

# Tracing the Invisible :Writing as a Trace

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*I do believe in poetry. I believe that words are creatures endowed with the power to put things together and bring them back to life.*

— Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints Memory and life writing*, 1997.



— *Verschreibungen – Textures*. Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel*, 2016, produced by im flieger. Photo: S. Holzer

As a performer, movement researcher and author I am deeply interested in the connections between physical movements and the motions of the mind. I have the desire to encounter the world by connecting to the manifold potentials in our environment through dance. This means to me: a poetic engagement with space, time and matter through (physical) movements and words.

This text is an invitation to embrace verbal language and writing as a trace in relation to movement and dance. Writing, in this sense, can never reveal the whole experience but can give some indications for oneself to remember, and for others to continue their own interpretation. I introduce different ways of writing in the following. They are a good entrance to document your movement research and can enhance your teaching.

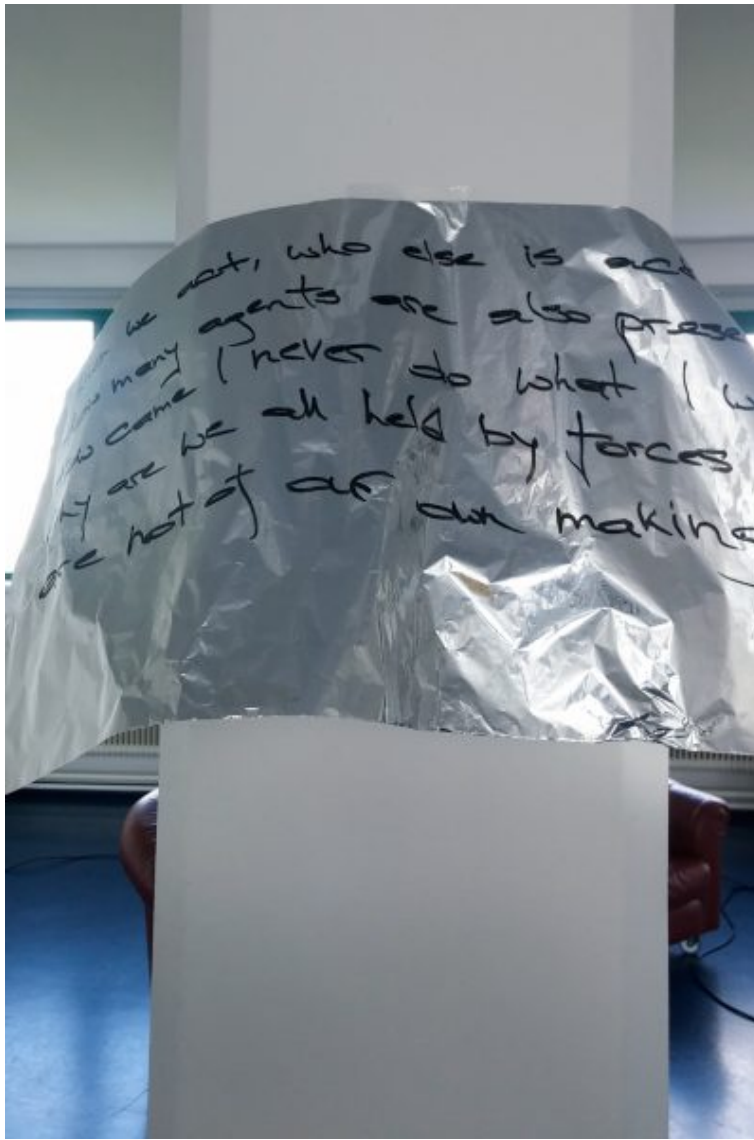
I am drawn to the intelligence of the body. Words, especially ‘the written’, sometimes seem like a confusing locking up of a flow of sensations and experiences: incomplete, far less complex, and much too simple to transfer the experience of movement. It is as if one is entering another language, a different field of language, which one can only share with the people who also engage in this activity. One becomes strangely speechless. I would say this not-knowing, this being a stranger towards one’s own language, towards what a words is can be a wonderful, playful, and surprising approach to language: we don’t know the word, the word does not know us. We meet, explore, and get to know the word and thereby ourselves. Thought-words are different than spoken-words, which are different when becoming written-words. The spoken word might become a song. The written word might become a scribble.

