



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Two Men Talking: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing

Citation for published version:

Gale, K & Wyatt, J 2008, 'Two Men Talking: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing' *International Review of Qualitative Research*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 361-379.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

International Review of Qualitative Research

Publisher Rights Statement:

Article is available electronically in JSTOR

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.





Two Men Talking

A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing

Ken Gale

Jonathan Wyatt

Abstract This paper follows the authors' collective biographical inquiry into "becoming men" (Gale and Wyatt, 2008), and pursues questions about "men-ness" in their writing relationship. Drawing primarily from Deleuze, both his philosophical concepts — lines of flight, nomadic inquiry, the rhizome, and more — and his insights into his collaborations with others, the authors work together on collaborative research ventures, mostly in an ebb and flow of writings that they exchange across the ether. They write with/to each other about writing, about their respective work, about love, about loss, about subjectivities. They are aware that in the intertextuality of this writing they perform themselves. Using rhizomatic and nomadic inquiry, in this paper they explore the experience of being two men talking, asking: how is this relationship constituted? How does writing create this relationship? What — gendered, sexualized — subjectivities do they perform to/with each other?

We have been writing together for three years, exchanging and responding to each other's writing as we inquire into understanding (our) subjectivities. We are influenced in this endeavour primarily by Deleuze, both by his philosophical concepts — lines of flight, nomadic inquiry, the rhizome, and more — and by his insights into his collaborations with others, particularly with Guattari and Parnet. For example, Deleuze writes:

What mattered was not the points — Felix (Guattari), Clare Parnet, me and many others, who functioned simply as temporary, transitory and evanescent points of subjectivation — but the collection of bifurcating, divergent and muddled lines which constituted this book as a multiplicity and which passed between the points, carrying them along without ever going from the one to the other. (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p.viii)

We have been interested in such indeterminacy in our work together: how our collaborative writing creates "muddled lines," and how "we write to fill the spaces between us and yet sense that we never will" (Gale and Wyatt, 2007, p.803).

In our first paper (Gale and Wyatt, 2006) we were struck by the differences between our writing styles; in our second (Gale and Wyatt, 2007) we enquired further into the process of writing and where it leads. In our most recent paper (Gale and Wyatt, 2008) we explored the (continuing) process of our “becoming men.” We exchanged stories from our childhood and early adulthood about boarding school, hair, sexuality, mothers, relationships and more. After Butler (Butler, 2004; Butler, 2006), we discussed the provisional nature of gender, and how in our collaborative writing — our “collective biography” (Davies and Gannon, 2006) — the experience of writing to and with each other about gender was central to our process:

Because of what has gone before, and because of our shared present and prospective shared future, we can perform these versions of our masculinities today. (Gale and Wyatt, 2008)

In this current paper we continue our Deleuzian dialogue about being, not being, and becoming men. We have written this through the practice of exchanging our writings as e-mail attachments (see Gale and Wyatt, 2006; Gale and Wyatt, 2007). Jonathan begins.

Two Men Talking I: December 2006 (Jonathan)

I have stories to tell you, ones that I have thought about sharing with you before now but have held back from. They feel like they are risky.

Tessa¹ more than once, has said to me, about you and me: “If Ken were a woman, I wouldn’t be happy.” I have taken this to mean that she perceives an intimacy between us that disturbs her.

Once, while I was in Bristol meeting you, I failed to contact her during the day. I was caught up in our discussions, preoccupied with you and me and our work together. Later, she and I spoke on the phone. She asked me, lightly and with humour, “Where were you? What were you up to? Were you having sex with a furry Cornishman?”

She calls our writing (affectionately) “up-your-bottom stuff”, referring to its theoretical content and to its focus upon ourselves. Our work is up itself.

Earlier this year (2006), back in about June, as the summer holiday was approaching, Holly (who was 14 at the time) and I were talking. She was asking me what all this writing and reading and talking to you and going to Bristol was about, and what was a doctorate anyway. I was telling her about the writing that you and I were doing together at the time. And I also mentioned that we (the family and you) were going to meet during the summer while we were on holiday. She asked me, with that slightly sneering directness that teenagers seem so adept at: “What is it, Dad? Are you and Ken gay or something?”

Jane Speedy, our supervisor, has often commented how she experiences reading our writings as “ear-wiggling,” a rare opportunity to listen to two men talking. She may have used the word “voyeuristic” in describing her sense of this experience.

When I told Tessa that you and I were doing this piece about being two men talking she pointed out: “But you and Ken don’t count. You’re not proper men.”

I have “mates,” male friends, maybe half a dozen. Most I have known for years, two for well over a quarter of a century. With some I e-mail, and before e-mail we would exchange letters. I meet my friends for nights in the pub. I have been on holiday with one, both when we were single and now with families. My friends are important to me and I would be happy to describe my relationships with them as intimate, but my intimacy with them has not provoked the kinds of questions from the two women in my family — taunting? joking? uncomfortable? — that I have outlined above.

What is it about our relating to each other, about being two men talking — or, more accurately, two men *writing* — that is disturbing, I wonder? And does it disturb us?

