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Abstract

Hailing love back into view: Working towards a feminist materialist theory-practice of entangled aimance in pandemic times

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This chapter attempts to hail love back into view in pandemic times. In searching for how love appears and what love can do, it asks how enactments of love in learning and teaching, in our work as journal editors, and in our writing collaborations, might work as a potentially hope-full feminist materialist response to the desperate and damaging times we currently find ourselves in. Grounded in an acknowledgement of interspecies relationality, in an affirmative ethical commitment to *zoe* (Braidotti, 2013), and in an attentiveness to the mundane matterings of everyday life (Stewart, 2007), this chapter proposes love as a form of entangled aimance. In this, it brings together work by Barad (2007) on entanglement, and Zembylas (2017) on aimance to advance a line of feminist materialist and posthumanist theory to think and do higher education differently (Gannon et al., 2019; Taylor and Gannon, 2018) and to speak into the separation, solitariness and seclusion that the ongoing time of pandemic has forced on us. We elaborate entangled aimance as a relational condition which offers some resources of hope in a time of destruction, despair, coping and survival, and ponder how entangled aimance may sustain us in our everyday work as academics. The chapter threads personal examples through its theoretical elaboration. In these examples we write from our two different locations – one of us in the UK and one in Australia – to consider how entangled aimance can work as a minor but significant feminist materialist ethico-political practice of hope in utterly changed higher education times.

Hailing love back into view: Working towards a feminist materialist theory-practice of entangled aimance in pandemic times

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Writing our way back in

This chapter began a good while ago in August 2019. Then, we were at the initial ‘is this a good idea and, if so, what shall we do?’ phase. We considered what the chapter would be about, what theoretical framings we would use, what initial readings we would do, how the writing would be shared, and the timescale we would work to. In other words, all the usual planning that attends a new writing project. Back then, our provisional abstract positioned our chapter as a ‘new material feminist response to the prevailing toxicities that constitute contemporary higher education’, in response to which we proposed to develop the theory-practice of ‘loving contamination’ as ‘a relational condition of our posthuman times – times in which we humans are entangled with nonhuman others in histories and presents of destruction, despair, coping and survival, albeit each of us in very different and very specific ways.’ Contamination seemed to us, in our pre-pandemic naivete, to resonate with notions such as institutional toxicity and affect contagion (Gibbs, 2008), that made us want to work it in new directions in coalition and collision with our developing thinking on love and hope – hence ‘loving contamination’. We said we would explore, via narrative vignettes from our two different locations in the UK and Australia, how ‘loving contamination’ appears or informs our pedagogy, praxis and wider lives as academics. Our chapter would encompass our nonhuman-human loves as the things that matter and make life bearable in the toxic times

of contemporary academia, with its prevailing, insistent and damaging regimes of measurement, performance, managerialisms and competition.

Why are we telling you what we were going to do? Well, because looking back *now* (as we write this chapter in September 2020 and, again, *now* as we revise this chapter in March 2021) those early plans seem to be echoes from a distant world. Our intention to think through the toxicities of higher education through the trope of ‘contamination’ is stunningly unworldly. In that pre-pandemic world academia, at least for established scholars like ourselves, ran in mostly familiar grooves, each year more or less similarly patterned by key points in the student-related yearly calendar, or by the ongoing work of research structured by bid deadlines, writing submission points and travel to international conferences. All of these things were, in those famous words of Donald Rumsfeld, known knowns. This was an academic world in which ‘unknowns’ came in the shape of low course numbers, the disappointment of another unsuccessful grant bid, a paper rejection, or a promising collaboration that failed to take off. Then, both ‘knowns’ and ‘unknowns’ were attended by the ongoing anxieties occasioned by too many meetings, were dealt with in the usual stressy rush of having too much to do all the time, and too many places to be. They occurred against the background of a sort of submerged depression arising from working in a culture which values education through a simple set of crude and cruel measurements of student satisfaction, outputs, bid money won and university rankings, rather than through human flourishing and fulfilment, improvement of life chances for disadvantaged groups, or the production of a more activist knowledge which aims to redress the historical wrongs of colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy. Nevertheless: those known knowns were what largely shaped our educational world.

Since then: the Covid-19 pandemic has poleaxed us. It's invisible, silent but lethal spread across the world has revealed how inextricably entwined human (and non-human) populations are and how dark and deep the extent of global inequalities run. The virus pays no heed to geography, nation state or human bodily boundaries: its aim is simply to find an amenable place/body for it to live and grow. The virus itself has no malign intent but its effects on human populations, welfare systems, and educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities) have been devastating as political elites struggle to respond to unprecedented (and how over-used that word has become in such a short time) conditions. Coronavirus has revealed the extent of, and further entrenched, ongoing inequalities: impoverished communities, precarious workers, and those at the sharp end of discrimination on the grounds of age, race, ethnicity, class, sex and disability have suffered disproportionately, and their deaths feature disproportionately in the available figures (e.g. Bhopal & Bhopal, 2020; Pilkington, 2020).

