrism in the Lacanian notion of phallocentrism. For Lacan, the phallus is the transcendental signifier, that which supports all signification as its condition for possibility. The concept of phallogocentrism makes clear the connection between the valuation of presence and the phallicized Symbolic Order. (1997, p. 47)

Our argument concerning these points is complemented by a close reading of key passages from Cixous's *The laugh of the Medusa* (1976) and from an interview with Cixous (2014) titled "The play of fiction" conducted by Christa Stevens in 1994.

Throughout this article we will consider the importance for writers to understand how the hidden forces or hegemonies that subsist within the key term and practice of intuition operate. Our intention is to denaturalise what has come to be seen as a natural and thus politically neutral, even beneficial, dimension of the writing process and of PLR. Our conclusion is that Cixous's approach to darkness merges a theoretical understanding of how power works through discourse with a keen awareness of how to practise writing non-transcendentally: that is, in a way, thoroughly grounded in potentially resistant socio-political discourses.

Historical approaches to intuition in western thought and writing

The long history of reflection on the creative process in western thought and writing has privileged the belief that artistic production is generated by a pre-eminent external force – synonymous with a mysterious space or power beyond human comprehension – which we are calling transcendental. This belief generally goes by the name of *intuition*, although the concept itself is sometimes threaded through other terms, notably *inspiration*. Still, however it is labelled, the running concept of intuition has been shaped differently by different thinkers.

An early approach to the concept of intuition is found amongst the Ancient Greek philosophers. According to Yulia Ustinova (2020), "Plato and Aristotle were aware of the importance of inspiration, and sensed it as coming from a supernatural external source" (p. 266). One such source was the Muses. Discussing early Greek poetry, Penelope Murray (1981) argues that "whatever else the Muses stand for they symbolise the poet's feeling of dependence on the external: they are the personification of his inspiration" (p. 89). Murray's phrase "dependence on the external" (1981, p. 89) highlights a spatial relationship between the writer and the divine, which, at least faintly, recalls Sullivan's double-landscape model.

However, the idea that the mysterious power or space within which intuition originates is replete with knowledge has since been replaced by the opposite notion that this space is unfilled by knowledge or at least inhabited by knowledge (apparently) inaccessible to humans. Robin Hard dates this shift to somewhere between the era of Ancient Greek poetry and today:

> In contrast to poets of more recent times, who have tended to appeal to their Muse as a source of poetic afflatus, ancient poets place more emphasis on the wisdom and knowledge of the Muses, as deities who know all that is worth telling and can give the poet the ability to tell it, and also to remember it (a point that was especially important to oral poets of early times). (2020, p. 191)

Romanticist approaches to intuition and writing reflect this transition. Where the Ancient Greek poets saw themselves largely as inspired and enabled by the Muses to impart divine knowledge, the Romanticists regarded poetry as more of a joint production of human and godly capacities. In the aftermath of Medievalism, Romanticist poets illustrate the Christianisation of the Muses through the notion of the poet as a mouthpiece for God, whose power is often represented through the depths and patterns of Nature (Cieśla-Korytowska, 2002, p. 49). Thus, for the Romanticists, intuition certainly involved some sort of "dependence on the external" (Murray, 1981, p. 89), to which they added a slightly more heuristic and human-oriented approach to knowledge and poetic production. To take one example, George Bisztray's (2002) notes in his analysis of Adam Oehlenschläger's poem "Guldhornene" ("The Golden Horns") that "Oehlenschläger's poem was a warning for his time that only the power of intuition and an appreciation of the past could drive mankind further along its road to knowing itself and exploring the context of its culture" (p. 231).

Oehlenschläger was writing around the same time as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose concept of the primary and secondary imagination indexes an enabling tension between the human-oriented and divine approaches to intuition in Romanticism. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge (1817) recomposes the (one-way) "dependence on the external" (Murray, 1981, p. 89):

> The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead (Coleridge, 1817).

For Maria Cieśla-Korytowska (2002), the Romanticist poet is "an intercessor between God and the people – a person ruled by divine inspiration, and endowed with an ecstatic character" (p. 50). Approximating though not exactly replicating this, Coleridge (1817) positions the writing process as an active parallel embodiment by the writer of the divine "eternal act of creation".

