

I

Jääskeläinen, P. and J. Helin 2021. Writing embodied generosity. *Gender, Work & Organization* 28(4), 1398–1412. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12650>

Reproduced as a part of a doctoral dissertation with the kind permission of the copyright holder.

Writing embodied generosity

Pauliina Jääskeläinen¹  | Jenny Helin² 

¹University of Lapland/Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

²Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University, Visby, Sweden

Correspondence

Pauliina Jääskeläinen, University of Lapland, Yliopistonkatu 8, 96300 Rovaniemi, Finland.
Email: pauliina.jaaskelainen@ulapland.fi

Abstract

This writing-story showcases the possibilities of shaking off limiting conventions and finding one's own way to academic writing. Pauliina had conducted fieldwork on “embodied facilitations,” through methods from dance and movement therapy, in three organizations. She then analyzed her material through thematic coding. This procedure, based on the logic of reduction, removed the diversity of embodied movements that were essential to her and the research participants. In searching for an alternative, we read Cixous's work on “generosity” where she emphasized how the “strangeness” of the other and of ourselves is not something to stay away from, but rather to embrace, during writing. This text, written as an interplay between us, illustrates how the generous stance opened a different approach to writing embodiment in research. We call it “writing embodied generosity”; an art-inspired writing-in-movement through reading, drawing, and listening that overflows and surprises us as we write in embodied multiplicity.

KEYWORDS

art, collaborative writing, embodiment, generosity, movement

Corporeal writing means opening up of the body that is not neatly weaved – breaking the seals of the containers that constrain us. Permeability and fluidity. Corporeal flow. (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008, p. 255)

1 | RESISTING

Pauliina: When I arrived at a workshop on academic writing as a comprehensive, embodied, and sensuous activity in June 2019,¹ I was stuck. I didn't know how to move on with my research writing. During fieldwork, I had carried out “embodied facilitations” in three organizations. I had used my experience from dance and movement therapy to arrange sessions where participants could take a break from their everyday work life and explore other ways of

bodily being. Having finalized these sessions, I next went into thematic coding. I classified my “data” based on different categorizations as a means of sorting and analyzing my material. I created, for example, categories based on dance and movement therapy's observation labels, notes of participants' wordings for their embodied experiences, observations of my own bodily resonance during the sessions, and so on. I then made several serious attempts to write based on these categorizations. Even if the coding included all the important words and concepts, I soon came to realize that this approach “froze” what had been moving and my textual attempts did not do justice to the lived experiences from the field.

In her text, “On being moved,” Höpfl (2000) critically discussed the problems that arise when the research process is squeezed into linear steps, and how that reduces embodied realities into static representations. Even though her critique was published two decades ago, this work formula is still the doxa, informing doctoral education and academic publishing practices. And I had fallen into the trap of taking this “safe” route toward writing. Having tried hard, this work procedure left me with unresolved questions such as: How can I write movement and flow without limiting our experiences from the sessions, but still avoid taking over, overunderstanding, or overinterpreting what we had done? How could I resist turning the research participants, as well as myself, into one-dimensional characters? I was also wondering if there was a way to continue to thrive in my artistic mode, or would academic writing simply require something entirely different?

This is when Jenny and I first met. During the workshop, she talked about research writing as movement, and she emphasized the need for breaking with the linear, chronologically informed, step-wise habits of doing research. Jenny urged us to go beyond these chronological time lines, which she also referred to as “horizontal,” because they risked flattening our work. As an alternative, she encouraged us to embrace vertical time, and vertical movements of writing from within the body, which would enable us to explore things deeply and to reach out higher (Helin, 2020).

These ideas, and the way Jenny spoke through her body without trying to hide her vulnerability, resonated with me as if she had hit a gong in the room. When she shared why she had started to approach the research process differently, which was because of a family situation that had affected her deeply, it made me think of my own personal circumstances that I was struggling with. All of a sudden, it became so obvious to me how important it is for us as researchers to recognize that we always write from within our own personal situation. If we do not pay attention to our situatedness, there is a risk that the interpretations of our fieldwork material will be colored in unintended ways. Furthermore, if we will not let our vulnerability—including the wounds that resist healing—be present in our research writing, how can we genuinely write from the body?

Another aspect of embodied writing that I took with me from the workshop was the possibility to reorientate my thinking about writing and movement, from movement as something that takes me from one point to another, to “thinking-in-movement” (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 204). These ideas, together with the strength that we as workshop participants felt as we collectively started to resist mainstream writing procedures (Ahonen et al., 2020), motivated me to continue my doctoral studies with greater freedom and creativity. Instead of using coding schemes that severely reduced my fieldwork material, I wanted to do the exact opposite: to explore how the multitude of embodied movements—which had been the foundation of my facilitation sessions—could also provide a starting point for my writing.

Jenny: Soon after the workshop where we first met, Pauliina sent me an e-mail and asked if I would co-write an article with her. Her challenges resonated with me as I am also struggling with how to be sensitive to flow, movement, and corporeal rhythms in my writing. I was also curious about how she, a professional dance therapist and doctoral student in the field of organization studies, would respond to this challenge.

When I heard Pauliina's frustration, it reminded me about a passage from Cixous that I had read in the book *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*:

It's perfectly possible to make a machine out of the text, to treat it like a machine and be treated by it like a machine. The contemporary tendency has been to find theoretical instruments, a reading

technique which has bridled the text, mastered it like a wild horse with saddle and bridle, enslaving it (Cixous, 1988, in Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 155).

It turned out that Pauliina had not only treated her fieldwork material in a machine-like manner, the coding had also reduced her own capacity to that of a machine-like being. This could not be further removed from the work Pauliina conducted with the people in organizations, to whom she had emphasized the importance of being through their *whole* bodies. And here she was, faced with her own bodily resistance.