In most countries in the affluent West, the pandemic has shown how years of politically-imposed austerity have compromised health sectors' abilities to cope and pushed formal care infrastructures to the brink of collapse. For impoverished communities with fragile health systems, Covid-19 presents an 'invisible catastrophe' (Dhillon, 2020) in which the deaths of those in vulnerable populations exposed the need/ desire to 'keep capitalism moving' at all costs as a political calculation. Covid-19 brought to the surface at a global *and* most intimate level (in the death of loved ones) the 'perfect storm' of callous and uncaring socio-economic entanglements which no one did but everyone should have seen coming. As Mitropoulos (2020: 3) notes 'both responses to the pandemic and the conditions of human health have been centuries in the making'. Central to this has been the privatisation of risk which has made possible the displacement from government onto individuals the responsibility for

exposure and death. This shift in turn has been made possible by deeply entrenched neoliberal formations underpinned by the financialization of human health, policies of austerity, insidious and growing authoritarianism, and a re-emergence of proto-eugenicist ideas which shape political elites' views about matters of survival and care – all of which have made it possible to promote views about 'underproductive' populations, whose economic 'inactivity' render them 'surplus' (Mitropoulos, 2020). Since January 2021, with the scientific discovery and pharmaceutical production of a number of vaccines for Covid-19, we have seen the global development of the new phenomenon of vaccine apartheid as a handful of high-income countries (the USA, the UK, the European Union, Canada, Switzerland, Japan and Brazil) commandeer vast amounts of vaccine supplies, thus increasing the risk for populations in low-income countries, particularly India and Africa. Along with the economics of big pharma, vaccine apartheid is also enabled by little known intellectual property treaty rights – the Trips agreement – a waiver of which has explicitly been opposed by high-income countries thus exacerbating death tolls in those other countries (Kashyap and Wurth, 2021).

The higher education institutions we both work in are entangled within these broader socio-economic global pandemic conditions. Our respective universities have acted, on government guidance, to protect staff and students by moving teaching online, closing campuses, and disseminating technological resources to support extended periods of home work. At the same time, HE institutions across the world acted quite swiftly to remove those who they initially deemed to be 'surplus' bodies, to use Mitropoulos's phrase: casual staff, adjunct staff, temporary staff, graduate teaching assistants. Their contracts were terminated or not renewed as soon as they legally could be. Government or institution-imposed furloughs enabled administrative staff to be at first sequestered and then re-deployed. As time went on,

staff who left for whatever reason were not replaced. These ‘first wave’ institutional responses were then followed (again, quite quickly) with courses closures, department closures, and voluntary redundancy or early retirement schemes. Then (not long after) come the bigger hits: compulsory redundancy and institutional restructuring in the wake of a collapse in ‘international’ student numbers which rendered ‘elite’ universities just as vulnerable as widening participation universities.

At the end of September 2020, at Carol’s university in the UK, the new academic year began and, within a week as Covid-19 spread, students were confined to halls of residence, isolated in their homes, banned from socialising in pubs and threatened with expulsion from their course if they did, compelled by law to download the track and trace app. Government politicians promoted a discourse of ‘irresponsible young people’, part of a wider political blaming of the general public for ‘not following guidelines’, albeit those guidelines were poorly defined and badly communicated by a Prime Minister forced to apologise for his inability to articulate his own government’s Covid-19 restrictions at a press conference on 29 September. The positioning of students and the public as to blame for Covid-19 spikes was reiterated by government and in the popular media as a means to draw fire from the lamentable government response to controlling the spread of the virus while concertedly outsourcing multi-million pound Covid-19 contracts to the private sector without any usual tendering process. As the pandemic intensified and the academic year progressed, the government did a *volte-face* realising belatedly, in the face of widespread evidence, that the vast majority of the population were assiduously following Covid-19 social distancing rules. Throughout the academic year, students were taught in hybrid modes before teaching moved online again across the UK. A priority group vaccination approach based on age and medical

vulnerabilities is introduced. Students are a low priority group as the virus continues and its pace begins to diminish.

In Australia, Covid-19 has had a very different trajectory than the UK and most other countries of the world. It struck early at the beginning of the academic year, and at Susanne's university in NSW, the Vice-Chancellor ordered all teaching and learning to flip to online delivery in the third week of the academic year. Campuses were vacant for most of the year with restrictions justified through the Orwellian language of 'Covid-safe' and 'Covid-normal'. A year later, the VC mandates return to campus, surveils attendance via QR code check-in, and demands notices on office doors declaring our availability – a bizarre contrast to other policies that have eradicated academic offices in favour of hot-desk shared spaces. Most academics and many students remain reluctant to return. All lectures are still online. To our south, by late October Melbourne had experienced the longest continuous lockdown in the world, and is now awash with festivals and events. Government subsidies for lost wages, rental assistance and other social supports were carefully designed to exclude international students, many thousands of whom have been stranded in this extraordinary new phase of Australian isolationism, while many Australians overseas are still unable to return. There is an acute awareness of looking out from a remote island bunker (or fortress) to the rest of the world, with which we are, nevertheless, inextricably entangled.

