

Tender threads: *A multimodal methodology for creative rebellion*

Joanna Cook

1. Unravelling threads of disciplinary boundaries

My professional journey as a dancer, teacher, researcher and multimodal choreographer stems from conservatory dance training:

*...a four-year-old girl
Dressed in pink leotard and tights
Every inch of her body on display.
She is told to ... Smile
And silently copy every move her teacher makes. (...)
We are being taught to be good girls. And I love every minute of it.
(Cook, 2021, p. 5)*

As a young dancer, I never questioned the edges of the dance discipline. But as I began my academic journey, my understanding of what dance could be began to shift. I noticed how cultural conditioning, social politics and inherent knowing were woven into the fabric of my metaphorical skin – the suppression of my voice to conform to the ideal of the good girl, the woman I was expected to become. This awareness ignited a micro-protest within me, resisting the imposed expressions of politeness, deference and restraint, as well as the suppression of agency, autonomy and voice – qualities tied to societal ideals of feminine identity. Recognizing that the oppression of women is deeply embedded in societal structures and the very fabric of individual experiences – a collective and generational legacy (Cook, 2021) – from this understanding, I began to scaffold a methodology that leans into the edge spaces of the silo of the dance discipline, to (un)do my conditioning. I do not believe that my art, my

practice, can change the world. But it is a micro-step towards the creation of a world I long for.

My multimodal practice integrates interdisciplinary research, embodied art-making and feminist choreographic methodologies. Central to this practice is the act of translation – a deliberate reworking and reimagining of ideas, movements and materials as they shift across modalities. Translation is both a mechanism and a metaphor, a process of opening and entangling that resists closure and creates space for relational co-labour. It invites questions: What does it mean to translate a gesture into a mark, a sensation into a word or a shared moment into an enduring practice? Following Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre's (2023) insight that 'methodology can become monstrous, almost pathological, and the rage to methodologize is fierce' (p. 29), this work embraces a continual cycle of inquiry and reflection, critically reassessing assumptions and approaches. Leaning into Erin Manning's (2016) notion of a 'more dynamic than method', I emphasize modulating bodies, ¹ environments and evolving ecologies through iterative shifts (p. 40). This is not a fixed framework but a practice that develops through responsiveness, where conditions change and relationships emerge. To sustain these ongoing relationships, I cultivate strategies that prioritize emergence – constantly forming and re:forming within the unfolding (maree brown, 2017).²

In this chapter, I approach translation as a process of re:engagement and re:imagining – where ideas, bodies and modalities interact to create new forms of understanding and meaning across disciplinary boundaries. As an act of rebellion, this translation challenges traditional hierarchies, creating space for alternative voices and co-laboured engagements.

This chapter will unfold two instantiations of multimodal creative practice:

Expanding (practices of) Flesh

...we are all a little bit naked.

These projects exemplify how this methodological practice operates as a process of translation. In *Expanding (practices of) Flesh*, translation emerges through tactile and material engagements that challenge bodily and disciplinary boundaries. In *...we are all a little bit naked*, translation operates as a web of relational exchanges, where voices and materials create a dialogue across space and time. These projects reflect the ways in which translation, care and response-ability are enacted through collaborative, embodied methodologies that prioritize attentive listening, mutual adaptation and the nurturing of

shared agency among human and more-than-human participants. My practice welcomes polyphonic, divergent, dissident, soft and loud voices – voices that challenge norms, resist conformity and bring alternative perspectives into the conversation. It recognizes the valuable knowledge within bodies and embraces uncertainty to find resonance through others' words, mouths and voices – pushing beyond disciplinary edges (Barad, 2007).

Translation bridges tactile sensations, vocal expressions, gestures and visual forms (Campbell & Vidal, 2018), engaging both vocal and broader bodily forms of communication, including touch, spatial orientation and movement. These interactions create shared meaning beyond linguistic boundaries (Scott, 2019). My practice fosters dialogues that generate experimental spaces for unexpected connections, integrating interdisciplinary approaches into collaborative processes. Translation weaves threads of knowledge into opportunities for co-creation and relational engagement within artistic practice (Lykke, 2012; Sandford, 2015).

The way modes influence one another highlights the role of multimodality in strengthening sensory and material connections. Multimodality functions as a form of synesthetic transfer, reframing creativity as an interwoven process where sensory and material expressions intermingle to generate knowledge. Sensory regions of the brain may overlap – hearing music as shapes or colours (Brang & Ramachandran, 2011) – or movement might materialize as text or images, one materiality emerging through another. These intermingling modes resist strict categorization, allowing meaning to span boundaries (Brang & Ramachandran, 2011). Within this context, Manning's (2009) notion of *relationscapes* frames exchanges between bodies and environments as inherently unstable and always emergent. She argues that sensation and materiality fold into one another such that movement itself becomes 'the very condition of the becoming-body' (p. 64).

