"An Evil Text": Chilean National Writing Plan and Students Becoming Writers with Villainy

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This article examines high school students' responses to an exercise from the Chilean National Writing Plan which invited students to "write an evil text." The data was analyzed through a diffractive reading using affect theory. We asked the texts: What do affective repertoires related to villainy do to students becoming writers? We describe the affirmative potential of these affects and strategies used by students becoming writers to contest normative childhood and youth relations with cultural products and affective repertoires in education. Based on our findings, we posit that the entanglements between writing exercises, student writers, and villainy produced non-normative affects related to evilness, which in turn assembled into cultural zones of exception in which children and youth could speculate around complex topics such as the pleasures related to violence.

Key words: *student writers; villainy; violence; pleasure; affects*

Becoming writer with nonnormative affects

In this article, we set ourselves to explore how writing with evilness and villainy engages students in speculative becomings that interrupt normative affective repertoires. We explore such becomings in the frame of a writing promotion program, the Chilean National Writing Plan (NWP), implemented in public and charter schools in Chile through the distribution of writing diaries. We specifically focus on one prompt in the writing diaries to inquire into the processes of students becoming writers with affects that disrupt traditional adultist figurations of

children and youth. We examine an exercise which invites high school students aged 14 to 17 to follow this prompt: *You are the villain or the villainess of the story. Write an evil text*. We chose this exercise because its responses "glowed"—paraphrasing Maggie MacLure (2013)—with particular significance in relation to its destabilizing affective potential, that is, its potential to destabilize our understandings and unconfessed assumptions about students and schools. We also chose it because, after reviewing the diaries, we realized that the exercises that prompted students to write fictional stories had fewer responses than the personal prompts, with the notable exception of the "evil text" one, which had many responses (145 over more than 200 diaries). We explore what this exercise about villainy did in relation to young people becoming writers.

In previous research concerned with literacy educational policies, we contended that educational policies about reading and writing get easily assembled with normative neoliberal desires related to the improvement of students' self-concept and limited understandings of what success and happiness are (Errázuriz & García-González, 2021; García-González & Errázuriz, 2021). In this previous study we argued that a particular sense of happiness is reproduced in Chilean policy about education that is transformed in turn into what Cristina Delgado Vintimilla (2014) calls a politics of niceness embedded in neoliberal schoolscapes. As Sara Ahmed (2010) has argued, individual happiness in neoliberal societies is produced as the ultimate goal: having a nuclear family, having an economically successful career, and cohabiting with others without conflict. Schools reproduce this politics of niceness, which is

> characterized by a commitment to social harmony, to a common good. This commitment prescribes the privileging of certain ways of being—of certain feelings, responses, and actions—and the denigration and dismissal of others. Such a politics (of niceness) expresses a profound concern for the personal and the superficially affective, thus prescribing the ways a collective exists in these contexts as if the well-being of such a collective is defined by the warmth of its relations and its commitment to harmony. A certain etiquette of niceness prevails, one that functions as a social code and substantiates the neoliberal "happiness turn." (Vintimilla, 2014, p. 84)

When we first read the diaries of the NWP, we thought that the students replicated moral adult patterns and normative desires, that is, that the stories about evil and villainy were organized within moral systems in which evil was defeated and punished, niceness triumphed, and normative happiness was achieved. We were wrong. Enjoyment and pleasure related to the pain of others and refusals to reproduce these values were some of the affective repertoires that crossed these exercises. We argue that the significance of the analyzed exercise might rely on the potential to destabilize neoliberal happiness in schools by engaging students in speculative becomings with evilness, interrupting "othering" processes and producing cultural zones of exception in otherwise very stable and normed institutions.

We examine what this exercise about villainy did in relation to young people becoming writers. We first present our theoretical framework and some relevant literature for this study. We later describe the methods we used to produce and analyze the data and explore our four central findings. We conclude with our thoughts on the significance of these results for literary and writing education and its relation to other research fields. We contend that our reflections about the writing of children aged 14 to 17 are especially relevant for childhood studies' rethinking of possible approaches to the child and the child's innocence in the context of increasing neoliberalism and individualism. We propose that evilness and villainy might give us access to uncharted territories in which we, as researchers, might become differently with children and their affective repertoires.