During this period a new and utterly tragic way of seeing how the world is connected is visualised in gruesome daily graphs and charts from Johns Hopkins University which detail, case on case, the Covid-19 death toll, its rises, falls, and rises again, as it spreads over the globe unevenly but inexorably. The effect of the virus materialises in faster or slower national responses which bring total or partial lockdowns, physical/social distancing, hand sanitising,

face-coverings, arrows and 'stand here' spots on supermarket floors, new regional delineations of safety and zones of fear. Initial panic buying, the collapse in food bank donations, and disruption to production and supply chains, at least in rich countries, are just some manifestations of how the politics and geographies of economic privilege are differentially distributed. In all of this, we come to know that a new ontology of human suffering, trauma and death expands and exposes us in new ways to life's fragilities. As we review this chapter in April 2021, Italy, Germany and France brace for a third wave, and India suffers a second wave which spreads from cities and devastates small towns. Every death an intimate instantiation of an ongoing global tragedy.

As first wave pandemic shifts into second wave we exchange emails. Susanne writes of:

Slogging away in our bunkers ... a mandatory week of university shutdown at the end of September (to force us to use accrued leave), and also sliding scale of unpaid days spread across the rest of the year ... Melbourne is disastrous, in Stage 4 lockdown, and rest of Vic is still in Stage 3 with minimal movement and borders all closed. So we soldier on with family Sunday afternoon zooms, from all our dispersed locations (25 August, 2020).

Carol writes back:

The UK is 'open for business' and Covid-19 is still on the run around ... The deaths in care homes have been astronomical ... I'm finding it hard to think myself into the love chapter, no inspiration yet (27 August, 2020).

Susanne emails back:

I feel like we were so naïve a year ago! There is a touch of Pollyanna in both us perhaps – I don't mean this in a bad way! Whatever we write will need to be more complicated and ambivalent than it would have been that's for sure (27 August 2020).

She offers the following thought as consolation: 'We are not compelled to even do it if it comes to seem impossible', and the following as encouragement 'though ... it would be a shame to withdraw'. Carol agrees. In such dark times, writing together is itself an act of feminist solidarity in seeing how we might hail love back into view in pandemic times.

So, we ponder: where and how does love 'appear' in these pandemic times? What can love 'be' and 'do' in feminist materialist frame? And how does love refracted through the deathly glare of the pandemic connect to 'feminist hope'? What might this have to do with higher education? We return to our chapter abstract to see what we can salvage. What remains of our initial ideas that we can we pick up, warm in our hands and nurture again to bring this chapter to life?

Hailing love back into view: Speaking with ghosts, the capacity for response-ability, and entangled aimance

The impetus for writing the chapter came from Deborah Bird Rose's book *Wild Dog Dreaming*. I (Carol) look at it now (4 October 2020). The dingo on the cover looks right back at me. It is sitting behind barbed wire, its ears pricked, its brow furrowed, its muzzle soft, its eyes filled with a glaring and hurt intensity (Figure 1). Its death, and the many millions of

other dingo deaths, were caused by British-settlers and then Australian colonialist hunters staking out land that was not theirs and in doing so destroying species and appropriating country. That dingo's haunting presence brings Karen Barad's (2010) words to mind. Hauntings, she says are material, they are not merely subjective memories of a past that has gone. She says there can be 'no erasure' of past violences. Rather, it is only by 'facing the ghosts, in their materiality and acknowledging injustice' without any empty promises of repair or making amends that we may hear what their 'speaking silence' tells us (Barad, 2010: 264).

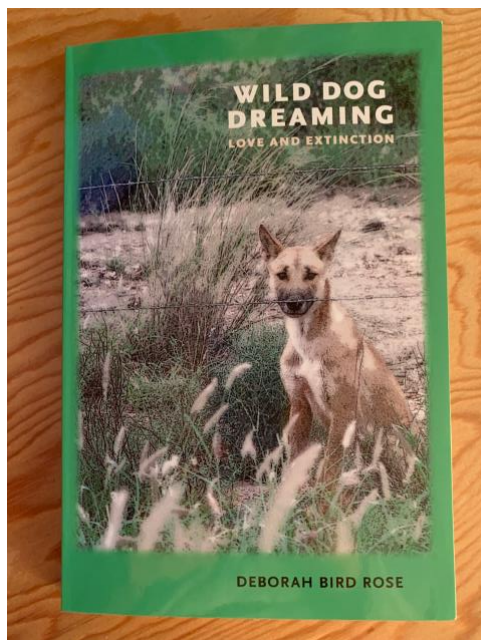


Figure 1: Book cover (Photo: C. Taylor)