Multimodality becomes the strategy I employ to instantiate these abstract ideas, with a distinct emphasis on how multiple modes entangle and co-create meaning within the practice. Drawing inspiration from alys longley's (2020) insights in her performance lecture, *Language is an Intangible Bridge*, I ask:

What is it to take all elements of a practice seriously, particularly those that are often overlooked? In writing, for example, voice, colour, design, binding, the gesture of handwriting the performativity of context, the relationality between text and reader. Or for dance, vocabulary is democratized, the theatre space is distributed, we see a playscript as a choreography, a danced choreography as a drawing in time. (p. 103)

My practice values the shifting of one form into another, creating space for dissidents and disrupting conventional practices or questioning established frameworks. I focus on how different modes evolve together, each contributing its threads to the fabric of a project. In this context, I contemplate the diffraction of intra-action, where matter bends around obstacles as it materializes (Barad, 2014). I view translation as a dialogue between texts – where ideas and perspectives grow, reflect and diversify. The tension and friction between movement, situation and object are crucial for understanding relationships within artistic practice (Spångberg, 2012), where the yearning for change fuels the struggle: ‘Desire, intent, and purpose become clear through pushing against a resistance, as the *what should be* becomes clearer through *what it is not*’ (Yoo, 2021, p. 195).

I think of reaching out to touch.

The reciprocity of touch – to touch and be touched – holds resistance, connection and the cellular push and pull of togetherness and apartness. Moving beyond surface interactions, it becomes an exchange between human and more-than-human materials and materialities. Translation, as I conceive it, is an ongoing negotiation – a reaching out to touch while being touched in return. This process shifts practice in unanticipated ways. A gesture translated into text might lose its embodied immediacy, while tactile experiences often resist being fully captured in words. These gaps and resistances are not failures but openings – points of tension where new meanings can emerge. Translation becomes an act of co-creation, where the original and its (mis)translation entwine, unsettle and reshape each other. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) phenomenology and Karen Barad’s (2007) agential realism, I approach touch as active and embodied – a mutual becoming where agency is shared.

My desire to challenge norms, social structures and institutions coexists with the acknowledgement of my complicity. I recognize my privilege as a Pākehā woman in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and as a dancer in a large institution. I feel the pull, the desire to rebel and the safety of being held. I look beyond myself to our world in crisis – war, COVID-19, climate change. Donna Haraway’s (2016) concept of staying with the trouble encourages me to lean into complexities and uncertainties as I cultivate micro-protests within my evolving practice. This involves navigating intersecting realities – people, modalities and desires – with resilience and humility and committing to engage with tensions and contradictions.

It means embracing uncertainty and understanding that meaningful change begins with small, deliberate actions within our immediate spheres of influence. This text will weave together thoughts, literature, protests, concepts, findings, discussions and multimodal invitations in a nomadic, rhizomatic manner – where connections branch unpredictably like roots, moving across disciplines and forms to create new relationships (Braidotti, 2006). This weaving enacts translation, where disparate modes and ideas are brought into dialogue, reshaping and refracting through the process. The concepts that emerge, though elusive and fluid, are embraced in their complexity as I co-labour with a constantly evolving practice – thoughts in perpetual motion (Manning & Massumi, 2014).

2. Embodied matter: Material enfleshment

in the middle of beginning, let us pause ...

look around the space you are in

What do you notice?

What feelings do these noticings evoke?

Can you name aloud the things your eyes caress?

Words falling over each other in a rush to be heard, se

en, formed, f e l t

Do you name some things with more affection than others?

How does the formation of words in your mouth

f e e l?

Can you translate this into a movement with your fingers?

Pick up an instrument of inscription find a surface

to be marked

close your eyes and draw these sensations onto the surface

Open your eyes.

As a point of departure, I question:

What do I notice?

What do I pay/gift/give my attention to?

Can I name the things that come into/draw my attention?

How do I deal with the many things I become aware of at once?

What are the things I choose not to name? What are the things that do not call as loudly?

By turning towards some things, I turn away from others; how do I choose which calls to follow?

I explore my intuition through Emotional Aesthetics – a philosophy that places emotions at the centre of artistic decision-making (Cook, 2023). In my creative practice, this framework guides choices in choreography, material engagement and collaboration. Curiosity, care, heart, passion, desire, listening and attention become essential elements, shaping a practice that is tender and care-fulled.³ This curious engagement fosters a sense of withness, as described by Lisa Samuels (2021): ‘an attention that does not seek to be somewhere other than in relation’ (p. 60). This relational attunement encourages considered risks, embraces uncertainty and deepens the connection between emotions and creativity. Informed by adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy* (2017), I focus on adaptability, meaningful connections and the patterns that emerge through small, intentional actions.