As Anne DeLong comments, “In Coleridgean terms, the reliance on formal elements is akin to the lesser, secondary imagination that unifies the divinely inspired but often chaotic experiences of the primary imagination” (2012, p. 24). In a way, Coleridge’s approach reflects an internalized version of the process of intuition that for Cieśla-Korytowska is aligned with an external relationship of the writer to God. To this extent, Coleridge’s approach appears to influence the intuitive practices of later writers. Although still rendered in the language of the external, these practices seem, in fact, to involve drawing upon a divine element of the writer’s own self in an embodied substitution for the idea of God.

Amongst 20th- and 21st-century writers, we notice that the “dependence on the external” (Murray, 1981, p. 89) is couched less in the language of the divine and reflects a more individualised, bespoke and heterogeneous conception of the sources of intuition. In parallel, intuition has become more a signifier of the writer’s identity and not so much a reservoir of inspiration shared with others. What is retained from the Ancient Greeks and the Romanticists, however, is an ongoing complex mediation between writing practices and the transcendental, avowedly segregated, origins of intuition. Even so, a key difference between 20th- and 21st-century writers and their forerunners is an increasing engagement with intuition in relationship to notions of the unknown, as opposed, most obviously, to a divine being of complete knowledge which grounds both Ancient Greek and, to a degree, Romanticist thinking [2].

The 20th- and 21st centuries have seen an explosion of constellated terms related in various ways to intuition. Scouring an admittedly large and diverse selection of sources uncovers additional terms including: demon, daemon, phantom, ghost, angel, Martians, unseen being, possessed, dictated, impregnated, labyrinthine, tunnel, cave, spirit world, third mind, obstruction, obscurity, impulse, hunch, luck, collective unconscious, emptiness, disorientation, under water, empty theatre, twilight, blackout, and dark room (as many of these terms appear in multiple sources it makes little sense to reference them in pedantic detail). Random examples of how particular writers have orientated themselves to these terms include George Orwell’s “one would never undertake [writing] if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand” (2004, p. 10), Rudyard Kipling’s observation that “when your Daemon is in charge, do not think consciously. Drift, wait and obey” (1937, p. 210) and Ian Rankin’s comment that “I’m really not in control at all of what I’m writing. It’s almost as though before I start writing there’s a shape sitting there that I’ve not seen yet, and when I start to write the novel the shape will reveal itself to me, the novel will decide which way it wants to go” (“On Writing”, 2011).

In the introduction to her book *On writers and writing*, Margaret Atwood (2015) compiles a list of responses from fellow writers on the motivations for their writing – which are endlessly varied – and on what it feels like when they are writing. The following section describes how the writing process frequently implicates disequilibrium and opacity in an overlapping movement with the approach to what Atwood calls “the conditions for vision” (p. xxii):

> Obstruction, obscurity, emptiness, disorientation, twilight, blackout, often combined with a struggle or path or journey – an inability to see one’s way forward, but a feeling

> that there was a way forward, and that the act of going forward would eventually bring about the conditions for vision – these were the common elements in many descriptions of the process of writing. (2015, p. xxii)

Here, Atwood connects with the intuitive approach of the Ancient Greek poets and the Romanticists, but her emphasis is not so much on the influence of the divine as on the guiding power of an unknown environment in which the writer's senses, especially sight, are heightened and refined by the very act of writing as a "going forward" (2015, p. xxii). By reversal, one might say that the journey towards increased sight is simultaneously a journey out of the opposite state of affairs: that is, blindness, darkness and uncertainty – in short, the unknown. That said, there is a suggestive parallel between Atwood's observation and Coleridge's thesis that the secondary Imagination shapes and unifies the chaos of the primary Imagination. To this extent, Atwood's observations also tap into an older version of intuition.

More relevant to the concerns of this article, however, is Atwood's conclusion, on the same page, that "possibly, then, writing has to do with darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it, and, with luck, to illuminate it, and to bring something back out to the light" (2015, p. xxii). We are interpreting "luck" as an analogy for intuition, which situates Atwood's work in proximity to the writing processes outlined so far in this article. To an extent this passage repeats the approach of the Ancient Greek poets and Romanticists in that intuition is figured as a response to a certain compulsion driven by an external source. In Atwood's case, that external source is darkness. However, the slippage Atwood entertains between "desire" and "compulsion" (2015, p. xxii) suggests that the relationship to this external source has become more complicated in recent times. Atwood's formulation equivocates between two ideas of the writer: either as their being compelled by an external source and their being driven (outwards) by internally constituted desire, which might be related to the divinity of the self-observed by Coleridge. Importantly though, what is retained in both of these formulations is the structure of a relationship between the writer and another space and the idea that intuition relates strongly to the passage between the writer and this space.

