

Weather under pressure: kin/aesthetic practice and dancerly scores for unstable times

JO POLLITT

Centre for People, Place & Planet and WAAPA, Edith Cowan University, Whadjuk
Noongar Country, Western Australia

/ She's just like the weather, can't hold her together¹

two degrees of depth and she is s i n k i n g forecast / f a i l e d
sirī / / / / /
/

clouds line full and filling break
 arrange the sky without direction and the battering of wind forgets
 turbulent / pressure systems

already charged //

This essay is a return of sorts to a methodological dancing body that has been taken up with academic accelerations and university machinations and is remembering again, with increased agency, my trust in artists, and trust in knowledges that rest through and under words, agitate beyond skins. It is through my understanding of the practice of dance improvisation that I correlate the instability of the body with the instability of weather in order to think with the dramaturgical context of rapidly changing climate times. I propose that such choreographic thinking through kin/aesthetic practice can generate expanded meteorological literacies toward increased agility and more nuanced connection with the emergent challenges of climate futures. I engage throughout the essay, a methodology of *writing as dancing* (2017, 2019, 2022) that inhabits the act of writing on the page-screen-stage with the same energetic states, tone and compositional attention accessed when I am dancing. The spacing of the word essay, for example, makes a choreographic entrance that explicitly insists on more room via the improvised pressing of fingers to keyboard to unfix associations, slow the pace of thinking-writing-reading, and respond-in-movement with the pressure of increasingly unstable weather.

[illegible]

This is weather > under uncoded atmospheric [] >>>>>ecopoeticalpressure

As a dancerly *e s s a y* with lineage in performance writing, concrete poetry, choreography and feminist transcorporeality, the work invites a reading through your own fluctuating weatherbodies that allows for porous catchments, distractions, associations and slippages of content, unfixed and border resistant, to catch what stays, and allow all else to seep otherwiseways. There are three main interweaving foci that offer a logic for reading with:

one > the concept of thinking with the instability of everyday weather as the dramaturgical context for our times, in that weather is always in flux, always in movement

two > a theoretical swell of thinking through kin/aesthetic practice that offers dancerly scores for increased agility, improvisation, and responsiveness in unstable times

three > a trio of weather-scoring projects that occurred between 2022-2023 distilled into postcard-sized portals throughout the *e s s a y* as examples of an expanded meteorological method of atmospherographic weather reportage titled:

- i. *spells for weather* /
- ii. *weather vein* /}
- iii. <weathering

Each of these three intimate atmospherographic feats of dancerly and writerly attention harness *writing as dancing* as a kin/aesthetic effort toward expanding meteorological recordings of the movement of atmosphere in a poetic choreographic practice I term weather-scoring. These three weather-scoring attempts demonstrate the potential of *writing as dancing* to cultivate responses as generative embodyings of place-based weather instabilities in various contexts. This method of atmospherographic weather reportage actively works to expand and unsettle dominant Western processes of measuring and recording of weather in order to include more relational complexity, and here I acknowledge that First Nations understandings of weather and human-environment relations as interconnected and inseparable long pre-date Western concepts of transdisciplinarity and the more-than-human. Drawing on the work of the Bawaka collective in illustrating the interconnectedness already present in First Nations epistemologies, feminist settler scholars in early childhood education Tony Rooney and Mindy Blaise research with young children through creative methods to actively work against the ubiquitous ‘weather-wheel’ identification of the weather ‘outside’ toward learning that weather is everywhere. They posit the ‘affects of weather as more than an individual or unidirectional sensation, but rather affective flows between entities that cannot be disentangled from power, politics and sociality’ (85). To this end, settler anthropologist Natasha Myers applies a decolonial feminist praxis, arguing ‘it is necessary to detune the colonial sensorium and its mechanistic common sense that can apprehend those

differences and specificities of bodies and relations that otherwise would be hard to grasp' (98).