In this sense, this text promotes an engagement with our sensorial perception beyond a thinking which devices the world just in oppositions, such as logos/pathos, signifier/signified, soul/body, self/other, good/evil, culture/nature, man/woman, understanding/perception, inside/outside, memory/oblivion, speech/writing, day/night, etc. Going beyond these binary conceptions makes the world richer, and makes life and dancing much more fun.

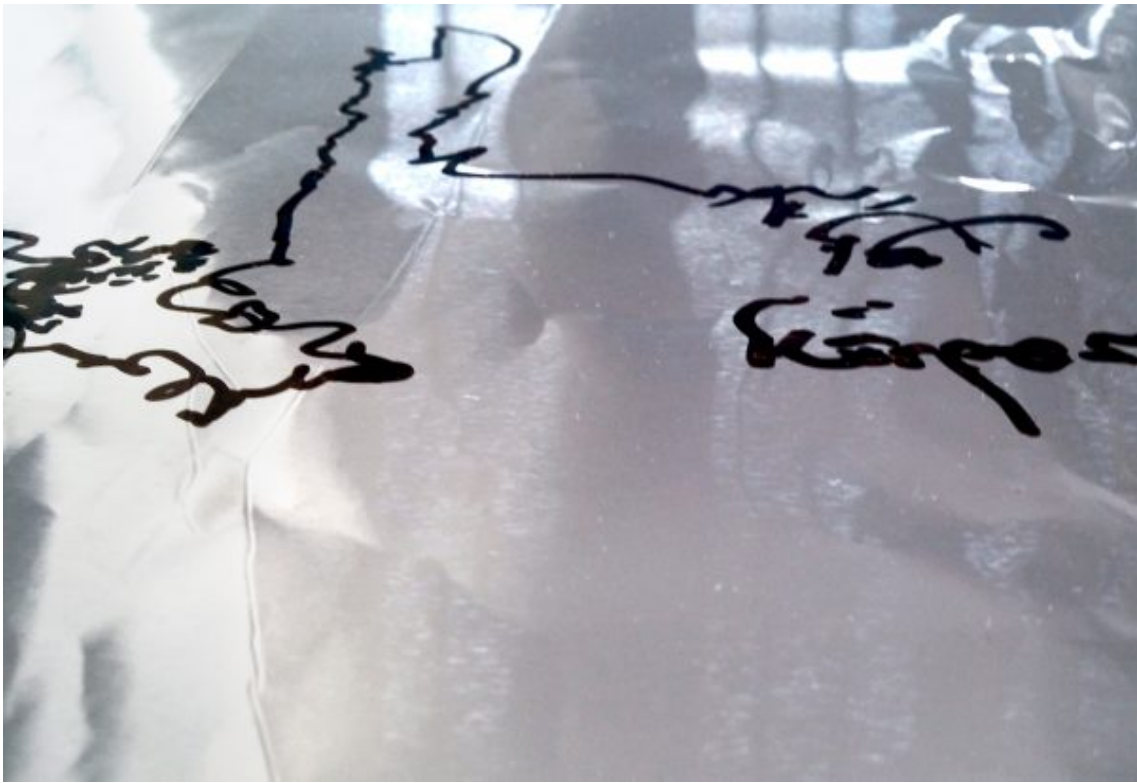
*The process of writing is to circulate, to caress, to paint all the phenomena before they are precipitated.*

— Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints Memory and life writing*, 1997.

To tune into a different perception in relation to language, you can sometimes listen to someone speaking and neglect the meaning and mainly concentrate on the sound of the words, the rhythms, and silences. As if you are foreign to the language, just ‘understand’ by listening to the intensities. In this way language and speech become a song, become unspoken in a way, become murmurs, whispers, melody, and noise. This will for sure influence your writing.