Recognizing the centrality of more-than-humans and taking them seriously allows their agency to unfold. Jane Bennett’s (2010) concept of vibrant matter situates objects as active participants, leading and co-labouring in the creative process. They take me on their own journeys, and I follow. Through active listening, I desire materials, humans and more-than-human objects to guide me beyond the edge of the known and into spaces of (not) knowing, doing and undoing. This aligns with Sara Ahmed’s (2006) work on how orientations and positions towards objects influence the way we perceive and navigate space, sharpening my attention to the ways bodies – human and more-than-human – connect and interact within their surroundings.

Throughout my artistic journey, I have developed the concept of Tender(e) Practices, blending the mindful engagement of tenderness with the essence of tension, rooted in the Latin *tendere*, meaning to stretch.⁴ This intertwining of tension with attention (*attendere*) and intention (*intendere*) allows me to engage with creative processes as forces to reach for, pull away from and translate through artistic practice.⁵ I approach tenderness as part of an interconnected, life-sustaining web that encompasses bodies, selves and environments, drawing on Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher’s (1990) framework of care and extending

this through Jane Bennett's (2010) exploration of human and more-than-human entanglements, which emphasizes the agency of more-than-human matter in shaping these relationships. I work with what is already present in the space, fostering openness and practices of re:use, re:pair and re:cycle. This approach cultivates reciprocal relationships, guided by curiosity and intimacy, which open pathways to new possibilities. Drawing on Haraway's and Bennett's perspectives, I explore distributed agency – how vitality moves through material and living bodies. This inquiry shapes my methodological practice as I consider how shared response-ability – the ability to respond – emerges within the blurred boundaries between human and more-than-human, material and immaterial, deepening my understanding of the interconnectedness that sustains my creative processes.⁶

3. Resonant words: Dancing pages

These pages unfold slowly. Care-fulled slowness. Attention-fulled slowness. Writing takes on a life of its own, embracing liveness as it shifts through space, time, material, mammalian and object bodies. It seeks to instantiate the choreographic practice and process of dance-making within the reshaping of the written form. While inscribing the logic of movement, I acknowledge the insufficiency of writing to fully capture a world animated and brought to life

exi

s

t

ing

through movement.

I question how marking the page – fingers pressing laptop keys in a semi-rhythmic micro-movement – can breathe renewed life into my practice. Can it reorient the process, offering different insights?

Can we make our language fall through all our hands and
watch where it goes?⁷

The writing becomes inseparable from the choreographic practice. Language takes shape through its inscription on dancers' bodies, unfolding within dialogue and improvised scores. Through multimodality, I aim to develop ethico-political ecologies that integrate multiple threads as a scaffold within which moments of 'loss, a shift, or a rupture' lead to new courses of action

(Springgay et al., 2005, p. 898) – unfolding between the boundaries of the conscious and nonconscious, cultivating an ethics of practice that responds tender(e)ly to emergence.

Towards an ethics of practices as co-labourers we:

intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity
to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for

embracing the co-presence of polyvalent voices and motilities
calling forth practices that do not perpetuate the silent oppression experienced
in our training

working around
between
within
growing in the cracks

creating space to do things differently.

trusting curiosity
love,
passion
rather than

predetermined logic

the practice creates its own ethos
micro-hierarchies
micropolitics
it is held by/within
an
ethic of care
sustain-ability and response-ability

it is open to
following
leading
it is slow

paying attention to what arises

it is messy

it feels chaotic

it is emergent evolving

itself iteratively

it is held but not controlled

it follows curiosities.

it cultivates non-lingual languages

untethering from semiotics while holding the thread

engaging with it when needed.⁸

I explore expanded notions of choreography as it shifts across mediums, from the page to performance, from words to marks, lines to actions and flat images to embodied encounters. I question the elasticity of each evolution, observing how movement materializes as sound, sign, drawing, breath, physicality, punctuation, bodily form, focus, acoustics, comfort, certainty, dispersion, reverberation, materiality, impatience, quality, frame, instability, knot and amplification – each iteration a thread in the evolving process.

This work unfolds through attention, relationality, response-ability and co-labour(ative) engagement, exploring the intersections between disciplines and thriving within the cracks as a form of activist practice. Drawing on Audre Lorde's (2018) assertion that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, it challenges dominant norms and structures by creating new tools and methodologies that disrupt established boundaries and hierarchies. Like the growth of a weed – perhaps a dandelion breaking through concrete – it emerges from the margins, confronting the status quo and envisioning this micro-world differently through creative and critical interventions.⁹

Throughout this process, I question how different modalities can lead, follow, generate, sustain and respond within the artistic practice. Vernacular languages emerge – expressed through noise, movement, sounding and breath – gradually expanding the flesh of practice.