Speaking wordlessly with this dingo pushes us to make a move – to move back into and take forward the themes that underpin this chapter – love, loss and loneliness – but now woven into, shaped by, and refracted through the hauntings and the ghosts produced by pandemic times. Susanne's ghosts precede the pandemic, with the catastrophic loss of native species and habitats in wildfires that are estimated to have directly killed one billion animals. These

ghosts attend our new knowings, feelings and sensings. These ghosts greatly intensify the need to think about how a feminist posthuman ethic that centres love as enactment can work to contest current loss and ongoing loneliness. Thinking-with dingo, thinking-with ghosts, thinking-with feminist materialism, thinking through the pandemic, attaches a new urgency to the mundane ways we might find to sustain ourselves.

But speaking with ghosts is not just an act of remembrance; it is an act of responsibility and an acceptance that ‘we’ – that is, ‘you’ and ‘I’ here and now – are entangled with/in histories that are present materially and affectively, which are written on bodies, into psyches, and enacted through relations. Barad says: To ‘speak with ghosts’ is about accepting responsibility for what we inherit from the past and the future; it is a practice which might enable us to be more responsive, to widen our capacity to respond to the entangled relationalities of the present. Zembylas (2017) suggests that love is key to enabling us to widen our capacities to respond. He considers how love, conceptualised as a mode of ‘aimance’, brings together friendship (*philia*) and love (*eros*) as an ethico-political practice in education. Zembylas suggests that aimance encourages educators to:

Invent pedagogies that are “reparative” (Sedgwick, 2003): that is, pedagogies that attempt to address wound, injury, and suffering within a frame that takes into consideration histories of violence, oppression, and social injustice without falling into the trap of sentimentality (Zembylas, 2017: 24).

Furthermore, Zembylas’s argument for going back to the philosophical origins of aimance and its emergence ‘at the interface of Islamic and Western thought’ (see El Khayat & Khatibi, 2010) opens an orientation for love as the generation of affective solidarity towards

and with ‘otherness’. We take this movement to affective solidarity up as a practice of working, tentatively and hesitantly, towards opening spaces for more productive ways of being and doing in higher education in pandemic times and, more broadly, for ways of living better together. Such doing is risky – and also necessary. Barad suggests that being responsive and response-able entails putting oneself at risk; it is, she says, ‘to risk oneself (which is never one or self), to open oneself up to indeterminacy in moving towards what is to come. ... Only in this ongoing responsibility to the entangled other ... is there the possibility of justice-to-come (Barad, 2010: 264).

We want to take Zembylas’s concept of aimance and develop it a little further by bringing it into connection with feminist materialist and posthumanist thinking. Thus, we hail into becoming the conceptualisation of ‘entangled aimance’. In this, entanglement has a specific meaning. In Barad’s material feminist lexicon, entanglement is a notion derived from quantum physics which presupposes a material connectivity between objects, even those separated by large distances, such that an action performed on one affects the other. In an ethical sense, entanglement entails ‘relations of obligation ... indebtedness ... a diffraction/dispersion of identity ... noncoincidence with oneself’ (Barad, 2010: 265). As Barad puts it in her essay ‘On touching’, this is an ‘infinite alterity’ where ‘the stranger [is] threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being’ (2012: 217). Entanglement has been taken up in education and social science as posing a useful way of thinking about connectivity and boundaries. If, in nature and reality, everything is already connected, then nothing is ‘detachable’ or ‘separate’ or, indeed, separable. Where boundaries appear, those boundaries are clearly a human invention and have been instituted to establish hierarchies, mark out divisions, and propose where the perimeters and edges of something lie. In education, the most obvious example would be the work that disciplines do: not only does

Physics have a clearly demarcated subject-matter, for example, but in a hierarchy of subjects, it is usually placed near the 'top'. But the positioning of Physics in this way speaks of culturally-sanctioned boundaries in knowledge production. In that sense, 'Physics' is a result of Western, patriarchal Enlightenment legacies which accord privilege to scientific rationality as the 'best' mode of thinking. One could, conversely, position Indigenous thinking at the 'top' of an entirely different cultural imaginary that rests on interdisciplinarity for its privileging of relation with land, sensory and intuitional thinking, the importance of ancestral memory, and the interdependence of human and non-human life. This imaginary entails very different ethical parameters and intellectual genealogies.

Thinking aimance as a mode of entangled love which figures reality as a time-space of connectivity, then, leads into the need to accept that human and non-human bodies are entangled and potentially co-constitutive equal partners in knowledge-making; that learning and teaching are dispersed activities that bring in affect, sensoriality and memory along with cognition; that academic life happens relationally and is instantiated in events, happenings and doings outside the boundaries of the 'paid job' and which stretches 'institutional work' in multiple directions; and that writing projects and collaborations bring into being modes of *jouissance* that escape the confines of technocracy that performative regimes in competitive institutions normally require. Specifically, conceptualising entangled aimance with feminist materialism helps attend to how power matters and is materialised in everyday acts and doings, and to how power might be undone through material enactments attuned to combatting gender inequality, discrimination, and violence in education.