Affective repertoires and becomings

We read the NWP and the student writing this program produces as entangled with political and affective repertoires that deterritorialize normative understandings of childhood. We understand political and affective repertoires as an extension of the concept of cultural repertoires (García-González, 2021). In cultural repertoires, culture is conceptualized as a toolbox that presents possible habits, values, styles, routines, ideas, and narratives that orient action (Swidler, 2001). We consider affective repertoires as possible emotional and affective orientations, possible ways of feeling and/or of describing your feelings that become "sticky" (Ahmed, 2004b) with discourses, bodies, spaces, and other things and, therefore, political. Our concept of affective repertoires is thus a concept we use to pay attention to what is often missed when we attend solely to discursive formations and is therefore related to the conceptualization of affect in social theory. For Margaret Wetherell (2015), affective experiences are characterized by a range of bodily sensations, emotional responses, and cognitive evaluations that are not bound in the individual but made with and within the social. Affective experiences are shaped by broader social structures, cultural norms, and historical forces.

Our concept of affective repertoires is closely related to Ahmed's (2004a) concept of "affective economies" which describe how "emotions circulate as signs of value within cultures" (p. 117). Ahmed explains that emotional value is created through the interplay of emotions and objects, bodies and spaces and are continuously shaped by cultural norms, power relations, and historical forces. Ahmed argues that affective economies are at work in the production of gender and racial identities, and that they play a key role in shaping the experiences of those who do not conform to dominant norms. Emotions and feelings become habitualized and embodied through repeated practices and interactions; these habits can be difficult to break but can be changed if we change such practices, interactions, and sustained narratives.

The concept of becoming comes from new-materialist philosophy in which subjects—both human and nonhuman—are always in flux, changing and becoming something in relation to the world. As Rosi Braidotti (2018) explains from a posthuman and new-materialist philosophical standpoint, subjectivity cannot be understood "along the binary oppositional axes that separate humans from nonhumans, culture from nature, 'us' from 'them'. On the contrary," she argues, "posthuman subjectivity is nomadic, distributed, relational and process-oriented" (p. 221). In other words, becoming refers to posthuman subjectification processes, or becoming something new in relation to the context.

When speaking of repertoires, we remain vigilant to the movement of affective repertoires, focusing on how the written exercise of villainy in the frame of the NWP may hold potential to break or change normative understandings about good and evil and about children's and young people's orientations toward these affective notions.

Childhood studies, evil, and the erasure of villains

We read the affective repertoires produced by and with this writing program as related to a posthuman conceptualization of the child (Murris, 2016). Following on Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, Karin Murris and Johanna Haynes argue that children and youth suffer from onto-epistemic injustice (Haynes & Murris, 2017; Murris, 2016; Murris & Haynes, 2019), that is, that they are wronged as knowers because they are (onto-)children. The call for a critical examination of our epistemological orderings has caught the attention of childhood studies scholars. Childhood scholar and geographer Peter Kraftl (2020) proposes moving away from concentrating on children's agency as their individual prerogative toward perceiving it as "a relational dynamic," "a complex," and "an assemblage" (p. 5) that emerge from children's and childhood's "linkages with other human and non-human aspects of the world" (p. 6). Thinking relationally about the child as always already entangled

"within this larger relational field of human, non-human, and technological forces" (p. 8) decenters it as an identity category, making it an ontological becoming affecting and affected "in the event assemblages" (p. 8). Such an approach means in turn that childhood (like youth, we could argue) unfolds across time and space.

In children's and youth literature and culture studies we find a growing interest in shifting the attention from adult writers to children and young readers and then to children and young authors (see Conrad, 2019; Cumming, 2017; Friedrich et al., 2018; Goebel, 2022; Haverals et al., 2022; Wesseling, 2019). Such an attention to youth authorship is framed in a broader rethinking of the notion of children's agency and how to do research about children. Particularly interesting in this body of work is Elisabeth Wesseling's (2019) article "Researching Child Authors: Which Questions (Not To) Ask" in which she calls for a rethinking of the fundamental tenets of the children's literature studies research field to come to terms with child and youth authorships that are much more complex and less innocent than what we usually consider them to be. This article aims to enrich this small but growing body of literature on youth authorship and very specifically on how we might read such texts from postdevelopmental understandings of children and youth.