Where I live on Whadjuk Noongar Country in Western Australia, the six seasons each arrive with the onset of subtle environmental shifts that mark a responsive turning rather than a fixed date. These are seasons that do not subscribe to colonial time and make room for sensing weather that is always moving with/in malleable time. While weather is place-based – you can look up temperatures and wind speeds of specific towns on a smart phone, for example – it does not recognise borders or stay within geographically or politically demarcated boundaries. Rather, it is atmospherically both locally and globally connected. *Weather does not move on with executive orders.* As a queer white woman settling and unsettling on Noongar Country since the age of five, I work with the Western postmodern dance lineage I inherited via elite academy dance training together with feminist and anti-colonial intentionality I practice as part of a transdisciplinary university research team at The Centre for People, Place and Planet and with #FEAS Feminist Educators Against Sexism. Here my interest is in engaging with the kin/aesthetic through the mode of weather-scoring works to expand meteorological methods for reigniting and embodying curiosity in weather knowledges and weather bodies beyond asking 'Hey Siri, what is the weather today?':

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Weather-scoring i:

spells for weather

Spells for Weather is a project by Australian Artist Janet Laurence in collaboration with and featuring the Dirt Witches and Tree Venerators (women including artists, academics, scientists and activists who assemble as mostly untrained performers, collectively changing activist ensemble states through creating site-specific environmental interventions). Performed at Bundanon as part of Sydney Festival on Sunday 29th January 2023, I joined the project on the invitation of choreographer Lizzie Thompson who couldn't be there and assisted Janet as dance dramaturg and rehearsal director. Lizzie's choreographic and poetic (I would argue atmospherographic) scores prompted the ensemble to work physically to connect with *and as* distributed atmospheric weather – a process that manifested in a collective concentration of 'witchy spells' perhaps quietly conjuring the soft rain falling that arrived in the final few minutes of the performance. During my time with the ensemble, I responded with weather-scoring as an expanded meteorological marking of the event:

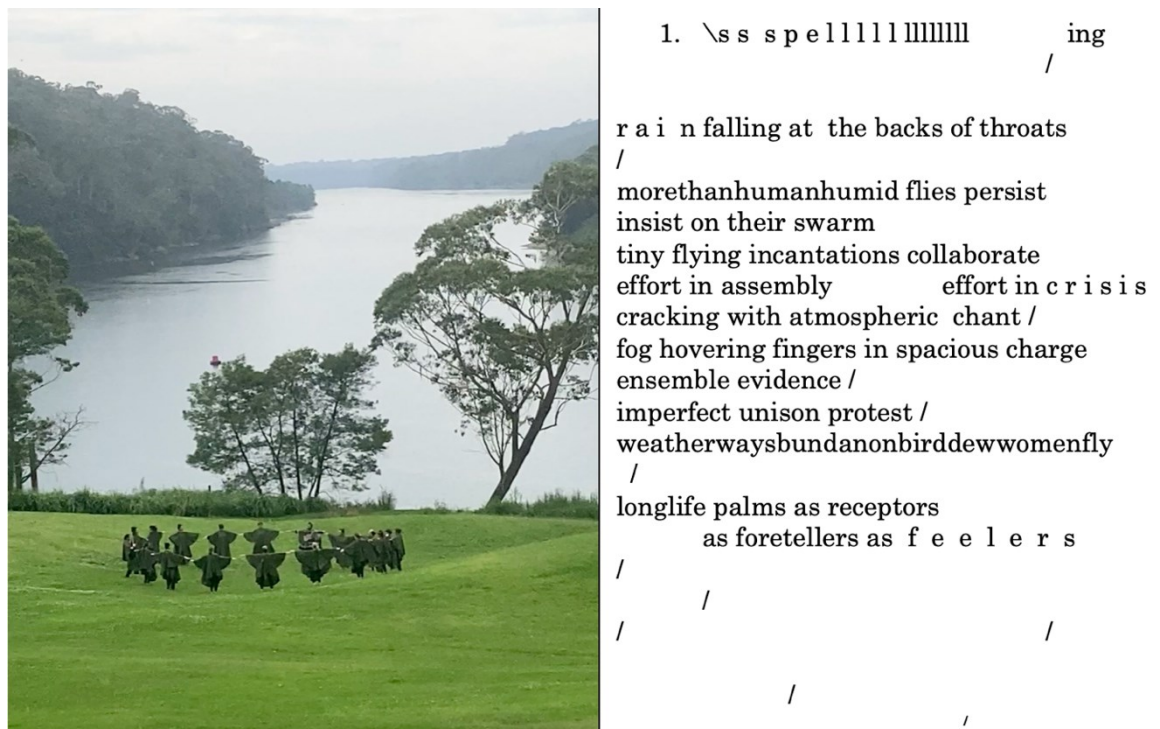


Fig. 1 (left) *Spells for Weather* by Janet Laurence, Sydney Festival Bundanon Gallery, 29th January 2023
(right) weather-scoring i by the author.