Love in higher education when conceptualised as entangled aimance also enables us to look for, and at, the materialities of pedagogy, work and writing that often go unnoticed; it helps

us reveal the ‘contact zones where ... flows of power take place’ (Stewart, 2007: 3). This is because it hones in on the mundane matterings, the ordinary occurrences, the everyday happenings within which the liveliness of matter appears and through which matter makes its importance and its demands apparent. In this our intervention is of a piece with earlier feminist political accounts that centre and celebrate the importance of the mundane, the everyday and the unremarkable. Feminist materialism invites attention to matter as ‘lively’ (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Bennett, 2010; Coole and Frost, 2010) and to the fact that ‘matter and meaning are not separate entities’ (Barad, 2007: 3). It requires us to develop practices of ‘thinking-with’ theories, objects, affects, to trace their co-implications. Take the mask for example, whose lively materiality is now a daily event for most of us. Along with masks, materiality extends to eyes and the tiny muscles of the forehead and their expressive interactivity; to touch, its absence and its gestural substitutions; to the matter of the virus itself, the potent droplets that the masks purport to curtail, depicted in animated public health communications; and to continuously reconfigured and often contradictory dictums and imperatives from various authorities. The cloth mask or disposable mask carry traces and histories of production – in factories, ateliers or on kitchen tables – and distribution – through pharmacies, charities or online Etsy stores which entangle us at global-local levels and which produce the litter of discarded disposables in gutters, waterways and street corners. These human-non-human matterings are new trajectories of waste and damage which coalesce into the ongoing entanglements with which we deal daily both in our teaching, our feminist materialist ethics of aimance, and in our worldly practices.

In what follows, we work with a feminist materialist conceptualisation of ‘entangled aimance’ as an analytical and practical tool to support our ponderings on how to enact love as feminist praxis for hope in higher education pandemic times. We ponder the mundane modes

of ongoingness that have come to matter (more) to us in the times of separation, solitariness and seclusion that the pandemic has forced on us. The next three sections consider, respectively, our teaching and learning, our journal editorship, and then our writing collaborations, and the ways in which a feminist posthuman love as entangled aimance can orient us toward sustaining some-thing(s) that matter in these disjointed times. Our ponderings are suffused by Deborah Bird Rose's (2011: 2) comment that 'love is awesome ... but equally, love is complex and full of problems and possibilities'. We wonder how might a loving contamination help us think through problems and point us towards new possibilities? Our ponderings are unfinished and unfinishable; they are a hesitant and faltering searching on potential ways to rethink subjectivity, power, relationality and ethics in contemporary times.

Teaching and learning

Covid-19 has radically reconfigured the ways that universities organise teaching and learning. This is the most obvious thing to say about our Covid year, but it may not be the most interesting. The mattering of screens, technologies, wifi networks, proprietorial software, social media platforms, configurations of space, time and bodies all require analytical attention. Online platforms have produced perverse and productive disruptions. Visibility and privacy are upended, hierarchies collapse. Students zoom in to tutorials from cars, from bed, from video-muted black squares as well as from staged tidy study spaces. Imported backgrounds reveal longings for holiday elsewhere, and happy other times. Glimpses of cats, children, domestic spaces, cake and coffee cups reframe lecturers and students, reconfiguring affect, materiality and empathy beyond what is possible in conventional spaces.

Pedagogical work inspired by feminist materialisms has tended to emphasise embodied teaching and learning encounters in the immediate spaces of classrooms. Taylor and Ivinson (2013: 668) note that:

While the student enters the classroom as a classed, gendered and ethnic being, she or he also enters as a being who breathes in air, air that circulates through the air conditioning system, that whistles in through a cracked window pane, that carries the smell of freshly cut grass, that was part of the storm that broke the tree in the playground last week, etc. All teachers know that the bodies that enter the classroom after a wet and windy break time need to be managed in a different way to those that arrive straight from the history lesson. They know that bodies with asthma have to be given special provision to use inhalers. And they know that children who arrive with no overcoat and leaky shoes attend to the maths equation in different ways to those who are well heeled. The forces and powers at work in classrooms operate through the bodies and things of the classroom, its space and its many materialities.

This point is underscored by Hinton and Treusch who consider ‘relations of knowing, being and responsibility enacted in the classroom’ (2015:1) through practices including group work and collective analysis that entail ‘co-productive engagement of bodies, spaces and wor(l)ds’ (2015:4).