We depart from an understanding that developmentalist theories of childhood and youth permeate literature and culture (García-González & Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2020) and that this might also be related to the context of growing erasure of villains and adversaries in children's and youth literature (Díaz-Faes, 2022; Genc & Lenhart, 2020; Larragueta Arribas et al., 2022; Stephens, 2019). As Montreuil et al. (2018) have argued, developmental theories understand children and youth as incomplete moral beings that need adults to mold them. In literature about child development, morality and the capacity to respond to moral dilemmas are usually produced as adult capacities and children and youth as in the process of acquiring them. We posit that the progressive erasure of villains and evil in children's and youth's cultural products might respond to developmentalist concerns regarding the capacities of children and youth to deal with moral conflict. Villains have become more and more tame in cultural products for children and youth, even sometimes being turned into heroes altogether—as in, for example, the movie *Despicable Me* (Coffin & Renaud, 2010).

Scholars who have attempted to study the relation between children, youth, and the concept of evil have explored its normative effects. These studies argue that children and youth ascribe the category of evilness and villainy to "others," usually as part of a political processes of othering that reproduces dominant cultural norms (Spanothymiou et al., 2015; van Kessel, 2017). For example, in their study of children and youth evaluating villains and evil in children's literature and cultural products, Spanothymiou et al. (2015) found that frequently students would state that villains come from "other countries" and have a "different cultural identity," as well as being older than them (p. 52). Cathryn van Kessel (2017) corroborates these findings, arguing that evil is an order-word (in a Deleuzian sense) that reproduces othering assemblages with specific affective repertoires. van Kessel explains that the "application of the word *evil*, like the word *guilty*, can change social positions in a profoundly negative way" (p. 579, italics in original); she found that when students produced evilness it was sticky with affects like cold, shivers, fear, and unease (p. 585) which, according to her, could later relate to hate. van Kessel (2017) finishes her article identifying a need to "trouble the power of the word evil" (p. 597).

This article attempts to respond to these critiques, gaps, and epistemological queries by exploring how student writers were becoming with affective repertoires related to villainy and wickedness. In the following section, we describe the methods involved in the production of the data in the pilot of the NWP and our thoughts on the data through these theories.

Sites and methods

The Ministry of Education of Chile developed the NWP, a writing promotion program piloted in 2019. In its first stage, this program assumed the challenge of fostering motivation for writing among students as a response to the available evidence showing particular deficiencies in writing education. The Chilean language K–12 curriculum includes several learning objectives related to writing. These objectives are "free writing, writing narratives, writing informative articles, writing other non-literary texts, readability, writing processes and language skills" (Espinosa & Concha, 2015). The objectives concerned with free writing promote student experimentation with language, advising that students search for a personal voice in their writing and develop a pleasurable need to write. Even though ten years have passed since the promulgation of the curricular documents setting these objectives, available research on the topic showed that writing education in the country was usually centered on describing textual structures, writing texts without an addressee, emphasizing correct spelling and grammar, and producing texts with themes of little interest to students, with little room for personal writing (Espinosa, 2018; Flores-Ferrés et al., 2020; Gómez et al., 2016). Hence, students in grades 1–12 received free writing diaries with exercises to trigger writing for personal, social, and fictional purposes, using several discursive genres (lists, notes, posters, letters, stories, dialogues, etc.). After the pilot study, the program was implemented throughout the country in public and charter schools.

A qualitative study of the pilot implementation of the NWP (Espinosa & Concha, 2015) showed that students welcomed free writing. The students in the study expressed that the diaries allowed them to explore their subjectivities and personal interests, which they thought was something they rarely got to do in school. This study also showed how students produced the diaries as a possibility to write freely in contrast to traditional school writing characterized as fake or a routine of fictitious roles. Finally, this study found that students valued the opportunity the diaries gave them to express feelings and emotions that usually have no space in schools, like anger, sorrow, desire, violence, and pleasure. As one girl interviewed described, writing freely "is like your life, but in writing" (Espinosa & Concha, 2015).