Having established an ethos of micro-protest and tender(e) emotional responsiveness, the examples that follow embody this philosophy through instances of co-labour(ation). These instantiations manifest how bodies work within the complexities of multimodality, fostering curiosity, love and passion. They embody an open, slow and messy evolution.

4. *Expanding (practices of) Flesh*

Held tightly encased in a cocoon of cheesecloth. The fabric presses against my frame. Diffractive slivers of light filter through my eyelashes, folding as I begin to move. This space, just beyond my flesh, expands with my breath. All at once too close and not close enough.

Expanding (practices of) Flesh is:

an exploration
 a series of performances
 working with ideas
 of enfleshment
 of stretching, encasing
 holding of self
 other and the space in between

 different sensations arise
 from built-up residues
 of experience

 resisting habitual movements
 embracing feeling entirely uninteresting
 seeing what emerges

 standing in solidarity with those who came before
 stand alongside

 anger is not good for women
 we should all be angry

 standing with materials and materiality
 our ally, our co labourer
 pushing beyond preconceived idea(s)
 pushing restricting
 the limits of bodies mammalian, material, object
 feeling who is around

 what do they bring to the space
 giving ourselves room to fail
 hindering supporting

no longer finding ourselves powerless
the sacred things
vulnerable things
activated without farce or force
an honest embodiment
doing the thing
not performing the doing of the thing
exploring how the body distinguishes feelings
enraged anger external friend to me
the cloth expands
forming shaping
covering my natural stance
challenging perceptions
a trick to the naked eye
no *body* will speak for you
her anger has nowhere to go
question it all

Expanding (practices of) Flesh begins within a circle, where seven women gather on a studio floor with a shared purpose: to challenge conventional dance-making processes and disrupt feminine and dancerly conditioning through multimodal co-labour(ative) experimentation. Turning inward, we explore without a predetermined output or performance moment. As a form of micro-protest, we deliberately decelerate – resisting the speed of the world and the pressure to articulate quickly.

We slow down, finding the ebb and flow as we:

pour
gr
a nu lar
caring
pushing
pulling
elastic ally
ship
(Cook et al., 2024, p. 51)



Figure 12.1 *Hands*. Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2020.



Figure 12.2 *Contact*. J. Cook, 2023.

In the early stages of our movement explorations, I brought in various objects from home, including a cheesecloth tube. One co-labourer, in a playful moment, slipped inside the tube, wearing it like a cocoon, tying another piece around her head. Attention at this moment and leaning into what emerged unfolded a new direction for our collective work. We hung the cheesecloth from the ceiling, creating an enclosure that acted as a protective second skin – reminiscent of flesh. This soft, flexible layer breathes and moves with us, serving as a companion, shelter and barrier between our inner and outer worlds. Like the body's memory, this outer shell bears marks of what it shelters, revealing what is enclosed within (Abraham & Torok, 1994).

Just beyond our skin, the cheesecloth forms a thin layer that separates the inside from the outside. This space, though often uncomfortable, supports and witnesses our experiences. It bears weight, growing intimate with time, closeness and sweat – whether we stay, let go, hold or are held by it. This space embodies tangible possibilities and the struggle inherent in navigating the world. It is marked by interactions—

expanding tearing
causing tension

demanding our attention.

We reflect on what we bring into the space and the bodies already present. How do they shape our movement, thoughts, emotions, being, speech and relationships? Inspired by Sara Ahmed (2006), we recognize that *bodies* mold themselves through contact, constantly orienting towards each other and reshaping through touch – a touch that is itself touched (Husserl, 1989). Intentional movements and



Figure 12.3 *Expanding (practices of) Flesh Rehearsals*. Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2022.

choices determine what is within reach, with (un)conscious desire propelling us closer to *bodies* (Ahmed, 2006).

We begin to name things – *bodies*, as we traverse space together.

What is it that connects us?

Considering the global context outside the studio walls – a world in crisis – we create a web, touching and being touched, feeling the curiosity and risk in the aftermath and persistent presence of COVID-19. We stretch towards each other, harnessing emotion and vulnerability through our co-labour(ative) efforts. Within the practice, provocations emerge from conversation:

imprint space with your body
push in closer to avoid the pain
touch without touch

We take words from books, inscribing them on tea bag surfaces.¹⁰

Creating soundscapes, concrete poems
scores from fragmented text

we sit in a circle
our voices weaving together
as words spill on top of each other
non-sense making sense in our togetherness

Our co-labour(ative) scores inspire movement. We dance solo, in duos or trios, finding a shared centre and activating principles of contact improvisation.¹¹ We hinder and support each other – speaking our intentions aloud, voices overlapping as images of being supported while feeling hindered fill the studio space.



Figure 12.4 *Fragments*.
J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.5 *Resonance*.
J. Cook, 2023.