I was deeply thankful for the invitation to be part of Pauliina's fascinating research and I was thinking of how she could get back to her artistic mode. Like Pullen (2018), who offered embodied writing that without excuses falls out and bleeds on the pages, I understood Pauliina's quest to be a search for a way of writing that overflows without predefined boundaries, as it connects the body and the mind, allowing expressions from vulnerable flesh that no longer wants to be silenced. In other words, a writing that invites "a plurality of particularities, rather than as a set of generic rules that are to be followed" (Pullen & Rhodes, 2015, p. 88).

With that aim in mind, we talked about, like Gherardi (2019, p. 46) reminds us, how this would require us to forget the method which we had been taught, and instead be open to changes, surprises, and spontaneity. Furthermore, in our shared curiosity toward movements that break with the horizontal time regimes that tend to govern our writing, we decided to support each other in exploring vertical writing movements. Pauliina offered the metaphor of writing in spirals; a playful and open attitude toward words and text-making, which allowed us to dig deeper and climb higher in our search for that which matters deeply. However, in order to move on, I first needed to learn more about the sessions that Pauliina had facilitated.

2 | FACILITATING

Pauliina: I call those sessions embodied facilitations and I conducted them with groups in three different health care and social service organizations in Finland. The purpose of these gatherings was to help employees find out how to enhance their well-being through practices from dance and movement therapy. With this emphasis, I combined the two disciplines I had studied: dance and movement therapy and organization studies.

The premise of dance and movement therapy is that our movements and bodily sensations give us "information" about our typical habits of acting and reacting during the sessions and in other contexts, like at work (e.g., Davies, 2006; Levy, 1988; Pylvänäinen, 2018). Fundamental to the facilitation process in organizations is the awareness of how the body is an important source of organizational knowledge (Gärtner, 2013; Ropo & Parviainen, 2001). More specifically, all the personal ways of acting and reacting in day-to-day encounters are seen as body movements (e.g., Biehl & Volkmann, 2019; Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). In addition to our visible, kinesthetic movements, even emotions are understood as verbs rather than adjectives as they move and change in us from moment to moment (Siegel, 2009). These different bodily aspects are connected to each other, as described by Fuchs and Koch (2014, p. 9):

Emotions result from the body's own feedback and the circular interaction between affective affordances in the environment and the subject's bodily resonance, be it in the form of sensations, postures, expressive movements, or movement tendencies. Through its resonance, the body functions as a medium of emotional perception.

Hence, our thoughts flow and the movement of breathing accompanies our thoughts as well as our bodily movements. Even if we mostly work through and with different electronic devices or other material artifacts, our bodies are always in some sort of movement as long as we live.

According to the philosophy of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty (2012), we encounter each other and coconstruct the organizational "flesh" through these movements (Biehl & Volkmann, 2019). Merleau-Ponty's (1968)

concept of flesh, interpreted in organizational contexts, refers to our entanglement with coworkers, leaders, and other artifacts in organizations in a complex nexus, where movement in some part causes movement in other parts too. From this perspective, there is no possibility to “hide” like a fly on the wall, and my presence was entangled with the research participants in the flesh of the facilitations. Hence, the meaning of what we were doing during the sessions was jointly created through the resonance from our bodies (e.g., Samaritter & Payne, 2013).

Our joint resonance, recognized in our bodily sensations and movements (Fuchs & Koch, 2014, p. 9), was then reflected in conversations that we had during the facilitation sessions. Well-being at work, how to think of free time, vacations and wishes for not having so busy workdays were among the themes that often came up during these occasions. Translated into the language of movement, I interpreted these themes as the participants' experiences of having to work in quick and forced movements at work.

To be able to recognize these different kinesthetic and sensuous movement qualities in our bodies, requires the capability to move “vertically” between the different levels of experiencing. I think of this movement as an “inner elevator”; to be at the bottom is to feel and sense something that you probably cannot explain immediately with language-based thinking. It is the “level” of most mundane acting, feeling and moving (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This is the level of a direct understanding and learning through the body, the first medium through which we have been learning and resonating with the world since we were a fetus in our mother's womb. The important thing is to understand that this first, kinesthetic way of learning and communicating with others does not disappear, even though we learn to communicate through language (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015).

To move to the upper floors with the “embodied elevator” is to name and make sense of bodily sensations and movements with language. Through this metacognitive skill, we can recognize our bodily sensations and movements and think what they mean for us. This metacognitive reflection is used in body therapies, and just rehearsing directing our thoughts toward bodily sensation and movements is useful in balancing our bodily states toward better well-being (Buckley et al., 2018).

Having discussed perceptions of bodily movements, I offered the participants the possibility to explore some movement polarities (e.g., slow/fast, sharp/smooth, heavy/light; see Levy, 1988). After recognizing, which qualities felt familiar, we tried the opposite ones. In remembering that our natural movements are connected to our coping mechanisms in our day-to-day (work) lives, it is possible to teach our bodies to expand the variety of our daily ways of coping (e.g., Laban, 2011; Levy, 1988; Pylvänäinen, 2018). Based on this logic, I thought that exploration of slow movements and related bodily self-reflection could enable balancing and soothing experiences for the participants, who suffered from the pressures to be efficient and fast in their work. This understanding of well-being as increasing the different qualities and perspectives through the polarities, is also prevalent in Eastern philosophies, such as Taoism:

In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang describe the idea of the interconnectedness of contrary forces and represent the complementary and interdependent nature of contradictory or opposite polarities. The contradictions exist together and are inseparable. Health and wellbeing are connected to this notion of yin and yang. In the traditional Chinese medicine paradigm, the balance between these two opposing forces is fundamental and the correct balance between the two must be reached for harmony to be achieved. An increase in one will bring a corresponding decrease in the other, leading to an imbalance. This unity and harmony exist both inside and outside the individual. Here, we see the broadening of the spectrum of harmony to include not only the internal balance within one person but also the interaction between the external systems and interrelations between people and society and the natural world (Kalmanowitz, 2017, p. 48).

