

Materiality of Research: Without End: Documents of Research by Meghann Hillier-Broadley and Francis Blore

*What are the parameters of the academic document? And how can its myriad forms deepen and shape the process of being in research? Ahead of upcoming postgraduate symposium [Without End: Documents of Research](#) (University of Northampton, 16 February 2018), **Meghann Hillier-Broadley** and **Francis Blore** reflect on the generative potential of the various fragments – from post-it notes to notebooks to highlighted texts – that form the material substances inspiring and driving research.*

*If you are interested in submitting an abstract for the symposium ahead of the deadline on **1 November 2017**, further information can be found below this post [here](#). This essay is part of an LSE RB series examining the material cultures of academic research, reading and writing. If you would like to contribute, please contact the Managing Editor of LSE Review of Books, Dr Rosemary Deller, at lsereviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk.*

Without End: Documents of Research



Image Credit: ([Without End symposium](#))

Research (noun)

1. The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.

Research (verb) [with object]

1. Investigate systematically ([Oxford English Dictionary](#))

Such a definition of research feels too linear: it does not seem to account for the frenetic and labile nature of thought as it breaches the 'new'. At the time of writing, I feel caught in a metaphorical microcosm of all that I wish to say about the experience of being in research. In this metaphor, the empty white page is the gap in my discipline and the text is the 'new' I wish to create. The gap is that space within which I begin to hear the whizz and hum of the engine of thought. Its openness offers room for thought to become profuse, to unfurl and populate.

Without a map for the new, the ends remain undisclosed: these speculations multiply faster than logic can attend to. Thought does not beget thought, but rather innumerable seductive possibilities. I am piqued by all, and to think of the play of potentialities offered in this gap, to constellate and cohere, to give form and reason to the new, to create this text, my charge becomes a giddy thought. As with any research endeavour I have undertaken thus far, there are so many ways this could turn out: so many ways to constitute meaning and so many meanings that could be constituted.

Yet, to say something, anything, one must be drawn from many, and the giddy must become steadied. This is what Hélène Cixous refers to as '[the moment for cutting short](#)', where a hundred sentences are suppressed for one. It is the point where potentialities must be postponed or deferred. There are a battery of thoughts, intrigues and insights, a tangle of possibilities, either sitting outside this text or sleeping beneath it in the palimpsest nature of its constitution. For this text, as with any output, more is always omitted than submitted. As I am writing, I keep reluctant secrets out of necessity rather than desire. Despite this, against desire, such action is necessary to flesh out the body and substance of potential, an exchange of riches to buy that moment of quietude and consolidation that finds progress, direction, so the new may form.