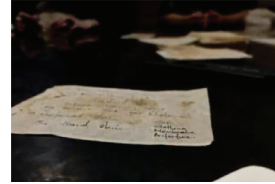


Figure 12.6 *Teabag
Fragments*. J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.7 *Word Spill
Trio*. J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.8 *Word Spill
Group*. J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.9 *Word Spill
Move*. J. Cook, 2023.

Building on these scores and the resonant echoes of our voices, we construct movement conversations. A challenge arises as we experiment with our gaze: Can we maintain eye contact while navigating, hindering and supporting? Our voices grow louder, weaving fragments from the texts we have absorbed, the language we carry with us.

We consider how these words fall through space.

Where do they land?

How do they overlap, creating sense out of non

sense?

Our bodies resonate with sound, speeding up, moving through space in bursts that lack coherence. We push our bodies, relishing the pleasure of exertion, transitioning in and out of the floor – what is this flesh capable of? The exertion turns to rage, fuelled by reflections on our individual political, religious and social contexts. Rage erupts in powerful exhales, guttural yells and the

resounding impact of feet meeting the floor. Our rage is not aimed at each other; instead, we direct it at the floor – Papatūānuku can take it.¹² Rage, both concept and emotion, challenges the facade of our trained politeness.



Figure 12.10 *Expanding Video*. D. Chin, Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2022.



Figure 12.11 *Expanded thread*. J. Janon and J. Cook, 2022.



Figure 12.12 *Rebellion*. J. Cook et al., 2023.

Within *Expanding (practices of) Flesh*, we weave an ecological web of relationality – existing in reciprocal relationships, building trust and collectively holding space. Prioritizing each co-labourer's wellbeing, we embrace radical openness through flexibility, accommodating individual schedules and needs. Though this practice is not utopic – radical openness is HARD. Absence is HARD. Pressing against is HARD. Physical presence is not always possible, and strategies to maintain continuity are cultivated.

What is vital to be passed on what will be re:found

through the process of becoming

We co-labour iteratively, not pushing towards a moment of witnessed performance, *reviewing the rehearsal as performance* – events that are evolving, emerging and happening now. These are moments of emergence, the thoughts in the act of becoming (Manning & Massumi, 2014).

Moments of witness are viewed as reorientation:

how can we be aware of the new bodies and space

how do they impact our decision-making

how might we

s t r e t c h toward

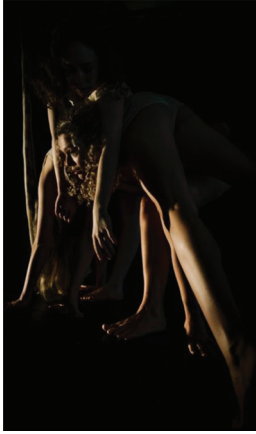


Figure 12.13 *Expand Limbs*. Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2023.

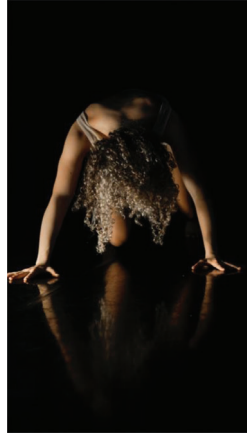


Figure 12.14 *Push*. Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2023.

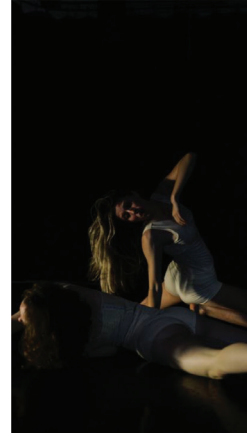


Figure 12.15 *Exertion*. Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2023.

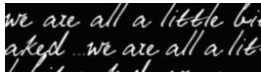
In *Expanding (practices of) Flesh*, we explore the space between the intimate and the global, the personal and the political, framing our journey as a form of micro-protest. We weave movement, language and sound into an embodied practice rooted in tender(e) practices and emotional aesthetics. This space allows creativity to unfold through unhurried contemplation, with a focus on care, sustainability and response-ability. Using emergent strategies, we engage directly with materiality through concrete, visceral experiences.

5. ...we are all a little bit naked

...we are all a little bit naked grew from a desire to reach out and connect – beyond the studio space’s dancers, bodies and contexts. To connect people I knew but who had never met, who might never meet. This co-labour(ative) project cultivated a container for other people’s voices through threads of call and response.

ways of hearing “what each other can hear,”
hearing each other hear “how we are not heard”
we are “louder not only when we are heard together,
but when we hear together”
(Ahmed, 2022, paras. 12–14)

I initiated the project:

Hello 

I have been putting together an invitation to be a part of a (quite open) multimodal call + response project: ... we are all a little bit naked. An invitation with detailed information is attached. I would love to have your 'voice' within the project, and if it is something that calls to you, please let me know.

***trigger warning – partial nudity included in the invitation**

Joanna.