The writing exercises considered for this article were written by grade 9–11 students aged 14 to 17 from two schools participating in the piloting of the NWP. Specifically, 219 diaries were collected for analysis, 127 from students in a rural public school from a small city near the metropolitan area, and 92 from an urban charter school in Santiago. Within the sample, 92 diaries belonged to 9th-grade students, 40 to 10th-grade students, and 87 to 11th-grade students, totalling 110 identified as females and 109 as males. Students received a notebook with several writing prompts and were invited to write at different moments during the language class. Teachers were asked to implement frequent writing routines, but each of them could establish the exact frequency that best fit their context. Because free writing can trigger personal experiences, teachers were advised to keep the notebooks in a box whenever the writing activity was over, in consideration of students' privacy and to prevent texts from being read without students' explicit consent. From the 219 collected diaries of grade 9–11 students, 145 of them had written responses to the prompt *You are the villain or the villainess of the story. Write an evil text*. These responses were photographed and read by the research team and then analyzed.

We analyzed the material using Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei's (2012) methodological proposal of *thinking with theory* by examining how the data "glowed" (MacLure, 2010, 2013) with particular significance in relation to our understandings of affective repertoires. Jackson and Mazzei describe thinking with theory as a process of diffractive reading in which the data analysis is done by "plugging in with theory" and troubling traditional divisions between analytical and theoretical approaches. Through this process the researchers are invited to arrange and rearrange data and theory together in an iterative process. In our case, it moved us to read the diaries and data as interrupting normative affective repertoires. We plugged the concepts of affective repertoires and becoming

(Deleuze, 1994) into the data. While doing this diffractive reading, we looked for data that glowed. In other words, we were aware of the "emergence of sense in encounters with data" (MacLure, 2013, p. 661). This means that we welcomed the emergence of the "abstract or intangible that exceeds propositional meaning" (MacLure, 2013, p. 661). We understood that the data glowed when several things happened as our research team encountered the diaries. As MacLure (2010) explains,

> some detail … starts to glimmer, gathering our attention. Things both slow down and speed up at this point. On the one hand, the detail arrests the listless traverse of our attention across the surface … that holds the data, intensifying our gaze and making us pause to burrow inside it, mining it for meaning. On the other hand, connections start to fire up: the conversation gets faster and more animated as we begin to recall other incidents and details…. And it is worth noting in passing that there is an affective component … to this emergence of the example. The shifting speeds and intensities of engagement with the example do not just prompt thought, but also generate sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain frissons of excitement, energy, laughter, silliness. (p. 282)

We finally organized our sense making into four "findings" (or students' strategies of becoming writers) which helped us sketch such entanglement of youth, writing, diaries, and discourses. We have organized these findings in three sections: students becoming writers with fluidity and ambiguity, students becoming writers with literary tropes and political repertoires, and students becoming writers with lack of punishment and cruel joy.

Students becoming writers with fluidity and ambiguity

In these stories, we found a fluid and ambiguous production of the figure of villains, victims and heroes. Both in the stories where the writer used a first-person narrator and in those that did not, characters were not easily defined and often it was hard to detect who was the villain. We found many where the characters were animals, as in fables, but in most, the moral in the story did not quite fit traditional narratives. For example, in one of the stories the trope of the wolf as a villain appeared in a rather unexpected way:

> The bad guy in the story. Tired of being always the bad guy in stories, the wolf got up that morning ready to resign his position. (Student writer 1, 2019)

The young writer becomes with the trope of the evil wolf while deconstructing it with a figuration of a tired wolf, who works as such and has to address a boss who will receive his resignation. We could read this story as a playful reimagining of traditional tropes of evil, as well as a critique of clear-cut production of traditional characters in children's stories, which lack the complexity and fluidity of other cultural products.