As the facilitation was based on these ideas of how to balance movement between different qualities and how to make connections between the different aspects of experiences, I started to think of how to bring this into the writing process. For that, we turned to literature on embodied writing.

3 | READING

Jenny: While in the process of developing a better understanding of Pauliina's facilitations, Cixous's work around generosity kept coming back. Not the least because Pauliina's facilitations seemed to be based on a generous attitude toward the workshop participants and their felt needs. As I understood the facilitations, they unfolded in response to the participants' embodied reactions and conversations. This generous stance appears to start from an openness toward the other, which in Cixous's words can be expressed as a curiosity toward the "strangeness" in the other; a generosity that is "enabling the other" (Phillips et al., 2014, p. 324).

Cixous further argued that the focus on clean, prethought thinking has to do with the idea of writing as an activity based on an economy of return, of knowing what to say in advance and bringing writing back to oneself: "The masculine libidinal economy is thus predicated on a concept of giving bound up with obligation and reciprocity" (Phillips et al., 2014, p. 323). Hence, according to Cixous, while the masculine logic of return focuses on production, accumulation, and profit, the feminine logic of generosity thrives on giving, spending, and excess (Boulos Walker, 2017); that is, writing with generosity is a writing for, and with, the other. The body is the origin of such writing:

It is from the body's rhythms and gestures that a certain kind of writing emerges. For Cixous, in order to write one must be body; sink into the heaviness of the body. The body is the scene of writing, a writing that has the power to subvert traditional cultural forms (Boulos Walker, 2017, pp. 158–159).

However, writing with generosity does not stop there. While emphasizing the generosity toward the other, Cixous is at the same time deeply involved in how we as women can develop a generous stance toward ourselves and come to writing on our own terms: "Women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement" (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). She emphasizes that the movement of writing starts from within the body, through the flows of breath and blood that want to be written on the page. Instead of trying to master the research process by traditional procedures, a feminine writing with generosity thereby enables alternative modes of writing. And, by expressing this form of feminine "corporeal rhythm, movement and sensations, [it] can be seen to construct a specific aesthetic experience for the reader" (Biehl-Missal, 2015, p. 182).

However, as Cixous (1988) pointed out, masculine and feminine economies are not fixed biological categories. Instead, by writing about these different attitudes toward the other, she is playing them against each other in a subversive style of writing that is meant to facilitate alternatives. In this way, the language of generosity can be thought of as an arrangement of openings that spirals off in a manifold of rhythms and directions. Drawing upon Cixous's nondualistic texts, Phillips et al. (2014, p. 314) suggested a "bisexual writing of organisation studies – a writing that challenges hegemonic masculine orthodoxy by confusing it rather than attempting to replace it with another (feminine) orthodoxy." Like-wise, the feminine act of generosity is not for women only as the libidinal femininity "can be read in a writing produced by a male or a female" (Cixous, 1988, p. 129).

In her article published in *Gender, Work & Organization* in 2015, Biehl-Missal made connections between Cixous's work on feminine writing and organizational esthetics in the orchestration of a "feminine creation." One of the contributions of this approach is that it enables "writing as an intensely visceral and sensual form of artistic expression with un-orderly, creative and embodied impulses" (Biehl-Missal, 2015, p. 179). This form of feminine creation seems to resonate with what Pauliina is longing for; an approach to writing based on inclusion rather than exclusion of the ambivalent emotions and experiences that she had encountered during the sessions. Could feminine creation, in this case with a particular focus on generosity, enable Pauliina to trust to her art-based practices in her writing?

4 | DEEPENING

Pauliina: When I engaged with these ideas around generosity, they immediately seemed to create room for me to try out other ways of working with embodied knowing and self-reflection. Actually, already back then at the workshop, when Jenny spoke about how her difficult family situation had affected her research practice, I began to ask myself how my personal situation affects my academic work. I am especially interested in why my body resonated like it did during the facilitations, as well as after, when I returned to my fieldwork material.

I thought that if I try to understand these feelings better, it might bring something important into the discussion, especially because I was so “inside” the research material. Importantly, I also wanted to inquire into the research participants' experiences from their point of view, not only through my own emotions toward them. By taking both my own, as well as the participants' descriptions of our embodied experiences into account in my writing, I hoped I could engage with the embodied aspects in my research from different angles. With this, I could at least expand and add new perspectives to the traditional ways of doing research where the manifold of experiences tends to be polished away (Thanem & Knights, 2019). I began to think of how embodied writing could allow me to travel and climb between different levels with the embodied elevator. I thought that moving across the levels, the need to emphasize either the bottom floor or the top floor would vanish. In other words, we could possibly shatter the binaries (Knights, 2015), and forget the need to argue about which floor is the most significant and instead involve different layers of experiences in the writing process.

With these thoughts in mind, I started to look at my own situation at the time of doing this research. It became increasingly evident to me that the death of my 2-year-old son, a couple of years before I started the facilitations, had changed me. I had to admit that the grief had made me fragile and I often had to gather—and somehow guard—myself in order to get through the facilitations. I repeatedly wrote in my notes that I felt exhausted. The emotional work that I needed to do to open myself to the participants' mixed feelings, and often resistant feedback, felt so heavy at times that I had difficulties in breathing. Sometimes, I doubted if I was capable to go on, but something kept me going.

These heavy feelings also accompanied me during the analysis process. It was especially so when I read the notes and interviews from one of the organizations. During these reading encounters, I experienced the same anxiousness, frustration, disappointment, and powerlessness that I had often felt when I worked with this group. I experienced that I had failed to “sell” the facilitation method to them, and therefore thought that I had failed in my work.

While I gave these emotions time to settle, I noticed that everything that I found painful was overshadowed by many other encouraging and supportive experiences that other participants in that group—and especially in the other two organizations—had expressed. Even though many of the participants found this facilitation useful, somehow the anxiousness and the vague sense of failure tended to paint the whole research process with dark colors over and over again.