Figure 12.16 ...we are all a little bit naked invitation. Y. Lee and J. Cook, 2023.

Fourteen artists responded.

Ten of the artists live within or around the Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) area

One is in transition between Taupō and Tāmaki Makaurau

One lives in Canada

One in Rotorua

One in Whangamata

They were invited to engage in six cycles of response over two-week periods. Their first creative response was to the words and images on the invitation they received, and every two weeks, they would receive

*a gift in the form of a response from one of the other artists.*¹³

The work was shaped by the limits each participant set for themselves, depending on time, resources and interests. Some made handcrafted objects; others created digital works. Some wrote poems; others made images or movement-based videos. Initially, there were no specific guidelines or conditions around the form the work would take. My fundamental desire was for the artists to feel safe expressing things they could not in other contexts. I know that safety means different things to different people, and this is something I cannot control. But in an effort to create a slightly safer space, I was transparent about figuring this out as I went along – asking for feedback on what artists needed or desired.

In the first cycle, *gifts* were exchanged anonymously. I knew who the artist was but did not share that information. I asked the artists how this felt for them. Many expressed openness to sharing their identities and a desire for a personal connection with the giver. So, in the second cycle, I offered the option to share an image representing themselves as an artist – it did not need to be a headshot but could be if they wished – and a short blurb about themselves, whatever they felt comfortable sharing with the receiver of their work.



Figure 12.17 ...we are all a little bit naked artists. J. Cook et al., 2023.

Through further feedback, artists expressed a desire to connect more deeply by hearing the maker of the *gift*. This led to the invitation for artists to add a vocal layer to their work. If they had written a poem, they were encouraged to record themselves reading it, attempting to activate a level of personhood and connection with people they did not know.



Figure 12.18 Artist 14//Response 1. J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.19 Artist 14/Spoken response 1. J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.20 Response 1//I am not angry. J. Cook, 2023.

Some artists preferred to keep their voices private. Within the ethos of radical fluidity and co-labour that prioritizes the needs of each participant, the structure proved flexible enough to accommodate a diverse range of desires. Some were open to sharing their work publicly; others preferred to keep their work within the collective. As such, within this sharing of the project, only photos, bios and works have been shared with express permission from the artists. For those who preferred to remain anonymous, rather than removing them and their work from the web, I have redacted their image and bio – a type of presence through absence. They are part of the web – they are vital, they are present, but they are held in a way that supports their needs and desires – engaging a similar method as in *Expanding (practices of) Flesh* where the co-labourers well-being and the relationship are put before the work.

In the first cycle, *gifts* were given digitally, but as the project evolved, I desired to craft envelopes and cultivate creative ways of *gifting* the *responses*. I made translucent envelopes with the artist and cycle number on the front.



Figure 12.21 *Envelopes.*
J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.22 *Envelope Content.*
L. Cook and J. Cook, 2023.

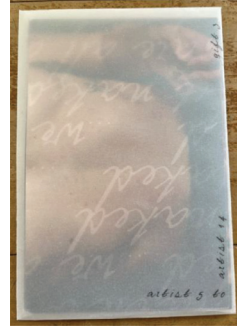


Figure 12.23 *Artist 3//Envelope.*
J. Cook, 2023.

Where artists made physical objects, the *gift* would be given as the original object along with the translucent envelope containing an image, bio and QR codes to any other digital materials. There would also be an image of the object so it was clear which cycle that object had come from. This method also allowed me to keep track of the *gifts* and *responses* – a digital archive of the web of the work.

There was a labour that grew for me – the labour of picking up physical responses, the labour of reaching out to see if delayed responses were still coming, and how to ask this openly and responsively to the artist, the web of the project and my role as the curator. There was labour in responding to each artist and each response, in making the envelopes and in cultivating strategies to minimize the labour at the end of each cycle. As such, I would pre-print artist bios and images, and as each *response* came in, I would try to curate as I went. The trickiest part for me was negotiating who would receive which *response* as a *gift*. I made these decisions based on three principles:

No doubling up – you only received one gift from an artist, but you would not receive from all artists as there were only six cycles and fourteen artists.

Physical objects – I attempted to curate the physical objects so that each artist received at least one.

Delayed *responses* – if an artist's work was significantly delayed, I would either redirect the work to myself or be more strategic in ensuring it went to someone open to receiving their *gift* and cultivating a response in a shorter time frame.

The project's labour-intensive, detail-oriented approach carved out a space where each artist's contribution was included and held with care, through a

radical fluidity that aimed to disrupt hierarchical norms, allowing collaboration to unfold in ways that valued autonomy and mutual respect. As the curator, I worked to foster an environment where trust and vulnerability were central. There was a labour that required continuous investment, but it became a practice of care – rooted in the relationships that sustained the work. It felt like a micro-protest, echoing the activist work I described earlier by resisting the commodification of creative processes and allowing the project to develop naturally. I carry the weight of this role, both then and now, as artists placed their trust in me to safeguard their creations and responses, creating a space where their vulnerability was respected and their work protected.

