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*Collaborative writing ‘betwixt and between’ sits jaggedly against traditional regimes of authorship*

*Abstract*

*In the context of academic financialisation where writing is ‘repurposed’ as an outcome designed to maximise financial profit, and to resist the pressure to be ‘careless’ (Lynch 2010) ‘ideal functionaries’ (Pereira 2012), we – a group of five women academics – come together to share stories of our accrued wisdom about living in the afternoon of our lives. We also share our creative writing and theorising about collaborative writing processes in papers, chapters, and conference presentations. As we do so, we encounter a conflict between our practice of inter-personal collaboration and the traditions and pressures of academic authorship where we are expected to publish in a vertical hierarchy of*

*(first author,  
nameless et al.s,  
date).*

*We therefore reflect on the paradoxes and tensions involved in collaborative writing within the academy. In particular, we explore how co-operative practice congruent with the philosophical framework of new materialism sits jaggedly against an academic culture of individualism, surveillance, audit, and the pressure for academics to (be seen to) publish. We offer no conclusion or easy resolution, but like Socratic ‘gadflies’ we seek to trouble the structural impediments to collaborative writing in the academy*

*Keywords: Collaborative writing, feminism, new materialism*

## **Background and introduction**

We begin this discussion by establishing a context within which we work, and with which some of you may be familiar – the contemporary academy. We also establish the form of communication we use throughout this paper by juxtaposing traditional academic scholarship with writing that reflects an embodied and feminine experience of working with/in academia. In doing so we blur ink with blood (that which has been written with that that has been felt), and blend the scholarship of others with the beats of our own, to reveal a collaborative and holistic practice of writing. In concert with

Cixous' (1975) reflection that disrupting traditional masculine discourse can act as a form of feminine resistance, we seek to present a creative/academic argument, in content and form, to establish that through collaboration, like mixing liquids in a petri dish, individuals' contributions can become indistinguishable from that of another's, and logic/s and emotion/s dissolve into each other. Moreover, we consider that the productive, and reproductive, energy of collaboration, can bring forth ideas and writing that would not have been birthed through individual endeavour or creativity. So, through a blurring of scholarship with personal and creative reflection, we critique the notion that collective composition can be communicated and valued through hierarchically ordered academic authorship.

Universities of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are widely understood to have become subordinated to and shaped by the imperatives of the economy (Pereira 2015), and many of us working within the academy feel that our work is becoming increasingly commodified, seen predominantly in terms of how it can financially profit the academy. A second impact of the academy's genuflection to the economy is a radical transformation in our working conditions, which includes an 'elasticisation' in time and space of when and where we engage in scholarly work (Lynch 2010; Gornall & Salisbury 2012), with increases in workloads so significant that we can only complete all our responsibilities by working outside of our contracted number of working hours (Gill 2010). For many of us the increase in intensity and demands of our work is wearing. It wear(ie)s us, and our wear ebbs into our work, and our work flows into our lives – not ceasing for Sunday nor holiday.

Each day I go home from  
work I see myself in the small  
rectangular glass pane of the  
front door. I see myself as a  
husband or wife might  
sometimes see their spouse,  
and I ask: 'Is this job affecting  
you?' When I ask myself this  
question I give it much  
thought: over the lip of a  
drinking glass, in the face of  
the microwave, at the foot of  
the bed. Yes yes, I know. I see  
the body in everything. 'This  
is because of your work,' I  
say. 'The boxes are piled too  
high. You cannot see over  
them.'

(Watkins 2014: 6)

Indeed, the resulting stress of academics' (over)work exceeds that found in the general population (Catano et al 2010) and it's likely that a practicing academic reading this currently feels 'exhaust[ed], stress[ed], overload[ed], ... anxi[ous]' (Gill 2010: 229), while for many of us the wear seems to dissolve the plumpness of our flesh, the density of our bones, and the agility of our muscle.

Inside she feels paper-thin  
her ribs made of pipe cleaners  
her spine of liquorice.  
She's had the stuffing knocked out of her. She's spent.

(Crimmins in press)

A third impact of the financialisation of academia is the repurposing of academic activity to achieve the highest levels of profitability possible (Morley 2016), part of which requires academics to produce a ‘quantity’ of scholarship in ‘high ranking’ journals identified by the academy to be of value, and to follow research trajectories determined as institutional priority areas (Rigg, McCarragher & Krmenc 2012). As a result, many academics’ creative and scholarly activity is not driven by their curiosity or perplex, but is tailored to fit both the interests and styles of a favoured area of investigation and publication. In these ways, neo-liberalist management structures are said to privilege performance management over creativity, criticality, or scholarly independence (Morley 2016).