But when the ‘classroom’ materialises, and pedagogic encounters happen, in the various somewheres (bedrooms, dining rooms, study corners in living rooms etc) of virtual spaces, then a feminist materialist pedagogy which disrupts classroom-based notions of reflexivity,

experience, identity and agency and which explodes binaries of teacher/ student, theory/practice, space/knowledge, human/nature becomes useful to think with – because a material feminist pedagogy instead emphasises entanglement all the way down. Braidotti's (2018: xiv) minimal requirements for 'socially just posthuman pedagogy' are that it must be 'consistently posthuman at both analytical and normative levels' and that it should 'foreground the socio-political aspects of the posthuman predicament'. Her affirmative ethics demands 'an increased dose of collectively drawn creativity' and 'transversal subject assemblages' (xvii). Stengers (2018: 82) advocates a practice of slow learning – of learning 'with others, from others, thanks to others what a life worth living demands, and the knowledges that are worth being cultivated' – and situates relationality and response-ability beyond capture by the violences of capital and dominant science as central to this learning.

In this year of offsite teaching and learning, students have entered our homes and they have allowed us into theirs at all sorts of times and under all sorts of conditions. We have cried and laughed and felt together, as we have sought ways to best support each other and to form sustaining communities. Susanne has worked with schoolteachers who have flipped all their teaching online while managing the welfare and access to resources for children and their families, and with social ecology students designing projects that can reengage young people with their environments in this context of catastrophic climate change. Carol has worked with teachers in international schools stressed beyond measure at working insane numbers of hours to support their students' learning online. In both locations, our students' own practitioner research – small-scale research projects oriented to career progression objectives and planned under entirely different conditions – gets temporarily shelved or done in frustratingly small bursts of activity at the edges of the weekend.

While our universities have responded by giving blanket extensions for assignments and theses to try to reconcile student stress and assessment imperatives, the need to attend to the material conditions of how learning appears in students' lives, to hear their stories, to listen to what is said and not said, matters now more than ever before, and shapes our everyday efforts of trying to craft modes of ethically affirmative relational learning which moves beyond humanistic conventions of university authorised teaching and learning. Feminist materialist pedagogies entail the cultivation of attentiveness and responsibility, and an acute awareness of co-implication with worlds that are both intimate and extensive. Their practices must be simultaneously humble, halting and concrete (Taylor & Gannon, 2018: 82). As time passes, we continue to teach and we learn with our students: we learn about their lives home-schooling at the dining room table; working on their assignments in exhausting evening sessions when family are in bed. We, like them, spend our days staring at screen for hours on end with aching and unmoving bodies. We as educators co-evolve in relationalities shaped by the new material-virtual conditions borne of the pandemic. While 'outside' of computer screentime, dining rooms and study corners, the cycles of life continue turning and seasons are passing.

As October 2020 comes to an end, outside the walls of my (Susanne's) home, everything is throbbing and thrumming with vivid and deafening life. Just three seasons beyond the devastation of bushfires last summer, cicadas have emerged from under the earth. For seven years, they have dwelt underground, crawling out finally as nymphs who shed their shells and climb on trees, rocks and letterboxes. They are 'notorious singers' (<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/insects/cicadas-superfamily-cicadoidea/>) producing the loudest sound of any insect in the world. There are more than 200 species in



Figure 2: Masked Avenger on letterbox (Photo: S. Gannon)

Australia. Around my home I have seen Green Grocers and Masked Avengers (Figure 2). Their aliveness, their patience, and their persistence are contagious. In my despair at loss of life and of habitat, at the inexorable destruction of ecology, and the absence of political will to respond to climate-change induced disaster, the call of the cicadas teaches me that this is a long game. In a colder country, on the other side of the world, I (Carol) take my dog, Frankie, for his (our) lunchtime walk: feet on the pavement, grass and mud; slow movement treading intimately known ways; his nose in the air inhaling scents or snuffling in the compacted leaves. The air and light encourage us to stretch our bodies in this mundane daily routine that offers a vital refreshment for facing an extended afternoon's screen-time. What the cicada teaches, what a dog teaches, is that learning must be powered by love, joy, humility and the knowledge that we are all in this together, while recognizing that we are differentiated and differently invested in ways that matter intimately and profoundly and that shape our relational bonds. But love as entangled aimance sits within Braidotti's evocation of *zoe* as essential for an affirmative immanent posthuman ethics attentive to 'the non-human, vital force of life ... the dynamic self-organizing structure of life itself' (2013: 60). The pulse of

the cicada's call, the rhythm of walking with a do, match the pulse of blood in our bodies and the rhythm of our heartbeats.