The dramaturgical context of our (unstable) times: *unsettled weather [pressure]*

The weather today is more than meteorological, it's political and emotional, and thus expanded weather literacies are urgently needed in developing the capacity for more nuanced and responsive abilities to encompass the affective registers of living with the unstable. With meteorology concerned with short-term weather, the climate of our times is steeped in long-term, ongoing colonial and patriarchal powers making vital that 'our co-emergences with/as weather have to be understood in the context of power geometries' (Wright 96). The predominantly Western white frame of ecopoetics and nature writing provoked poet Ellen van Neerven to propose an alternate practice of 'nurture writing' (2024, 7) for use by First Nations folk who already understand environment as kin. In their 2024 lean toward 'nurture' writing, van Neerven is generous in spelling out the problematics of the separation implied in nature writing:

I am not aware either of any First Nations words for such things as environment or ecology, because it is all Country, which cannot be compartmentalised or labelled beyond what it is. In Indigenous worldviews, the concept of nature is a foreign one, a separation, separating ourselves from the environment we are related to. We see everything as connected. (9)

Literary scholar Hanna Musiol, drawing on Stacey Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality and Christina Sharpe's political clarity of the 'total climate' being antiblack, argues that Black ecopoetry demonstrates an alternate 'sensorial climate systems thinking' that resists mainstream fixity and foregrounds 'a decolonial reclamation of precarious bodies *and* their modalities of environmental knowing' (159). Musiol reiterates that 'such ecopoethic work often demands reclaiming environmental thinking and the body from its racist and misogynist Eurocentric environmental, ecopoetic, and even posthumanist traditions' (162). Van Neerven's call for 'nurture writing' is part of this ecopoethic work.

In their 2020 book *Sky Country*, astrophysicists Karlie Noon (Gamerói) and Krystal De Napoli (Kamillorói) grapple with the Western project of fixing knowledges: 'In acknowledging the vastness of [Indigenous] knowledge systems and the spiralling depth of their interconnected layers, we encounter fundamental incompatibilities when we try to capture them in the static written form... writing it down changes it, imposing a stillness on the knowledge' (46). Cultural geographer Sasha Engleman's concept of 'elemental geohumanities' is helpful here in that it includes 'artistic practices that question the way weather is measured, created and known' (3). Engleman's feminist 'Open-Weather' project with artist designer Sophie Dyer actively works to disrupt and expand meteorological modes through generating feminist satellite data directly involving the body as 'an agitation of embodied and sensory weather knowledges, and, in turn, the agitation of "scientific weather"' (7). Here I think of the ways poetic writing such as *writing as dancing* can contribute to prising open and making room for movement in otherwise fixed forms, and how kin/aesthetic and weather-scoring practices can work to jostle apparent stillness and fixity through transdisciplinary frames, grapplings and attempts.

Thinking like a dancer invokes an unsettling and expansive choreography in the academy with the potential to change and charge atmospheric attention in its ability to jostle pressured places of fixed knowledges and staying longer with not-knowing. Artist scholar Tru Paraha proposes 'a perception of the choreographic body as more than human in its volatile materialities and nonhuman genealogies' (233). Her choreographic and visual poetics work activates an 'inter-spatial movement strategy' (240), which is useful in thinking with the transdisciplinary abilities of artists in the academy. However, such 'spatio-somatic medium(s)' as Musiol identifies poetry to be (167), where poets 'move beyond the colonial environmental rhetoric, metaphorically and spatially' (165), are no easy feat to integrate in the institution. In 2023, artist scholar Haley Singer somewhat playfully wrote of her suspicion that:

poets are viewed by the university system as a kind of wilderness. A green cathedral, embodied. I mean, maybe they are thought of as beings who stand apart from other beings. Like when they think, torrents of mist shoot from their ears. And when they walk, they walk with boots damp from morning

dew. And when they speak, they speak as a lone crow calling from a great distance. If this is a way to understand poets, it makes sense of my sense that poets are treated by the university as a nature park: a thing to be managed, patrolled, audited, while also appearing to be authentic, untouched, complex, woven. Talk to a poet. Feature one at your conference, even. (np)