Other stories about animals also exemplify the playful nature of some of the students becoming writers with villainy. One of these students engaged with affective repertoires related to violence against animals:

> I'm walking and a little dog approaches me and I stick my tongue out at him and leave, ha ha ha I'm so evil. (Student writer 2, 2019)

The first line of the story recalls discourses and affective dispositions toward violence against animals, but the story rapidly twists the direction with irony to describe the action—sticking your tongue out at a dog—as an evil one, accompanying it with a laugh. The author plays with us readers, first leading us through an uncomfortable path, then mocking us by producing a seemingly inconsequential action as a wicked one. The fluid conceptualization of what counts as evil and the ambiguity in relation to the production of the villain are crossed by this taunting. Something similar happens with this other story:

> There never was a bunny more evil than Evil Bunny. Or at least that is what we can suppose after reading the letter he left on his bed one day after returning from school. (Student writer 3, 2019)

The student becomes in this story with this mischievous and playful production of an evil bunny. The first sentence sets us up as readers to be surprised by the representation of a naive bunny that wants to be perceived as evil. This student writer may be referring to *The Secret Life of Pets* (Renaud, 2016) and Snowball, the tough bunny character in it, to engage with evil. This bunny writes a letter about its evilness. Or—as in the use of "we can suppose after reading the letter"—the student writer is involving us as readers in the production of its evilness. The idea of a bunny attending school contrasts with what may be expected to be rebellious, producing a humorous turn in the narrative. At the same time, the story seems to be written as a preamble or an announcement of acts that do not occur during the time lapse narrated.

Finally, we also found many stories in which ambiguity and fluidity are related to the absence in the story of explicit evil acts or villains:

> Goodness is relative to the eyes of those who were raised with morals. (Student writer 4, 2019)

> Feelings only limit you from achieving your goals, you are weak. You lack hate. (Student writer 5, 2019)

These two examples lack the humour of the previous ones. These students use more sombre tones that engage with circulating ideas and affects about evilness, that is, with ideas about morality, goodness, and hate. These stories seem to set a scene for becoming evil, and do not engage with characters or actions. We can see ambiguity when the evil acts do not appear explicit in the story and readers are left to imagine what these announcements might imply. In both cases, the writers appear to be challenging the developmental and/or educational framework of being "raised" in certain ways. Writer 5 appears to be addressing a young person with the advice to embrace hate as a medium to achieve goals in life. Hate is here a productive force separated from feelings as those that make you weak. The author rejects those emotional repertoires that society instills in children—about being empathic, about orientating themselves to happiness—and proposes that hate (and resentment) are the way to get where you want to go.

Students becoming writers with literary tropes and political repertoires

This evil-text writing exercise appears to have channelled many literary tropes and affective repertoires. In the writing diaries we found plenty of archetypes, for example, the righteous indignation of revenge, or the playfulness of the gallant thief. As the most important exception for the lack-of-justification kind of story, we found stories related to rage or anger assembled with a vigilante or Robin-Hood-style main character, in which the rich were robbed and sometimes wealth was redistributed, like these ones:

> I am a villain, but I help all poor people and kill the richest ones. So, I was a good person. (Student writer 11, 2019)

> If I were a villain I would commit myself to stealing and doing great feats of the best robberies. I would steal from rich people and people with a lot of money so that they learn to feel what a sacrifice is, to live working to possess something. (Student writer 12, 2019)

As we see in both stories, violence may be justified for the means of social justice. Helping poor people and killing rich people is presented as a path out of villainy. The stories do not make explicit what makes a character a villain and disrupt normative moral orders. If the people being killed are rich, then evil turns into grace.

Some stories elaborate evil in relation to the Chilean political context to produce stories in which right and wrong are made anew. For example, the following story also uses the "eat the rich" trope while applying it to the representation of former president Sebastián Piñera (a multimillionaire who was Chile's president for two terms). Chilean social movements have used the figure of former president Piñera and the militarized police that control marches and demonstrations as antagonists and enemies of the people (Errázuriz, 2021a, 2021b) This story incorporates the figure of Piñera to produce a story with an antihero of sorts and subverts the concept of villain by introducing vernacular use of language traditionally associated with the working class in Chile:

> Gonna find a villainess to help me steal, and I'm gonna extinguish the insects just like I'm gonna fill the damned cuicos with cuts. I don't care if I make 'cuico' children orphans. First, I'm gonna take over La Moneda [presidential palace] and if Piñera makes trouble I'm gonna kill him too. I will have a big party in La Moneda. (Student writer 13, 2019)

