

## Design/Arts/Culture

Vol 5, No 1 (2025)

### POLARITIES LIMITS AND THRESHOLDS



#### TOOL 'N TELL

*Emílio Remelhe*

doi: [10.12681/dac.38881](https://doi.org/10.12681/dac.38881)

Copyright © 2025, Emílio Remelhe



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

Remelhe, E. (2025). TOOL 'N TELL: Visual Essay on Creative Writing. *Design/Arts/Culture*, 5(1), 152–157.  
<https://doi.org/10.12681/dac.38881>

# TOOL'N TELL: VISUAL ESSAY ON CREATIVE WRITING.

## ABSTRACT

The present visual essay addresses tools of work in the educational domain, specifically within the realm of creative writing. It assumes a metaphorical approach based on an analogy between tools from different fields of activity: it draws a parallel between the operational means of workshop construction and the conceptual means of writing. In this context, ideas such as order, discipline, and organization are still regarded as opposites to creative work. Paradoxically, it is common for the tools, means, and tasks to be perceived by those who use them more as obstacles rather than facilitators. Added to this are stigmas and misconceptions about words, writing, text, and, by extension, books, and authors, whose deconstruction is a workshop task. It is in this sense that the present work is oriented, aiming to create proactive conditions for raising awareness, exploration, reflection, and analysis, seeking to requalify the experience, perception, and self-knowledge. Specifically, it involves recoding a message of awareness to encourage personal and interpersonal engagement in writing, as well as implementing conceptual tools for guided experimental activities.

## INTRODUCTION

In pragmatic terms, the workshop is a particularly fertile space for highly programmed tasks, but also for creative wandering, seeking—and finding, even without searching—bridges, connections, and possibilities. The analogy between tools related to physical labor and conceptual work is nothing new. However, we believe it is necessary to revisit it to dispel stigmas. Two examples: a) countering the idea that writing is purely a matter of thought, aiming to avoid the risk of mental and psychological overload and thus mitigate its harmful effects; b) promoting the idea that the writing workshop, like workshops for metalworking, carpentry, or auto repairs, shares the need for discipline and the concatenation of procedures to solve concrete problems.

In the words of David Lodge, “As spiders make webs and beavers build dams, so we tell stories.” (2002: 15). Interested in the relationship between human consciousness

and literature—specifically, the novel—Lodge examines António Damásio’s proposals regarding consciousness as self-awareness, the extended consciousness inherent to the autobiographical self. In the taxonomy proposed by the neuroscientist for levels of consciousness, language only comes into play at the highest level: “Language — that is, words and sentences — is a translation of something else, a conversion from nonlinguistic images which stand for entities, events, relationships, and inferences.” (Damásio, 2012: 107). Returning to Lodge’s statement, it illustrates and confirms the human impulse for narrative, and more importantly in our context, frames this predisposition from the perspective of construction, of an activity, of a craft.

WORK, RELAXATION, DON’T THINK — these are the three fundamental principles for writing, according to Ray Bradbury (1996: 147). The author expresses his conviction that “For if one works, one finally relaxes and stops thinking. True creation occurs then and only then”; he argues: “The sculptor does not consciously have to tell his fingers what to do. The surgeon does not tell his scalpel what to do. Nor does the athlete advise his body. Suddenly, a natural rhythm is achieved”. Stephen King (2012) suggests that writers construct their toolbox so that “instead of looking at a hard job and getting discouraged, you will perhaps seize the correct tool and get immediately to work”. (2012: 82). This is because, according to the writer, “good writing is also about making good choices when it comes to picking the tools you plan to work with.” (2012: 93).

#### BUT WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Colum McCann, warning young writers about the “black dogs of the mind,” suggests that writing should avoid closure and seek openness: “Write so the world doesn’t close in upon you. Write so you eventually open new directions.” (2017: 144)

#### OPENING, DRILLING: SOME TOOLS DO THIS IN A MATTER OF MINUTES.

Paul Auster recounts a story from a precarious episode in his life, as a night telephone operator in the New York Times office in Paris: “The phone didn’t ring very often, and mostly I just sat at a desk, working on poems or reading books. One night, however, there was a frantic call from a reporter stationed somewhere in Europe. “Sinyavsky’s defected,” she said. “What should I do?” I had no idea what she should do, but since none of the editors was around at that hour, I figured I had to tell her something. “Follow the story,” I said. “Go \_where you have to go, do what you have to do, but stick with the story, come hell or high water.” She thanked me profusely for the advice and then hung up.” (1997: 69).

#### HOLD IT, DON’T LET GO: SOME TOOLS MULTIPLY A SMALL FORCE.

These two analogical examples should suffice to suggest the sense and potential of the exercise we propose to develop from these images. They form a mosaic, a texture. Their order in this document is merely conventional—they are the first collection to be expanded and systematized collaboratively. Their application involves contextually associating exercises ranging from fieldwork to storytelling, from life stories to character construction. Writers operate in an elliptical space, taking on alternating, repeated, sequenced, and resumed tasks: writing, rewriting, cutting, eliminating, recovering,





researching, and persisting; for those who write, verbs play the structuring role in language that we recognize them for. However, here we seek to draw attention to action verbs, to experimentation, and inherent procedures.

James Friel outlines a set of suggestions for implementing rewriting: «Be kind, be Patient, be Calm, be Colourful, be Versatile, be Curious, be Heard, be Flexible, be Cautious, be Meticulous, be Dependent, be Independent, be Stealthy, be Intent, be Subtle, be consistent, be Heard (again), be Vigorous, be Mean, be Restrained, be Meticulous, be Watchful, be Precise, be Active, be Decisive, be Done (2001: 261-269). In this context, we seek a proactive foundation for work, an attractor of theoretical-practical exercises on creative writing. Through these images, we aim to open a dialogical space around writing activities, and the intra- and interpersonal relationship with physical and conceptual tools. The seemingly prescriptive nature of this proposal helps us start precisely with the idea of prescription to deconstruct established beliefs; in other words, it begins with a negative task, retreating to a situation that allows for moving forward with greater awareness and benefit. One of the “thoughts and habits not conducive to the work”... “requiring specific tools or equipment to do the work” (2023:139). Although the illustrated tools bring their specificity, we do not intend to limit the activity to impersonal techniques, but rather to problematize starting from this simplification.

## REFERENCES

- Auster, P. (1997). *Hand to mouth: A chronicle of early failure*. Faber and Faber.
- Bradbury, R. (1996). *Zen in the art of writing*. Joshua Odell Editions.
- Damásio, A. (2012). *Self comes to mind: Constructing the conscious brain*. Vintage.
- Friel, J. (2001). Redrafting your novel. In Bell, J., Magrs, P. (Eds). *The creative writing course-book*. Macmillan.
- King, S. (2012). *On writing: a memoir of the craft*. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Lodge, D. (2002). *Consciousness and the novel: connected essays*. Harvard University Press.
- McCann, C. (2017). *Letters to a young writer: some practical and philosophical advice*. Harper Collins Publishers.
- Rubin, R. (2023). *The creative act: a way of being*. Canongate Books.