— *Verschreibungen – Forces*. Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel*, 2016, produced by Im flieger. Photo: S. Holzer



— *Verschreibungen – Körper*. Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel*, 2016, produced by Im flieger. Photo: S. Holzer



— *Never ending fire opening up unfinished*. Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel*, 2016, produced by Im flieger. Photo: A. Lenz



# Writing Experiments

Engaging in experimental ways of writing and words, and language-games enriched my artistic practice very much: it advanced my thinking, writing, and talking about my own work and about the works of others, and it very much extend my way of listening.

## WARM UP – LISTING

In order to get a clearer notion of what you like and what nurtures and inspires you in terms of ways of using language, you can make some **quick lists** of authors, choreographers, artists, philosophers you really like and who inspire you.

1. Just take 5 minutes for each list. Do it whenever you have time. Close your eyes for some moments, take some sparkling breaths to connect and make a list. The lists can be completed and changed at anytime.
2. Put them somewhere you see them. The spirit of the people and their works will be closer to you.
3. Visit an example of a list here if you wish.<sup>1</sup>

## INSTRUCTIONS AND SCORES – TASK OR FACT ORIENTED WRITING

If you want to document in a **fact oriented way**, you can think about the things **you do in class as tasks**. Tasks are about the basic principles of actions, of what you mediate, of an exercise or an assignment. Noting down tasks is a way to formulate some principles about your work without getting too much into detailed descriptions. **A task oriented** documentation is about formulating basics: What is the use of space, the positions? How do you travel through space, in what kind of patterns (high, low, ...)? What is the rhythm? Do

you want to focus on different body-parts? Why do you choose certain exercises? etc. Tasks can be noted down – short and witty. They are invitations to yourself and others to interpret, find variations, and build up continuity. If you start writing about your class that way, you soon will find out **what is important for you**: the shape, the sensations, the playfulness, etc. With this in mind your tasks and descriptions will probably start to change as well. Maybe after awhile you will get interested in **the art of creating scores**.<sup>2</sup>

## AUTOMATIC WRITING – WAYS OF EXPLORING THE MOVEMENTS OF THE MIND

There are many ways of *automatic writing*. As it is a method to engage with your subliminal perceptions, it is often related to therapeutic or spiritual work. However *automatic writing* as a way to approach verbal language, not just from the logos for cognitive information transfer, has also a long tradition within the arts. For *Dadaists, Surrealists, Beatniks, Fluxus and Conceptual Art*<sup>3</sup> it was a widespread method to find and express different realities, and engage to language and writing in an experimental mode. Also within philosophy the *Écriture Féminine*<sup>4</sup> was urging and claiming the reality of the female body into the grammar and syntax of language. So, be sure you are in **good company in trying to trick the logocentric mind**. With this kind of approach the pen/your fingers are not only guided by your knowledge of how and what to write, but also opens up to the flow: a line, the paper or screen as space and your fingers tipping as rhythms.

1. **Decide on a medium.** Do you want to use a **computer** for your automatic writing session or do you want to use **pen/pencil and paper**? This is completely based on your personal preference. (If you are not skilled in typing on a computer without looking at the keyboard, it is probably

