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Working at the Wonder: Collaborative Writing as Method of Inquiry

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Abstract

This paper offers a discussion concerning the future of collaborative writing as a method of inquiry. Taking the form of a dialogic exchange, we take up Isabelle Stengers' notion of 'wonder' as a creative and political lens through which to consider the disruptive, radical and productive methodological capacity that collaborative writing as a research method potentially offers. Working particularly with Deleuze and Guattari, we argue that language in collaborative writing practices is deeply entangled with complex materialist practice; and through engagements with these 'matterings' we make sense of collaborative writing as immanent event. We discuss – and experience – the challenges that collaborative writing has for research and this paper pushes at established categories, works against the fixities of conventional theory construction, contests the humanist and phenomenological proclivities that arguably limit the process and effectiveness of collaborative writing as method of inquiry, and wonders at the immensities that are possible.

Key words: collaborative writing; wonder; Deleuze

Working at the Wonder: Collaborative Writing as Method of Inquiry¹

Introduction

There are, and have always been, research and writing collaborations, of course. However, the often-messy (see Kumsa et al., 2015) collaborative processes each involves tend to remain hidden in published research reports. An ambivalent attitude to collaboration prevails – and indeed is becoming more entrenched (see Wyatt et al., forthcoming) – within the academy, whereby social scientists are on the one hand required to develop collaborations (Anders and Lester, 2014; Gingras 2002) and on the other inhibited in doing so due to neo-liberal academic institutional processes that privilege individual achievement, progression and promotion. A doctoral thesis, for example, is conventionally understood as strictly solo work, while supposedly preparing students for post-doctoral work, the majority of which involves collaboration.

In the face of this ambivalence, and in resistance to the customary glossing of what research collaboration involves, some collaborative researchers have begun to make explicit their processes (e.g. Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), reflected upon the politics of research team dynamics (Lingard et al., 2007), the limits of reflexivity in participatory research (Kumsa et al., 2015), and the tensions involved in collaboratively interpreting data (Anders and Lester, 2014).

In this paper we wish to contribute to these discussions. It is *writing* collaboratively that we wish to focus upon, and specifically the potential, the ‘wonder’ (Stengers, 2011), of collaborative writing, not as the commonly viewed task of ‘writing up’ research findings, but as a method of inquiry in its own right.

¹ We presented an earlier version of this paper as a keynote at the Summer Institute for Qualitative Research, Manchester Metropolitan University, in July 2015. We thank Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and colleagues for their invitation to speak, and to our audience for their helpful comments.

Collaborative writing as method of inquiry

Collaborative writing as a method of inquiry has received growing interest and attention, in particular over the past decade, through, for example, the development of collective biography (e.g. Davies and Gannon, 2005, 2012, etc.), publications emerging from the Narrative Inquiry Centre at Bristol (e.g. Sakellariadis et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2011; etc.), streams at international conferences (e.g. the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2012, 2013), and two recent special journal issues on collaborative writing (Gale and Wyatt, 2012; Wyatt and Gale, 2014)².

Given the above, we seek in this paper to inquire into the future of collaborative writing as a method of inquiry. How might collaborative writing take us – and the academy – somewhere different? Where might we as a scholarly community take collaborative writing? Our purpose here is to do theoretical work, to hold up to scrutiny the terms that trip so easily from our lips and fingers as we talk and write about collaboration, those easy, everyday signifiers such as ‘we’ and ‘I’? What do they mean? How might we continue to work at *theorizing* collaborative writing.

For ten years, both together and with others, we have been inquiring into, with and through collaborative writing (Gale and Wyatt, 2009; Wyatt et al., 2011; Gale et al., 2013; etc.). From the outset we have been enchanted by Deleuze, drawn by the disruptive, creative, revolutionary world he and his collaborators offer us; and in more recent years, we have been captivated by posthumanism and its affirmation, echoing and extension of Deleuzian theorizing as practice.