(dance)Artists at Work

...we need better models for understanding the interplay of weather knowledges across scales, registers and disciplines; between sovereign relationships, the aesthetics of lived experience and the production of weather data. Some of these models may be found not in academic scholarship but in creative practice (Engleman 4)

Cultural commentator Esther Anatolitis argues it is the agility of artists that is key to the 'how' of working within the unstable, stating there is 'no equilibrium from which to act. We can act from a place of imbalance. We can unsettle our equilibrium to ground our actions' (15). Her summation of artists being 'adept at testing new models, jettisoning assumptions and experimenting with alacrity' illustrates crucial skills in being prepared to better respond in times of unsettled weather. With the meteorological turn in art (Randerson) vitally here to stay, it is important to acknowledge that the climate emergency impacts most severely on women, particularly women of colour, and that forecasting must necessarily be feminist in working toward countering colonial frames of complicity. Artist scholar Intan Paramedian proposes that 'decolonial feminism be viewed as an experiment: a risky, unfinished project rather than a stable site' (36), and as Anatolitis suggests, artists 'actively seek critical responses and opposing views. They are at home with conflict and risk' (67). Unsurprisingly, the contemporary artists at work in dance and within the project of expanding climate pedagogies – perhaps following the preceding ecofeminist imperative – predominantly identify as women.

The climate of mainstream dance, however, is particularly gendered. In 2018, an Australian report revealed that over an eleven-year period women were being commissioned at a rate of 26% in Australian Major Performing Arts Companies compared to men at 74%. Globally, the Dance Data Project study released in 2023 found that of 198 artistic directors of classically based companies, 29% are women while 71% are men. This is an astonishing worldwide statistic for a primarily women-identifying artform. *This is weather under pressure*. And this too is artists' work in the academy – to both agitate and support increased connection and generate platforms for understanding nuance, difference and complexity to enable and amplify difficult conversations. This gendered weather demands 'feminist ears' for embodying listening and persisting, as theorist Sara Ahmed calls for, as well as the role of the feminist killjoy in calling on oppressive systems and patriarchal 'business as usual' to advocate for transparency in activism: 'When you leak information, other people are led to

you. The more we leak, the easier we are to find' (271). Such listening and leaking can propel and support collective ensembles of feeling, moving and doing.

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Weather-scoring ii:

w e a t h e r v e i n

The practice of weather-scoring in the project *w e a t h e r v e i n* involved live projected *writing as dancing* as one part of a trio of improvisers that also included dancer Daisy Sanders and Sound artist CrOnes in a commission for the 2022 Audible Edge Festival. *w e a t h e r v e i n* entailed the artists' listening and performance practices of response, rest and repetition cast as an interconnected system of simultaneous dancing, sounding, and writing with the sound of weather. This excerpt of weather-scoring below suggests how thinking with the unfixity and movement of dance in correlation with the unfixity and movement of weather can contribute to cultivating and applying the responsivity and energetic agility of improvisation with/in increasingly unstable times:

Sky drawings criss cross the continuum \ | ~ / ((\ mouths filling running in circles rivulets
forecast under fingers slip. ed. / }