Taking Merleau-Ponty's (2012) ideas of the everresonating moving bodies as the worldview informing my work, I was highly aware of the fact that the grief I am experiencing affects every encounter and, thus, the facilitations I do. On one hand, I thought that my personal experiences actually deepened my understanding of life's complexity, which is of great importance when working with people. But, still, on the other hand, grief had taken me to another level—one of seriousness, exhaustion, and sadness. According to the feedback, this did not show as much as I thought during the facilitation sessions. The participants described my facilitation style as calm and trust evoking and, to my surprise, joyful. This made me think that even if my grief made me feel fragile, the simultaneous feelings of capability and pleasure in the successful moments made me strong enough to confront the difficulties during the facilitations, and now, in writing.

5 | RECONNECTING

Pauliina: Accepting my own situation, as well as my mixed emotions toward the research material, somehow gave me space to embrace the multitude of the research participants' experiences. In slightly opening the curtain of my sorrow, some light was shed on the beautiful and helpful experiences the participants had expressed. At the same time, Jenny's open-minded attitude toward my trials of making sense of the material, and her engagement with Cixous's work on writing with generosity encouraged me to reconnect with the art-based work practices. Additionally, I wanted to go further with the embodied philosophy by intertwining my writing from the body with the "flesh" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) of the research process. Concretely, I did that by acknowledging my body as an example of the "flesh" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) that draws its insight from the research material from its point of view.

Therefore, I decided to go on visualizing my insights into the research material, which consisted of my notes of the participants' and my own reflections of our embodied experiences during the facilitations. While reading and rereading the research material, I asked myself: If these multiple experiences could be described as one creature, what would it be like? This exercise is used, for example, in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy as a medium to

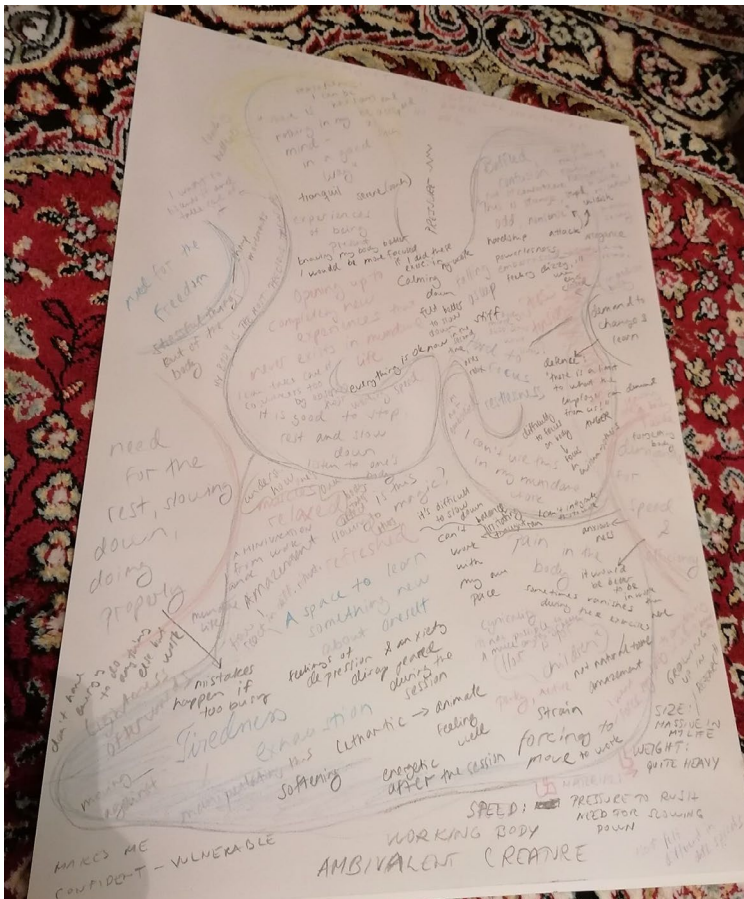


FIGURE 1 The first draft of the Creature

reflect on problems or difficult emotional states. The person who performs the exercise is asked to imagine what kind of shape, color, size, weight, speed, texture, or other qualities the creature would consist of, to concretize, and to make it into a more handleable form (Hayes & Smith, 2005).

By doing so, a picture of a two-headed creature emerged in my mind, and I wanted to continue to make this image more concrete by drawing it (Figure 1). While I was drawing the picture, I kept reading and rereading the notes from the facilitation sessions, focusing especially on the participants' descriptions of their experiences of the slow and fast movements and embodied self-reflections. Their wordings from those experiences started to form the creature through the drawing that was born from my bodily entwinement with the gathered material.

When I continued to include words and sentences from the material into the picture, the form of the creature started to feel right. I did not need to leave anything aside or close different qualities of experiences into separate