Two Men Talking 2: January 2007 (Ken)

Well! This is funny. Two Men Talking (1) has been sitting in my files for quite a while. I have read it a number of times and do you know, each time I read it I laugh! It is lovely that I know Tessa and Holly and can really sense them saying these things. Is it odd that I find their responses to us endearing and amusing?

You have prompted me to write here today. I have been grappling with body-without-organs, connectivity, multiplicity: Deleuze is always there, inspiring me, making me feel uneasy, pushing me to write more. But it is hard. The ideas I am working on here are challenging me and I am struggling to find my voice in this writing. I have found myself using the words of others, impressed and awed by their ideas, eager to immerse myself in them, work with them and then to create my own. Inspiration. These ideas have been with me for a long time and each time I read another plateau or listen into a dialogue with Parnet, they become shaken; I am stirred by what these ideas do to me, how they capture and incite me to think differently. I am desperate to do this collaborative work. Our process makes me think about something Bronwyn Davies (Davies and Gannon, 2006) says concerning her collective biography process and how some of those involved wanted to have a plan. They wanted to know what the writing was for, what the direction was, and Davies could only say “Let’s see what happens, let’s see where it goes.” The nomadic nature of our inquiries into writing seems to be like this. It seems that our lines of flight trace new shoots and pathways

in the rhizome; I am always aware that we or I might be going off in another direction. What feels good about this is the feeling of trust that I have in doing this. I have a feeling — no, it is a knowing — that it will all come together. I have a sense of what we are doing and it convinces me of its worth, it encourages and motivates me to do more. This coming together is the becoming that Deleuze talks about, the folding and the unfolding.

So our becomings as *Two Men Talking* fills me with anticipation, good humour: I sense a certain lightness of being. I don't know what I am going to write but I know that I am going to write from this sense. Like Bacon it is quite possible that bird my will become an umbrella.² The morphology of my writing is not spurred by intention; at the moment it is not even writing as a method of inquiry, it is writing as expression. Let me see what becomes. What is this, our becoming?

Two men talking: what's so unusual about that? Is it what they are talking about? All that "up yer ass" stuff and not about "wimmen," or football, or telling racist or homophobic jokes. Is it that? Is it because it does not conform to the stereotype? That seems too simple but Jane's sense of being the voyeur, Holly's acute teenage observation and Tessa's mature inquisition all tell us something about what we are doing. They are performing their selves to us, they are reading us in particular ways, they are curious. Is this because we are two men talking in ways that surprises them, that encourages them to express forms of disquiet? Jane almost appears gleeful that she is able to peep in to see what we are doing! Tessa's enquiry suggests a reading of us that is perhaps a little threatening: threatening because it is unusual? Women looking at men. Women who care about these men? My partner does not express one jot of curiosity. She encourages me. She asks occasional questions about what we are doing but she never looks at our writing or shows much of an interest in it. If she thought that I was having sex with a tall sensitive (male) therapist she would probably say "Well done!"

And what does this say to something else that Tessa said: "If Ken were a woman, I wouldn't be happy"? It is almost as if our friendship, our writing together, our intimacy, would mean something different if I were a woman? If I were a woman is it likely that you would be having sex with me!? Odd though it is we can be trusted as two men talking; we are not going to engage in anything amiss, we are only having "up yer ass" conversations! But Jane, the self-confessed voyeur, feels that she might be party to a party! She appears to sense that she is becoming privy to intimacies that are, perhaps, suggestive of something more, the mysterious, exotic (erotic?) frisson of two men talking.

Two men talking: what do I think about that? You talk about other relations you

have had with men and observe that it is not like ours. I can similarly reflect upon my friendships and agree with the tentative conclusions that you are making but this does not surprise me.

I sense bodies-without-organs (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). I sense an emerging reluctance to talk about these generalised gendered wholes, these “men,” these “women.” I sense a uniqueness in you and me. I know you inhabit a male body, though, as Judith Butler points out, “sexual difference is not a given” (Butler, 2004, p.178). However, I do not feel that this is leading me to talk generally about you and me as two men talking. It feels to me we are talking; there are verbs and the nouns are not necessary. I recognise you as a man, I recognise me as a man, but I do not therefore feel that this alone inscribes you in a special relationship to me. It is true we are “two men talking” but it feels to me that the “men-ness” of this is subordinated by the “talking-ness.” I am not sure if I want to compare you with others. As I write I have started to do that in my mind, I have started to try to uncover diversities, my friends, lovers, other “men,” other “women,” and all that does is to provide me with rich complexity, thickness of description, multiplicity and connection but little gendered generalisation.