Publishing matters

The two of us writing this chapter are Co-Editors, with two other academics, of the international journal *Gender and Education*. During our tenure, we have aimed to put in place and to sustain a feminist conceptualisation of journal editing. This is both a personal-political commitment and an embodied enactment of feminist praxis in which the work of journal editorship is oriented to changing oppressive publishing structures and enhancing resources of hope for self and others through the publishing work we do and enable. Our feminist work as editors occurs in relation to the complex tensions arising from doing feminist work in a politically-charged publishing terrain still largely geared to White, masculinist modes of academicity and capital, and in which publishing metrics have an overriding influence on external evaluations of one's worth and standing as an academic: how many articles you have published; how many papers in Q1 journals; their citation count; and your H Index. These performative measures have material force in determining career trajectories through promotion and preferment; and they have affective import in shaping our sense of self in a field of power. As feminist editors of a major journal on gender we contest these performatives and, instead, seek to use our feminist commitments to reshaping editing and publishing practices in line with our collective commitment to women's struggle for social justice. These endeavours are ongoing, negotiated again and again in each of the decisions we need to collectively make. Editorial work entails affective labour and through it we have tried to enact a feminist ethics of care within what were already 'toxic times' (Taylor et al., 2021).

The pandemic has intensified the need for a collective material feminist praxis in publishing. There is widespread reporting of cascading negative impacts in what was already a notoriously uneven gendered field and an increased sense of ‘ontological insecurity’ for women in academia (Wright, Haastrup & Guerrina, 2020). Journal submissions authored by women have dropped, patterns of first/middle/last author by gender have not favoured women, and these impacts are exacerbated for early career researchers across all disciplines (Squazzoni, Bravo et al., 2020; Vincent-Lamarre, Sugimoto & Larivière, 2020). As yet, we have not seen submissions by gender change for the journal that we co-edit, and the volume of submissions has continued the increase that we have seen over several years, however we have begun monitoring this data. In academia, as with the virus, it is likely that there will be a long-Covid effect. However, the burden of blind peer review, which has always relied on invisible labour and academic generosity, has been impacted during the pandemic and we are more than ever aware of the imposition that any request to review places on an already stressed and overworked academic. Within our broader journal community, we are aware of stellar women scholars who have lost academic posts within this new pandemic austerity in universities. None of this is a ‘good news’ narrative and sorely constrains the space for love.

Given the intricacies of academic career progression, publication in peer-reviewed quality journals is crucial to secure and retain employment in universities. Prior to the pandemic, our strategies were to enhance the capacity, knowledge, skills, visibility and publishing success of emerging and early career academics. We initiated an Associate Editor role to enable women from different locations and perspectives to participate in the editing collective with the intention that this would influence the directions and inclusiveness of the journal. We developed hands-on workshops for doctoral students and ECRs intended to ‘open the black box’, or reveal the ‘secret business’, of writing, reviewing and publishing in a Q1 academic

journal. We incorporated our own varied and emotive experiences of review and looked at the materials and technologies that form the reviewing apparatus. We have offered these as activity-based workshops at international conferences such as ECER, AERA, Gender and Education, Gender and STEM Education, and in our own universities. During 2020 with the move of all conferences online, we have developed an online version of the workshop and are delivering this with feminist associations and gender networks. We hosted a meeting on feminist academic freedom at the annual *Gender and Education* conference in 2019 and invite members of the journal's editorial board to attend meetings.

At all of these occasions we aim to grow awareness of the journal, to support the development of the feminist scholars that form the expanding journal community, and to try to enact a dynamics of academic care, rigour and reciprocity. These activities are relationally oriented and aim to effect a feminist materialist intervention in a global and competitively-organised capitalist publishing industry largely inimical to collaborative and care-full working practices. These interventions, in particular, aim to extend some mode of entangled aimance towards supporting early career researchers who have expressed their interest in becoming peer reviewers to develop their reviewing skills and who, in pre-pandemic times, we would have met at conferences. Now, in our multiple online lives, we are working through how a feminist materialist 'entangled aimance' might take shape and take hold in new ways in the changing academic territories of pandemic and post-pandemic times.

Writing collaborations

Writing collaborations have always been central to our academic practices. For Susanne, collective and collaborative inquiry have formed her academic subjectivity. Writing has

opened experimental textual spaces for the emergence of the not-yet known, for heterogeneity and difference, for a vitality that comes from thinking beyond the self (Wyatt et al., 2018). Covid-19 has provoked a long collaboration with writing and art-making friends in Australia and UK. The invitation to participate, initiated in England by Jane Speedy and in Australia by Bronwyn Davies, came on March 30 2020 and we are still writing, weekly or fortnightly, within our pods of three in each location, and periodically as six. What we write has no form, or has found its own form, week by week with the shifting affective, material and pandemic conditions in our locations and globally. Art-making practices have also varied in their intensities and resonances. Some of us are professional artists, others are less skilled. We have become a transversal mobile writing assemblage as tropes and images migrate and pick up speed as they move amongst us.

