



Letters to Gravity: Words that rise from the flesh, fall back into meaning

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The video article traces the emergences of the biopoetic workshop "Le parole hanno un peso", part of the action-research project "Quante Storie!", initiated in 2022 by Antonella Cuppari and Silvia Luraschi. The project explores community-based approaches to eating disorder experiences through arts-based, embodied, and narrative practices. Since 2024, the research has developed in the Province of Lecco (Northern Italy), where Antonella Cuppari coordinates field-based actions. The workshop emerged through the dialogue among the practices of Rosita Mariani, Antonella Cuppari, Gaia Bonanomi, and Silvia Luraschi, and was funded by Consorzio Consolida and Cooperativa Sociale La Vecchia Quercia, with support from the University of Milan–Bicocca.

Keywords: eating disorders; biopoetics; feminism; research-creation



VIDEO ARTICLE

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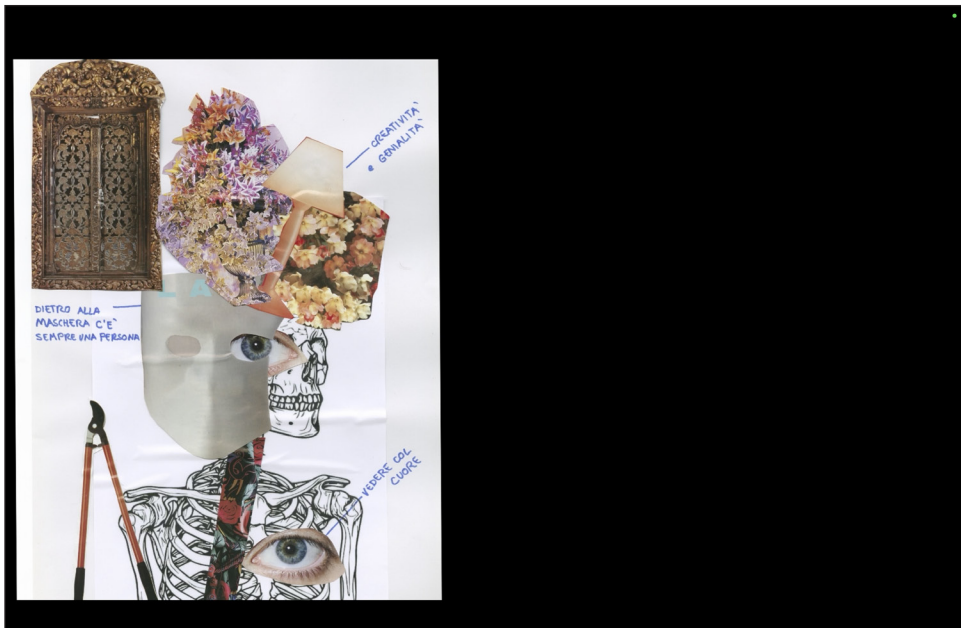
STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE



Excerpt from "Mangia"



Excerpt from "Mangia"



VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

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[0:10]

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Antonella Cuppari, Gaia Bonanomi, Silvia Luraschi, Rosita Mariani

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Cara Gravità,

mi dispiace. Non ti ho mai capita, così impegnata com'ero a lottare contro di te. Avevo così tanta paura di te: trattenevo il respiro, toglievo peso, cercavo di rendermi più leggera... e così facendo mi sono distrutta. Poi, a un certo punto, sono caduta. L'atterraggio a terra è stato uno shock, una rivelazione. Scoperta nel dolore. Dolore ovunque. Non avevo più la forza di resistere. E lì ti ho sentita. Ti ho sentita. Gravità, tu non sei la mia nemica. Sei la mia avversaria. Una forma d'amore, nata non dall'accordo, ma dalla resistenza. È dalla tua opposizione che nasce la mia forza. Grazie al tuo sostegno, vivo, mi muovo e provo piacere. Usare la forza contraria a mio vantaggio. Opporti resistenza per prendere slancio. Attingere forza, la tua forza. Fidarmi. Affidarmi alla vita.