I am being drawn to your final thoughts and curiosities. You say: “The question is, what is it about our relating to each other, about being two men talking — or, more accurately, two men *writing* — that is disturbing, I wonder?” and I think, yes, this is an important question

Tentatively I am going to suggest that “two men talking” is disturbing to others because of the way in which men (and women) are constituted as gendered wholes. We are familiar with Foucault’s discursive effects, with docile bodies and the hegemony of type and specification and it feels to me that what we are beginning to do here is to disassemble all that. If gender as discourse, gender as text makes our talking and writing together in these ways “disturbing,” then that is part of what we are doing and this will involve us in troubling the ways in which sex and gender (whatever they are and however they are related) are always brought together into categories, types, or what Foucault prefers to call, “species” (Foucault, 1998). We are “male” or “female,” “masculine” or “feminine,” “heterosexual” or “homosexual”: it is always nouns. It is always presented as black and white. I can’t stand it: it all seems to be so shallow. The processes at work here are all to do with the idea that we can somehow discover identity rather than about engaging in a consideration of the way in which these identifications are made up at different times and in different places. We have here a set of constructed categories of knowledge which appear to govern us, establishing patterns of conformity and framing our norms, values and beliefs, so it seems to me very exciting to be disturbing these things.

Two Men Talking 3: February 2007 (Jonathan)

I am energised by your writing: by the humour you refer to: I too catch myself laughing at the “furry Cornishman” every time I read or think of it. I am energised by your strength of feeling, your passion, in resisting being “noun-ed”. It’s this that I would like to respond to particularly, by telling you a story. It’s a recent story about a moment when, as St. Pierre says, I think that I “got” Deleuze (St. Pierre, 2004), profoundly: a haecceity. I plugged him in.

I attended a group relations conference in November (Grubb Institute, 2006). Thirty-three participants and ten staff — from the UK, the US, the Middle East, Africa, Scandinavia, and France — gathered for a week to explore what happens in and between groups and organisations. Such events have a long tradition in the work of institutions like the Tavistock and Grubb Institutes (it was the Grubb Institute that ran this conference). Group relations draws from psychodynamic and systems theories about human beings’ behaviour in groups.

The conference was structured around a number of different “events,” where different configurations of the membership (participants and staff) met, always with the same underlying purpose of experiencing and examining the here-and-now of the occasion: what feelings do we notice? What sense do we make of these feelings? What meanings do we attach? How might we articulate these? How does what is happening here connect with the whole? The staff role is to act as consultants to the various different groups, to notice and draw attention to behaviour that they see as being significant in helping them to work with their own dynamics.

One such event was the Large Study Event, which took place each morning for ninety minutes. All participants attended, with three staff as consultants:

It’s the fifth morning. I choose to sit near the middle. The chairs, as always, are in a spiral. As the room fills around me I can see the backs of some people’s heads, the faces of others. Still others I have to shift position to see. One consultant, who has been waiting outside, enters the room at the designated start time of 9.30am, draws the door shut behind her and finds a seat. This signals the beginning of the event. (Working with the time and other boundaries is a motif during the conference.)

There’s silence at the start, which is familiar. Today, it feels to me that the silence suggests a need to digest. There have been struggles over the week about who we are to each other and how to be in this group, how to find a space, a voice. Race, sexuality, politics have been named: one morning the Palestinian (gay) man sat

next to the young — Jewish, lesbian — woman from Jerusalem, who in turn was alongside the London-based South African, white, Jewish woman consultant, and this configuration was a focus for passionate, painful discussion about violence, oppression, diaspora, and loyalty. The quasi-political affiliations of those who are involved in the rival Tavistock Institute have been identified as a present, live issue in the room. Male sexual attraction to women has been made explicit: an older man expressed the longing he experienced as the youngest woman in the group moved to sit next to him, during the session, in the empty chair at the centre of the spiral. More than once the three out gay men have spoken to their sexuality. Rivalry, hate, competition, love, desire — all, if not identified as such, have been expressed.

I have spoken most occasions. Some people rarely do; others do so frequently and easily. My heart always races when I speak. I like it but I find it difficult. Two mornings ago — it was a morning when the group was struggling with personal memories and experiences of political and sexual oppression — I noted my awareness, in the room, at that moment, of my middle-class, Oxford-connected, straight, Englishness. I spoke about this, conscious as I listened to myself of my accent and manner. In amongst the effort to identify who we are in this context I found myself cast in this role, moulded. Yesterday at this event I remained feeling stuck in this persona and could not break out of it. The past twenty-four hours I have been straining against this sense of being typecast. I am aware that I have bought into it; I do not blame the group, but nevertheless I see it as something I am “carrying” for the group. During other events yesterday I felt that I had lost my voice, unable to break out of a straitjacket that I had donned. (And if I have both been placed and placed myself in this straitjacket, I have wondered, haven’t others too — as “gay,” “straight,” “Jewish,” etc.?). I understand this as projective identification (see Bion, 1961; Klein, 1984; Ogden, 1986, etc.): that I am carrying for the group the meanings attached to middle-class, Oxford, straight Englishness that others do not wish to own: Privilege? Authority? Up-tightness? Likewise, I am colluding in disowning parts of myself and ascribing them — putting them into, even — others.

Last night I did not sleep well. I was fired by remembering, as if from nowhere, an ancestor — Thomas Wyatt — who was an Elizabethan poet and, even more powerfully, his son (also Thomas Wyatt), who led a rebellion against Queen Mary. It was not a successful rebellion, it has to be said, in that he thought the had mustered many more supporters than was actually the case and marched on

London expecting to be joined by throngs of fellow rebels angry at Mary's plan to marry a Catholic. Sadly (for him) there was not much more than a smattering of supporters when he reached London and he was promptly captured, arrested, imprisoned and, within a short time, executed. His dismembered body parts were displayed in various London locations in a bid to warn others not to do similar. So, a rubbish rebel but a rebel nonetheless.