We call these Corona Diaries, or Quarantine Conversations, but lately we have mobilised the figure of the migratory Arctic Tern, a bird known for its long and convoluted route spanning journeys from Wales, UK to New South Wales, Australia. Although the demand to write, to think, to create might sometimes seem a burden – for Susanne it is usually last minute and late at night – and although we have said we don't know what we are doing, the reasons why we are doing whatever this is that we do are that it is essential, it is life-giving. It has made a virtue of and held open a space for the impossibility of knowing what we are in, and what the future might hold; our feelings, fears and furies; for the intimacies of all our everyday. Vulnerability and exposure wend through our work as we are variously positioned by age, geography, health, intimacies as 'at risk' in some ways or other. Sometimes, theory slides in and tangles itself up but the practice has been the thing, each of us writing/ making in response to the infinite capacities and provocations of those others – trees, fathers, dogs, and much more – that have become part of our expanded imaginaries. This is a decentred self-

propelling feminist materialist pedagogical practice, a ‘collectively drawn creativity’ (Braidotti, 2018: xvii).

For Carol, the conditions of possibility for writing during the pandemic have been reconfigured in some unforeseen ways. Writing during the pandemic has gathered new rhythms, intensities and modes of existence. Here are just two. The first concerns emails. When lockdown first hit in March 2020, daily work emails diminished to the almost non-existent for a few weeks: I was getting four or five emails a day whereas in usual times I receive between 40 to 80 emails a day. Writing and responding to emails takes up a significant portion of my day and I am always ‘behind’ with them; the email flow is endemic to the materially embodied sense of being geared to feed ‘the acceleration machine of immediacy’ (Vostal, 2016: 24) that is contemporary higher education. When the first lockdown hit, colleagues were in shock and survival mode; the priority was coping, looking after students, coming to know what was going on and how to ‘deal with’ what it. For the first time in about 20 years, ‘non-essential’ emails took a backseat. I could ‘clear my inbox’ each day. This small but palpable joy went on for about two weeks. Since then email traffic flow has exponentially intensified. The university’s email communication overdrive results in so many institutional emails about campus safety and how to ‘improve your teaching in online learning’ I simply do not have enough time to give them more than a cursory skim before moving them into a new folder called ‘Online – useful?’ The relationship of email volume and stress is well known (Jerejian et al., 2013) and read and unread emails constitute a material haunting of academic bodies caught on the pandemic slipstream of never enough time *and* of having to find time to respond response-ably to students’ and colleagues’ needs and institutional requirements.

The second concerns a writing collaboration that generates ongoing instances of academic flourishing in the pandemic. I work with a group, with whom I have collaborated for a number of years producing research-creation ‘disturbances’ to undo normative modes of conference presentations (Benozzo et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019), and who together are returning these events into a book. We Skype regularly: our writing plans and discussions are an open space, a joy-full online cocoon of fizzing laughter, in which inventive play, creative possibilities and ideas are thrown out like spider webs, threads picked up and passed on in relays and from which new collaborative knottings emerge. We care for and with each other as entangled co-conspirators for whom writing-laughing-creating nourishes aimance. I think of my work with this group as a sort of picnic. I write of it as something done ‘through generosity and hospitality in an informal, more airy openness’. I ponder how our individual ‘edges’ and the limits of the body and boundaries rub off and merge with each other through our work as ongoing collaborators. Our modes of writerly aimance push us toward a *posthuman* sense of self-dispersal. In pandemic times, I find a deep solace in the way that our ‘picnic mode of collaborative endeavor, research and writing practices partake of the generativity of collective enunciation: I am not “I” alone. The pseudo-authority of the individual “self” is shunted to one side; a “we” emerges and takes hold, dissolving the “I” in a postpersonal affective and often joyful embrace, a sort of transversal *jouissance*’ (Taylor, 2020: 2). As the months pass, I work slowly and finish other writing projects, some on time, many late. Academic time-space stretches out and shapes itself to the ebb and flow of the virus: a devastating second wave from November 2020 onwards bring more fear, isolation and despair for colleagues and students alike.

Conclusion

We have re-turned to our original ideas for this chapter, which we warmed in our hands and then opened a space for them in our hearts and heads. This process was not easy: the pandemic has created immeasurable gulfs and losses. It has also brought us sharply into a space of sometimes chaotic distancing which has made us face the question: what matters? in some profound ways. Feminist materialism has helped us answer this question as it shifts the emphasis away from the human and, instead, enables a wider view of how all sorts of nonhuman bodies, objects and things have agency within choreographies of meaning-making. It also draws attention to the necessity for relationalities which enact embodied and embedded 'response-ability' (Barad, 2012: 208). Drawing on feminist materialism to pursue the question of what matters? has enabled us seek traces of what might be called 'love' in our daily practices as academics in higher education systems struggling to cope with what the pandemic has brought. Considering the import of these relational, material traces has led us to formulate 'entangled aimance' as a potent concept that points to an ethic of entangled sustainability that can offer hope and help mitigate some of the toxic effects that are already so pervasive in contemporary higher education. In doing so, we heed and hang onto the words of Fred Moten, who says 'everything I love survives dispossession, and is therefore before dispossession' (cited in Tuck and Yang, 2012:10) and which, as we noted earlier, advocates learning 'with others, from others, thanks to others what a life worth living demands, and the knowledges that are worth being cultivated' (Stengers, 2018: 82).

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