We pause and nod. This idea reverberates with/in us. It feels like a truism to us (the authors) that income generation and performance management are privileged over (our) creativity, (our) criticality, or (our) scholarly independence as we are positioned as instruments, part of the neoliberal apparatus (Honan, Henderson & Loch 2015). Correspondingly, when a striving for profit shapes decisions about which topics, and modes of inquiry and communication are celebrated or relegated in academic institutions (Pereira 2012), ‘epistemic injustice’ is enacted, and only certain phenomena are researched and made known (Morley 2016).

The walled garden becomes more walled. Moss grows over what is left unseen/unknowable.

In such a regime academics who research themselves/ourselves are accused of ‘navel gazing’ (Livholts 2012: 4) and speaking in the first person is considered both incorrect and an indulgence (Palmer 1998). In contrast, we are schooled to adopt an objective gaze and to communicate in ‘grapholect’ – a form of third person ‘objective’, concise and formal language (Bizzell 1992). Yet grapholect is anything but objective, it is a derivation of an upper-class code of communication of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and its valued position in most academic journals takes a clear stance that only reason, separate from emotion, can produce ‘proper’ knowledge (Bizzell 1999). Correspondingly, Don Watson laments that the contemporary academy and its language are unable to convey any human emotion, including the most basic ones such as happiness, sympathy, greed, envy, love or lust. ‘You cannot’, he says, ‘tell a joke in this language, or write a poem, or sing a song. It is a language without human provenance or possibility’ (in Davies 2005: 1). Such tendencies and restrictions can lead universities to become affectless spaces (Clegg 2013), with a pressure for academics to live the ‘careless’ lives of ideal functionaries (Pereira 2012). This position presents an irony, or a double bind. Academics are to take good care, to be care-full, not to (look as if we) care about that which we investigate or write. We are encouraged to leave our hearts at the door of academia.

### **Being careful in a careless place**

Leanne walked into her office at the University ready to start the day. Well, she thought she was ready, but when she arrived Leanne felt as though she was missing something. She couldn’t quite put her finger on it but the sensation lingered, refusing to leave her in peace. Leanne sat down on her chair and surveyed the room around her, trying to locate the source of her incompleteness.

Had she forgotten her laptop? Had she left her mobile phone at home?  
Or perhaps she had missed a meeting that wasn't in her diary?

Without thinking Leanne's hand strayed to touch her forehead and she felt an unspoken sense of relief to find her head still in place. She stood up and looked outside the window and then she saw it – the lost thing she had been looking for. It was her heart. It lay on the footpath below just outside the door and she raced downstairs to retrieve it. With two hands Leanne carefully picked up her heart and went to carry it inside with her so that she might feel whole again. But each time she tried to walk through the glass doors, they automatically closed shut and refused to allow her entry. Leanne tried again, again and again but to no avail. She took off her shoes, thinking that perhaps they were not walking the talk closely enough. She took off her coat, thinking that perhaps she had been mistaken for a Woolf in sheep's clothing. But still she was denied access. Leanne looked down at heart and wondered. She gently wrapped it in her coat and laid her heart gently on the ground. This time the doors slid open without question. Leanne knew she had no choice. She must separate her heart thinking from her head feeling. She left her heavy heart outside and took her heavy head back to her office to begin the day. (Lipton & Mackinlay 2017: 102)

For us, we five women, a line is drawn. We cannot continue to shape ourselves into cogs in the production of 'the academicwritingmachine' (Henderson, Honan & Loch 2016); we cannot comfortably squeeze personal curiosity, a sense of wonderment, or the 'I' or 'we' out of our academic lives. Though we are tired and weary, a pulse remains to reveal ourselves and to connect with others.