Full of my rebel, and my poet, I stayed between waking and sleeping most of the night.

There are exchanges in the room about an empty chair: who is missing? Where is she? How do we experience her absence? What does she, and her absence, represent for us? Again, this is familiar discourse. The energy seems flat. One of the two women consultants, Mary, sitting directly behind me, intervenes. She offers a hypothesis about what the discourse thus far might be hinting at, and she finishes with a challenge:

"There are many voices that we are not hearing, parts of ourselves that are not being given voice, that will say something important to this group, this system, here, now."

Full of my deliberations last night, and restless to find a way in, I seize the invitation:

"I am going to take up Mary's call because I'm conscious of parts of me that I have not expressed here. But what I'm most aware of first is that I have lost my appetite. I usually eat well but these past couple of days I have not wanted to eat and I don't fully understand why, but I connect it with this: that I've felt stuck in a position here of casting myself as English, middle class, Oxford. I can't digest it. And I'm tired by this, and tired of not being hungry. It's not all of me. I have an ancestor who was a poet and another, his son, who was a rebel. He was hopeless as a rebel but he had a go. I feel that I've probably given my poet some space at this conference but today I want to speak up for my rebel."

I notice that I am looking directly at Steve, a young, Irish, gay man to whom, at an earlier session, I expressed anger and with whom I have had no contact since:

"And Steve, I've hardly spoken to you. But I have Irish blood in me too and today I wish to own my Irishness."

He is surprised by my making contact with him like this. I go on:

“And what frustrates me is that I also wish to tell you that I find you an interesting, attractive man but I feel inhibited in doing so. Because here we have to label, we have to box ourselves in. If I tell a man here that I find them attractive I will become one of the gay men. We have conveniently located all the “gayness” in the out gay men. The “straight” men do not speak of their attraction to each other, nor much, it has to be said, do we do so to the women here. For fear of what? Being ascribed an identity, I think, or of generating confusion about our identities. I am party to that. But no, there is a multiplicity of feelings, thoughts, desires, that flow through me. I am struggling, but I do not wish to be boxed in as straight or gay, English or Irish, middle class or working class, or whatever. I will not be.”

I didn't say all of that final paragraph. I wanted to and I should have but I was afraid to. I said some of it, and more of it differently a day or two later, at a different, smaller group.

I understand this experience in different ways. I can see it, from one point of view, about becoming conscious of what had hitherto been unconscious. I was not (fully) aware that, at times, I felt rebellious, angry, and desiring of (forbidden?) intimacy. These feelings came into view as I worked with the genealogical metaphor of my internal ancestral rebel, my Thomas Wyatt, and I had to work out how to understand and what to do with them: Were these feelings mine? To what extent were they, unconsciously, being projected into me? Towards whom or about what was I angry and rebellious? What kind of intimacy did I want?

At the time — and for the twenty-four hours leading up to it — I was mostly aware, however, of multiplicities. This is Deleuze, I thought. This is something of what he meant. It was exciting. Deleuze and Guattari's writing about how to make oneself a body-without-organs (BwO) provides insights: my experience was a noticing of a “connection of desires, conjunction of flows, (and) continuum of intensities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.179). I sensed that I was “lodge(d) on (the) stratum” of English, middle-class, straightness, and felt impelled to “experiment with the opportunities it (offered)” (p.178). I managed to find “an advantageous place on it”, to “find potential movements of deterritorialisation” (p.178) away from the fixities of given or claimed identities. I sought possible lines of flight, experienced them, produced “flow conjunctions here and there”, tried out “continuums of intensities segment by segment”, and, in speaking up as I did, found “a small plot of new land” (p.178). I needed to be troubled by where I was, enough to examine the detail of what I was experiencing so that “through a meticulous relation with the strat(um)” I could succeed in “freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a body-without-organs.” (p.178)

Maybe Butler brings these together — unconscious processes, multiplicities, BwOs — when, in writing about Braidotti, she notes that for Braidotti,

(M)ultiplicity is a way of understanding the play of forces that work upon one another and that generate new possibilities of life. Multiplicity is not the death of agency, but its very condition. (Butler, 2004, p.194)

For Butler some of these forces are unconscious but they all work through the body, so when something new happens, “it is the result of an activity that precedes the knowing subject, but is not, for that reason, fully external to the subject.” (ibid., p.194)

Something new happened for me at the conference. The embodied awareness of multiplicities — some of which, though in me, were not all of me — drew me into performing new possibilities.

So where does that leave us and our work, and being “two men talking”? It leaves me seeing us less as “men’ — as nouns, as static — and more, as you draw attention to, as being verbs, as becomings (each of us) and as a becoming (the two of us), seeking — being — conjunctions, connections and continuums.

What I have not addressed in this piece, but which I am aware of at this moment, is how *writing* is doing this, and how the process of writing to *you*, now, here, is (or is not?) contributing to our multiplicities, our BwO.

