

## From *What Is* to *What If* to *Let's Try*: a Treasure-Box for the Playful Academic Supplementary Material A: The Protocol for the Playful Academic

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This protocol aims to bring together the different ways in which we are present to and involved in our work: from the space(s) that we inhabit, to our bodies, the aspirations and questions that motivate us, as well as the social and larger professional dynamics that we form part of. It invites you to imagine, reflect and populate your work, together. In spite of the care this box holds for playful collaborative work, we cannot (and would not) determine how exactly you respond to this process. We encourage you to take the freedom and responsibility to pause, or to ask for a moment for reflection with (one of) your colleagues whenever you feel the need to<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, we are curious which other directions you might want to explore - the box is an evolving collection of suggestions and material.

*One night I watched my thoughts  
piling themselves up all around me.*

*My mind built a house out of all those thoughts — then filled that house.*

*Soon it was a whole city.*

*A whole world.*

*Oh, my beautiful, beautiful thoughts.*

*Who will look after you after I'm gone?*

*I swear I weep.*

*I weep for all of you.*

*Do you really want to be free?*

*Are you ready to leave behind*

*your precious little houses —*

*make your home everywhere?*

*It's not as hard as you think.*

*First stand up.*

*Then walk out the door<sup>ii</sup>.*

### *ACTIVITY 1: Drawing In Circles*

This activity can be used to explore a sense of shared belonging and decision-making. We also found it a lot of fun - an ice-breaker before starting to work together.

You will need a large paper/surface, colored pens (one color for each), a comfortable space to sit/lie/stand so that everyone can reach the workspace.

The form of the game is as follows. We give you a limited set of painting gestures: circling, making dots, and drawing parallel lines. Imagine them as continuous gestures: Repeat them without interruption until you switch to another gesture or a conscious moment of pause.

Gather around the paper/surface. In the beginning, stand still and silent. At any point, anyone can pick a pen and start performing their choice of gesture. As soon as that happens, all others join that person in performing the same action, until any of you decides to change to a different gesture, or pause. The trick of the game is that whenever one person takes initiative, all follow. Quickly and organically.

Notice when the game feels out of bounds. Need a restart? Express your desire to stop by simply pulling out of the circle. The basic idea is to invite simple expressions and interpersonal awareness.

#### *possibilities for variation #1:*

If you have enough space and moving is not a problem, the exercise can also be performed as a movement session. The paper would correspond to the floor, and the painting gestures to different gestures (moving the hands or another body-part to form a certain shape, or moving a certain and not other part of the body, ...) or ways of moving around the space (slow-fast, upright-crawling, ...). This setup could also serve as an intermediate one between the original version of activity 1 and activity 2, transitioning between inner and outer/social focus while moving in space/to write.

Alternatively, you could use body percussion: the paper would correspond to the surrounding (sounding) environment, and the painting gestures to sounds produced by clapping, rubbing your hands, vocal sounds, steps on the floor, etc.

For online, digital sessions, different drawing, sound production, idea mapping, or movement emulation software could be used. For example: Aggie.io / Mozilla Hubs / Zoom / Soundtrap / Coggle.

### *ACTIVITY 2: Writing from Toe to Ceiling*

Find yourself in a familiar (hand) writing position, bringing or imagining any material you need to write. Now scribble (doodle, draw. Don't think about what you are 'writing').

As you scribble, explore your sensations while focusing on different body parts. Start from the fingers holding the pen. How - if at all - do you feel your writing in your fingers, wrist or

elbow? Do you feel movement in your shoulders and back? How far does it reach? Is there any sense of movement in your hip? Your knees?

Take a minute simply to rest your attention on one part of the body, while you are writing.

Can you initiate a scribbling movement from here? (Focusing on initiating movement for example in the upper back - can you do that, and it just so happens that you scribble?) Or could you combine these places, and initiate the movement from *between* your fingers and, say, your upper back?

Also check in with your posture and environment. How are you holding yourself? What could you do - if anything - to make yourself more comfortable in your activity? Where are you with respect to walls/boundaries, furniture and others present? What is happening, besides your own exploring? Notice if the room and the others affect your experience and activity.