*Tired and empty*

*Life-sapped, energy depleted*

**All forms filled in, boxes checked, still room for improvement**

*All hours in the day spent*

*Dragging feet, heart crying out, trying to listen, trying to add value, trying, trying, trying, dying*

*Where is the joy, the vision, the making of a difference?*

**Compliance, accountability, do more, do more with less**

*Pressure, guilt, drained from doing, yet not doing enough?*

*Not doing what matters... ...to me*

*Where is what matters?*

*The mattering of meaning, community, relationships.*

**Compliance checks, benchmarks, performance measures by COB**

*Too many deadlines, too many deadlines, too many deadlines.*

*Dead inside. Draw the line.*

*I don't want to stand back and let education and systems and accountability delete the person, delete the joy and the creativity*

*I don't want the shallow to delete the deep*

*I don't want the far gaze to delete the looking closely*

*I want to understand your life and for you to understand mine*

(Black 2015)

So, with/in this context of elasticisation, intensification and 'repurposing of academic activity' to maximise financial profit, we five women academics, the co-authors of this paper, are drawn together to share our experience as women academics in the afternoon of our lives. In deliberate resistance to the neo-liberalist script – and its related pressure – to live affectively thin (Collini 2012) and careless (Lynch 2010) lives, we seek out spaces for re/humanising companionship and com/passion.

### **A line is drawn**

We therefore interrupt our  
student-email  
grant-proposal  
lecture plan  
tutorial PowerPoint  
draft paper  
promotion application and  
resignation-letter  
writing-filled-weekends  
to pause  
to reflect  
on who we are,  
and how we are living  
as women academics.

Our reflections draw us deeply into the rawness, tenderness, and mostly hiddenness of the lives we live outside-of-academia. We share our hitherto untold stories of birthing a son with Downs Syndrome, a daughter with Ectodermal Dysplasia, losing a mother and father, living with/in depression, losing a husband to alcoholism, engaging in IVF, and growing up surrounded by political pamphlets, optimism and over-full ashtrays. The process of sharing these stories evokes for us a powerful in/vulnerability and we write 'on the edge without a safety net' (Vickers 2002) as women who are academics, but not as academic women.

Through the act of sharing and writing ourselves, writing shaped by feminine and feminist experience, we draw not 'a paper penis' (Cixous 1975), but blur academic/masculinist discourse with poetry, song and image. We create 'bicultural' communication (Blankenship & Robson 1995) by engaging in what Susanne Gannon describes as zig-zagging 'between categories, that produce knowledge in the gaps between analysis and creativity, reason and emotion, intellectual and (aesthetic, mind and body, academic and everyday' (Gannon 2005: 626).

And our writing together is not just productive (though we have collaborated on several book chapters, academic papers, and delivered/facilitated five conference presentations/workshops over the last two years); it is also *reproductive*. Through our writing together our life stories tumble out colliding with each-others, gathering speed, messiness, honesty and bravery, landing on – or being birthed by – receptive bodies. As Sarah reflects:

I used the invitation to write the story that was  
stuck  
through all my other writing  
stuck  
in overcoming my situation  
stuck  
...  
and I stopped my waiting, living in the nether-land  
and told my story  
just as it came.  
There was no judgment  
There was no shame.  
Just my life  
at that time  
... I have by these women,  
been heard.

(Sarah cited in Black, Crimmins & Jones 2017)

Where we had previously felt blocked, burdened and heavy, the emotional energy and receptivity of the writing group seems to draw open our arteries and release stories searching for light.

I move and sit and look at the screen, the keyboard, pause for a moment and then it begins, it flows, sometimes caught like water in a dam, lapping, and then trickling through and then flowing freely, spilling over the top. Likeminded souls residing in the same eras, moved by the same social frames, coming together via awkward technologies, sharing their journeys, their lives, their most memorable, heart-wrenching, soul-giving seconds, hours, and days. In these sittings, someone else's story moves our being, confirms the challenges that must be faced by us as humans. This is life, our lives committed to words, images, metaphors, and emotions. Our emotions freely spill onto the page. (Julianne cited in Black, Crimmins & Jones 2017)

We acknowledge each other's presence as a listening:

This is the first time I have felt that my unique voice is heard and valued. This time has allowed me a space to understand and to begin to voice the enormity of grief at the loss of my life-partner. (Janice cited in Black, Crimmins & Jones 2017)

These, our reflections, speak of the ovarian-like energy that opening oneself and writing with and to others can offer. Previously stuck narratives are provided easy passageway in the drawing forth of our open companionship. And our writing seems to create its own life force, outside of any one of us. Through sharing stories and conversation, we unearth new stories, and new ways to express experience. We listen with full embodiment and respond with care and sensitivity, and through this process of sharing and listening our

writing group has become a human and humanising refuge from the increasing demands of Henderson, Honan & Lock's (2016) 'academicwritingmachine'.