Two Men Writing in (Smooth) Space: February 2007 (Ken)

As is so often the case now, I am writing and I don't know what I am going to write. I have read your last piece again and am invigorated by what you have to say there. Your writing comes off the page, enters me: affects. “You” is indeterminate. Your writing, your “doing,” is tangible; it is the action of you to which I am finding myself responding to here. Inter action: responding to your writing. I am now bringing my writing to you. I feel as if I am writing in the space of the other. I feel very troubled, my life is hurting me and as I write I am wondering what that “I” is, what it means to me, what it means to others. Therefore, I am trying to put that aside; I am trying to write, perhaps to be in the writing. It feels like being in the writing is about embodiment, soul, about self coming through, about being recognised. Becoming in the writing feels more like living in the writing. Is this a life in the writing? Is there a sense in which being and becoming intersect and are connected?

Laurel Richardson has spoken of her experience of rejecting some writing of Virginia Woolf's that had influenced her, “like a mantra”, for a long time: “I find it now, behind the guest room door, propped on the floor, braced by the wall: Virginia's facing the wall” (Richardson, 1997, p.174). Talking further about her reflections on her own writing and her “rejecting” Woolf, she said: “I wanted to write through the “personal” binaries (me/them, good/bad, for/against) that were my walls, invisible to me then,

bracing and constraining.” (ibid., p.174). This “writing through” is what draws me in here; it feels Deleuzian, like a line of flight, like the creation of a concept which is an event, mercurial, connected and multiple. You talk of your fear of being “ascribed an identity” but then, as resistance, you say: “But no, there is a multiplicity of feelings, thoughts, desires, that flow through me. I am struggling but I do not wish to be boxed in...” It feels as if Richardson’s “writing through,” her writing as a method of inquiry, becomes us in powerful ways. It feels as if, as you “give your poet some space”, as you “speak up for (your) rebel”, you begin to dissolve the constraints of those categories, just as Richardson at first struggled with her “overactive sociologist” and her “suppressed poet” (Richardson, 1997) and then allowed herself to write through them, to write as becoming. Braidotti talks of nomadic inquiry in similar ways; for her the nomad is only passing through: “s/he makes necessarily situated connections that can help him/her to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national fixed identity” (Braidotti, 1994, p.33). This is it, isn’t it? Never fully taking on these “limits” and struggling with the forces that seem to want to fix us in these ways. I am not sure that those “feelings, thoughts, (and) desires” that you talk about, “flow through you”: it feels more as if you are them, that they are becoming you. The “you” that you talk about being flown through is indeterminate: “poet”? “rebel”? “middle-class”? “straight”? As you say: “I will not be.” You were feeling, you were thinking and you were desiring and, if anything is to be essentialised, it is these doings, these actions if you like. Right now I am writing and I am struggling with this writing; this feels far more important, in terms of what we are doing, our writing, than to say “I am Ken”, or “I am a man” or whatever. The writing and the struggling is me.

I have been thinking about Deleuze and his writing, that the “body” of Deleuze’s work is a body-without-organs: Deleuze and his work are not fixed. They are becoming. We recognise the “body” from the way in which the familiar concepts as organs are related to the whole, they link together, the connections are there, but, crucially, it is us who makes the meaning of all this. Because “(t)here is no heaven for concepts” (Deleuze, 1994, p.4), concepts are events, being created, shifting form and meaning. We can only gain or temporarily have a sense of haecceity, or multiplicity, or faciality. The “organs” of the Deleuzian “body” are not constitutive because they are always reforming, being re-used, drifting from tangibility to intangibility and simply shifting in sense and meaning. Our thinking about Deleuze, our use and application of his figures in our writing is also a territorialisation, a political act, where we take his ideas and use them; we plug them in (St. Pierre, 2004). As Massumi says:

A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window. What is the subject of the brick? The arm that

throws it? The body connected to the arm? The brain encased in the body? The situation that brought brain and body to such a juncture? All and none of the above. What is its object? The window? The edifice? The laws the edifice shelters? The class and other power relations encrusted in the laws? All and none of the above. (Massumi, 1987, p. xii-xiii)

And this of course is a signifier for what we are railing against here. We are concerned at being named, of being given a gender, a class, a sexuality. Whilst we have been active in this, we are also aware of the discursive forces at play and which act upon us, constituting us, making us up and fixing our identity. It feels that in the chaos, interconnectedness and multiplicity of Deleuzian thought and feeling we are de-centring ourselves and displacing the self-conscious "I". By drawing upon Richardson's inducement to use writing as a method of inquiry, we are acting transgressively, preparedly unaware of beginnings or ends, opening ourselves to what emerges and being ready for the unlikeliest of consequences. I have a note here from a workshop run by Bronwyn Davies at QI2006³, which may not be directly ascribable to her but which seems relevant to what we are exploring here: "writing is a place that is blind, where strangers and unfamiliarities meet". Nomadic inquiry can take us through the plateaus and territories of Deleuze and Guattari's topographies of space, resisting the certainties and stabilities of the logos of striated space, where language is interested only in the closure of the denotative utterance, and exploring, through the application of strategies of territorialisation, the doubt and uncertainty of the nomos of smooth space, where language celebrates the openness of the connotative utterance.