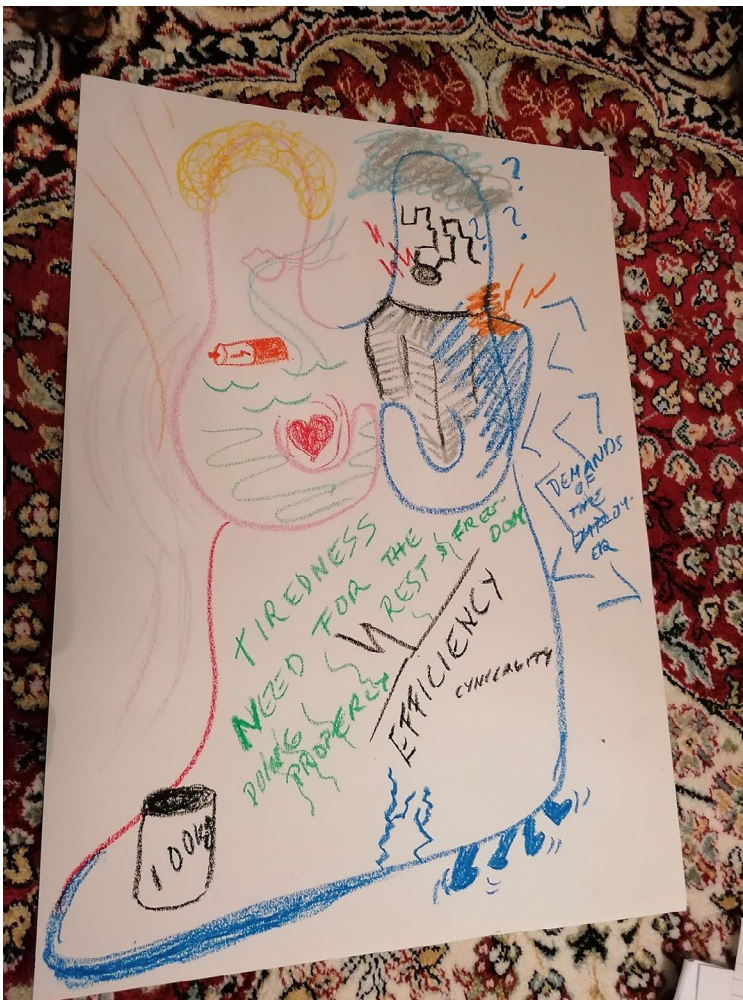


FIGURE 2 The Ambivalent Creature

boxes. That is how my fieldwork notes brought the creature to life. I then placed the pressures and wishes experienced by the research participants on the outside of the creature.

Even if the creature had got some sort of shape, it became truly messy and I wanted to strengthen the visual side of it so that it would better symbolize the experiences during the facilitation processes. Therefore, I drew a new draft of the creature with a careful selection of words included.

Looking at all the participants' experiences as one creature made me feel empathy toward the facilitation processes as well as toward myself as a facilitator. Somehow, through this exercise I gained distance from my own emotions which enabled me to see a greater multitude of different qualities in relation to the sessions. All of a sudden, this strange-looking figure got a name: The Ambivalent Creature (Figure 2).

In my drawing, the Ambivalent Creature is trying to move fast with its many feet, under the pressures of work, but the weight of the fatigue on its tail is constantly slowing it down, making moving difficult. The two heads of the creature have different opinions about almost everything concerning the embodied facilitation exercises, which is why its hands push each other in constant tension. While one side of the creature tells itself that it can recharge its batteries during the facilitation, the other side feels uneasy about attending the embodied exercises. The blue side has difficulties lying down due to its aching muscles and back pain. It often resists and is sometimes cynical about this kind of facilitation. By the contrast, the pink side emphasizes that slowing down and relaxing exercises help it to recover from the hectic work. The Ambivalent Creature embodies how all these different forces, and all their contradictory movements, exist simultaneously.

6 | HESITATING

Pauliina: When I decided to let go of the analytic method of coding and set out to work with my research material from a generous, nonjudgmental stance, I could start to reconnect with the experiences from the facilitation sessions differently, which enabled me to articulate the contradictory experiences that emerged even in the same persons during the sessions. Furthermore, writing from the generous stance helped me to recognize *the ways in which* my situation informed how I looked upon the research as a whole.

This attempt to write in the spirit of generosity also highlighted significant questions. For instance, the resisting attitude from the blue-head's side made me hesitate: Is this facilitation yet one more demand from the employer? Is this even an ethical thing to do, even though I asked each individual for permission? What and whose purposes does this facilitation actually serve? Like one of our reviewers of this article wrote: "Maybe we start with a generous intention but is this really what we achieve?" This was a question that had nagged during some of the facilitations. And I think the Ambivalent Creature illustrates that this facilitation had both intended and unintended consequences.

Another ethical question that this writing made visible has to do with how to write about research participants' experiences. After one of our reviewers had pointed this out, I asked myself again, how I could prevent myself from taking over the research participants' experiences in my writing. Hence, even when I am trying to present others' experiences generously, that emphasis is already loaded by prereflective, political meanings (Diprose, 2002). I suppose that despite all our attempts, writing about others' experiences is inevitably some kind of taking over. I write through my body's perspective; even though I and the research participants are part of the same "flesh," my hands are the ones that write, draw, and move. My body always differs from the others' bodies, because I cannot escape my body, nor should I. However, what this showcases, is the importance of trying to be aware of how these processes influence the writing.

I was also struggling with how to look upon this attempt at writing with generosity at large, and the creation of the Ambivalent Creature. After all, we have been taught how to write properly which includes the need to "tidy up our embodied writing which leaks - we edit, cleanse, correct and say what other people want us to say" (Pullen, 2018, p. 125). Along these lines, I got feedback, for example, concerning the colors that I had intuitively

chosen for the two heads of the Ambivalent Creature. I was told that to use pink and blue to illustrate the opposite experiences—and especially the choice of using pink to symbolize softer, open, and accepting attitudes and blue as a symbol of resistant attitudes—is culturally formed and, as such, too obvious. The drawing was also described as a bit childish.

I responded to the criticism by asserting that I am aware of the fact that this trial will most probably be viewed as childish and naïve by some—many even—in the serious adult world of academia. And yes, this picture could have been drawn by a child. However, it was drawn by me, a researcher, in a serious attempt to write and think differently, to challenge the prevailing hegemony of research analysis tradition by allowing myself to explore the potential of a mode of analysis we would normally think of as “childish,” or not to be associated with academic thought and work. Like Bachelard (2014) suggested, when doing phenomenology, it is essential to be able to see as if for the first time, through astonishment, which requires proceeding by means of a positive naïveté. I did this by playing with the research material, shaking off the serious and restrictive adult mind for a moment, and by throwing myself into intuitive, instant creation.