The ongoing conversations and thinking has been something that has sustained me through the last tough years of academia – times when my workload has been beyond me, and my sense of academic worth at rock bottom. In this collaboration, I have found that I have contributions to make, that research can be so much more than what the academy perpetuates. For the first time EVER in my academic life I have a group of women around me who are inclusive ... who also operate from an ethic of caring. Sharing the load has felt important too. And that load sharing looks different each time, but it never feels like "here I am again, doing it all on my own". We are prolific 'responders' and so I find our informal email conversations that 'surround our research work' as meaningful as our academic writing. (Ali cited in Black, Crimmins & Jones 2017)

### **Writing betwixt and between**

Our process of writing and sharing resembles a call and response, a to-ing and fro-ing, yet we adhere not to rules of turn-taking. This process is unlike the practices of women's writing groups such as Beck et al (2006, 2008) who

meet monthly and individuals present their own research for the scrutiny of the group. This scrutiny attends to the structure, clarity and focus of the paper being written rather than the content. Acting as educated lay readers, we bring our disciplinary approaches to bear on what we hear and read. This is not an unwieldy, free for all conversation but follows a discussion template adapted from the workshop and outlined in an earlier paper. (Beck et al 2008)

We, the authors of this paper, confound the patterns of when we will meet, or who will present work, in what order, 'you-then-me-then-her', by sharing our work only when we feel ready to hear others' thoughts about it. And when we are gifted a work we sit with it until its words and images penetrate us. When ready to respond we offer the ideas, memories or emotions that the work evokes from us, and describe how the work resonates with/in us. Rather than offering critique, we talk of the elements that connect us to the work. We also probe for more when we feel there is more to know or feel. So, we might also seek out further detail, texture, image, or percept by asking 'how did it feel?', 'what did it look like to you?', 'does that have a colour or shape?' or simply 'tell me more about it'. We are not therapists or critics but friends seeking connection, and through conversation we re-work each other's stories so that our collective foot/heart-print becomes evident in each (re)developing draft. The residue of each conversation appears as new text, as new image or metaphor, and at the end of our meeting something exists that didn't exist before.

However, what is not so easy to evidence in the lines on a page are the stories – or moments within a story – that are birthed by the involuntary tear, gasp, smile or laugh, and the presence of the group. It is difficult to show how a dawning, a memory, or the courage to write are brought unto being by a companion's held breath, nod, or by their just sitting-near. Yet, we five women regularly experience an intangible, though material, exchange that propels us to share stories that were unlikely to find form without

the attendance of the group. Taken by surprise by the kindest gaze we often share more than we knew we knew, and offer more than we thought we had. Thus, the physical and emotional presence of supportive others can beckon the emergence of unforeseen insights, theoretical connections, metaphors, and memories.

It is in these moments of collective conversations that the unconscious or previously unconsciously known emerges; and our deep connection opens ‘the back door of thought’ (Cixous 2004: 169), to reveal ‘a place where the unthought, the risky, the impossible can be imagined ... [where] writing comes from “deep inside” [Bosanquet 2017: 88]; it comes from somewhere in our stomach/s, in our womb/s’ (Cixous 2004).

And this – our lived experience of the re/productive energy generated by writing together – seems to align with the philosophical concept of new materialism.

## **New materialism**

New materialism is an ideological construct or way of understanding that sits within the broader philosophical landscape of post humanism. It conceptualises humans as but one of many forms of matter that exist and vibrate within the universe. Post-humanism also identifies, in a significant departure from a human-centred thinking, that humans are inextricably enmeshed with/in our environment.

New materialism, and agential realism more specifically, inhabits a post-human thinking where bodies are understood not as pre-existent or independent of each other, but as fully interconnected and brought into being through material interaction/s. That is, agential realism considers that all entities *emerge* through an interplay with other matter. Correspondingly, a new materialist lens suggests that it is through our inter-action/s in the reading and writing of this paper that ‘we’ are brought into being. It also accepts that ‘affect’, a particular form of matter, is created between (our)selves and other material/beings, and so does not belong to specific bodies or entities (Barad 2007). Within this understanding, affect, created between bodies is (re)productive as it stimulates a response-ability. Indeed, for Barad, affect and the often ‘insensible, the irrational, the unfathomable, and the incalculable ... help[s] us face the depths of what responsibility entails’ (Barad 2012: 218). Thus, it seems for us (the co-authors of this paper), that we unconsciously respond to the womb-like affect of the writing group by bearing down and drawing forth stories and experiences that were hitherto hidden, dusty with age and disuse.