There exists a nomadic absolute, as a local integration moving from part to part and constituting smooth space in an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction. It is an absolute that is one with becoming itself, with process. It is the absolute of passage... (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.494)

I am going to find that famous Barthes quotation where he talks about the texts that are written rather than the author that writes.

Postscript to Two Men Talking in (Smooth) Space: Losing it!? February 2007 (Ken)

I have read Two Men Talking so far, your contributions and mine, and I am left carefully pondering the question you leave at the end of your writing:

What I have not addressed in this piece, but which I am aware of at this moment,

is how *writing* is doing this, and how the process of writing to *you*, now, here, is (or is not?) contributing to our multiplicities, our body-without-organs.

This is troubling me. My previous piece touches this question, skirts around it, like a nervous animal unsure of its prey, but does not fully connect with what it is asking. I remember a long time ago coming to Derrida and Foucault in my studies and finding myself wondering where all this thinking about language and meaning was connecting with the phenomenologies of self that I had grown up with. My reading of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty and then Heidegger familiarised me with the idea of a “being,” of *dasein*, of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Sartre, 1973). I began to develop an understanding of a self going through life, as Sartre says, of “surging up in the world” (Sartre, 1973, p.28) encountering the world and changing with experience, abandoned to the angst of individual decision making, with no one, no God, to help me make up my mind. I therefore found Heidegger’s device of placing being under erasure useful and, similarly, when I found Derrida using the same device to explain the endless play of signifiers (see Derrida, 1976; Derrida, 1978), I felt equally at ease. As I reflect back upon this time, a few years ago perhaps, I am aware that I shelved what now seems to be an uncomfortable binary: border crossings to be made, perhaps. Boundaries to be dissolved.

My reading of Judith Butler has helped and I feel that, so far, our writing, up to the point of your question, has taken us to a similar way of thinking that is expressed in the following assertion from *Gender Trouble*:

Clearly this project does not propose to lay out within traditional philosophical terms an ontology of gender whereby the meaning of being a woman or a man is elucidated within the terms of phenomenology. The presumption here is that the “being” of gender is an effect, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology...As a genealogy of gender ontology, this inquiry seeks to understand the discursive production of the plausibility of that binary relation and to suggest that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of “the real” and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalisation. (Butler, 1999, p.43)

We seem to have been working toward and with the “doing” of gender and what Butler calls its “effects.’ We haven’t looked directly at power and, in particular, at the way in which Foucault talks about power as actually forming the objects about which it speaks. It seems to me that Butler makes this point well in this book; she takes Simone de Beauvoir’s profound and direct assertion that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (de Beauvoir, 1978) and advances it into a detailed and challenging piece

of rhetorical writing. She emphasises how language works to fix and establish ontologies of gendered self but, as I write now to inquire, I am searching for a sense in which her writing addresses the question that concerns us here.

It is fascinating in the quotation that I have used from your last piece that you have italicised the words “writing” and “you”: this is the binary, here is the boundary; this is the border that needs to be dissolved. Is this somehow a phenomenology of language? In the *definitional ceremony* (White, 2000) of our writing it is becoming increasingly clear to me (in existential or phenomenological terms but not in epistemological terms!) that whatever “I” is for me is also the writing. I have grappled with the embodied nature of what we are doing. When I first read Davies and Gannon (2006), their use of the embodied self in relation to memory work troubled me. I was trying to understand it and couldn’t. I was searching for a meaning and I couldn’t find it. But now as I write I am increasingly gaining a sense of what this is. I am feeling a sense of needing to write, of struggling with the writing, of searching for help in the writing. More, perhaps. My being in the writing? My being is the writing? I have talked before about the way we might seem to be performing our selves in the writing and I haven’t lost my sense of that: I know that I am writing to you but increasingly this is feeling like I am writing with you. If writing the self is about performance I have a growing sense that this performance is characterised in an embodied way. Stanislavski’s idea of method acting, where the actor as person becomes the part and the part becomes the actor, not just in the “performance” but in life in general, seems analogous to this feeling that I have about this.

I have been struggling now for days; wanting to write, not knowing what I will write, not knowing if I will be able to write but, somehow, knowing, sensing, that this is me, this is what I want to be doing, what I want to be, where I want to be. Here at this desk, tapping these keys, looking at this screen, my glass of water, books, the silences of this house. This is my sense of self, embodied in the writing. The bigger picture of my life remains troubled and as I write here now anxieties and sadnesses pervade my sense of self; I feel as if I am identifying myself through this but this identification is not working in a Foucauldian sense; I don’t feel “constructed” by circumstance, by the naturalising forces of discourses. I know that these forces are there and that they have in the past and are now playing a part in my life, in the formation of self; but that is not what I feel captured by here and now. My energy, my life force seems to be in this writing. I know, when I have thought about Bacon and his painting and his life, his process, the way that he worked (Ficacci, 2003; Deleuze, 2004), that senses of self will change. My senses of self will become apparent and then, perhaps, diminish. Or explode! My “painting” will change, the duck that I drew will become a rabbit⁴, but, as Deleuze encourages me to think, I am becoming through and in the writing. Like