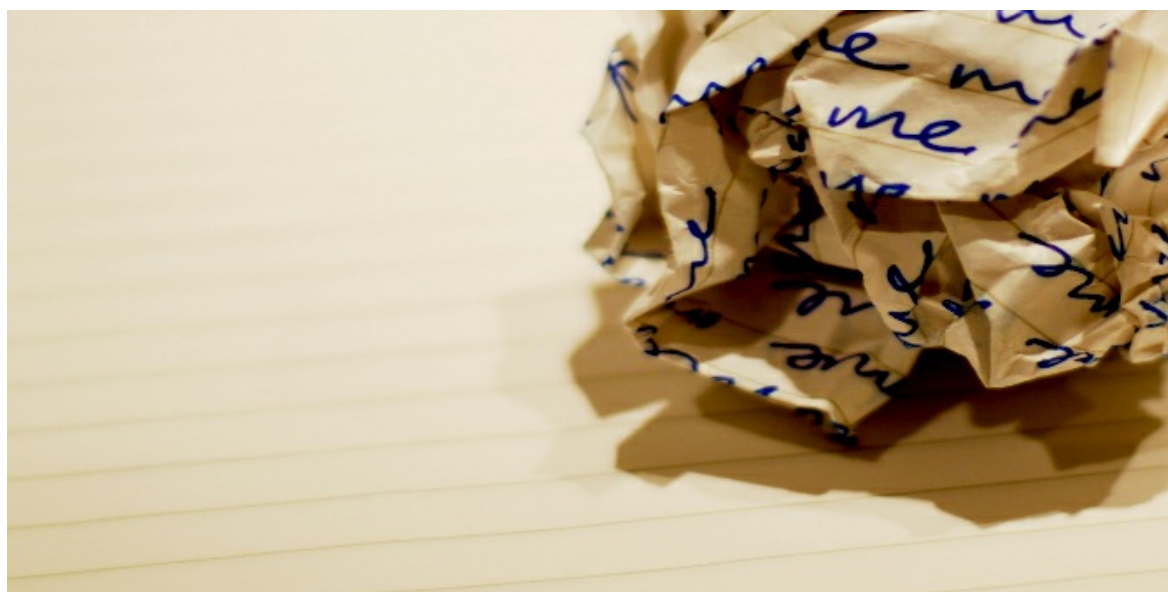


Image Credit: ([*_Abhi_* CC BY 2.0](#))

In looking around me now, I find that to move from the giddy to the quiet requires an act of exorcism. The space needed to allow these thoughts and potentialities to operate and act out, to be indiscriminately curious of each other, is too expansive to be observed internally. So, there is evidence here of thought expressed materially – of the need to externalise thought, to engage it, to handle it, remember it, so that it may be kneaded into a semblance of form. Through externalisation, the drawing forth from the capacity of the body, those sprawling speculations, shimmering questions, alluring diversions, become material agents in the world of things. All those contingencies, incompletes and bits-and-pieces I need but cannot carry, are a glistening breadcrumb trail of interactions and fragments that allow the process to continue ever deeper.

At my present point in the process, there has been a return, a recall to one site of interaction I know well. This site is my desk. Notwithstanding their standard stock build, there is something specific about a desk and its ancillary components. Bruised with ink, blemished with coffee rings, this desk bears witness to scuffles with the new. This computer has played upon all vulnerability, participating in both the feat and folly of searching. This chair, with its peeling arms, has been a support through nights of angst and labour, of toil. There have been so many times that I have been lost into these objects and these activities that our difference has blurred. To enter this site, I feel my constitution shift; I exist somewhere between these objects. The return to this interaction is awash with histories that recall their loves, desires and ambitions to the present and inform what I am here to do.

There is concurrence of this type of interaction in all the objects that thought has brought me to. From the outset, there was one book that I reached to out of instinct. We have collaborated so many times prior. The words now tell of our combined narratives and, without knowing why, there was the sense our story would continue here. But, beyond these words, the connection is as much about objecthood as it is content. The book's thumbed pages and battered corners expose the histories coming together and our minimal degrees of separation. Having been studied at length, the object itself speaks of the unformed and, as such, unutterable decanted wonderings and agitations: that enactive mode of being that can be reclaimed through proximity. It points to the effect of rapt absorption, of touch and time, where thought and being have been enfolded in the interaction. It points to the kinship with the object as a ['thought companion'](#).