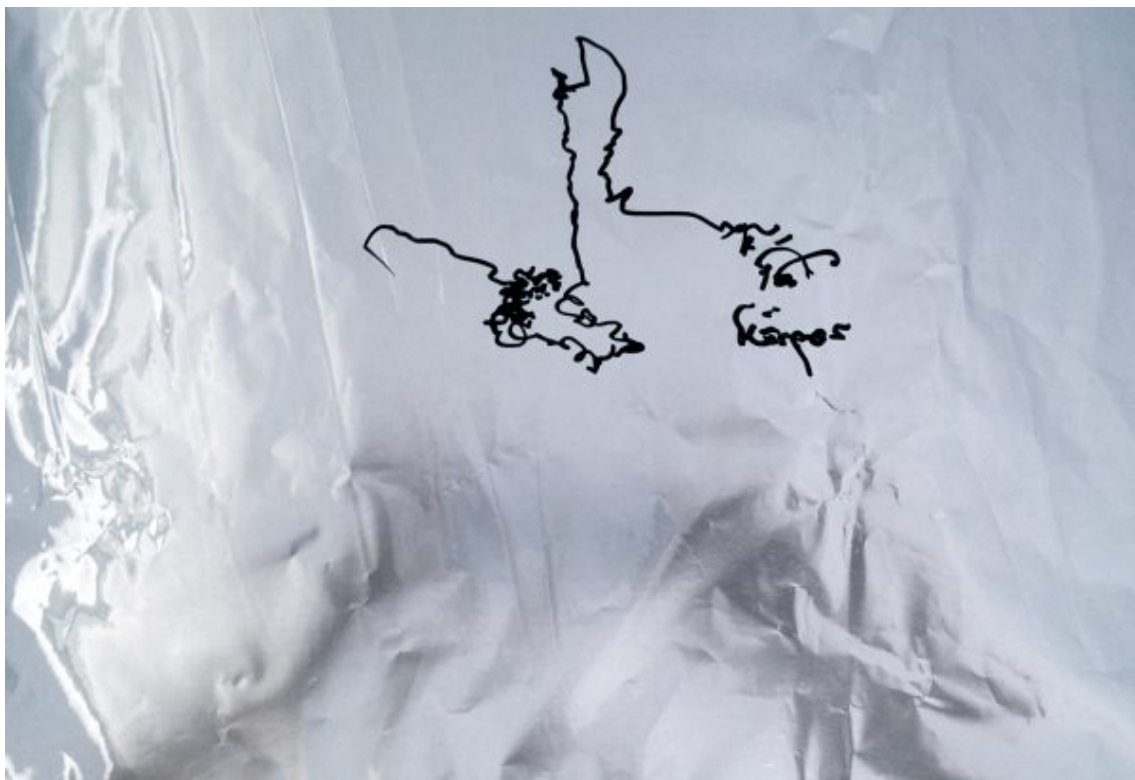
better to use pen and paper, so that you will not have to concentrate on the act of typing.) See what you like best.

2. Think about the class or session you want to write about. If you want, you can give yourself an additional question or topic, which is on your mind concerning the class. Take a few deep breaths and clear your mind before you start writing. **Don't underestimate how you start**, since it will influence your writing session. **Don't judge!** The process of writing starts with whatever comes into your mind as it comes into your mind. **Don't mind spelling, grammar, and the structures of the sentences.** Also, if other things are more prominent than the class you want to document: **Don't worry! Be playful!** If you loose track from the class, trust that you will come back to it. Let your hands do what they want. If you write with pen and paper, try to let the pen on the paper. You might want to play with the pressure of the pen touching the paper; you might turn the paper around, might move around your pen if you are not writing words. Give yourself time so that your tactile and kinesthetic senses can connect with the cognitive awareness, watch, read, and accompany your own impulses unfolding. **Don't judge! Develop a flow. Don't interrupt to think what you should write.**

3. Set a timer. 10 minutes should be a good starting point. Setting a timer relieves you from the questions: did I write enough, long enough? Am I finished? Also from the statement: I don't have enough time to do this now. If you want to write for longer, then do so. If you set your timer for 10 minutes, but you feel like you have more to write, keep going until you feel that you've gotten it all out. **But don't stop writing until the 10 minutes are up**, even if you feel that you have run out of things to write. Keep trying, and eventually your hand will write something. You can repeat thoughts, letters, signs, dots, anything. Just don't stay away from the page or the keyboard for too long.

4. Read what you have written. Now you should go back to what you have written and read through it. **Again don't judge yourself.** Stay open, friendly, and curious towards your own exposure. This is not about doing something right! What you have written may not make any sense at all, and it definitely needs not to be pretty.
5. Highlight or circle anything that is interesting to you. As you are reading you may find things that you find particularly interesting. You should make note of these by underlining them or encircling them to come back to.