With Stengers our struggles are not to be described as forms of ‘eliminativism’ (2011: 368). In this respect our writings do not claim to ‘know’; in their becomings they suggest belief. With Lyotard we sense our writing ‘being dispersed in clouds of

² See Wyatt, Gale, Gannon and Davies (forthcoming) for a fuller outline of the history and development of collaborative writing.

narrative language elements ... we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable' (1979: xxiv). And so, for example, in our recent struggle with the autoethnographic possibilities that our work appears to entail we have posited an 'assemblage/ethnography' (Gale and Wyatt, 2013; Wyatt and Gale, 2013) in an attempt to trouble the humanist implications and inferences of its antecedent descriptor.

In moving into the position that this usage entails we relish the agonistics of our struggle; we feel unsure of what we tentatively propose and in the proud ambivalence of this messy uncertainty we do not wish to eliminate the claims and assertions of others and to bring our struggles in to the foreground. Therefore we are with Stengers when she says that 'we need other kinds of narratives, narratives that populate our worlds and imaginations in different ways' (ibid: 371) and within these agonistic processes of believing we sense experiences of joy and wonder as we bring these possibilities to life. So when we describe our work in this paper as 'working at the wonder' we want to evoke a wondering that thinks, searches, ponders and probes. In turn, our intention is convey collaborative writing as contributing to a complex materialist practice (Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman, 2011) that, with Stengers, 'upset(s) our established categories and shift(s) our own theories.' (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman, 2011: 15): collaborative writing as a 'rare event' that can – at its best – invoke a sense of wonder to 'counter stratifying tendencies.' (ibid.)

We recognise and relish the 'power of wonder' (op. cit) that Stengers celebrates and in this sense we find our writing as inquiry being drawn into the 'entanglements' that Barad (2007) sees existing in the multiple intra-actions of language and the material

world. When discussing the intrinsic agonistic and processual tensions of language games Lyotard pointed to the ‘perpetual motion’ that is always involved in the displacement of any set of language relations by the ever presence of new forms that always traverse them. He talks about a discussion where ‘questions, requests, assertions, and narratives are launched pell-mell into battle’ (ibid: 17) and what is clear from what he says here is that affect is deeply imbricated in these relational conversational exchanges: what is being said *matters*. In affect the volatility of these encounters is infused by the simple observation that the material is important; matter matters. To cite Spinoza’s talk of the power to affect and to be affected as being a denotative dimension of materiality it is also important to mobilise Bennett’s notion of ‘thing-power’ in which, as she says, ‘(a) lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonyms but as vital materialities’ (2010: 21). It is in the vibrancy of this relationality that we want to talk about working at the wonder as a necessary part of engaging in collaborative writing as a method of inquiry. Stengers (2011) talks of affirming

‘that to be interested by something has the character of an event, since it gives to that something a power it does not generally possess: the power to cause us to think, feel and wonder, the power to have us wondering how practically to relate to it, how to pose relevant questions about it .’ (374)

This is where our interest lies, where the fire is sparked and where we work at wonder, not just to think, ponder or to ask questions but to be taken aback and to share the sense of always becoming able to be surprised.

In what now follows we take up this exhortation for and of ‘wonder’, this creative space

of becoming, by writing again into our collaboration – collaboration as a dynamic process – to see how we each, and we all, might become what we were not before.

In this paper we wish – through collaborative writing as inquiry – to push at collaborative writing, to take it to task, to hold it up for examination, and to wonder.

Borrowing from Wyatt et al. (2010), the paper takes dialogic play script form: exchanges between the two of us and between ourselves (sic) and those with, to and from whose work we speak. Questions of ‘ownership’ and ‘authorship’ between the two of us implicitly arise (whose writing is whose? are we speaking our ‘own’ writing?), a politics of academic writing that we seek, with others (e.g. Gannon et al., 2014) to ‘deterritorialise’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The paper begins with Jonathan writing to Ken at the beginning of 2015, writing that Ken then picks up from, and that Jonathan interrupts. This moves us into a discussion, with Deleuze, Haraway, Bennett and other new materialist and posthuman theorists, about ‘assemblage/ethnography’ (Gale and Wyatt, 2013; Wyatt and Gale, 2013) as a way of conceptualizing collaborative writing and of resisting the pull of the ‘auto’ of autoethnography; and we briefly offer our current concerns about the suffix ‘ethnography’. We end with a look to the future. (As if the future is not always already present.)