Further, just as post-humanism is concerned with questions of *how* non/humans interact, and less concerned with questions of *what* non/humans are (Ulmer 2017), we are concerned with the inter-actions of a collaborative writing group, and acknowledge the creative vibrancy or energy that companionship and conversation can create. In our experience, just as matter is a ‘dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still’ (Barad 2007: 170), so the energy betwixt and between (us) moves us and calls forth a response. Leaning into these ideas, collaborative writing can therefore be understood as the co-production betwixt and between living and non-living matter.

Yet, we were formulating this awareness of the re/productive energy of the writing group before we engaged with theoretical readings around new materialism – before we had clear organising patterns through which to observe our practice. As Rankine states in *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*, ‘Sometimes you read something and a thought that was floating around in your veins organizes itself into a sentence that reflects it’ (Rankine 2004: 127). Proto-new materialist ideas are reflected in our ponderings in 2016, a year before we



encountered ‘the theory’:

And we find we are one, united. Together we soar high above the pages, the heartache, the challenges, the memories – we are brave in these moments when we share the what and the how and the why and the why not... (Julianne reflecting January 2016, cited in Black, Crimmins & Jones 2017)

And without there being a moment of transformation or one event which shredded my cocoon, somehow over time and conversation and sharing and laughing/crying at and with our stories/lives my ‘I’ disappeared. Even in the most personal of ventures of writing of and about oneself, the ‘I’s have gone. Now fearless and fortified by solidarity and vulnerable-strong women we are ready to share more publicly our work, just part of which happens to be written by me. (Gail reflecting January 2016, cited in Black, Crimmins & Jones 2017)

These reflections, and the idea that collaborative writing is co-produced betwixt and between (us) writers, resonate with MacLure’s understanding of what it feels like when we work with the vibrancy of others, as well as the vibrancy of data:

something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over, effecting a kind of quantum leap that moves the writing/writer to somewhere unpredictable. On those occasions, agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us. (MacLure 2013: 661)

Sometimes a surprise email from one of our group creates joy or an excited tremor. Before we read its contents our fingers (or is it our hearts?) tingle with anticipation. Its ‘affect’ is not the response of detached and ‘reasoned’ bodies competing with each other for intellectual supremacy or scholarly points, but reflects our embodied beings entangled with the world (Danvers 2016). In contrast to the de-humanising and affectless culture of the academy (Clegg 2013), we experience connection with fully-embodied affect.

We imagine other collaborators might experience similar weaves and embodied connections.

And for writers who may not so ostensibly co-create work, we share the words of Howard S Becker to reflect that ‘all artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people’ (Becker 1982: 1). Indeed, Becker found signs of cooperation and ‘patterns of collective activity’ in everything classified as art, and recognised that all artwork assumes a given form in the context of much broader collaborations and interactions. Similarly, Vernon and Marsh (2014) remind us that there are layers of backstage participation that are not always obvious in the development of poetry, and describe writing as a ‘joint activity’. By this understanding, the work we create bears the footprint of what we have read, watched, heard and touched, and the energy of the land on which we walk. Or as Graham Allen beautifully considers, ‘no text, much as it might like to appear so, is original and unique-in-itself; rather it is a tissue of inevitable, and to an extent unwitting, references to and quotations from other texts’ (Allen 2000: 15).

Thus, it is possible that we are each collaborator, consciously or otherwise. Further, by viewing solar systems and objects within them as matter that vibrate, all relationships are

flattened and inter-connected, as opposed to vertical and hierarchical (Phillips 2016).

Yet (pause) we find this egalitarian notion of the interconnection and horizontal nature of matter within the co-production of writing as paradoxical to the material conditions of the academy – with its current regimes of individualism and self-promotion.

### **The materiality of a neo-liberalist academy**

We therefore experience a tension between writing interactively and collaboratively in a culture of academic competition where the number of our ‘outputs’ and the ‘order of authorship’ can make or break an academic career. In particular, whilst we acknowledge the co-constructed nature of our writing and value the vibrancy of the re/productive energy of an in-between-ness, we are also cognisant that we write in a context where ‘publication productivity, defined as the number of peer-reviewed articles published ... is a primary factor in the assessment of tenure and promotion’ (Rigg, McCarragher & Krmenc 2012: 491).