These materials can already become your **documentation** made of special unexpected imprints. You can use them to extend your text and let your next class and dance be inspired by.<sup>5</sup>



— *Verschreibungen – Körper*. Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel* 2016, produced by Im flieger. Photo: S. Holzer



Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard.  
— Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints Memory and life writing*, 1997.

## CLUSTERING – FOR TRAVELLING ASSOCIATION CHAINS

*Clustering* is a method developed by Gabriele L.Rico, a creative writing teacher. In this way, chains and clusters of associations are created starting from a central term. It is a way of brainstorming. *Clustering* assumes that creativity happens through the concurrence of the visual and conceptual way of thinking: the left side of the brain is for conceptual and the right side for the visual processing of the mind. In this way of writing both sides of the brain are used. As Gabriele L.Rico put it herself, “A non-linear brainstorming process, clustering makes the design of the mind’s interior, invisible associations visible on a page. Clustering becomes a **self-organizing process** as words and phrases are spilled onto the page around a center. The mind begins to see pattern and meaning, and the writing flows naturally into a vignette.”<sup>6</sup>

1. Cluster-core: Start with a single sentence, phrase, or some notes. Put it in the middle of a paper and encircled it.
2. Associate from there and **continue associating**. Write down where you want on the paper. Every association is encircled again. **Every association is valuable, don’t censure!** If you feel you loose track, just look at your core association and wait to welcome a new one. When you feel you ended associating, make a break. Look back at your paper and start making connections between the things you have written by connecting them through lines and creating association chains.
3. You created a web of trial. By looking at your clusters,

you get a notion and a glimpse of a text to be. You will feel the impulse to write clearly – if you do, just set out to write. You will see that your mind is more open, and different connections will occur and inform you.

This method can help you to decide, intuitively and therefore wisely, what you need to document.



— Writing. Photo: S. Holzer

## FOUR COLUMN METHOD – TRACE THE FREE FLOWS AND JUMPS OF THE MIND WITHIN A STRUCTURE

This is a method inspired by Sigmund Freud's noting down and analyzing his own dreams. The suggestion here is to use 4 columns, but you can add or reduce the number, as you need. The *Four Column Method* is enhancing the creative process and documenting it at the same time. It opens up to the **free flow of the mind** and offers, at the same time, a **structure**. It is a good method **for preparing a class** or getting clarity about the research you are setting out for.

1. **Column:** For all your **spontaneous thoughts and impressions** which are there and are not related to your documentation.

- Start with: How do I feel now? How am I today: physically, emotionally, mentally? (I feel excited. It is hard concentrated. I am tired...)
- What is the **specific project** of this documentation? (I want to think about the build up of the class. I want to continue the way I decided to document. I want to focus on the impressions I have from my students....)
- Do I look forward to do this? Am I stressed? Because...)

2. **Column:** This is the space, where you actually **write what you want to write about**. Do it the way it comes to you right away. It is a raw draft. Corrections and revisions come later. **Don't be too critical and don't interrupt the flow!**

3. **Column:** Here you note down **comments and remarks which pop-up** in your mind **regarding your writing**. Don't think long, how you could change something, **just note it down**. Often another word or formulation comes up soon as you continue writing because the pre-consciousness is all the time busy with the creative process.

4. **Column:** This is the so-called *free-market*. You can note down all ideas of classes, workshops, choreographies, performance, or what you would like to cook, or whom you have to meet. You will decide later if these thoughts and ideas are valuable and in which sense you want to realize them or not.

In order to create your documentation, you can draw from all the columns for your writing. You will see it gets easier with time and you intuitively and quickly will know what you can use and what not. This will support the flow of your writing. It can also be inspiring and

supportive to look back at the process of writing or revisit thoughts and ideas which did not find an entrance into this specific text you wanted to write, but maybe settled in a different text during your teaching, or supported your research.