Disturbing assemblage/ethnography

J: I walked up the hill early this morning from home to work, north to south.

The slope is manageable at first, then the gradient steepens beyond the shops and tramlines of Princes Street into the climb towards the Royal Mile. At the top my breaths are deeper and, even though this was an early morning of brisk winter wind, I was ready to throw back my hood and unzip my thick coat. The coat was bought on a visit to Minnesota in March four years ago, where the snow lay six foot deep. It's made for tougher winters than puny Edinburgh in puny Scottish January.

I was early, the morning still dark, but the main roads across the city were intermittently busy. The wintry weather and the impending, well-forecast snowstorms, lent an edge of anxiety. I looked up at the tall buildings, fearful of what might fall. I worried for the double-decker buses climbing The Mound where the wind rushes strongest. I hesitated crossing roads, waiting for the green figure to light even though I could have walked across in the spaces of quiet.

On the Saturday morning before Christmas, I stepped out of our flat carrying a bag of rubbish to throw into the large bin the other side of our street. At the edge of the pavement, just above a parked 4x4, I looked back and forth, saw the road was clear, and began to cross. The instant I stepped onto the tarmac I felt the impact. It was momentary but it knocked me off balance. My left side, from thigh to hip, pulsed. The parked car had reversed into me. The 4x4, right there beside me as I stepped from the pavement but which had been mere background – brute, passive matter – in my mission to place bag in bin, was clearly – how shall I say? – agentic. I stood in the road two feet from the car, restoring my balance as best I could as if there was nothing to be done, nothing to be said, just 'ah well, let's carry on'.

I had been ill for days, with a relentless cough that propped me up in bed and kept me awake; and, like every morning under the cosh of my bug, on that Saturday I was

well-medicated, my perception dulled. I made again as if to cross, still with bag in hand, still aiming for that large, black bin opposite. I looked up and down the road. It was only then that I saw the driver, registered that there even was a driver, someone at the wheel, someone involved in what had happened. He was still in shock himself. He wound down his window.

‘Are you ok?’, he asked. ‘I’m so sorry.’ A soft Edinburgh accent.

‘Yes, I’m fine. I’m sorry too. I wasn’t paying attention.’

‘Nor was I,’ he replied.

‘But I’m ok. Thanks.’

‘Thank god for that.’

I crossed – at last – and got rid of the rubbish bag. Tessa and Holly joined me outside as planned and we walked up the hill into town. Every few minutes I told them, ‘I got hit by a car.’ ‘I just got hit by a car.’ We laughed every time, but it wasn’t funny.

The ‘I’ I think I live with, the ‘I’ that seems apparently purposeful, intentional, in control, the one that I assume I need in order to get through the day, is none of those. Or not only so. This morning’s sense of vulnerability was not just the property of this morning’s weather.

K: I think and feel that there is a sense in which we can talk about our writing in terms of agonistics. When with you I open up this space and start to write to inquire, almost inevitably, I feel I am also with Deleuze –

J: Yes, he is always here, and always has been. Our third, or fifth or sixth. I turn away from him sometimes, exasperated, tired, wanting to find someone else to play with, and I do – we do – but he’s always there when I return, cigarette in hand, looking into the camera, walking the beach at Big Sur, in need of a hair cut. Felix: we often forget him. How could we? How do we? A man of such life, such vigour, such appetites. He of the refrain, the ritornello – more his figure, the pianist’s, than Deleuze’s (Dosse, 2010). They have been, are, our refrain perhaps. –

K: We are never alone as we construct this space and it is his constant and always transmutational presence that makes our desert so populous. This population explosion, one that we have referred to so many times in our writing, is brought to life when he says:

J: ‘To write is not to recount one’s memories and travels, one’s loves and griefs, one’s dreams and fantasies ... literature takes the opposite path ... and exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of the impersonal –which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point; a man, a woman, a beast, a stomach ... literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say ‘I.’ (1997: 2-3)

K: We have already talked about our collaborative compositions as a kind of remaining within, where our sense of living with/in bounded selves interacting with one another is becoming more and more lost within the increasingly immanent nature of the contingencies, heterogeneities and flux that work to bring stuttering life to our always emergent relationality. We are ‘apparent’. This is never easy. We have always struggled. It was a kind of relief that we knew that Deleuze also struggled with this.