The next historical moment we wish to highlight in the discourse of writing and intuition involves the emergence of Practice-Led Research (PLR), which is an academic and institutionalised form of the creative arts that seeks to identify and privilege its capacity to create knowledge. Carol Gray (1996) asserts two principles of PLR:

> By "practice-led" I mean, firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners in the visual arts. (p. 3)

Linda Candy, drawing on the work of Stephen Scrivener, offers an important addition to Gray's definition of PLR. Using the similar term "Practice-Based Research", Candy argues that:

> It is important to make a clear distinction between practice-based research and pure practice. Many practitioners would say they do "research" as a necessary part of their everyday practice. As the published records of the creative practitioners demonstrate, searching for new understandings and seeking out new techniques for realising ideas is a substantial part of everyday practice. However, this kind of research is, for the most part, directed towards the individual's particular goals of the time rather than seeking to add to our shared store of knowledge in a more general sense. (2006, p. 2)

In brief, Candy here asserts the importance of transferability of knowledge to a full definition of research. However, we acknowledge that it is impossible to pin down what "pure practice" (Candy, 2006, p. 2) is, and that, in any event, work produced as "pure practice" (p. 2) may still contain, at least potentially, transferable knowledge.

Historically, the term Practice-Led Research, accompanied by variations such as Practice-Based Research and Research-Led Practice, entered the language of academia and the creative arts in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Australia, this development happened in parallel with – and largely as a consequence of – the reforms introduced by the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins [3]. Jen Webb argues that:

> The requirement to engage in conventional research as well as professional creative practice was a direct consequence of the Dawkins reforms, which placed on art educators the imperative to produce research that met the specifications of the annual Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC), without adjusting HERDC to accommodate the sorts of work we produced. (2018)

Obviously, things have changed greatly since 1988 and PLR is securely established in many universities, as evidenced for example by the significant number of grants awarded to creative arts disciplines by the Australian Research Council ("Congratulations", 2021). Nevertheless, the seamless incorporation of creative arts research into the Australian and international academies is yet to be achieved. This is indicated by the ongoing distinction in Australian university policies and practices between Traditional Research Outputs (TROs) and Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs).

Central to our article, the reliance on the understandings of intuition outlined above has survived, and indeed thrived, through the vicissitudes of the cleaving together of the creative arts with PLR. Like Sullivan, the following scholars of PLR valorise intuition as a crucial element in the methodology of the creative writer operating within academia. Webb (2015) suggests that "writer-researchers, unlike other researchers, are first invested in the imagination, intuition and the beautiful use of language" (p. 114). Baz Kershaw also mentions "intuition" as part of his argument that "insight and maybe even instinct" have a role to play as "creative springboards for performance research" (2009, p. 113). Admittedly, Kershaw is not referring directly to writing, but he is quick to roll his comments into a more general point about research in the creative arts, posing the provocative question, "Could it be that the august institutions charged with supporting advanced research in universities worldwide should adopt 'hunch' as

a dynamic addition to the practice-as-research lexicon of starting-point terms?" (Kershaw, 2009, p. 113). Kershaw continues: "'hunches' – or, more conventionally, 'intuitions' – problematise the well-worn modernist oppositions between mind and body, spirituality and materiality, creativity and rationality, arts and sciences, and so on, and can issue in aesthetic forms that confound those distinctions" (2009, p. 115).