— *Never ending fire opening up unfinished*. Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel* 2016, produced by Im flieger. Photo: Jack Hauser

## MIND MAP – CONSTRUCTING AND REPRESENTING THE MOVEMENT OF THE MIND

The term *Mind Map* was first popularized by British popular psychology author Tony Buza. However the use of diagrams that visually **map** information using branching and radial maps traces back centuries. These pictorial methods record knowledge and model systems, and have a long history in learning, brainstorming, memory, visual thinking, and problem solving by educators, engineers, psychologists, and others.<sup>7</sup> The method to develop a *Carte de Tendre*, for example, was a map developed in the salons of the 17th century. It was a collective social practice done mainly by women and drawn by many hands. It was a mapping

considering the imaginary land called Tender, guided by emotions and sensations. From a later feminist perspective it was a social-political trajectory where the personal become public and therefore political.

1. **Start in the center of a blank page** turned sideways. The horizontal format opens to a horizontal way of thinking.
2. **Use an image or picture for your central idea**, if possible. Use colours throughout. Follow your flow of thoughts and let them spread over the page. Connect them with each other and the image in the center.
3. **Connect the different chains with each other**. Make your branches curved rather than straight-lined.
4. **Give single names** to these branches.

*Mind Maps* are great to collect different materials as documentation and can create inspiring collage-like maps, which can also work as a score in order to develop choreography.<sup>8</sup>

## COLLECTING A5 FILE CARDS – CREATING A FLEXIBLE, DYNAMIC MAP

For documenting your inspirations, thoughts, and experiences in a dance class you can also **use plain A5 file cards**. They easily fit into small pockets and can be carried anywhere. On these file cards you can note down your thoughts, draw, or glue pictures. As this is a method to collect heterogeneous materials, in terms of thought, and also in terms of paper: printed, handwritten, photo, drawings, etc. it is recommended to us one format to collect them. The great thing with this method is that you can revisit it and rearrange, exchange some cards, continue compiling, start a new map, and you can gather them under a certain theme or subject. You can gather them in a box and arrange them in relation to whatever you are up for creating. You can



place them in the space and play with distances, and even positions if you want. They can be used in a class and/or as document of a class, and lead you into an artistic adventure.<sup>9</sup>



— *Verschreibungen* – *Open Atelier* Artistic Research by S. Holzer in the frame of the project *Stoffwechsel* 2016, produced by Im flieger. Photo: J. Hauser

1. If you'd like to print this list you can find a copy of it in the following link:  
<http://www.idocde.net/idos/1785>
2. See On Scores by Sabina Holzer & Defne Erdur.
3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrealist\\_techniques](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrealist_techniques) (01.02.2017).
4. *Écriture Féminine* translates from the French as *feminine writing*, though it is often translated as *women's writing*. The theory, which unpacks the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body, and female difference in language and text, is a strain of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the early 1970s through the work of theorists Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Chantal Chawaf, Catherine Clément, Julia Kristeva... to mention a few. It has subsequently been extended by other writers. For example psychoanalytic theorist and painter Bracha Ettinger emerged in this field in the early 1990s. *Écriture féminine* as a theory foregrounds the importance of language for the psychic understanding of self. The theory draws on the foundational work in psychoanalysis about the way that humans come to understand their social roles. In doing so, it goes on to expound how women, who may be positioned as 'other' in a masculine symbolic order, can reaffirm their understanding of the world through engaging with their own outsidership.
5. On Scratching the Script, you can find a suggestion of looping, writing and dancing.
6. <http://www.gabrielero.com/> (05.01.2017), and further reading: Gabriele, L. Rico (1984). *Garantiert schreiben lernen*. Berlin: Rowohlt.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartography> (05.01.2017).
8. Here you can find some examples of using Mind Maps to develop dances: 'Basic Income Dance' by Sabina Holzer: <http://www.idocde.net/idos/1701> (01.03.2017). 'Steps' & 'Hands' by Harika Onur mentioned in Defne Erdur's article Hunting, Gathering, Cultivating.
9. The documentation of the Project *Die Unbändigen*, which was developed using A5 files can be reached from the following link: [http://www.cattravelsnotalone.at/DU\\_Meetings.html](http://www.cattravelsnotalone.at/DU_Meetings.html) (17.01.2017).