The web holds them...

it travels
it moves
connecting across
around
between



Figure 12.24 *Artist 13//Mouths.*
B. Weber, 2023.



Figure 12.25
Artist 7//
Watercolour.
Y. Lee, 2023.



Figure 12.26
Artist12//Delicate.
Y. Dullabh, 2023.



Figure 12.27 *Artist 14//Angry.*
J. Cook, 2023.



Figure 12.28 *Artist 6//Cycle 4.*
J. Smolira, 2023.



Figure 12.29
Artist 1//Cycle 2.
T. Chenkovich,
2023.



Figure 12.30 *Artist 4//Cycle 4.*
E. Fletcher, 2023.

For the fourth cycle, I was travelling, so all responses were given and re-gifted digitally. I pre-empted this by informing everyone two cycles in advance. Many appreciated the new perspective this offered, with a fresh entry point to the work. This shift led me to consider how this project might come to a close. With permission from each artist, I created a password-protected digital platform that held links to all of the fifth cycle of *responses*. This allowed the artists to see all of the cycles' artwork for the first time, including the work of artists they had not received from. I encouraged them to travel through the site, finding fragments of resonance and inspiration for their final cycle of response.

For the sixth and final cycle, I initiated a gathering in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). Artists could still respond digitally if they preferred, but I wanted to offer a moment of meeting, physical touch and collective holding. For those outside of Tāmaki Makaurau, I suggested Zoom or digital submission of their final responses.

Seven artists gathered at a cafe for coffee and smoothies, sharing their final *response* as a *gift* for all.

each had a moment to speak
to share
to reflect.



Figure 12.31 Artist 3//
Reflection. K. Bell, 2023.



Figure 12.32 Artist 7//
Watercolour2.
Y. Lee, 2023.



Figure 12.33
Artist 1//
Nasturtium.
T. Chenkovich,
2023.



Figure 12.34 Artist
11//*Reflection*.
K. Mandolidis, 2023.

As I revisit this project, the weight of responsibility remains – emphasizing the trust placed in me to honour each artist and their work. The intimacy that grew within their creations forms connections across physical distance, allowing their voices to be heard and their contributions to shape the shared fabric of the project. Each work becomes a micro-protest as women co-labour, blending

their diverse experiences and embodied knowledge to create multimodal gift// responses.

Looking back through our shared experiences, I can see that our tapestry aligns with foundational philosophical threads, representing a radical reimagining of

agency
autonomy
interconnectedness

This work embodies adaptability and responsiveness, following *Emergent Strategy* principles (maree brown, 2017). It resists systemic inequalities by observing phenomena, prioritizing critical connections and building systems of change, working towards a reimagined world of co-labour(ative) world-making.

6. Woven threads of the web

I desire to cultivate
a web of questions, ideas, themes
provocations, philosophies, theories
that morph, move, respond, and react – continuously shifting

a practice that
listens
learns
knows
together
unfolding inter-
transdisciplinarity
through multimodality

taking each mode and materiality seriously
blurring the lines between modalities
moving and being moved
touching and resisting
pondering proximity
intimacy
reciprocal touch
together/apart

thoughts in the act
 perpetual motion
 tender(e)ly stretching
 re:using
 re:pairing
 re:cycling
 bodies coursing with live-ness
 re:orienting practice
 embracing the inherent unpredictability
 the co-presence
 of polyvalent voices and motilities

 working around
 between
 within
 growing in the cracks

 trusting curiosity
 love
 passion
 rather than predetermined logic

 micro-hierarchies
 micropolitics
 held by/within an ethic of care
 sustain-ability
 response-ability

 open to
 following
 leading
 paying attention to what arises

 chaotic
 emergent
 evolving itself iteratively

 held
 not controlled
 curious

elastic
 interstitial processes
 emergent knowledge
 gradually expanding the flesh of practice
 an ethos of micro-protest
 fostering an open
 slow
 messy evolution

In *Expanding (practices of) Flesh* and ...*we are all a little bit naked*, translation operates as an iterative, emergent process, guiding the co-laboured creativity at the heart of these practices. Through translation, feminist gestures of responsibility and resistance emerge, nurturing collective modes of making and being. Grounded in the lived tensions of co-labour, translation embraces unpredictability and attends to care within the complexities of multimodal methodologies. These projects challenge norms by translating between the visible and the felt, creating relational spaces where creative entanglements unfold.

As I revisit this work, I see how all the threads come together – movement, language, materiality and care have been woven into a single fabric. The tension between these threads forms the basis of the creative practice, where each mode and material participates in an ongoing translation. The process of translation becomes a means of reimagining what collaboration and co-labour can mean: as a practice that resists boundaries, embraces fluidity and attends to care in all its forms.