So, although our coming together carves out a space for re/humanising companionship and com/passion, we feel a pressure for our work to ‘count’ in the academy (Henderson, Honan & Loch 2016). In particular, our interaction as a group of women academic/writers entangles with our material circumstances within the academy where one of us is employed on a one-year fixed term contract; one is on a part time two-year fixed term contract; one is subject to a period of probation before her employment is confirmed; one is seeking promotion to better reflect her contribution to both her institution and the academy; and one is walking away, sore and wounded after finding no foothold in the academy. If we are to gain or maintain a place at the academic table we need to (be seen to) publish, and we are seen when our names are printed as authors on published work.

Indeed, we come together to write in an environment where the value of research is increasingly metricised, audited and used for performance management (Morley 2016), and although Barad suggests that the ‘difference between a research active and a research inactive identity, a knower and non-knower... [is] unstable and transitory (Barad 2003: 822), our experience demonstrates that these categories are used to promote or punish. Our annual ‘personal performance review’ processes require us to identify the number of papers we aim to publish, and the names of journals we will target – like stag or grouse. And as ‘research productivity’ is often easier to measure than other aspects of our work, we are predominantly measured against the number of papers published that bear our name/s (Altbach 2014). Yet most tension for us as collaborators exists because ‘appointments, tenure, promotion and research funding are generally accorded to those who appear as first authors (Wyatt et al 2017), and ‘individually authored, ostensibly academic, publications produced by the lone researcher are most highly rewarded in the current research-funding environment’ (Beck et al 2008). So, when the lead author position is attributed a higher status than that of fellow collaborators the once flattened and inter-connected relationships of co-writers are transformed into a vertical hierarchy of

(first author  
nameless et al.s  
date).

This regime of traditional authorship troubles us, and so we look to other writing collaboratives in the academy to consider what strategies they use to ‘author-ise’ their

collaborative process. A notable collaboration is *Haug et al*, a group of fourteen German feminists who engage in collective memory work as they believe ‘liberation cannot consist in the propagation of solitude’ (Wyatt et al 2017: 739). Yet despite their collective process of inquiry, their use of ‘we’ throughout their work, and ascribing different chapters ‘to individuals or small groups of authors within the collective’ (Wyatt et al 2017), their collective name, ‘Haug et al’ subsumes members in the collective other than Haug. Thus, even in their bid to communicate the collaborative nature of their process a hierarchy is established and the ‘et al.s’ are made invisible.

Other feminists who worked and published collectively are JK Gibson-Graham. Graham, a geographer, and Gibson, a political economist, created a composite authorial name and often used the first person ‘I’ through many of their publications in an effort to demonstrate the cohesive and collaborative nature of their process. However, though a composite name works well for two authors’ collaborating, it functions less effectively for three or more authors, and collaborative writers still have to decide the order of names presented in the amalgamated pen name.

Finally, some feminist collectives list the names of contributors in alphabetic order to communicate equal input to the work, despite the fact that Akhabue and Lautenbach (2010) query how ‘equal contribution’ impacts opportunities for tenure. Alternatively, Wyatt et al (2017) suggest that another strategy for discerning the order of names listed on a publication is to consider ‘who is most in need of first authorship at this particular point in their academic career’ (Wyatt et al 2017: 754). Yet, as we have discussed, in our case this is difficult to ascertain as two of us are employed on fixed term contracts, another is still in the ‘probation period’ that accompanies new academic appointments, and another is seeking academic promotion. Furthermore, universities increasingly use the previous year’s publication metrics to allocate ‘research hours’ in subsequent academic years. Without ‘first authorship’, even if we are fortunate enough to be offered another fixed term contract, we may be stripped of the research hours so vital to co-creating our writing without a first-authorship role in our publications. Our co-operative practice and impulse to collaborate thus sits jaggedly against an academic culture of individualism, audit, and the pressure for us to (be seen to) publish.