Without filtering, polishing, or judging the outcome, I got in touch with how I thought the research could be produced through the body that is indeed the primary source of knowing the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). When I was drawing the Ambivalent Creature, I did not let my analytic part lead the act of drawing, but rather aimed at the “middle floor” by acknowledging the research material’s “speech” as well as the form in which it wanted to emerge on paper. Using art as a method, as I did with the Ambivalent Creature, corresponds with how embodied art therapies work: to find a way to throw oneself into a creative process, without judging the outcome (e.g., Payne & Deanie, 2020). When I brought in this alternative, childlike wondering into the process of writing research, I had to resist my feelings of embarrassment and thoughts that advised me to polish the form and appearance of the Ambivalent Creature. I think that if I had done so, something authentic, and thereby something essential for this method, would have disappeared. Hence, my purpose was never to create a master artwork. I simply wanted to gain insight into the material through the methods of art therapy.

Even though art has been used as a method in organization research in many different ways, Leavy (2010, 2015) claimed that there still is an unfortunate tendency to separate the practices of doing research and doing art. She pointed out that art and research are just two different means of illustrating reality and such a dualistic separation is not necessary. Instead, art and research can be thought of as providing different thoughts and perspectives, and through a combination of these we can increase our understanding of the world we live in (Ellingson, 2017).

To follow the example of how art therapies bring the philosophy of embodiment to a practical level, it felt reasonable for me to use the same methods and practices in writing as I used with the research participants to help them make sense of their embodied experiences. In a way, this was also a spiral movement, where I returned to the same ideas and premises in another layer by deciding to trust art therapy’s symbolic methods and the embodied elevator in the writing process. At the same time, I turned to other material encounters where my hand could move freely on the pages, using different color pencils to express the research insights. Hence, I sort of “danced” through the fieldwork material intertwined with my experiences that cut across work and life.

7 | ENABLING

Jenny: Reading Pauliina’s words about her attempt to no longer be ruled by reductionist analytical procedures but to write with generosity, showcases the possibilities, as well as difficulties, in connecting differently to others as well as ourselves. It makes me think of Ericsson and Kostera’s (2020, p. 1412) work on “alterethnography,” a form of writing that radically reorients us as we try to more fully understand the other; in short, a writing that “makes

space for serendipity and synchronicity, because with the giving up of control of the situation, the researcher becomes more attuned and more sensitive to the unexpected and unplanned." These words can easily sound romantic in some sort of idealistic world of research, but, as we have seen, it is clearly not. Writing from the flesh is "disruptive, vulnerable and affective. It has the ability to move in intensely visceral ways" (Huopainen & Satama, 2020, p. 337). In their work on writing and dancing, Mandalaki and Pérezts (2020) emphasized the nakedness of this experience; thus, this is a writing where things are at stake, it is not always pleasant, it can be scary even, as Boncori and Smith (2019) shared in their account on how to write about the lived experience of miscarriage.

When Diprose (2002, p. 190) concluded what writing with corporeal generosity meant to her, she emphasized that it came as a kind of "life force," and she continued: "a passionate defiance of corporeal borders in response to being cut, touched, or wounded, an overflowing that is neither simply active or passive." She described it in terms of "writing passionately in blood." The failing attempt to write other's otherness because we always write from within our own flesh, something that Pauliina addressed above, was also noticed by Diprose. However, she continued that it is this impossibility that makes the attempt worthwhile, because the "awareness of this impossibility, of the danger of effecting violence and injustice in very response, inspires a passionate politics that would work through generosity for a justice that is yet to arrive" (Diprose, 2002, p. 194).

For a justice that is yet to arrive. What a hopeful invitation during our current troubling times. This temporal movement makes me think of where this writing collaboration started between Pauliina and myself, and I need to ask her, how writing with generosity connects with her profession within dance. I am asking, because, from the outset, it was not entirely evident.

Pauliina: To me, the connection between how I threw myself into drawing/writing and dancing has to do with the generous attitude toward oneself. I have found that, for me, it is in that "generous stance" where creativity is born. Whether it is choreography, drawing, or writing, I need first to find that stance where all the echoes of judgment and restrictive thoughts are silenced and replaced with a soft acceptance toward any possible outcome coming from my body. I think it is something that I have learned in my dance therapist's training; to listen to and trust the forms that are born through my body in that safe "state." Thereby, for me, writing embodied generosity has to do with what becomes possible to write, through that generous stance toward oneself, toward others, as well as toward writing itself.

I cannot emphasize enough how important the collegial support, encouraging attitude, and the whole collaboration with Jenny and others were to me to enable me to get into this "generous stance" during this writing process. Jenny's openness toward my ideas watered the seeds of my thoughts and that was invaluable for me. I suppose that the path I took, trying to think from the beginning what embodied writing could mean in practice, and not adopting any traditional, already accepted protocol to do my research, made everything insecure. Most of all, I was (and still am) afraid to be "too odd" to be accepted by others in the academic community.

The generous stance acted as an opening toward the unknown, or as a throwing oneself into insecurity, which encouraged creativity throughout the research process. Daring to throw myself into this kind of writing through reading/listening/drawing required the *trust* that is needed when we commit to throw ourselves into unknown terrain as a "method" of doing research. In the words of St. Pierre (2019, p. 10):

I believe it is more difficult to be experimental than to follow the self-evident, common sense doxa of a clear, well-defined, preexisting plan, a methodology designed to control and contain inquiry in the service of valid science.

I experienced this difficulty mostly in the slowness of our process. Even though this writing and thinking together was very inspiring and deeply satisfying, I often felt huge pressures to get this paper published as fast as we could. I regularly confronted the academic "machine" (Helin, 2020) between the lines of others' comments or in

the signifying silence when I said that I had focused on writing this piece for over a year. I had to regularly remind myself that doing things differently, also feels different in the body. I noticed this in my constant struggles between the feelings of impatience and inadequacy in contrast to the will to really value what we could achieve with “slow reading” (Boulous Walker, 2017), “sensory slowness” (Satama, 2020), and “vertical writing” (Helin, 2020), by resisting the academic pressures to produce articles through flat, horizontal rush.