Struggling is what it is all about. Remember when we said with Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon,

J: 'Deleuze struggled to find a way of bringing together this idea that we are all part of the same Being, and at the same time, that we are multiple and emergent' (Wyatt et al., 2011: 2)?

K: So writing in the tricky vision offered in this tentative darkness, I feel my way into sensing these agonistics not as a conflict, as a battle to the end and one in which there will be a winner and a loser, rather, in this sensing, I find this self working on a plane of immanence in which struggle is the becoming of the agonistic practice. Part of this struggling exists within the challenge to a metaphysics of being, it allows space in which differentiating precedes binary, oppositional and preferential categories of difference. The agonistics involved in the stripping of the power to say 'I' whilst embracing vital and affective dimensions of respect, concern, worthiness, admiration, fear and so on seems to be most effectively about rhythm and perhaps the subtle intra-acting intricacies of the dance. So when Deleuze and Guattari offer that –

J: '(c)ritical distance is not a meter, it is a rhythm. But the rhythm, precisely, is caught up in a becoming that sweeps up the distances between characters that are themselves more or less distant, more or less combinable' (1987: 320)

K: – they appear to be talking about a form of agonistics that is about flow and the play of transmutational energies, where the forces at play in the rhythmic dance between, say, two animals, works to reduce the significance of the one, the 'I' and,

perhaps, is generative in bringing other(s) to life. I/they/we/us appear and then?

I/they/we/us disappear and then? –

J: I am interrupting, intervening in the dance of your writing. Yet it's not yours, it is always already ours, always already others'. The rhythm of the words, not the metre, caught up in our becoming. What do Deleuze and Guattari say about 'interrupting'? It's the break of the rhythm; it's the making of a new rhythm. A stuttering. The way the rain beats on me as I walk up Dundas Street in the early morning, then silence as I pass under the awning of a roof, then begins again. Silence full not empty. Changing what comes before and after. (Perhaps, by the way, after Karen Barad, I should say '*intra-rupting*'; separating together/apart.) –

K: We know that Deleuze and Guattari talk of writing 'minor literatures' that are to do with experimentation, invention and of taking lines of flight. We know that these 'minor literatures' always involve us in stuttering, in shifting our attention away from this or that to this and that, to welcoming the 'and' that is always around the corner. It is as if the utterances, the refrains and the stutterings of these 'minor literatures' are therefore about *delirer*, what Joughin, one of Deleuze's translators, referred to as 'to leave the furrow, go 'off the rails,' and wander in imagination and thought' (1995: 17) and through the force of repetition creating the possibility for new life, for working at the wonder. Collaborative writing as 'minor literature', therefore is less about a humanist, a phenomenological or an oedipal desire to give life to a self, a body, an 'I', and more to do with always writing for the people and the forms of life that might appear, reappear and disappear and, perhaps, that becoming lost in the in-between are always missing. –

J: I stumble here, trip over you, reading and re-reading, wanting to find you. I walk away and return. Walk away, return. Each time it is different. I linger over that final sentence ‘Collaborative writing as ‘minor literature’ is...always writing for the people and the forms of life...that becoming lost in the in-between are always missing.’ Those ghosts, those hauntings. We write collaboratively for our ghosts. –

K: So if collaborative writing is a method of inquiry then it is a form of agonistics that can be used to release the self, the ‘I’, from the entrapments that these forces and energies attempt to place upon it. So again, in this sense, it is also about people and things that are always missing. If collaborative writing is also a ‘minor literature’ then it is also being written in territorialisation, by minor people, people who are somewhere else, people that in their constant becoming are always missing.