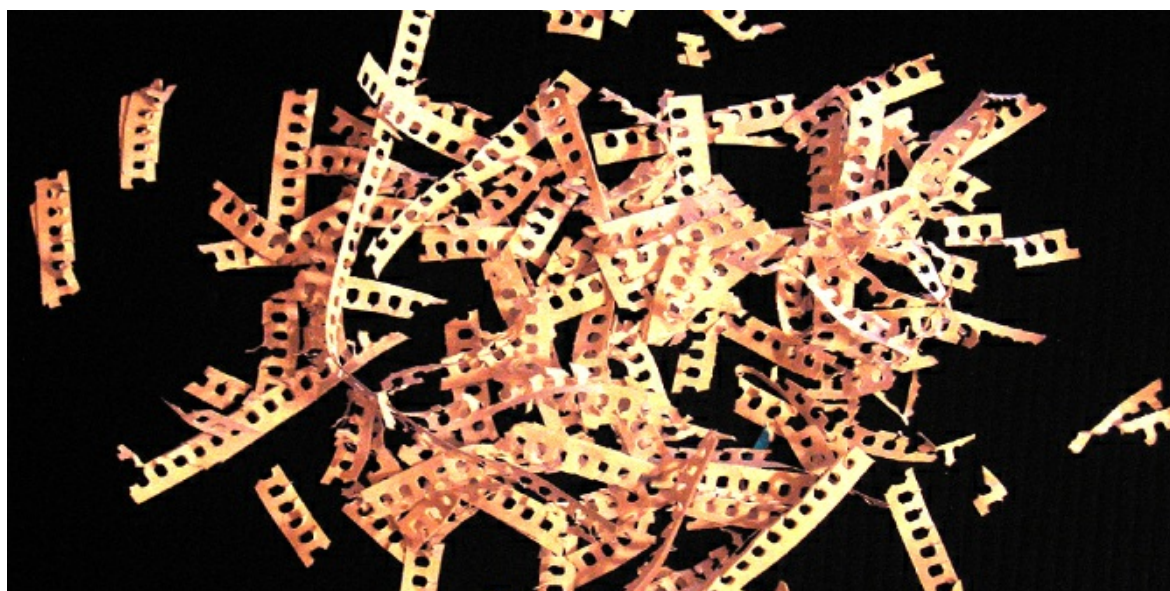


Image Credit: ([crabchick CC BY 2.0](#))

This kinship is enshrined in the fragment, the fleeting moments of lucidity, scribbled, scrawled or scattered around various apparatus of thought. To my left, the notebook is open; there are pages of notes, free-wheeling thoughts in anticipation of writing this text. At points of hesitation, I return to pages with everything from words to sentences to paragraphs, from nodes on mind maps to multiple draft structures. The lineage of material thinking exits the page and rises before me onto the wall into an array of post-it notes. Their mobility allows constellations to gather and loosen as the thinking of the text mutates. Following the trajectory brings me back down to the desk, to the highlighted and annotated texts within which I have sought both the ignition and salience of speculations. In the middle, the current text.

All these fragments lock their generative thought into their physical condition. Their material condition is important for 'the term "material" describes [...] substances that are always subject to change'. In being incomplete in both condition and content, understood as material, all these artefacts of thought beckon further enactive treatment. Through this, I am able to move backwards and forwards in time through the notebook. I can feel the reach of drawing a straggling post-it note back into the constellation. I can be detained by the fluorescent glare of a highlight. In working with materials, I am offered the opportunity to be involved in the process: picking up/internalise thought(s), putting down/externalising thought(s). The rub creates the submissions and omissions in the fusion of thoughts into an idea. As one highlight reads:

[‘This restlessness creates the subject through coalescence, coagulation and coordination, here moving swiftly, there moving slowly.’](#)

Coalescing ideas, thicker and denser than thought, fall to the middle; the form of the new that comes to be the text.

And thus, the text is cut short ...

...but outside the text, encased in these objects, shot through these fragments, the materials to which I have entrusted my thoughts remain vibrant: the documents of research *in potentia*.

*These 'documents of research', which incite, inspire and contain the precious directions and deviations of research, are to be the subject of the [Without End: Documents of Research](#) Postgraduate Symposium to be held at the **University of Northampton** on **Friday 16 February 2018**. Alongside traditional twenty-minute oral presentations, there will be an exhibition of research documents, ranging from text, image, audio, visual artefacts to specimens that showcase the diverse materiality of research and its processes. The intent of this interdisciplinary symposium and exhibition is to reflect on the research process, of being in research, and the documents which facilitate and inform this. If you would like to submit an abstract for the oral presentation or a document for the exhibition, please see [the Call for Papers](#) – the closing date is **1 November 2017**. **Without End** seeks to be an academic, supportive environment for postgraduate students and early career researchers to present their research and works-in-progress through the framework of their own documents.*

Francis Blore is a practice led PhD student at The University of Northampton researching the expanded field in drawing. Francis leads a Life Drawing class at the university and has presented his research at several conferences and is co-organiser of the Without End: Documents of Research Symposium.

Meghann Hillier-Broadley is a PhD student at The University of Northampton researching the Anthropocene in Children's Fantasy literature. Meghann is an Associate Lecturer in the English department and has presented her research at several conferences and is co-organiser of the Without End: Documents of Research Symposium.