Tua, Silvia

Dear Gravity,

I am sorry. I never understood you, busy as I was fighting you. I was so afraid of you not breathing, removing weight, trying to make myself lighter... In doing so, I destroyed myself. Then, at some point, I fell. The landing to the ground, a shock, a revelation.

Discovery in the pain. Pain everywhere. I no longer had the strength to resist. And there, I felt you. I felt you. Gravity, you are not my enemy. You are my adversary. A kind of love, born not from agreement, but from resistance. It is from your opposition that my strength arises. Thanks to your support I live, I move, and I take pleasure. To use the opposing force to my advantage. To oppose you in order to gain momentum. To draw strength, your strength. To trust. To entrust myself to life.

Yours, Silvia.

[2:04]

Excerpt from “Mangia”

This article comes from the encounter of four embodied practices. Antonella contributed her experience in creative writing; Rosita in somatic movement and dance; Silvia in the Feldenkrais Method; and Gaia in photography. Research connects all of us.

We present a biopoetic workshop held in Northern Italy, focused on the weight of words. Biopoetic means a method that intertwines embodied perception and poetic language (Snowber 2016; Weber 2016). We situated ourselves within feminist research-creation and practice-based embodied research. In our approach, bodies, materials, words, and images do not just represent experience—they co-compose it (Loveless 2019; Manning and Massumi 2014; Truman 2022).

The workshop is the final phase of an action-research project launched in October 2022. Its goal is to promote a community approach to eating disorders. It moves away from a purely individual or medicalized view of bodily and mental distress. The first phase, based on auto- and duo-ethnographic research, explored the theme of gravity. In Italian, *gravità* refers both to the severity of illness and to the force that anchors all bodies to the earth (Cuppari and Luraschi 2023a, 2023b). The video opens with a letter to Gravity in Italian. We wanted to preserve the language in which the process was born, breathed, and took shape.

The second phase produced a video performance, *Mangia*, with local artists and stakeholders. This initiated a first public dialogue on eating disorders (Cuppari and Luraschi 2024). The biopoetic workshop is the third phase of the project.

In September 2024, we launched a public call for participants. Sixteen women voluntarily joined. This is significant. It reflects a cultural context where practices related to dance and care are often seen as more accessible—or more socially authorized—for women than men.

The workshop explored key questions: What happens when words commonly used in discussions about the body are explored through somatic and artistic practices? How can these words lose their apparent fixity and become experience, relationship, living matter?

The workshop was a cooperative and embodied space (Heron 1996). Dance, photography, somatic movement, creative writing, and visual experimentation allowed participants to think with and through the body. The camera and photographic equipment were also present as situated participants. Their presence was discussed with the participants. The video does not aim to convey internal feelings directly. Instead, it shows what becomes visible when a body in research meets an audiovisual gaze. Editing focused on resonance, with images accompanying the text in a sensitive way.

We are aware that the bodies in the video may appear relatively normative compared to dance imaginaries. Consistent with fat studies, this allows us to question the unstable relationship between embodiment, appearance, stigma, and invisibility from two angles (Levinson et al. 2024; Romano, Heron, and Henson 2021; Strings 2019). On one hand, access to body practices and public exposure is shaped by shame, modesty, permission, and self-devaluation. On the other hand, bodily and psychological distress cannot be inferred from body shape, gender, or skin color.

[7:19]

1. When bodies vanish and words weigh heavy

“What sound does glass make in the instant before it shatters?

I was this close to breaking apart.

There is no word that captures the foresight of that sound.

I thought that words are mostly absences.”

(Paganelli, G., 2022)

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Disorder.

Disorder.