Jenny: Yes, I would also like to emphasize how generousness is intertwined with temporality and writing. One example of this is Kivinen's (2020) deeply touching piece on “Writing grief, breathing hope.” In this essay, she starts to articulate and give voice to her grief from losing her mother as an 11-year-old girl, and she tells the reader how she has written this text during three different time zones. The first part of the text she wrote in one go and the text is raw, written from a body that “attempt to keep the embodied response to grief at bay,” even though her “grief is everywhere” (p. 3). The second part was a 2-month reflection over the first part, and in the third part, she manages to look forward toward a writing in hope, and “therein lies the potentiality for change, and freedom” (p. 8).

In following how Kivinen (2020) enabled her wounded voice to transgress through writing over time, her words reminded me of how our work had also grown and transformed as we allowed ourselves to not rush through revision rounds. I recall how we in the beginning wrote as a “we.” Somehow, along the way, that was not enough as we wanted to move on and express ourselves more deeply and we changed to a writing from our first-person subjectivities. Even though this was not a conscious choice, but rather something that just happened, I found this change generative as it enabled me to express myself more freely and I could continue to read Pauliina's work in its “strangeness,” as I no longer had to become “one” with her voice. Eventually, I became Pauliina's dialog partner, just like the Ambivalent Creature, which helped us to articulate ourselves differently, often through unanticipated utterances. Not only did Pauliina and the Ambivalent Creature respond with unexpected wordings that excited my curiosity toward what would come next, but I could also turn my own subjective writing into an explorative mode. In this exploration, Pauliina offered the metaphor of writing in spirals as a way to enable vertical movements where we could jointly dig deeper in our collaborative writing. This was helpful because with that approach not everything needed to be said at once, and we allowed each other the time to sit with the text where every “round” in the spiral uncovered new layers of articulations. By way of example, early on in this collaborative process, Pauliina wrote how she had been deeply touched when I, during the writing workshop in Helsinki, had talked about how I missed my two daughters after a divorce from their father. In the first round, Pauliina wrote about how that reminded her about her own grief that she housed in her own body. In the later spiraling turns, she added that the grief came from losing her 2-year-old son. As I read this, which I did not know about before, I suddenly realized how our situated, corporeal experiences of grief in relation to motherhood had changed everything for us. I find it interesting that from the beginning we had felt a connection between us without knowing exactly why, and during the (vertical) spiraling turns we slowly found out more about each other, as well as ourselves. This makes me think that even if it would be counterintuitive to provide some sort of finalized definition of what we mean by “writing embodied generosity,” could it be that the releasing of surprise during the process of writing is the great gift of writing embodied generosity?

Pauliina: I agree fully. The surprising, spiraling twists and turns—which reminded one of our reviewers about Baroque art and architecture—have been of great significance during this collaborative writing. When Jenny opened up her vulnerability so generously, that inspired me to look at my research through my vulnerabilities. I genuinely feel that by writing through these painful experiences instead of trying to distance ourselves from them, we were able to extend beyond our current limits and ourselves (Gilson, 2014), and to reach toward the others in their differences. Researching human communities is both blurry and clear, complex and simple, spontaneous and planned, but rarely linear. Therefore, it is essential to try to keep the movement in thought and writing, which establishes connections between spontaneous, creative, intuitive acts as well as more thoughtful, explaining, and rationalizing acts. Even though I address these polarities as if they were something separate, we should bear in

mind that they are just the opposite sides of the same coin (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), or—as is the case with the Ambivalent Creature—different qualities of the same being.

Finally, for me, generosity in doing research meant letting go of hopes for personal benefit, or, in other words, giving up the idea of reciprocity-based economy while doing research:

She doesn't 'know' what she is giving, she doesn't measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn't got. She gives more, with assurance that she'll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought, transformation. This is an 'economy' that can no longer be put in economic terms. Wherever she loves, all the old concepts of management are left behind (Cixous, 1976, p. 893).

In practice, I needed to give up hopes such as "I must convince people with my writing about the significance of the embodied facilitation method." Thereby, I was able to focus on the plurality of aspects that emerged, despite the emotions they evoked in me. That is how, when Cixous's conceptualization of generosity entered our conversation, I started to "reorient my thought" (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 695), which helped me develop my thinking further and to *throw myself* into the trial of writing guided by my intuition. Eventually, the generous stance toward writing evoked a *sense of liberation*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Suvi Satama for her insightful and encouraging commenting on our work. We would also like to thank Alison Pullen, editor, as well as the anonymous reviewers whose generous engagement with our work made a huge difference to us during the course of writing this article. Jenny would also like to thank Annika Skoglund, Uppsala University, for numerous conversations around Cixous and generosity. Pauliina would like to show her gratitude to Janne Kosonen for conversations about the embodiment during the "philosophy walks." Our warmest thanks to Susan Meriläinen for introducing us to each other and Sari Kokkola for the valuable advices during language editing.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared to guarantee the privacy of the research participants.

ORCID

Pauliina Jääskeläinen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1732-885X>

Jenny Helin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3289-4286>

ENDNOTES

¹ Gender, Work and Organization: Workshop on Writing, Hanken School of Economics & University of Lapland, Helsinki, Finland, 6-7 of June, 2019.