emergence from emergency replace the e with y with why



pages of wind white turbine comas llllllll turning air here comes the rain again

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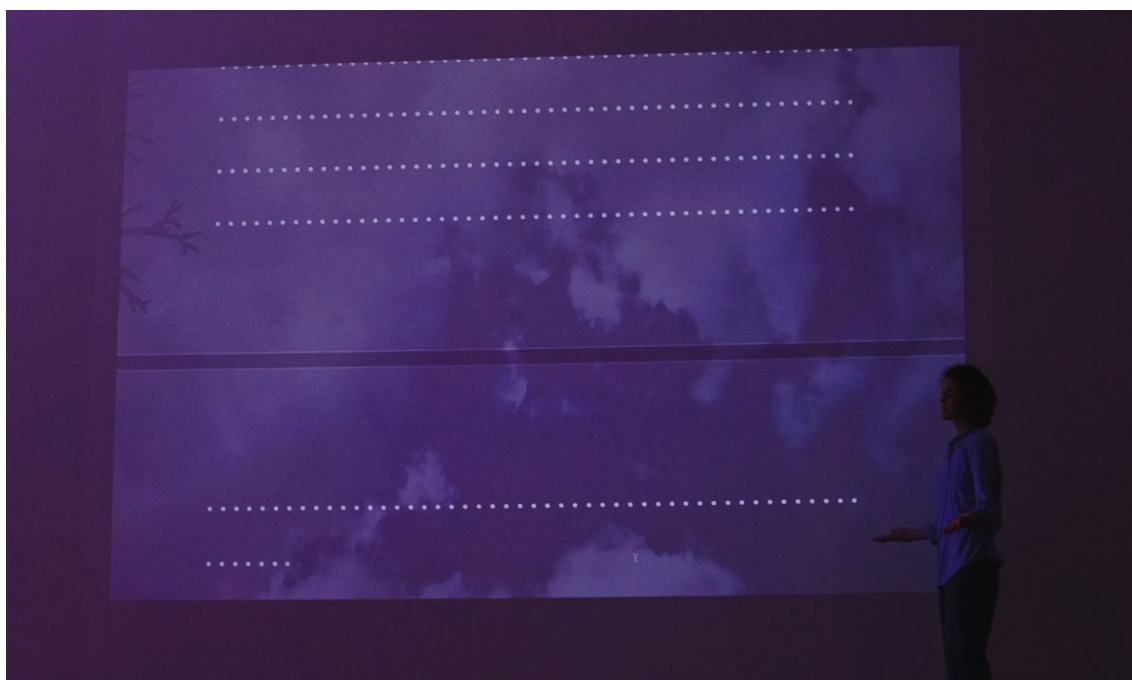
[illegible]

Fig. 2 & 3 weather vein (screenshots), by Jo Pollitt, Daisy sanders, & CrOnes, 2022 Audible Edge Festival, Old Customs house, Fremantle/Walyalup. September 17, 2022.

Expanding modes of meteorological forecasting and reportage

My body and its weathers came about through relationships rather than strict boundaries (Wright 90)

The practice of forecasting weather is, most simply, the mapping of the movement of the atmosphere, and thus deeply connected to choreographic or, in the case of weather-scoring, atmospherographic form. Increasingly drawn to the haptic drawing practice and data processing visualisations of meteorologists, I formed a research relationship with the WA Bureau of Meteorology in early 2022. Through knowledge-sharing, data contribution and collaboration on various projects, most recently with the exhibition *Forecast* at The Art Gallery of Western Australia, our conversations centre on the scission of arts and science and the vital confluence of Western and First Nations weather knowledges. It is an ongoing conversation that acknowledges the ‘climate’ of difficult and often resistant institutional change in prioritising this kind of knowledge-sharing. As the meteorologists I work with explained to me, forecasting the chaotic fluctuations of the atmosphere requires *ensemble* methods. *Writing as dancing* understands these relations as *always ensemble* through the responsive composition of words and poetic marks in a continuation of a dancerly engagement with environment, sensation, presence and speculation. As an artist-scholar and dancer by trade, the practice of feeling, anticipating and responding to moving changes in atmospheric phenomena makes sense. It is the ‘plurisensorial network mobilised in dancing’ (100), as described by dance scholar Erin Brannigan, that has much to offer in cultivating human connection with everyday weather. The practice of *writing as dancing* as an embodied connector with/in place is one that enacts a rigour of kin/aesthetic attention that senses through charting and composing directional, energetic and tonal shifts of physical imagination in a continual un hiding of affect that the body knows *f e e l s* before we can say it.

In returning to the (dancing) body, and to artists’ practice, I find clarity in a lineage of dance improvisation that is grounded in both ephemerality and unfixity, and in specificity, form and attention through a focussed commitment to staying with the moment that is leaving. Dance improvisation artists are practiced at moving with the unstable and embodying somatic, responsive, compositional, relational and imaginative states of awareness – useful skills perhaps in countering times of increased control, political hierarchies and climate inequities. Thinking (a)tentatively with bodies of physical imagination demands practices of perpetual relationality and co-composition with the more-than-human as a necessarily ensemble practice of improvisation.