An eating disorder is not merely an individual “disorder”. In Italian, disorder is translated with *disturbo* that means both disorder and disturbance — something, or someone, that bothers others. Yet this experience, this trembling of the body and of meaning, is an opportunity — a chance to look together, to examine the weight of certain critical words that speak of the body. They reveal a history — a history of domination over bodies, a slow colonization that has led to their progressive dematerialization.

Excerpt from “Mangia”

Where are the bodies?

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, philosopher Guy Debord (1967), wrote that existence was no longer based on being, but on having, and above all — on appearing. Today, that discourse reaches its culmination. Humans have become projects — brands in perpetual construction (Han, 2014). Everyone is “free to be themselves,” yet this freedom is a trap: it demands continuous improvement, constant performance. The person becomes an avatar. It is no longer the avatar that must resemble the person, but the person who must live up to their avatar. We live in a society that has literally devoured bodies. The pandemic reinforced this devouring. Touch was forbidden. The skin became a privatized organ. The body’s openness to relation was denied. We were confined — sliding deeper into the digital world, toward a new cyber-capitalism (Preciado, 2022). The body of cyber-capitalism is a spectacle — scanned, retouched, hacked, copied.

Bodies without skin collapse.

Words without bodies weigh heavy.

[9:40]

2. The revolt of bodies: the reemergence of an ancient bond

“Fossils, when they resurface, dance their own revolt.”

(Cornelio, G., 2024)

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Beauty.

Beauty.

In late medieval Europe, the page was skin — of lamb, of goat, of calf. The word marked and incised the flesh. At the same time, the skin supported the written word — it carried its weight, its pressure, its permanence. The bond between the animal's body and writing also shaped the birth of scientific reason. Through dissection, through the opening of bodies, humans sought knowledge — and the knowledge of bodies became the measure of truth.

From Aristotle's zoology to Galen's medicine, the classification of life was born from the study of death (Vegetti, 1987). Over the centuries, the dissecting gaze moved from animals to humans. It learned to name, to divide, to catalogue. And so the same rationality that sliced open flesh began to slice open meaning.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders — the DSM — is one of the heirs of that tradition. It classifies, it describes, it enumerates the deviations from the norm. But within its pages, amidst the cold precision of categories, another story pulses — the story of living bodies that resist being reduced to symptoms. These bodies speak in their own ways: through disobedience, through dissidence, through disidentification (Preciado, 2022).

Who is disturbed by disorders?

The DSM not only defines illness — it defines what counts as normal, and in doing so, reveals the politics of care, the geography of discomfort. In Italy, the Ministry of Health called eating disorders a “hidden epidemic” (2021).

Disorders spread.

Disorders infect.

Excerpt from “Mangia”

Gentner and Meadow (2003) taught us that metaphors shape science. And so biology learned to speak the language of war: the body as fortress, the virus as enemy, the immune system as army (Preciado, 2022). But the body is not a state. The immune system is not an army.

Disorders are (not) viruses.

They are messages, relations, vibrations of imbalance and care.

What do disorders have to say?

[13:25]

3. A filamentous exploration, between skin and bones

“This is the paradigm of a deeper awareness, of thick skin, of collagen and mucosa, of musculature, stretch and contraction, of the sacred knowledge of all that is wet and sticky, of all that moves and flows from itself without separation of the self and the object, of the observer and the phenomenon.”

(Pendell, D., 1995)

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Skin and bones.

Skin and bones.

It is often said “*skin and bones*” to describe a fragile body. A body barely there. Yet — our skin and our bones are so much more than mere containers. Skin, especially, is an extraordinary sensory interface, a living bridge between our sense of self and the outer world. Through it we perceive touch, warmth, pain. Through it, we enter into relation — into contact — with everything that surrounds us. The dermis — antenna, detective, guardian — lives in the in-between: between outside and inside. Like the cell membrane, it negotiates permeability, deciding what may cross the threshold, and what must remain outside. To inhabit the world through the skin is to awaken subtle sensors, to open the gates of perception — and, at times, to protect ourselves when the outside becomes too much.