Bacon when he died, there will be many canvases “unfinished,” stacked in the kitchen and the hall, the line between him and the canvases blurred, erased by the vibrant processes of his refusal to be a “painter” and yet inextricably fused to that becoming self that I am reading now and attaching such significance to. Clearly, he is defined by his work and yet I remember that when he died people spoke with surprise and in wonder about the unfinished paintings: “How odd that he didn’t finish them: how strange.’ This misses the point: the “unfinishedness” of those paintings characterised the way in which he worked and, therefore, in this sense, characterised him. For me, in so many senses, none of his paintings were “finished”; I know that they hung in galleries and were exhibited but they always seem to carry with them the potential for change, to be changed. This is how I feel about our writing. I know that we too have “finished” pieces, and that is great; it is good to have our writing published — out there, so to speak — but at the moment, for me, it is the “in here” that is important and the sense that the “in here” is also now, as I write, becoming me and becoming us through this process, our exchanges, our dialogue, our “between-the-twos.’ I am not writing; I am becoming! Have I overstepped the mark by saying this? I found myself laughing as I wrote that, seconds ago! What am I saying here?! Are you with me? I want to be cheeky. I want you to smile too. I want your sense of self to smile with this embodiment that I have just sensed. I am in the writing; the writing is in me. As I write here I am also defining myself but the figures that I produce to do this are elusive: will you get them? Yes, of course you will. You will get them. Your getting them is also about dissolving that you and me binary. Two Men Talking is about (our)selves. It is talking, it is writing, it is becoming.

I am going to stop here. I have started to worry that I am losing it! I started to think that I had better write some more analytical material and be more reflexive about the representations of self that we are working with here. I am wondering if I should be asking questions about my narrative work as therapy. I am thinking that I should consider the processes that “define” us here; that I should go back to Foucault and power and look again at the ways in which discourses produce us; that I should think again about gender and self, that doing collective biography encouraged us to explore. But I have just seen Bacon’s studio in South Kensington and all those unfinished canvases stacked in the hall and I am feeling OK again. I don’t think I am losing it yet!

Two Men Talking 5: March 2007 (Jonathan)

I have taken longer to write this than I can remember doing with others. It has not been the struggle that other writing has been, but I have only been able to write in

small doses. It is as if the writing is inviting me to take care. It may be that this is because it is risky: there is something almost unsayable to articulate.

I feel relieved to be writing again. Writing like this to you — though this implies the me/you binary that you have been developing away from.

As I write:

I am thinking about: this, here, now. What this is like. Pen in hand, in a café in Oxford. The shape of my body, the angle of my pen. (And written again, here, now, as I type my handwritten text.)

I am asking myself, why do I now enjoy writing long hand, whereas until less than a year ago, I only used to write at the keyboard? Something is freed by the holding of a pen, the inscribing of ink onto a page in the red and black note book. (See Cixous, 1991.)

There is more though: I am questioning why it is not only the writing by hand but the setting in which I am writing. I enjoy writing — I am unable to write in any other context, it seems — in “in-between” places, mostly cafés but also at, say railway stations, airports. These public, in-between places are settings where people are passing through. Here, there is the noise of people talking — the students discussing their music lecture — and there is movement as people arrive and leave; buses pass, babies chatter, milk is being steamed. So I wonder about this need to write in such settings — amongst movement and transience — and think that these features are perhaps echoes of my internal writing world. If I think of “flows (that) pass and escape” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.178), how writing is an attempt to disappear (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), then my need to be in places like these begins to make sense.

This, here, now, writing to you. The you-ness of this writing, and how different this sense is from, say, when I write with a more generalised audience in mind. This latter audience feels to one side, where I can glimpse it. Here, the you-ness is in front. I’ll come back to this you-ness. Others’ witnessing of our writing feels increasingly important, but there is a difference.

I am aware of Joe⁵ and the now resolved falling-out with him that I have told you about in passing. Not so much the experience itself (whatever an “experience itself” might mean) but what it means to want to write about it to you. Writing into an empty space would not be the same. Writing to you means it is going somewhere; it is directed — into the collection of muddled lines between us. So, if I were to write about Joe now, it would involve writing within the multiplicity we are creating and are being created by, and adding to our collection of muddled lines. It is writing into inhabited, rather than empty, spaces.

I also notice myself thinking about what you have brought us back to. You seem to say that the writing and the subjectivity are “one.” It is not I (subject) who writes. The writing is me. And more: the you and me and the writing and subjectivity are all “one.” I use the word “one” as meaning not that they comprise a “whole,” but that they are inseparable: felted (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004).

I feel dizzy. I am unable to hold any of this still: you, me, writing, our inquiry, my gender, your gender, my sexuality, yours — nothing is fixed, it feels, even for a moment. These are all flows and intensities...and it seems too much. I long for ground-ness — but as soon as I say the word I am destabilised by questioning the metaphor and its implicit binaries (ground/air, low/high, earth/sky). I feel destabilised.