Somewhat differently, Jane Goodall (2009) approaches these issues of PLR in a fashion shaped by awareness of a similar external force to that identified as part of the creative process by the Ancient Greek poets and Romanticists:

> Even among the most hard-headed novelists there are those who accord some kind of uncanny autonomy to the book in the making, as if an unwritten novel is a determining entity that takes possession of the writer, generating nightmares of technical impossibility from which the only way out is ever deep resignation to the work as daemon. (p. 205)

"The spooky art of fiction writing," Goodall claims, "involves a commitment to improvisation and randomness [and] a submission to the erasure of authorial design" (2009, p. 207). Lorna Fergusson (2013) notices a similar abdication of the authority of the author in her metaphoric representation of PLR as an approach dependent on what she calls the "subconscious": "Composting, to use a gardening image, is about giving a story time to come into being … Like the slow accumulation of leaf mould, random notions, thoughts, opinions and experiences drift down into the subconscious" (pp. 40–41). Similarly, Robyn Stewart (2010) comments,"My research practice continues as a process of continuous discovery, filled with correspondences and contradictions, intuition and surprise, serendipity and discipline" (p. 124). Such a vocabulary of intuition echoes through many other theorists and practitioners of PLR, including Anthony Marshall (Candy, 2020, p. 185), and Andrew R. Brown and Andrew Sorensen (2009, p. 162). For Annette Iggulden, the notion of "slippage" away from internal control over the PLR process is crucial: "This method permitted an uninterrupted momentum of body movement, rhythmic flow of line, less conscious control of the words and evolving overall image, allowing for an intuitive response and slippage of thought, feeling and action" (2010, p. 70).

Our historical review of observations by western writers on the writing process (or on the creative arts process within which writing nests) regularly connects intuition to what Penelope Murray has called a "dependence on the external" (1981, p. 89). While this relationship has, in certain respects, shifted over time, the external force has largely been constructed as outside the conscious control – or even the comprehension – of the practitioner. For example, Sullivan's "open landscape" (2009, p. 48) is reminiscent of the divine source of transcendental inspiration that the Ancient Greek poets and Romanticists drew upon, even as the language of divinity has withered away. Later writers, especially those working within a PLR framework, tend to figure this external force as an unknown space. Writing about PLR, Jane Bacon states that, for "creative practitioners … the unknown … is the only place of certainty" (2010, p. 65). "The light (and dark) of creativity", she continues, "is not a given, it is not a thing to be named,

labelled, boxed, clothed or melded as we see fit" (Bacon, 2010, p. 65). Sullivan extends the logic of Bacon's position in his somewhat hyperbolic argument that this same certainty – the unknown – is "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (2009, p. 48).

It is important to note that we see great value in Sullivan's work as a theorist of PLR. For better *and* for worse, his contribution is the product of a powerful historical tradition of the identity and practices of the writer discussed in this section. We interpret the shortcomings of his approach as due simply to the carrying forward, not unexpectedly, of concepts from the long (if not entirely homogeneous) history of representations of intuition.

In the following section, we unpack the problems inherent in Sullivan's position and, by extension, the views of those within his theoretical ambit. We anticipate the work of Cixous as another model of intuition and writing that we suggest is better grounded in the historical, social and political discourses that always already surround practices of creative writing.

A critique of transcendental intuition

Writers work with language and, as Paul Dawson points out, language is always already coterminous with history, society and politics:

> The recognition that writers do not simply employ a neutral language to express their unified vision of the world, but instead represent within the literary work a range of extra-literary languages which organise social relations, means that an attention to form also requires an attention to the prior utterances, dialogised words, and world views of the heteroglot, and ideologically conflicting, social languages being artistically orchestrated within the text. (2003, p.10)

This dimension of language is obscured in the approaches to intuition outlined in the previous section through the assumption that its sources are somehow sequestered from the concerns of humankind. More specifically, the resort to intuition as the driver of creativity mitigates against reflection by the writer on the combinations of power and knowledge that circulate, as discourses, through us. Such terms recall the well-known work of Michel Foucault. Gilles Deleuze suggests that, for Foucault, "to write is to struggle and resist, to write is to become, to write is to draw a map" (1992, p. 44). For Deleuze, following Foucault, writing practice is always already an engagement with power-knowledge forces and may even be an affirmation of these forces. But at the same time, the writer's words are inevitably an instrument of struggle and resistance. As Foucault observes, "points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (1981, p. 95). Foucault's comment contains a social justice potentiality and we return to this towards the end of this article.

For now, our concern is that the model of intuition Graeme Sullivan and others maintain assumes that there is something outside of the power network as elaborated by Foucault. This section critiques the common approach that sees intuition as preceding only one way, through a single channel from the transcendental to the writer, which culminates in the creative

production of words. For Sullivan and others, it is never a case of picking and choosing amongst diverse, even conflicting, intuitions. In other words, from a Foucauldian perspective, we are laying bare the blindness to power of traditional intuition as a non-heterogeneous impulse.