Our skeleton, too, is not merely a rigid scaffold. It is an intricate network — a choreography of tissues, of cartilage, tendons, ligaments — each one essential. Bone tissue supports, protects, enables movement. It stores minerals. It produces the blood that carries oxygen, the blood that defends and nourishes life. Thanks to this living structure, the incredible complexity that we are can exist — and coexist.

Over time, the words of the body have been dissected. Separated from what they refer to. They drifted away, abstract, judgmental. From judgment — even self-inflicted —

one emerges in fragments. Dissected. Somatic exploration entered our process to reconnect those fragments, to bring words back to their biological ground zero. Immersion in perception restored meaning and sensoriality to weight, to bones, to skin.

Words dissolved — and reappeared — rooted in the body, enriched with new resonances (Bainbridge Cohen, 2008). Poetry entered the workshop as a filamentous, moist, unsettling language. It crackled against the habitual word, transforming the white page into a wild landscape where vigilance and sensitivity could return. Inspired by the *rhizome* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), the poetic word did not advance frontally — but underground, subversive, opening fractures in common sense. It showed us that what seemed sealed in meaning could be traversed, made alive again.

In this sense, the poetic process resonates with Haraway's "spèchiulative fabiulation" (2016): the possibility of crafting narratives that unsettle dominant stories about bodies and open unexpected kinships between bodies, languages, memories, images, and gestures. Poetry thus became an embodied counter-narrative: a way of shifting the place from which we look, and from which words look back at us, allowing meanings to emerge before they become fixed.

[18:07]

4. Taking care of the monstrosity of the word

"Every word that composes a discourse drags along with it a narrative world with its own moral rules, corresponding to gestures, practices, and behaviors. (...) The words that accumulate in the discourse about the fat body are stratifications that create the monstrous. Fear constantly seeks to prevent one's own body from dissolving into that repelling creature. (...) In the unconscious passage from identification to assimilation, the narrative world blends with reality, creating heroines and heroes, but also monsters."

(Strings, S., 2022)

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Fat.

Fat.

The word "fat" is often seen as an enemy. A substance to fight. Zero fat. Low-fat diet. The war on fat. And yet — inside this word there is a living tissue, surprising,

vital, essential for our survival. Fat protects. Fat endures. It resists compression. It keeps its form. It is a shield — quietly working, holding us together, uniting and protecting what lies beneath. Our brain, too, is full of fat. Glial cells — those silent helpers — are its very foundation. They feed the neurons, sustain their rhythm. In the peripheral nervous system, motor and sensory neurons are coated in myelin — a sheath of fat. A protector. An insulator. It makes the message faster, the response more alive. Fat is also pure potential energy. Stored in silence. Waiting to be called. A reserve for the body.

To deconstruct the emotional weight of fat was like tuning into another vibration. A different frequency — where softness reveals its strength. We discovered that softness can be power. That resilience can be round, pliable, alive. At the level of lived experience, we let matter guide us. Through touch, through the handling of objects and substances, we opened perception to the presence of fat — as a resource, a nourishment, a source of integrity and trust. Some words became passwords — guiding us back to our own fat.

Sliding.

Density.

Resilience.

Connection.

Quiet qualities that we explored through movement. The dances that emerged were full of joy — of fluid vitality, of conscious physicality, of wholeness and peace. To observe from within, through embodiment, is to cultivate a tactile gaze — a sensing of subtle shifts in the individual and collective bodymind. In those zones of proximity that seem empty, attentive listening reveals a fabric of micro-events, subtle messages, quiet transformations.

The most meaningful discoveries always happen together. We searched for monsters inside words — and we cared for them. Monsters are the *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919) — the uncanny. What has been repressed yet insists on returning. We tended to the monstrosity of words, welcoming their wildness. Wildness is the ethos of monsters — their way of being in the world, of unsettling what is familiar and taken for granted. In the workshop, words were unearthed, touched, moved, observed. Bodies sweated words. Each encounter became a gesture — turning the soil, reawakening what lay beneath, what was thought inert, like sourdough rising again, giving birth to new life.