Therefore, although like Wyatt and Gale (2017: 356) we are ‘drawn by the disruptive, creative, revolutionary world ... collaborators offer’ us we also need ‘to be counted, to belong, to be hailed as academic, to be successful, to be recognised’ (Honan, Henderson & Loch 2015: 46) in order to maintain our academic positions. Hence, we feel a compulsion to comply with some dominant practices and positions in academia ‘as a matter of survival’ (Angervall 2016). Yet, it is not only an impulse for personal survival that propels us to maintain a role in academia. We don’t engage in our work to marble our floors or chandelier our ceilings; we are academics in order to create new wonderings and knowledge, to inspire and harness the potential of our students, and to support the development of fairer societies. And part of that is to create a fairer academy, which is a microcosm of our society with the potential to model a human and humanising institution. Thus, part of our work as academics is committed to critiquing the competitive and divisive culture of contemporary academia, and feel we can more usefully do that by exposing and wearing down the ‘academicwritingmachine’ (Henderson, Honan & Loch 2016), from inside (it), than outside of it.

Correspondingly, we feel that as critical scholars and practitioners we need to be in the academic ‘game’ to expose its flaws and foibles, and to create alternative offshoots to the narrow individualised and corporate accounts of academia. As Eagleton asks, ‘If neo-liberal resisters ... quit, then what or who remains, and does this signal the end of critical scholarship in academia?’ (quoted in Morley 2016: 33). We therefore need to retain positions in academia to fulfil the role of social scientists to render the world

problematic, and ‘to expose that simplistic and reductive solutions of “what works” formulae is not enough’ (Morley 2016: 40). So, we wish to hold on to our roles in order to act as Socratic ‘gadflies’ unsettling and critiquing academic practices that are prescriptive, restrictive, reductive, and no longer useful in a post-modern epoch which embraces post-humanist ideas and new materialist understandings. Our role, and this paper in particular, thus seeks to highlight the tensions and paradoxes of collaborative creative writing in the academy, and to make manifest our contention that the current focus on outputs and tangible measurements such as the order of authorship fails to accommodate the re/productive and generative potential of shared and collaborative processes.

## Conclusion

This paper explores the context in which we women/academics/writers are drawn together to share the hitherto-hidden stories of our lives. We write in response, and to resist, the pressure to live and write affectless (Clegg 2013) and careless (Lynch 2010) lives; and to find companionship and warmth.

In concert with Wyatt and Gale (2017) who embrace the disruptive and creative world that co-operative writing offers, our coming together also corresponds with the collaborative writing of Beck et al (2008), which is a creative and feminist response to academia’s chilly environment for women (Beck et al 2008). Yet, unlike the organised, structured process of collaborative writing that Wendy Beck and her colleagues employ, our collaborative writing process follows a to-ing and fro-ing and a blurring in the middle. We share our own stories and respond to others by identifying how they resonate (with/in us), and through this process one story seems to beget another, and another ... and at the end of a sharing of conversation and self, we inhabit something new, and something exists in writing that did not exist before.

In acknowledging the creative, womb-like vibrancy that deep listening, companionship and conversation can create, we recognise that many times the stories we birth when we write ourselves (Cixous 1975) come not from a place of consciousness or pre-planning but are drawn from our unthoughts deep in our stomachs or wombs (Cixous 2004). Our reflecting on the process of our women’s writing collaboration we lean into a new materialist understanding that matter is a ‘dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still’ (Barad 2007: 170), and the energy betwixt and between (us) moves us and calls forth our response. More specifically, our practice resembles that of MacLure’s who describes that through the process of intra-action ‘something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over [where] agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us’ (2013: 661). Consequently, as the stories we finally publish or present bear the finger/heart-print of us all, it is not always easy to discern which of us had the most impact on the work created.

Yet, though our storying together brings a humanising and post-human inter-connectivity, we experience tensions and paradoxes when writing collaboratively within the contemporary academy. We acknowledge that the materiality of our writing group exists within (as part rejection to) the materiality of a neo-liberalist academy and that the academic culture within which we produce work betwixt and between us is a financialised material force that exerts a pressure to be individual and evidence one’s individual skills and entrepreneurialism. In particular, we expose how first-authorship is used in the securing of academic tenure, or even another fixed term academic contract; and that evidence of research productivity determines the time and space academics are

afforded to engage in research and writing in subsequent academic years. It seems to us that we need not only to publish, but we need to be seen to publish to secure some footing in academia, and that the order of names in our authorship is a metric that supports an academic's place at the table.

We do not offer a solution to the jagged edge between collaborative practice in the individualised and audit culture of the academy, but seek to draw attention to the often taken-for-granted and hierarchising structures and strictures of traditional publishing to collectively find ways for collaborative writing, as an interconnected and flattening process to be recognised in the academy.

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