If you feel like it, find a different posture or place to perform your writing exploration. You could also choose a different pen or switch to writing on an imaginary keyboard. Repeat the exercises above. Do you notice any differences?

When you are ready, take a moment to finish your exploration, then come together for the next activity.

Would anybody like to share something with the group?

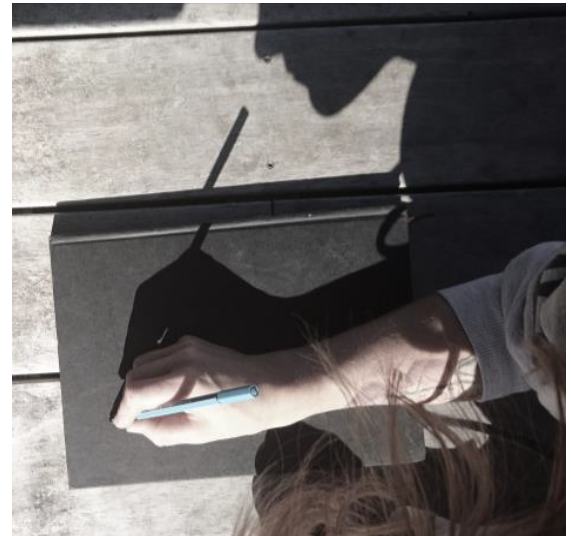


Figure 1S: Writing from the back of my head? Exploring Activity 2.

*possibilities for variation #2:*

Instead of writing, any other activity can be performed 'From Toe to Ceiling'. For example, if you are preparing for a public presentation of your research, you could apply the same steps to "scribbling" with your voice. Start talking with random syllables. Get acquainted with how your speech apparatus behaves and how it feels to talk from different parts of your body, etc. Similarly, if your academic work involves technical operation, laboratory experiments, or musical performance, you could apply the same principles to these practices.

If the idea of 'writing/speaking/.. from a particular body part' is at first hard to grasp, you could exemplify it in a simple movement exercise: lie down on the floor, lift your hands with straight arms so that they meet in front of your chest, pointing to the ceiling. Now, keeping your arms straight, slide your hands' surfaces across one another. As you do this, you will likely notice movement in your shoulders, where your back touches the floor. Can you initiate the sliding movements of your hands *from this area (back/shoulders)?*

### ACTIVITY 3: *Each of Us and All Together*

Here we invite you to set and share your current context and perspective. We start with individual reflection and bring them to the group in a sharing circle. Here, it can be helpful to time your turns at reflection and sharing - perhaps one person from your group takes this task, simply keeping an eye on time, or using an app that makes a soft sound to mark the beginning and end of the set time.

To begin this activity, we invite you to look at the set of questions below in *Table 1S*. We recommend that each of you finds one question. The question is meant to lead you into reflecting on how different aspects of yourself and context relate to your work. The set covers what we found most important. It is neither exhaustive nor particularly 'right' but we include it here as something to inspire your inquiry.

Take your time (about 5 minutes) for individual reflection on the question that you will offer (to yourself, and later to the group).

Importantly, get concrete: As you sit with your question, notice which *specific situations and experiences* come to mind. What is it about them that matters to you and the work you are engaging in? If you feel like it, take a few notes (draw, visualise, move - whatever helps you stay with your question).

*Table 1S: A Collection of questions to support personal inquiry.*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Questions</i>
A. Personal motivation and background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why am I engaging in this project? How is this collaboration meaningful to me?</li> <li>• What are my needs and interests?</li> <li>• Which stories connect me to this project?</li> <li>• What is it that I seek to engage with?</li> <li>• Which particular aspects of the project connect to which particular aspects of me, today?</li> </ul>
B. Body and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the position of my body? What does it feel like?</li> <li>• Where in the room have I put myself? What is present from my perspective? What do I sense?</li> <li>• Am I comfortable, vibrant and available for this project?</li> <li>• Is there anything I want to move or change in my body or space to feel more comfortable, vibrant and available?</li> <li>• Spend a moment thinking about the circumstances that allow you to be here - this can be people, the weather, good food, an inspiring teacher or an unforeseen event.</li> </ul>