In this frame of mind, and trying to allow myself to stay destabilised, I go back to how you write about writing. When I write, I write with you in mind. You are in my mind, in me. I have a picture of you reading as I write, in your office at home, or, having printed my writing out, in your kitchen with a coffee. I imagine how you might be responding — how you might write in the margins, handwriting at an angle to the text, words, phrases, question marks. I imagine your wanting to rush to respond, trying to find space amongst the demands of your children, your work, and your relationship. I have all this — you — in mind; I have my experience of the writing, feeling, thinking Ken within me. And therefore, this is one way in which “we” write together, even when we are apart. Without you — or Ken-ness? Or is it Ken-ning, the verb? — there would not be my writing.

So here is another take, then, on the “disturbance” that our relationship has engendered (an interesting word!) in my family, where Tessa asks “were you having sex with a furry Cornishman” and Holly asks if you and I are gay: I would suggest that our writing together is indeed a kind of love-making. I think that this is what Deleuze means when he says “Writing carries out the conjunction, the transmutation of fluxes...one only writes through love, all writing is a love-letter.” (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p.38)

References

- Bion, W. (1961). *Experiences in groups*. London: Routledge
- Braidotti, R. (1994). *Nomadic subjects*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge
- Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1990.)
- Cixous, H. (1991). Coming to writing. D. Jenson. *Coming to writing and other essays* Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press
- Davies, B. and Gannon, S., Eds. (2006). *Doing collective biography*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- de Beauvoir, S. (1978). *The second sex*. Harmondsworth Penguin
- Deleuze, G. (2004). *Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation* London Continuum
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2004). *A thousand plateaus*. London: Continuum. (Original work published 1980.)
- Deleuze, G. and Parnet, C. (2002). *Dialogues II*. London: Continuum. (Original work published 1977.)
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and differance*. London Routledge
- Ficacci, L. (2003). *Bacon* Los Angeles Taschen
- Foucault, M. (1998). *The history of sexuality volume 1: The will to knowledge*. London: Penguin
- Gale, K. and Wyatt, J. (2006). Inquiring into writing: An interactive interview. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 6: 1117-1134.
- Gale, K. and Wyatt, J. (2007). Writing the incalculable: A second interactive inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13 6: 787-807.
- Gale, K. J. and Wyatt, J. (forthcoming 2009). Becoming men, becoming-men? A collective biography. *Qualitative Inquiry*.
- Grubb Institute (2006) Being, Meaning, Engaging: 37th International Conference. November, 2006. Haslemere, UK.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* London Blackwell
- Josselson, R. and Lieblich, A., Eds. (1999). *Making meaning of narratives: The narrative study of lives, Vol. 6*
Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Klein, M. (1984). Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. R. Money-Kyrle, B. Joseph, E. O'Shaughnessy and H. Segal. *The writings of Melanie Klein. Vol III* London: The Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1946.)
- Massumi, B. (1987). Translator's foreword: Pleasures of philosophy. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1980.)
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *The phenomenology of perception*. London Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Monk, R. (1991). *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The study of genius*. London: Vintage
- Ogden, T. (1986). *The matrix of the mind: Object relations theory and the psychoanalytic dialogue*. Northwale, NJ: Jason Aronson
- Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of Play (Constructing an Academic Life)*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press
- Sartre, J.-P. (1973). *Existentialism and humanism*. London Methuen
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2004). Deleuzian concepts for education: the subject undone. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36 3: 283-296.
- White, M. (2000). *Reflections on narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications

Notes

1. Jonathan's partner
2. Of Bacon's *Painting 46*, Ficacci talks of "a mysterious adventure of modifications during its realization" and of various figures within the painting, a bird of prey, a chimpanzee, a field, changing and gradually re-forming and becoming "incorporated in other ideas or indistinguishable impressions" Ficacci, L. (2003, p. 23). *Bacon* Los Angeles Taschen
3. Second International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, May 2006, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
4. Wittgenstein used in his lectures at Cambridge what became the very famous ambiguous figure of the duck-rabbit. The figure can be seen differently as either a duck or a rabbit and the point that Wittgenstein was making through the use of this figure is that of "seeing-as"; the figure is representational, it is interpreted by the person who "sees" it. At this stage in his work Wittgenstein was influenced by the work of the gestalt theorist Kohler and both of these thinkers were influenced by the morphological studies of Goethe. For an extended analysis of this see Monk, R. (1991). *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The study of genius*. London: Vintage.
5. Jonathan's 19-year-old son

About the Authors

Ken Gale, EdD, MA(Ed), PGCE, is a Senior Lecturer in Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Plymouth. He has recently completed an EdD at the University of Bristol in narrative and life story research. He can be contacted via e-mail — kjgale@plymouth.ac.uk

Jonathan Wyatt, EdD, MSc, Med, is head of staff development at the Oxford Learning Institute, University of Oxford, and is a counsellor in the UK's National Health Service. He has recently completed an EdD at the University of Bristol in narrative and life story research. He can be contacted via e-mail — jonathan.wyatt@learning.ox.ac.uk