This blindness to power ramifies in several directions and across various social contexts. Two of these are neoliberalism and colonialism, in which power relations often take on a hegemonic force. Jacques Derrida's concept of the transcendental signified is useful in thinking through how the concept of intuition outlined above ends up being complicit with neoliberal and colonialist power relations.

Derrida's notion of the transcendental signified can be summarised as:

> the structuralist illusion of an ultimate referent at the heart of a signifying system which is portrayed as "absolute and irreducible", stable, timeless, and transparent—as if it were independent of and prior to that system. [Derrida] argues that dominant ideological discourse relies on this metaphysical foundation. All other signifieds within the signifying system are subordinate to this final meaning to which they point. (Chandler & Munday, 2020)

We see a connection between the tradition of transcendentalism within western philosophy that Derrida challenges and the long-standing, historical approach to intuition and writing outlined above. Derrida seeks to subvert "the classical exigency of what I have proposed to call a 'transcendental signified', which in and of itself, in its essence, would refer to no signifier, would exceed the chain of signs, and would no longer itself function as a signifier" (1981, pp. 19–20). We suggest that any given writer's desire to uphold intuition sourced from a divine presence – or, for that matter, from "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48) – echoes the same gravitational pull towards the transcendental signified. Furthermore, the production of writing via intuition on the terms of the transcendental signified creates an environment amenable to neoliberalism and colonialism.

In respect of neoliberalism, George Monbiot (2016) observes that the "anonymity [of neoliberalism] is both a symptom and cause of its power". Additionally:

> The words used by neoliberalism often conceal more than they elucidate. "The market" sounds like a natural system that might bear upon us equally, like gravity or atmospheric pressure. But it is fraught with power relations. What "the market wants" tends to mean what corporations and their bosses want … anonymities and confusions mesh with the namelessness and placelessness of modern capitalism. (Monbiot, 2016)

Such a constructed hegemony of unacknowledged and thus (apparently) unquestionable completeness of meaning closely parallels Derrida's notion of the transcendental signified. Brian Jarvis (2010) describes "the absent and unrepresentable financial architecture of neoliberalism" (p. 24) with its associated "global hegemony" (p. 23). To the extent that what might be called an intuition of the transcendental signified informs the writing process, the

writing so produced is at danger of forming a complicity with neoliberalism and its associated ills. Indeed, the very language of "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48) resonates uncannily with neoliberalist discourses in its suggestion of (economic or other forms of) openness and freedom.

Similarly, colonialism hides its power relations behind a hegemony of language such as that sustained by Sullivan's version of intuition. Patrick Brantlinger argues that "in imperialist discourse the voices of the dominated are represented almost entirely by their silence, their absence" (1986, p. 186). The idea of terra nullius in Australian colonial history may also be interpreted along these lines. "Broadly understood as the imperial tendency to treat tribal or indigenous land as 'no-one's land', *terra nullius* has long been seen as the defining feature of settler-colonialism in Australia" (Sen, 2017, p. 946). In linguistic terms, we may say terra nullius depends upon the foreclosure of meanings associated with Indigenous occupation prior to colonial settlement. There is no space that is not, to borrow Sullivan's own terms, always already "well-trodden" (2009. p. 48). Colonialism depends upon a mythology of unsettled space in order to justify the circumstances of settlement. Similarly, intuition in Sullivan's sense links the production of words and power relations to an ultimately exploitative understanding of an original space uninhabited by words and power relations such as those that pervade human society.

A third social mechanism with which the transcendental signified is complicit is patriarchy, which we discuss in the following section in connection with the work of Cixous.

Hélène Cixous, darkness and a new grounding for intuition

We are arguing that Cixous allows us to address the problems associated with the historical usage of intuition while retaining it within the writing process. Our concern is with how intuition is deployed, not with intuition itself. Cixous' reimagining (in effect) of intuition is driven forward as part of her general critique of the operations of western metaphysics, which she sees as complicit with what Jacques Derrida terms phallogocentrism (Feder & Zakin, 1997, p. 47). Extending Derrida's position, Cixous emphasises the historically obscured, gendered aspect of traditional writing forms:

> I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction. (1976, p. 879)

Noting the auto-concealing and unsuspected nature of a phallogocentric "economy" within "marked" or traditional writing, Cixous criticises writing practices that enable a concealment of patriarchal hegemonies. Historical approaches to intuition that rely on an incomprehensible transcendentalism support the writing practices that Cixous is targeting. According to Cixous,

however they may appear, traditional writing practices are never neutral or free from discourse. Through extension, as we argue below, this undermines Sullivan's "open landscape" (2009, p. 48) model of PLR because it discursively contaminates the idea of its openness.