C. Social expectations and group activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who else is part of this project? How does my relationship with them feel right now?</li> <li>• How do we take care of this project together?</li> <li>• Remember a specific moment: what do I notice or value about my contact with others?</li> <li>• Do we invite differences in our modes of engaging and relating? Different perspectives, needs, curiosities?</li> <li>• What quality of dialogue do we invite?</li> <li>• How do we reflect on and make decisions together?</li> <li>• How do we offer time to what arises between us?</li> </ul>
D. Traditions and transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember a moment of working on this project that you really enjoyed - what happened there?</li> <li>• Remember a moment of working on this project that was difficult for you or the group - what happened there?</li> <li>• What do you want this project to be? What has this project produced for you? Which new plans, possibilities and questions have arisen for you through this project?</li> </ul>

When the time for reflection is over, find your way into a 'listening circle'. One idea inherent to such a circle is that it offers a moment of attention to each of our stories. Physically sitting at equal distance and level can facilitate this quality of welcoming and listening. Introducing something - such as intentions, dedications (verbally) or an item (physically) - into the centre of the group can likewise serve this idea. It is a way of jointly creating the context and purpose of a meeting.

We furthermore find the following advice useful. Before you start to share from your reflections, take a moment to read it (out aloud):

- When speaking, focus on your personal experience: describe its quality, avoid generalising.
- When listening, witness what comes up for you in response to what is being shared. Try to let go of any urge to clarify, understand, judge (positively or negatively) or set right.
- At all times, sense what is happening to you *and* to others in the group.
- If you feel it is needed, take actions to turn the situation into a more welcoming, more supportive one.
- Sometimes silence is very helpful to communicate with ourselves and others

Now, revisit your notes and thoughts from the individual reflection. Is there something you learned about your motivation, practice or environment? Anything you would like to share with the group?



One person begins. (If you keep time, set for example 2 to 3 minutes for each person). Give a clear signal as to when you have finished sharing. To know who is next, simply go around the circle, invite another person by their name, or use a talking piece that you place back into the center, for anybody to pick it up (or its online variant: to mute/unmute yourself).

When everybody has had time to share, check in with the group if there is any interest in sharing more. You might also do 'another round' of time to share for each person.



Figure 2S: Materials and traces from Activities 1 to 4. AL exploring with two colleagues in Hamburg.

*possibilities for variation #3:*

You could vary this activity by *how* you select the question: whether you limit it strictly to one question or allow merging/several questions for reflection, as well as whether you pick it consciously, or select at random. Similarly, you can either specifically define the project or area of (working) life to which you want to apply your questions in advance, or not. Naturally, feel free to expand and modify this set of questions according to the needs and issues that emerge in your group.

*ACTIVITY 4: Triangulating Space*

As in the first game, you need colored pens, a large paper, and space to gather around it. This time each person picks one shape that will be his or hers throughout the game - for example one person picking circles/ovals, the other rectangles, and the third one triangles.

Now take turns at adding/drawing your respective shape to the paper, one instance of each figure per turn - varying its size, orientation, and position in relation to what has already been drawn.

Take as much time as you need for each action. Consider perceiving the paper as a painting, and notice how the points of fuge (recurring patterns), accumulation, rhythm, color, grading, and other formal aspects vary every time a shape is added. Also notice the effects of another person's drawing action on you. Can you, through your next action, bring this to play out on the paper?

Notice when you feel that you are done.



Figure 3S: A perspective shot through Activity 4 – this time triangulating space within a 3x4m area of lawn and additional materials found in the garden, rather than paper and pens only.

*possibilities for variation #4:*

Similar to Activity 1, you could replace paper and pen by moving yourselves or objects in and out of a designated space. Any substrate or platform can work: you could also iteratively record a sound to which each person can contribute with a specific vocal gesture, or perform a 5-minute improvisation that starts very simple and iteratively grows to include further actions. If you meet online, you could again use either of the collaborative software tools we list above with Activity 1.

*ACTIVITY 5: Reading between the Concepts*

With this activity, we invite you to fully commit to a text by paying detailed attention to how you subjectively experience it. New facets of this text might become apparent, opening other avenues for future research.