Cuico is a vernacular Chilean word that means rich upper-class subjects. It is used pejoratively. This story involves the term villainess as it is used in Reggaeton lyrics, a sort of femme fatale who is involved as the partner of the protagonist and participates in the evil acts described by him. It also narrates the premise of robbing and killing the rich and uses pejorative terms to refer to them (insects, *cuico*). The protagonist in the story fights not only the rich but also the symbolic representation of the antagonist of social movements, former president Piñera, in his path to the presidential palace. The ending includes a plan to host a big party there that would include people not usually allowed in government buildings. This story, in the context of the Chilean social revolt of 2019, illustrates how children can become writers with common cultural tropes—like eat the rich—and also with social movement narratives in which the president or the police are positioned as antagonists, since at that time the police, following the president's orders, violated the human rights of protestors. In these social movement narratives, the protestors are produced as heroes who usually destroy emblematic symbols of oppressive power, such as statues. The previous story does not replicate the selflessness of protestors fighting the good cause present in social movement narratives, but it still incorporates the desecration of the presidential palace and Piñera as an antagonist. This story participates in the collective production of social imaginaries, including in it social class conflict and violence. Other stories also responded to this historical context, echoing social movement narratives in relation to the police:

> I'm a policeman, I repress my people and I suck politician dick. The end. (Student writer 14, 2019)

> *Order and Fatherland* (Student writer 15, 2019)

The first story appears to draw on homophobic imaginaries to present policemen as evil and submissive. Evil is found in policemen who use violence against their own people, following politicians' orders. The villain in this story—the policeman—is characterized as servile. The student becomes a writer with social justice discourses circulating in relation to police brutality, but also with sexism and the production of sexual acts deemed feminine or gay as denigrating. In contrast, the second story simply states the title of the official hymn of the police in Chile—"Order and Fatherland"—as a response to the instruction "write an evil text." The student writer used the hymn's title as a whole story, and in doing so, deterritorializes and reterritorializes the words order and fatherland to situate the Chilean police as repressive villains. In this way, the author asserts that the ideals of order and fatherland justify evil acts and evil police.

Students becoming writers with lack of punishment and cruel joy

Cruel joy refers to expressions of pleasure and enjoyment of violence against others. This enjoyment of violence—no matter if the recipients of the violence deserve it or not—is ubiquitous in different types of stories from the diaries. Cruel joy is also somehow allowed by the lack of punishment for the acts that led to the enjoyment of

violence in these stories. Because there is no punishment, penalty, or call for attention in the stories after the evil acts are committed, the characters in the stories are allowed to enjoy and rejoice in evilness and villainy. The lack of consequences for evil actions is remarkable in relation to the most common narratives that we find in children's and youth literature. This lack might relate to gaming cultures in which we find abundant references to moral engagement in dubious acts with no consequences in virtual worlds (Atkinson & Rodgers, 2016; Bareither, 2017; Gandolfi & Antonacci, 2020; Klimmt et al., 2006). Could we assume that in these written pieces there is a certain contentment in leaving the evil actions' motivations unexplained? For example:

> In a park there is a line of ants and when I put my finger [on the line of ants]. They all scatter and finally I drown them. (Student writer 6, 2019)

> There was a time where a villainess was called Maura Dalia and she destroyed a whole city. The end. (Student writer 7, 2019)

Without giving any kind of reason or justification for the acts, both stories present damage as the centre of the story. In the first story, the victims are ants. In the second one, the victim is a city (and, we may assume, all that is contained in the city). The motivation for causing the damage is unexplained and the acts go unpunished.

In some stories the motive for villainy is acquiring money, but the story does not reveal how it became a motivation. There is another story that does not present a negative consequence but portrays the evil act as an effort, a sacrifice that allows the character to get pleasure in the form of satisfaction or excitement:

> Many think that villains only kill or destroy people, but I achieved something more compelling: psychological damage. Everyone is afraid of something, which leaves them paralyzed. The satisfaction of seeing them fighting their demons and losing is the most exciting thing in the world. Therefore, I managed to dominate this city. The people are so vulnerable that I managed to win. But there is always a sacrifice. (Student writer 10, 2019)

The description of joy as the motivation of evilness and evil acts frames this story and defies adultist perspectives concerning appropriate narratives for children and youth. Morality is reconfigured in relation to these pleasures. For example, one of the stories accompanied by drawings is the first-person account of a woman who had her heart broken by unfaithful lovers so many times that she began toying with men's feelings. The drawing in the story shows a woman cutting the heart out of one man, with the female character smiling and holding a knife as the man seems baffled and bleeds (Student writer 16, 2019). The story in this page is ambiguous in the use of "cutting the heart out" of men and keeps readers wondering if this phrase is metaphoric, but the drawing shows the actual depiction of this action. The enjoyment of the evil woman of the story is related to causing not just emotional but also physical pain, which provokes cruel joy in her. This might reflect becoming with different moral codes and values than those expected from students in schools.