Margaret Atwood recognises, among fellow creative writers, that "writing has to do with darkness" (2015, p. xxii). Saliently, Cixous also uses the term "darkness", with two consequences. Firstly, it inserts her thinking about writing processes within the narrative of intuition we have outlined above, which includes Atwood's observations. Secondly, it complicates and critiques the transcendental use of "darkness" as an element of intuition. This second consequence is itself consequent on Cixous's (1976) critique of Freud's notion of women as a "Dark Continent":

> The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable … It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. (pp. 884–885)

Just as female sexuality as the Dark Continent has been positioned as unexplorable by patriarchal hegemony, so have the sources of intuition traditionally been attributed to a transcendental or, to use Sullivan's term, "unknown" (2009, p. 48) realm. Cixous exposes the mechanisms that, by refusing to acknowledge the socio-political and discursive qualities of writing, effectively silence women. In this way, Cixous's early work on darkness provides the foundation for later observations that sit within the scope of the considerations of this article.

The following exchange from an interview in 1994 between Cixous and Christa Stevens is worth quoting at length as it provides the foundation for our thesis that how Cixous approaches darkness is markedly and importantly different from previous approaches to intuition and the writing process:

> CS: Hélène Cixous, you have often described your work as a journey or wandering [cheminement] – a journey that has taken you from 'the unconscious stage' – that is, from personal and internal texts – to 'the History stage', or the major plays you wrote for the Théâtre du Soleil. These wanderings take you towards the Other, towards others, be they your historical contemporaries, or, in the exploration of the 'I', those others of the I itself. And within that journey lies another that tells the story of the quest of someone making her way in the dark, with her eyes closed, towards the light, in her joys, her suffering, her contradictions, her crimes too. You take great risks along the way, entering territory where you don't know what you'll find. And yet, how can one communicate what is, by definition, outside the field of vision, of naming, of representation? How can one convey this darkness, transmit the untransmissable, the as-yet unknown, or what is likely to go unseen?
>
> HC: As for the darkness, it's not that I've got a theory of it. It's just that experience has always shown me domains where there's a shift [où je me déplace]. When I start

> writing, I'm feeling my way in the dark. It's a kind of darkness that's not altogether black – there are a few indicators, lights to guide me, black stars. But the darkness is the one in charge. It's the darkness in which all human beings live. It's there behind the door. As soon as you enter thought, there it is. As a general rule, we don't live behind thought – by which I mean thought that has already been expressed. We don't follow along behind discourse. We are always there in the strip-light or half-light of the already-expressed. But the dark part of ourselves – where psychoanalysis has built its kingdom – is there, all the time, behind our every action, every single day. (Cixous, 2014, pp. 3–4)

A preliminary word might be in order here about human concerns and psychoanalysis. This is Cixous's focus discipline and, more particularly, the context for all her comments about darkness. While psychoanalysis is sometimes critiqued for its irrelevance to communal history, society and politics, we reject this view, drawing upon Terry Eagleton's perspective in this passage:

> One criticism of Freud still sometimes heard on the political Left is that his thinking is individualist – that he substitutes "private" psychological causes and explanations for social and historical ones. This accusation reflects a radical misunderstanding of Freudian theory. There is indeed a real problem about how social and historical factors are related to the unconscious; but one point of Freud's work is that it makes it possible for us to think of the development of the human individual in social and historical terms. (1996, p. 141)

We position Cixous within this lineage of psychoanalysis and it is precisely her connection to what Stevens calls "'the History stage'" (Cixous, 2014, p. 3) that makes Cixous's work relevant to what we are calling dark practices of writing.