Kin/aesthetic practice: *dancing with the unstable**Weather abroad**And weather in the heart alike come on**Regardless of prediction* (Adrienne Rich, *Storm Warnings*)

The term kin/aesthetic is an amalgam of kinaesthetic (physical awareness, attunement, sensing and imagination), kin (human and more-than-human), and aesthetics (artists' practice, including in this case the choreographic art of writing and performance improvisation). This three-way praxis can heighten a 'plurisensorial' deepening of human-environment relations with weather instability. As Australian-Māori dancer and collaborator Paea Leach describes it, the kinaesthetic is 'a sense on the move... sensing is deployed into kinetic action; one becoming into the other – a co-arising' (45). Leach outlines the importance of kinaesthesia to dance scholarship and pedagogy in responding to the contemporary crisis of relationality because of increased distraction and disengagement. She links kin to kinship in a broader sense than human-centred colonial distinctions of human kin and draws on Donna Haraway's thinking beyond controlled networks of 'kin' to argue, as First Nations peoples have long understood, that kin/aesthetic attention includes the environment. Noongar and Yaruwu writer Elfie Shiosaki shares the notion of 'Country is kin' and calls on 'diverse and complex understandings of kinship which collide, converge and unsettle' (np).

Astrida Neimanis's concept of 'bodies of water' enables a critical thinking with kin/aesthetic practices and can be borrowed to think with 'bodies of weather' through artists' practice; 'even though this "water"... isn't "wet", it... amplifies...' and this 'not wet' kind of artwork can help to expand imaginaries (55). Such sensorial conditions can give us 'access to an embodied experience of our wateriness' (Neimanis 55) – or weatheryness, which is useful when trying to comprehend something as abstractly enormous as the climate emergency.

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Weather-scoring iii:***<weathering***

During the 2023 Recentring the Region conference at the associated *poetry in the pub* event in Naarm, I f o u n d *open space weathering* by Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Mae Hamilton scrunched up in the front pocket of my backpack. I unscrunched these found pages and, sharing one pen with the authors of the original text, worked fast taking turns in drawing out particular words by circling and scribbling over(under) to reveal a reweathered poem (under [time] pressure). Several minutes later, Astrida and I performed a simultaneously spoken and danced 'reading' of the poem to a small audience that emerged from this co-erasure. The

performed 'reading' duet was an imperfect kind of awkward magic that prioritised responses of immediacy and presence with a momentum, pace and attention that moved at the time and perhaps still moves. While improvised at speed and without rehearsal the response was performed with the lineage, time and deeply resonate thinking of the article. The images below are of the erasure work with the remaining words typed for clarity to the right of the image.