REFERENCES

- Ahonen, P., Blomberg, A., Doerr, K.T., Einola, K., Elkina, A., Gao, G., Hableton, J., Helin, J., Huopainen, A., Johanssen, B., Johansson, J., Jääskeläinen, P., Kaasila-Pakanen, A.-L., Kivinen, N., Mandalaki, E., Meriläinen, S., Pullen, A., Salmela, T., Satama, S., ... Zhang, L. (2020). Writing resistance together. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(4), 447–470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12441>
- Bachelard, G. (2014). *The poetics of space*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Biehl-Missal, B. (2015). 'I write like a painter': Feminine creation with arts-based methods in organizational research, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12055>

- Biehl, B., & Volkman, C. (2019). 'Spirits, dancing in the flesh': Choreography and organisation. *Culture and Organization*, 25(4), 284–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2019.1608204>
- Boncori, I., & Smith, C. (2019). I lost my baby today: Embodied writing and learning in organizations. *Management Learning*, 50(1), 74–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507618784555>
- Boulous Walker, M. (2017). *Slow philosophy: Reading against the institution*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Buckley, T., Punkanen, M., & Ogden, P. (2018). The role of the body in fostering resilience: A sensorimotor psychotherapy perspective. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, 13(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432979.2018.1467344>
- Cixous, H. (1988). In S. Sellers (Ed.), *Writing differences: Readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Cixous, H., Cohen, K., & Cohen, P. (1976). The laugh of the Medusa. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1(4), 875–893.
- Davies, E. (2006). *Beyond dance. Laban's legacy of movement analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Diprose, R. (2002). *Corporeal generosity: On giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ellingson, L. L. (2017). *Embodiment in qualitative research* (1st ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Ericsson, D., & Kostera, M. (2020). Alterethnography: Reading and writing otherness in organizations. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(6), 1402–1417. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12503>
- Fuchs, T., & Koch, S. C. (2014). Embodied affectivity: On moving and being moved. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 508. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00508>
- Gärtner, C. (2013). Cognition, knowing and learning in the flesh: Six views on embodied knowing in organization studies. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 29(4), 338–352
- Gherardi, S. (2019). If we practice posthumanist research, do we need 'gender' any longer? *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(1), 40–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12328>
- Gilson, E. (2014). *The ethics of vulnerability: A feminist analysis of social life and practice*. New York: Routledge. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ulapland-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1582669>
- Hayes, S. C., & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life: The new acceptance and commitment therapy (A new Harbinger self-help workbook)*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications
- Helin, J. (2020). Temporality lost: A feminist invitation to vertical writing that shakes the ground. *Organization*. 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508420956322>
- Höpf, H. (2000). On being moved, *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, 6(1), 15–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10245280008523536>
- Huopalahti, A., & Satama, S. (2020). Writing birthing bodies: Exploring the entanglements between flesh and materiality in childbirth. *Culture and Organization*, 26(4), 333–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2019.1618854>
- Kalmanowitz, D. (2017). Polarities and dualities: East west perspectives in art therapy with a refugee woman from central africa. *Creative Arts in Education and Therapy*, 3(1), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.15212/caet/2017/17/5>
- Kivinen, N. (2020). Writing grief, breathing hope. *Gender, Work & Organization*. 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12581>
- Knights, D. (2015). Binaries need to shatter for bodies to matter: Do disembodied masculinities undermine organizational ethics?. *Organization*, 22(2), 200–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508414558724>
- Laban, R. (2011). In L. Ullman (Ed.), *The mastery of movement*. Hampshire: Dance Books Ltd.
- Leavy, P. (2010). A/r/t: A poetic montage. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(4), 240–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800409354067>
- Leavy, P. (2015). *Method Meets art, second edition: Arts-based research practice* (2nd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Levy, F. (1988). *Dance movement therapy: A healing art* (1st ed.). Waldorf: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance.
- Mandalaki, E., & Pérezts, M. (2020). It takes two to tango: Theorizing inter-corporeality through nakedness and eros in researching and writing organizations. *Organization*. 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508420956321>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). In C. Lefort (Ed.) (A. Lingis, Trans.). *The visible and the invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). In (D. A. Landes, Trans.). *Phenomenology of perception*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Payne, H., & Brooks, S. D. M. (2020). A qualitative study of the views of patients with medically unexplained symptoms on the BodyMind approach: Employing embodied methods and arts practices for self-management. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 554566. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.554566>
- Phillips, M., Pullen, A., & Rhodes, C. (2014). Writing organization as gendered practice: Interrupting the libidinal economy. *Organization Studies*, 35(3), 313–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613483656>
- Pullen, A. (2018). Writing as labiaplasty. *Organization*, 25(1), 123–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417735537>
- Pullen, A., & Rhodes, C. (2008). Dirty writing. *Culture and Organization*, 14(3), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759550802270684>

- Pullen, A., & Rhodes, C. (2015). Writing, the feminine and organization. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(2), 87–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12084>
- Pylvänäinen, P. (2018). *Dance movement therapy in the treatment of depression. Change in body image and mood—A clinical practice based study [doctoral dissertation]*. Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä.
- Ropo, A., & Parviainen, J. (2001). Leadership and bodily knowledge in expert organizations. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 17, 1–18.
- Samaritter, R., & Payne, H. (2013). Kinaesthetic intersubjectivity: A dance informed contribution to self-other relatedness and shared experience in non-verbal psychotherapy with an example from autism. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40, 143–150.
- Satama, S. (2020). Researching through experiencing aesthetic moments: 'Sensory Slowness' as my methodological strength. In A. Pullen, J. Helin, & N. Harding (Eds.), *Writing differently* (pp. 209–230). Bingley: Emerald publishing.
- Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2015). Embodiment on trial: A phenomenological investigation. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 48(1), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-014-9315-z>
- Siegel, D. (2009). Emotion as integration. A possible answer to the question, what is emotion? In D. Focha, D. Siegel, & M. F. Solomon (Eds.), *The healing power of emotion. Affective neuroscience, development & clinical practice* (pp. 145–171). New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2018). On the need for methods beyond proceduralism: Speculative middles, (In)Tensions, and response-ability in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(3), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704464>
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2017). Haecceity: Laying out a plane for post qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(9), 686–698. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417727764>
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2019). Post qualitative inquiry in an ontology of immanence. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418772634>
- Thanem, T., & Knights, D. (2019). *Embodied research methods* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Pauliina Jääskeläinen (MSc) is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Lapland, Finland, with her dissertation focusing on using embodied methods in organizations. Her particular research interests include embodied—especially kinesthetic—knowing in organizations.

Jenny Helin is an Associate Professor in Organization in the Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden.

How to cite this article: Jääskeläinen P, Helin J. Writing embodied generosity. *Gender Work Organ*. 2021;1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12650>