There is a clear difference between Graeme Sullivan's model of intuition, which represents its dominant tradition, and Cixous's approach, which reworks the idea that intuition relates to the reserve energies of an exotic space. To the extent that the inspiration for writing carries consequences for the writing it produces, Cixous does not regard intuition as involving the production of writing informed by the notion of "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48). Always, "the darkness is the one in charge" (Cixous, 2014, p. 4), and therefore there is logically no prospect of "an open landscape of free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48).

Relatedly, Cixous problematises any sense of a clear separation between the origin of intuition and the locus of its influence within the writer's process and product. The dominant tradition of intuition insists upon a division between the realm of the divine – which is linked to "free-range possibility" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48) – and the secular realm of "well-trodden pathways" (p. 48). In opposition to this, Cixous glosses the darkness behind intuition as "there, all the time, behind our every action, every single day" and as "the darkness in which all human beings live" (2014, p. 4). Cixous further destabilises the division of divine and secular maintained, or

at least left intact, by Sullivan and others, in her proposal that intuition functions in a passage from "the dark part of *ourselves*" (2014, p. 4, italics added) into what might be called the writing part.

Allied to the notion that darkness is always already part of our lives, Cixous argues that intuition is interwoven with what we all share with others: namely, "discourse" (2014, p. 4). "We don't follow along behind discourse. We are always there in the strip-light or half-light of the already-expressed" (Cixous, 2014, p. 4). In this way, her model of intuition brings to the fore those power relations within discourses that are obscured (and thus given free rein) in the ideological model, enforcing an agentless cynicism, best represented by Sullivan's approach.

Cixous does more, however, than simply bring the power relations of discourse to the fore. Darkness as she presents it has differential internal and shaping intensities; she constructs it as one of those "domains where there's a shift [*où je me déplace*]" (Cixous, 2014, p. 4). This moment in Cixous's response to Stevens is admittedly open to many interpretations. We read the notion of "shift" as an anti-hegemonic energy within intuition, or at least as an opportunity to reveal the presence of hegemonies of discourse. Cixous thus counteracts the support afforded to hegemonies by the traditional version of intuition, in which creative texts are constructed as if discourses flowed into the human world from a domain that, if not exactly divine, is nevertheless exempt from the historical, social and political lives of humans. The "shift" might be thought of as something that makes (traditional) intuition other to itself and differential. It interrogates the supposition, dear to hegemonic and ideological power, that anything to do with language is perfectly stable and neutral in respect of human concerns.

Dark practices of writing

We began this article with this passage by Graeme Sullivan on PLR:

> What is of interest to practice-led researchers, however, is the possibility of new knowledge that may be generated by moving from a stance more accurately seen to move from the "unknown to the known" whereby imaginative leaps are made into what we don't know as this can lead to critical insights that can change what we do know. (2009, p. 48)

As noted above, Sullivan positions PLR as a radical methodological contribution to the project of knowledge development within the contemporary university research environment. It would be surprising if it were otherwise. For Carole Gray, as we have also already noted, PLR "is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods *familiar* to us as practitioners in the visual arts" (1996, p. 3, italics added). While it may appear to be subversive to graft the familiar method of intuition onto standard research methodologies, it is arguably the case that intuition hasn't been sufficiently interrogated for its atavistic debt to transcendentalism. Sullivan's approach effectively – though most likely unintentionally – smuggles transcendentalism into the Australian research ecology created by the reforms of

John Dawkins. This is not to say that the approach Sullivan takes has not had a similar impact on international PLR environments similar to Australia's.

The argument Sullivan makes that knowledge may be developed out of the "unknown" (2009, p. 48) situates the unknown, in the same movement, as the source of artistic inspiration. Exactly at the point where PLR intersects with contemporary university research imperatives (which insist upon the generation of new knowledge) it resonates with both an immemorial and a more recent moment in the thinking and practices of intuition. In the first of these, as exemplified by the Ancient Greek poets, intuition involves the divine transmission of knowledge to humans, while in the second and more recent moment, as Robin Hard observes, intuition is associated less with knowledge as such and more with "poetic afflatus" (2020, p. 191). Sullivan's concept of a movement "from the 'unknown to the known'" (2009, p. 48) is an odd amalgam of these two transcendental approaches. He asks us to entertain the possibility that the unknown can create knowledge via "poetic afflatus" (Hard, 2020, p. 191) and "critical insights" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48). The knowledge that the deities gave to the Ancient Greek poets directly is now constructed, almost the other way around, through the generation of "critical insights" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48) built on the energies of the unknown as modern-day intuition. Knowledge is now developed in the secular – not divine – world, even as it depends for its development on the unknown constructed in a fashion that closely resembles the divine origin of intuition upon which the Ancient Greek poets depended.