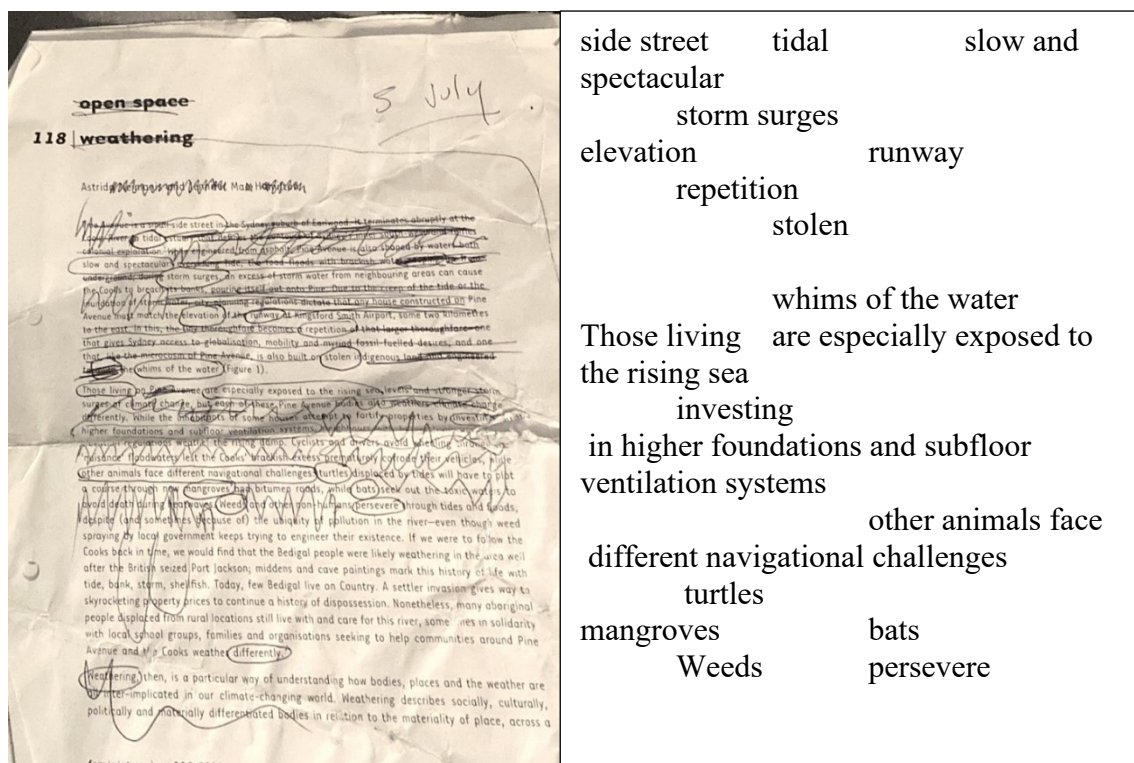


Fig. 1 page 1 <weathering by Jo Pollitt, Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Hamilton with lifted words on the facing image

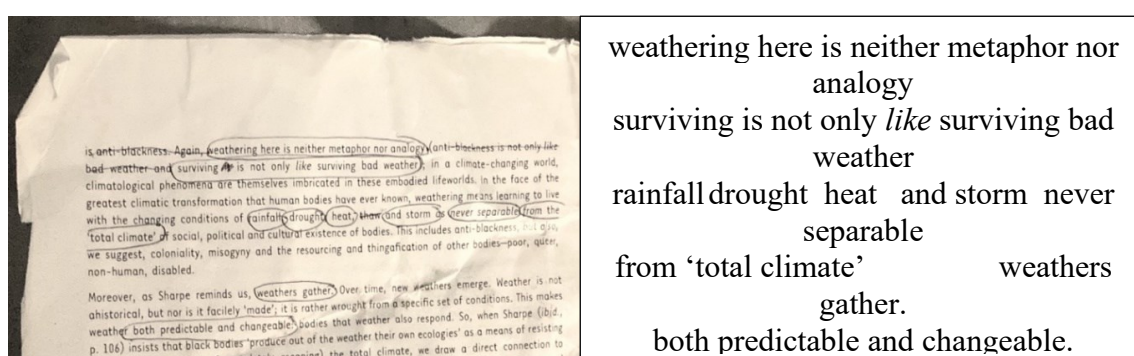


Fig. 2 page 2 <weathering by Jo Pollitt, Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Hamilton with lifted words on the facing image

On finding the <weathering pages recrumpled in the same backpack at home in Boorloo many months later, I used the words from our collaborative erasure poem in a practice of weather-scoring through *writing as dancing*.

[illegible]

weathering here is neither nor surviving
rainfall drought heat and storm never separable from ‘total climate’
weathers gather [.]

/ /

Concluding with an atmospheric charge

*we@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@h
erwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@herwe@her*

This essay advocates for renewed focus on kin/aesthetic practices as a vital tool for fostering climate activism and deepening human-environment engagement. It contributes to a call for an urgent shift to expand traditional educational meteorological paradigms to more embodied and affective learning and responding with weather. If climate is the choreography with a projected forecast of certain crisis, then weather is an improviser responding in the everyday. If climate is the colonial frame / r, weather is an improviser capable of disrupting the script via improvisation, responsive sensitivities and activations for fostering co-constitutive educational imaginaries.

Dancers are deeply practiced at moving with instability, and their practice of improvisation offers scores for doing and thinking through moving bodies toward expanding felt understandings of rapid change, imbalance and pressure. Dramaturg and performance scholar Rachael Swain describes dance as ‘a relational intelligence’ (135) and her ongoing work with Dalisa Pigram and Marrugeku makes visible the ways ‘new dramaturgical poetics can create the ground from which new political and aesthetic forms can emerge’ (143). Here I work with improvisational attention and the practice of *writing as dancing* toward developing increased sensitivity and agility in responding to weather that is on the move and under pressure. Weather-scoring draws on the use of scores as unstable responsive compositional

mapping tools that locate via a practice of dance improvisation as an effort toward enlivening presence in each day as a kind of radical impermanence. I think of weather-scoring as a mode of developing kin/aesthetic attention to support the urgent need for manifesting connection, climate activism, and care with both immediate and speculative climate futures. Each of the three weather-scoring portals shared are examples of thinking with expanded meteorological forecasting processes via dancerly and weatherly² scores of relational and haptic response. These projects all emerged from a practice of *writing as dancing* in various ways as energetic and embodied methods of responding to and with-in kin/aesthetic weathers. In staging and writing with-in porous, unstable and borderless bodies of weather, the ability to respond, or response-ability is cultivated by practicing improvisation as a strategy that is keenly relational and inherently place-based, a n d