Choose a short text that seems important for your common (writing) endeavour. Examples could be: a paragraph of your own article in the making, a quote you are considering to use, a paragraph of previous writing from either of you that could play into the current process, etc. We suggest not more than 5 sentences to begin with.

Pick one of you to read the chosen text aloud. It does not matter who it is but it is a good idea to change the reader from session to session. You can choose to only listen, or to also have the text as a printed version available for each of you. We recommend, however, that you do not read ahead.



Each of you, grab pens and paper. Feel free to use a large format of paper and multiple colors/types of pen.

Start reading/listening with great focus: one sentence at the time, pay attention to your experience while reading/listening. By experience, we mean your thoughts, feelings, mental images, bodily states etc. Notice what you live through while reading/hearing this sentence. Feel free to write notes, paint, sketch or use whatever connotation method helps you to describe, remember or manifest the experience.

When you are ready, proceed with the next sentence. Once you finish taking notes on your experience of the last sentence, we encourage you to enter into a dialogue as a group. You could collect notes on a board visible to all, to support yourselves in and keep track of the idea creations that might follow from this activity.

In this process, you might notice unique experiences and similarities across all or most of you. If your experience was different from your colleagues' - can you read the text like they did? You might go on to discuss if your experiences fit the purpose for which you (wanted to) use the text in your work.

Can you generate a variant with a different effect?

How was this like for you?

*possibilities for variation #5:*

For each of you to be able to fully focus on listening, you might record the text beforehand. And again, the attitude of slowing going through your work, step by step, can be applied to other material: from the series of points you plan to make in a meeting, presentation or paper, to any work-related progression of experience (as you read an email, type a sentence, watch an experimental stimulus, travel to you work place or prepare yourself a coffee).

*ACTIVITY 6: Creative Nonfiction*

This is an activity to facilitate play on expression. It might be a way for you to think differently-structured, more intuitive, or to start your thinking-process at an unusual point.

Choose material you want to write with (or about) today - it could be material from the reading game above, or any other ongoing work, such as an experience from one of the other protocol-activities.

Try to re-write/extend it in one or all the following ways:

- a) Think about the worst enemy of (your perspective on) the writing material. Write about it from this (antagonistic) perspective.
- b) Take a book, open it on a random page and take the third sentence of the page. Use this as your starting sentence for what you write.
- c) Write it as a confession.
- d) Think of somebody whose writing style you adore (can be a scientist, novelist, friend etc.). Try to write it like she/he would.
- e) ... *any-all-else you think of to spark your writing into a totally different direction! :-)*

Decide how much time you want to devote to this, today.

When you are done: check in if the group needs a break, before you go into a final 'harvest round' of witnessing the moments that stick with you, or sharing what you have learned and experienced with the group: a short moment to stretch, fresh air, a bit of movement, close your eyes.

*possibilities for variation #6:*

The list of possible variations is endless - find diverse starting points, characters and roles that speak to you or that make you take on a very different perspective. For more inspiration, you could also have a look at creative writing prompts online.

*ACTIVITY 7: Diamonds in the Raw*

What moments of the last hour do you treasure?

What is present for you now?

What, if anything, do you take with you out of this room?

What would you like to unpack in the next meeting?

To share and hear thoughts and impressions from the group, we recommend the form of a listening circle. If you decide to use it, take a moment to remind yourself of the form (see our list of advice in activity 3), find a time-keeper and set how much time you want to give this. Maybe give yourselves a minute or two for individual reflection, before you start sharing.

*possibilities for variation #7:*

Beyond the verbal sharing and written notes, it can be nice to have a material trace of your explorative process. A physical memory of something that came out of your time together - one idea might be the drawings from activities 1 and 4. They could live on as a postcard.

*Thank you for opening the treasure-box.  
We hope it can be your ally in many academic adventures to come .-)*

- i Splitting up in pairs for a 5minute check-in for each person can be a good habit to start group-work.
- ii Adapted from *The First Free Women: Poems of the Early Buddhist Nuns* by Matty Weingast, Bhikkhuni Anandabodhi.