In reiterating the traditional model of intuition that relies on transcendentalism, Sullivan begs the question of how the (transcendental) unknown can be the inspiration for the production of writing while falling outside the discourses that saturate all representation (Dawson, 2003). To this extent, the questions Christa Stevens poses to Hélène Cixous challenge the dominant approach to intuition: "How can one communicate what is, by definition, outside the field of vision, of naming, of representation? How can one convey this darkness, transmit the untransmissable, the as-yet unknown, or what is likely to go unseen?" (Cixous, 2014, p. 3). We have found nothing that would satisfactorily address Stevens's questions in Sullivan's work. He appears to rely on the unknown to structure his model of PLR without interrogating how the unknown, as darkness or otherwise, might complicate or problematise that model. In other words, he defers to the aura surrounding the tradition of intuition, which is interwoven with hegemonic power relations. Hegemonies function via their pervasiveness and the illusion that they are neutral or natural. The particular tradition of commentary on intuition that Sullivan maintains deploys the fiction that intuition is unknowable or beyond human comprehension. This perpetuates the notion that intuition is independent of historical, social and political discourses.

By contrast, Cixous aligns with Paul Dawson's (2003) point that language, wherever it appears, is saturated with discourses. While Cixous rejects the idea that she has a theory of darkness, she takes a step beyond Sullivan in attempting to grapple with the landscape of the unknown. Cixous's more experiential approach, which merges darkness with discourse, produces a vision of the unknown in which discourse is as active as it is in known landscapes of language. The difference from the known consists in Cixous' (2014) acknowledgement that, within the

unknown, "darkness is the one in charge" (p. 4). From a Foucauldian perspective, this acknowledgement of power creates opportunities of identification and anti-hegemonic resistance which the writer may exploit. Herein lies the importance of there being, within darkness as intuition, "a few indicators, lights to guide me, black stars" and the belief that "we are always there in the strip-light or half-light of the already-expressed" (Cixous, 2014, p. 4). What Foucault describes in terms of power, Cixous expresses in terms of a shifting in the landscape and qualities of darkness, which may be taken simultaneously as flaws in discursive hegemonies, targetable by writing, and as transferable prompts for resistant writing practices allied more generally to a non-traditional understanding of intuition.

We support Estelle Barrett's argument that "an innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research [PLR] lies in its capacity to bring into view particularities that reflect new social and other realities either marginalized or not yet recognized in established social practices and discourses" (2010, p. 4). PLR's reliance on traditional practices of intuition undercuts this laudable political and ethical ambition. For writers to be effective social justice actors, they need to question the power implications contained in the tools used in their writing. Carole Gray's observation that PLR involves "predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners" (1996, p. 3) underscores the particular dangers for PLR researchers in this space. Tools that are too familiar carry greater risk of never being questioned. To the extent that it is founded in a traditional approach to intuition resuscitated by Sullivan, PLR's social justice aims are threatened.

Darkness is a key term for the history, theory and practices of intuition and the theoretical advances emerging from Cixous's reconsideration of darkness may thus be used to rethink transcendental versions of intuition. To this extent, Cixous's dark practices of writing put into motion an alternative tradition of intuition that might enable PLR to better carry out its social justice project, as outlined by Barrett (2010), of bringing experiences and actors marginalised by naturalised hegemonic forces to the centre of our considerations as writers. In this way, Cixous addresses the problem that, by virtue of intuition, where writers feel most inspired to write is also where they may be most at risk of reproducing hegemonies of discourse.

Notes

[1] Graeme Sullivan's chapter "Making Space", which is a key text for our argument, is frequently cited and appears within a seminal collection of PLR scholarship edited by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean.

[2] In his theorisation of PLR, Graeme Sullivan digs his heels deeper into this sort of relationship to the unknown as a way for writers to generate new knowledge of known things.

[3] The July 2018 issue of *NiTRO: Non-Traditional Research Outcomes*, "The Dawkins Reforms – 30 Years On", provides an excellent overview of this stage in the history of Australian tertiary education.

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