[23:42]

5. From darkness to light: photography as a practice of transition and rewriting

“When we close our eyes, we see darkness. We often overlook it because we immediately fill it with images, restless thoughts, landscapes. But darkness can also be contemplated, letting our gaze be undone. (...) While we allow the subtle movement of darkness to dismantle us, revelations may arrive.”

(C.L. Candiani, 2021, p. 73)

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Disorder. Gravity. Weight. Fat. Mirror. Beauty. Skin and bones.

Mirror.

Mirror.

The vision we have of ourselves is often partial. Limited. Constrained by poses, or by stolen glances in passing mirrors. Through photography, we can renegotiate that image — reinvent it, reclaim it.

In the workshop, photography became another language. A way to explore, to break boundaries, to dismantle prejudice, to connect inside and outside. Not just a surface. Not only a mirror. But a practice of crossing — of rewriting the visible. Photography was present in two ways. First — through the photographer herself, a participant-observer, attentive, immersed. She documented the dance, the gestures, the drawings, the discoveries. She let the process lead her — following movement, following words, listening with her lens. Second — through an experiment, where everyone became the author of her own gaze. In front of a wall of mirrors, and with an analog camera in hand, we explored our bodies from new angles, playing with reflections and distortions, reclaiming our image from perspectives we had never seen before. After exploring the mirrors, participants closed their eyes. They imagined their inner discovery — and expressed it through a simple hand gesture. The photographer captured both face and gesture, fusing them through multiple exposure into a single image.

These portraits went beyond eyes, beyond mouths or noses. They awakened another kind of corporeality — where the inner and outer selves intertwine. Photography, usually bound to memory, became here an act of exploration. Of revelation.

[26:05]

Conclusion

How tiring it is, every day, to hold my body together...
what if it were play, and not struggle?

(Beatrice)

In discomfort I freeze, I become a stone...
but when I move, I listen to your flow
shifting me from one foot to the other...
and then I am happy.

(Anna)

I dance through space, moving weights and thoughts,
I do not weigh the tiny speaking humanity that I am, that we are.
Each time I can be myself, but also something else.

(Elena)

When something beautiful happens, let us be found.

(Rosita)

How can I feel this living body anew,
as I learn to look beyond the surface,
into the hidden threads that make it alive?

(Gaia)

At the end of the workshop, we took some time with the participants to look back together at the images, texts, and drawings they had created, and to decide whether — and in what form — the experience could be shared publicly.

The idea of a public sharing emerged as a collective desire, born from listening to what the process had generated. The final event was co-designed with the participants and took the form of an interactive exhibition, including moments of reading and dance.

They chose which texts to share, how to give voice to them, and how to move with them through the space. In this way, the workshop became a public gesture of care, exposure, and relationship.

To take care of those who live with an eating disorder begins, above all, by letting ourselves be found. By listening — to embodied voices, and to their echoes in the collective body. By tending to what remains hidden, muted, silenced — inside those voices. By caring for the culture medium, for the invisible, for the monsters that stir within, waiting to emerge through a new pact with words.

Culture and cultivation share the same root. Both come from the Latin *colere*: to cultivate, to care for. Their older root, *kwel*, speaks of cycles — of movement, of life turning upon itself. We cannot create culture, we cannot care for the words that shape our world, without tending to the soil we are made of — flesh, body, earth. Without remembering that we belong to the endless cycle of transformation and renewal.

[29:06]

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Texts

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Letter to Gravity and Introduction (S. Luraschi);

Paragraphs 1 and 2 (A. Cuppari);

Paragraphs 3 and 4 (R. Mariani and A. Cuppari);

Paragraph 5 (G. Bonanomi);

Conclusions (A. Cuppari).

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