The association of pleasure and enjoyment with cruelty and violence is produced in different ways. In this other story the student writer produced characters who felt fulfilled by murder:

> When I was a little girl, I was afraid of spiders. They told me that they [spiders] did not have feelings, that their hearts never beat, But I know the truth. When it comes time to kill, they feel more full of life. (Student writer 17, 2019)

The student becomes a writer with the production of villainy as an enjoyment of violence, death, and damage to others, and these desires—and sometimes actions—do not carry punishment or consequences for the perpetrators. Other student writers are even more succinct in their representation of the enjoyment of violence, sometimes

present in laughter or other signs.

> *I get my popcorn, sit on the couch and press the little button and … ¡¡¡Kaboom!!!* [accompanied by the drawing of an atomic mushroom cloud] (Student writer 18, 2019)

> *The one that crosses my path will die =)* [smiley face] (Student writer 19, 2019)

The idea of sitting down to eat popcorn and watch a bomb go off links a common pleasurable action—watching a spectacle while eating popcorn—with a terrible action: detonating an atomic bomb. In this story the student becomes writer with the enjoyment of extreme but not explicit violence. Another signification of this cruel joy can be read in the smiley face that accompanies the phrase "the one that crosses my path will die." Morality seems to be remade in these stories. The enjoyment of violence or damage against others becomes significant and more valuable even than human and nonhuman life.

We read the multiple expressions of cruel joy in the stories as being related to fantasies of engaging in evil. There is a desire to engage in violent acts that are enjoyable when the author has control over the outcomes of the characters and the story. This exercise allowed students to be affected by those pleasures.

Discussion: *These violent delights [do not] have violent ends*

The richness of the porosity of villainy and evilness in the examined stories is productive in relation to the literary tropes available for students and new possible affective and moral repertoires. The exercise's prompt appears to present an opportunity to enter a "zone of exception" where villainy is allowed. The exercise destabilizes adultist notions of childhood, youth, and cultural products for children and youth. We approached these texts as a response to Montreuil et al.'s (2018) call to "examine children's morality [through a deeper] engagement from researchers in the 'worlds' of children" (p. 24). The prompt allowed the emergence of knowledge related to violence, evil, and youth.

For one part, the students' becomings with evilness and villainy foster cracks in what Vintimilla (2014) calls a politics of niceness embedded in neoliberal schoolscapes. The stories do not reflect neoliberal desires related to happiness and niceness, but speculative worlds in which students could experience the pleasures of violence without evidently breaking school norms about children, youth, and society. For example, the engagement of students with social movement tropes, which is constantly policed and condemned by school adult agents in student politics (Errázuriz, 2021b), can happen as an imagined world in the writing diaries. The exercise on villainy allowed the student writers to become and merge into "other ways of being in the world, and other beings in the world" (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 92). The students were invited to become writers with evilness and villainy embodying affects related to *violent delights* that do not necessarily *have violent ends* (paraphrasing Shakespeare's popular line in *Romeo and Juliet*).

These speculative refusals of neoliberal niceness are related to what van Kessel (2017) calls the order-word evil. In her article she shows how students respond to the concept of evil by reproducing othering processes. Our findings stand in contrast to the affects found by van Kessel in her study of evil and youth. Evil is sticky, not with uneasiness or shivers, but with laughter, cunning smiles, and pleasure. We argue that the significance of the analyzed exercise is that students becoming with this writing process "trouble the power of the word evil" (van Kessel, 2017, p. 597). Becoming writer with evilness and villainy has the potential to destabilize the order-word evil by engaging students in speculative becomings with evilness, interrupting othering processes. Evil characters and villains are not easily identified in the stories we analyzed, thus making it hard to establish a clear division between who is identified as "us" and who as "them." On the other hand, one of the most ubiquitous affective repertoires crossing

these stories was related to cruel joy, or the pleasures derived from engaging in physical violence and causing pain to others in the virtual worlds within the writing diaries.