In the midst of the conclusion, I return to the beginning ...

look around the space you are in...

What do you notice?

What f e e l ings do these noticings evoke?

Has the way you see things shifted?

I invite you to reconsider and reengage with this practice, shaped by curiosity and care. This is not a conclusion but a continuation – an ongoing process of reimagining how we create, relate and respond. Each re: opens a space for attending to the unfinished, for working within the frictions and uncertainties that shape collaborative action. These tensions are not obstacles but necessary conditions for change, holding the potential to disrupt entrenched patterns and create new possibilities for connection, care and co-labour.

Notes

All images, QR-linked audio, and excerpts reproduced here appear with the artists' written permission. Where artists requested anonymity or redaction, identifying information has been withheld in keeping with the project's care-full(ed) protocols.

1. The term *bodies* is used to encompass both human and more-than-human object bodies, reflecting the aim to distribute agency and acknowledge the vital contributions of mammalian and material co-labour(ators).
2. The concept of *re*: developed through the *3R Dance Project* with Janaina Moraes (refer to @3Rdanceproject), nurtures a connected engagement with our environment. This prompts contemplation of consumption habits and their ensuing consequences. *re*: is linked to a purposeful deceleration, encouraging readers to take their time and elongating the pause.
3. In our work as teachers, dancers and researchers, Janaina Moraes and I use *care-fulled* to encourage pondering the hyphen. The hyphen is there to slow the reader down, interrupting and bringing attention to this notion momentarily as the language diverts from what is commonly known, prompting a pause for reflection.
4. The concept of Tender(e) Practices was introduced at the 2023 Symposium: *Multimodal Translation In The Arts* in a presentation titled *Practices of (in)(at)tendere: emergent (mis)translations*. The Etymology of Tension is derived from Douglas Harper's 'tension (n.)' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001). <https://www.etymonline.com/word/tension>.
5. Donna Haraway's concept of *staying with the trouble*, outlined in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), urges an embrace of uncertainty, contradiction and interconnectedness in navigating contemporary challenges. It advocates for engagement with the complexities of our world without seeking simplistic solutions, emphasizing care, collaboration and collective action for more just and sustainable futures.
6. Playing with the way I write words in this article not only changes how I write the writing, as suggested by Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), it extends beyond stylistic changes, inspiring a deliberate slowing down that encourages readers to reconsider their relationship with objects and systems. This concept is captured in terms such as response-ability, where the hyphen encourages readers to reflect on their ability to respond within responsibility.
7. Process notes from the artistic research project: a. longley, and F. González Castro (2023). *acut, inside the questions that are due to our souths attempting to write outside a limit*. Cococino Centre for the Arts, Arizona, USA, April–June 2024.
8. The practice-ethos list develops and adapts language first articulated in Cook (2023), here the wording is reshaped and expanded for the present methodology.

9. I refer here to the dandelion due to its ability to continue to grow within and around. Drawing from a. maree brown, (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press. 'Dandelions. The dandelion flower head can change into a white, globular seed head overnight. Each seed has a tiny parachute that allows it to spread far and wide in the wind. The entire plant has medicinal properties. Dandelions are often mistakenly identified as weeds, aggressively removed, but are hard to uproot; the top is pulled but the long taproot remains. Resilience. Resistance. Regeneration. Decentralization.' (p. 46).
10. In my master's project, J. Cook (2021). *Fragments of Silent Skin*, I repurposed used tea bags, transforming them into co-labourers for creative experiments. After deconstructing the tea bags, I utilized the tea leaves in compost or the garden and repurposed the outer fabric, creating a sustainable material body.
11. A definition of contact improvisation is offered in our co-authored chapter by J. Cook, J. Moraes, & a. longley, (2024). 'Re: pairing a culture of learning: Creative assessments that privilege care and relational teaching in a hybrid-learning era.' In *Innovating assessment and feedback design in teacher education* (pp. 38–53). Routledge.
12. Papatūānuku is the indigenous Te Reo word for earth in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
13. In this project, I am inspired by Genevieve Vaughan's notions of a gift economy (Vaughan, 1997; 2007) and Marcel Mauss's ideas on reciprocity and gift exchange (Mauss, 2000). Artists in ...*we are all a little bit naked*, engaged in cycles of giving, receiving and returning, which cultivated a web-like social network cultivated through mutual response-ability. However, unlike traditional exchanges where gifts flow between two parties, in this project, artists participate in a broader network where they give, receive and respond to multiple individuals. G. Vaughan, (1997). *For-giving: A feminist criticism of exchange* (Vol. 53, No. 54, p. 123). Plain View Press; G. Vaughan, (2007). *Women and the gift economy: a radically different worldview is possible*. Inanna Publications and Education; M. Mauss (2000). *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. W W Norton.

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