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Amplifying the ability to sense, respond, anticipate, and act in more nuanced relation to change,

the three weather-scorings accessed kin/aesthetic practices to (a)tentatively disrupt the paradigm of learning ‘about’ weather, toward generating alternate imaginaries for embodying affective meteorological attention with the unstable. What I propose through these weather-scoring attempts is the cultivation of kin/aesthetic practices through the body rendered as atmospherographic accounts. Not a closed bordered body but one that is moving with/as unstable weather. I argue that embodied improvised processes of relational and haptic weather-scoring can contribute to understanding the ensemble nature of human-environment relations and how increasing instability is the dramaturgical context of anthropocentric times.

The ability to physically and imaginatively attune to the instabilities of our times, such as greater fluctuations in temperature and increased extreme weather events climatically, politically, and socially, is vital in being responsive to change. I return and return to think here about what artists’ practice invites, expects, and how it contributes to the ecopolitical poetic mix by activating scores for increasing kin/aesthetic awareness, feeling and *doing* with/in nurturing human-environment relations. The work of artists, poets and dancers to attune to weather on the move and under [pressure] through *practice* offers generative agitation in institutional settings. Such kin/aesthetic scores invite inconvenient weathers to the table and insist on listening with feminist ears in an atmospheric charge to colonial heteropatriarchal fixity > *Talk to an artist. Feature one at your conference, even.*

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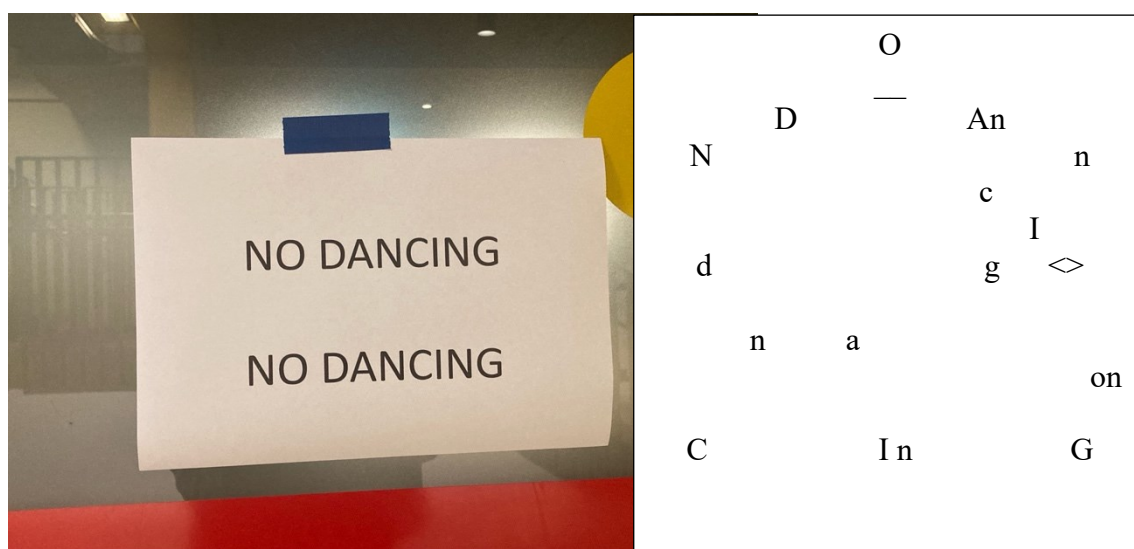


Fig. 3: On the left is a photo of a found sign on several internal windows of the ASLEC-ANZ Recentering the Region (2023) Conference venue, on the right are all of the letters redistributed in response to watching multiple ensembles dancing in front of the signs. **D a n c i n g**

NOTES

- ¹ Chorus lyrics from Florence + The Machine. "Landscape." *Ceremonials*, Island Records, 2011.
- ² The ability to sail close to the wind with little drift. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Weatherly. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved February 15, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weatherly>.

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in their provocations which helped me think with more clarity to better articulate practice, its relationship with weather, and the limitations therein. *To be continued.*

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