In game studies literature, virtual worlds created for digital gaming have become cultural zones of exception where people can engage and enjoy violent acts against nonplayer characters or even other players without significant consequences, thus breaking the moral rules and norms of the actual world (Atkinson & Rodgers, 2016, p. 1293). We see the exercise of writing about becoming an evil villain as a virtual world that functions as a cultural zone of exception. Students become writers with the pleasure and joy of violence—particularly of exerting this violence against others—in similar ways to which gamers become in games with these possibilities. As Christoph Bareither (2017) explains in his study of the pleasures of violence on gaming platforms such as GTA5 or DayZ, "playful virtual violence is a practice of using some of the meanings and implications of actual physical violence through these very explicit computer-mediated representations while framing this practice as play. Ultimately, this practice serves one purpose: to do pleasure" (p. 112). In that study, the researcher uses the term "feeling rules," which we consider a similar concept to affective repertoires. Feeling rules about violence in the actual world are related to condemnation, indignation, fear, and unease, but these rules are different in virtual spaces. Bareither explains that feeling rules

> dictate how one is to feel when violence is used and this depends on context. Only in very specific situations (for example: the hero kills the villain) can these feeling rules actually suggest having positive emotional experiences related to violence. Usually our bodies have learned to feel bad when violence happens, especially when the violence is unjust. An example for this is torture, which is not supposed to evoke positive emotional experiences at all (...) reflected in recent years by the public outcries about the pictures of US soldiers grinning while torturing prisoners. So we can assume that intentionally hitting and killing pedestrians with a car or torturing another player in DayZ are acts that normally would make the actors "owe" emotional dues such as remorse, sadness, etc. However, since these practices are both virtual and playful players can consider themselves at least partially exempt from these feeling rules. (p. 115)

The affective repertoires and how they assemble in cultural zones of exception differ from the ways in which students in schools are expected to be affected by evil, villainy, and physical violence against others. Reactions of disgust against characters who engage in acts of extreme violence and evil in cultural products such as TV shows or literature stand in contrast to the ways in which subjects might become in (un)real spaces, where they are morally allowed to engage with these *violent delights*.

This does not mean that the exercise of becoming writer in relation to villainy and evil might lead to violence in the actual world. Game studies scholars analyze these zones of exception as spaces where normative affective repertoires are more flexible and thus allow for new speculative worlds. For example, in their study about the *Overwatch* game platform, Gandolfi and Antonacci (2020) argue that players become with different types of violence which can be ludic and escapist, critical to problematize situations, practical, and even utopian, related to existential values. In our analysis of the villainy texts, we also found becomings with violence that signalled structural inequalities and problematic social assemblages. Nevertheless, there is still value in those exercises where evilness is not explained by subversion of modes of becoming. In his article Bareither (2017) posits that in the practices of playful virtual violence "we see that the pleasure of transgression does not emerge from simply feeling good about unjust violence. It rather emerges exactly because feeling good about unjust violence creates a contrast to how one should actually feel about it" (p. 116). The playfulness of the virtual space of this written exercise allowed students to become writers with evil and violence and, at the same time, to become in contraposition to them, allowing them to enjoy the violent delights without having to deal with the violent ends, and also—as Kortney Sherbine (2020) explores—

normative relations with cultural products and affective repertoires in education. The evil text writing exercise created a niche of speculation in schools, a virtual world that functions as a cultural zone of exception where student writers and villainy produce nonnormative affects.

This article has shown the value of children and youth experimenting with writing, particularly in relation to topics that seem to be tightly guarded and censored by schools and adults. The entanglement of the writing diaries, the policies related to the diaries, the evil text exercise, students, their voices, and cultural and political tropes allowed these youth to become writers with villainy and evilness and explore morality while producing imagined worlds of their own. The diaries and the experimentation with writing produced a cultural zone of exception for the students to playfully engage with difficult and complex topics like violence and cruel joy. The affective repertoires circulating through these exercises function as deterritorializing forces in relation to adultist assemblages related to children, youth, morality, and cultural products for them.

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