Jane Bennett talks of ‘thing-power’. In putting forward her argument she draws heavily on Spinoza and his use of ‘conatus’ as ‘active impulsion or trending tendency to persist’. Further she contends that ‘conatus names a power present in every body’ (2010: 2). I have been thinking of this in relation to your collision with the 4X4 –

J: I intra-rupt again. To laugh. ‘Collision’ suggests that it’s possible the 4X4 might have come off worse, that its reversal into me left a dent in its sleek black metal –

K: As I was saying, I have been thinking of your ‘collision’ with the 4X4 of the way that Bennett says ‘the us and the it slip-slide into each other’ (ibid: 4). As you describe this incident it as if you are engaging in a language that Deleuze would say ‘minorises’, where, just as with music, ‘the minor mode refers to dynamic combinations in a state of perpetual disequilibrium’ (1994: 25). As Bennett would

have it, agency is always being distributed and re-distributed across, through and within 'every body'.

We have been working for a long time with the paradox of the inadequacy and the necessity of the signifiers 'I', 'we', 'us' and others. And whilst that is also easy to get, doing collaborative writing has never been easy. After those very early readings of Deleuze and Guattari, by appropriating, being seduced by and then bringing the notion of 'between-the-two' into our own nascent collaborative inquiries, when we called our exchanges 'between-the-twos' and gave our dissertation and book the title, 'Between the Two', we have to open up to our own culpability: 'between-the-two' is different to and is more than 'us'. If it is needed the 'interferences' opened up by Barad's (2007) espousal of diffractive practice clearly illustrates that.

Existing simply as signifiers we can deal with them in the way that Derrida does by placing them under erasure as a means of providing a 'post' to the structuralism that their wanton and unreflexive use sustains. That is not enough. Whilst that seems to effectively deal with the discursive effects of language and culture it does little in relation to the materialities that all forms of language are inevitably contiguously entangled with.

We know that Heidegger's use of *dasein*, on the other hand, might be helpful in providing a means of sensing notions of the self in the immediate, situated materiality of being-there but it is extremely unhelpful in the way in which it ties us to the sentience and individuality of humanist and phenomenological notions of the subject.

J: I am involved in a project in Edinburgh on collaborative writing. A group of us, doctoral students and faculty, meets every month; sometimes we meet for a full afternoon, mostly for just an hour and a half. We talk, we write, we read. We laugh and we struggle. There's more struggle than laughter, at least for now. Sometimes we can laugh about the struggle.

Collaborative writing feels new. It's unfamiliar, though a few of us, I expect, have been in writing groups before. Being in a room together, writing, silent; writing in response to others' writing, changing each other's writing, taking it somewhere the author never intended. And reading our writing aloud: that moment of risk, the sound of our voice, the fragile gift, not knowing.

We meet in drab classrooms with grubby, dull carpets. No one is allowed to bring drinks into these rooms. University rules. We are not to be trusted. So we bring them anyway.

K: 'The ordinary registers intensities—regularly, intermittently, urgently, or as a slight shudder.' (Stewart, 2007, p.10)

J: We have lost one of our members; the rest of us keep returning each month, in faith in our 'minor literature'. Like you say, in this territorialising, we are all always somewhere else; in our constant becoming we are always missing. I say 'we'. It's easier.

K: I sense struggle, doubt, concern and a feeling of unknowing in the way in which you write about this collaborative writing group you are now working with in Edinburgh. I like it when you say that 'Collaborative writing feels new. It's unfamiliar, though a few of us, I expect, have been in writing groups before.' I like it when you

talk about ‘that moment of risk, the sound of our voice, the fragile gift, not knowing’ and meeting ‘in drab classrooms with grubby, dull carpets.’ Deleuze writes:

J: ‘Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming ...’ (1997:1)

K: And, so, perhaps, there are ...there are no names. There are traffic noises, someone tapping the keys of a laptop. The feel of sticky Formica. There is a smell: institutions have smells. The coffee that is being drunk tastes bitter, out of a machine: instant. The light is of the winter, it struggles at the windows, it is dominated by the pervasive glow from neon strips.

J: ‘The ordinary registers intensities—regularly, intermittently, urgently, or as a slight shudder.’ (Stewart, 2007, p.10)

K: I am returning to this writing after a pause; it feels enlivening. In affect it is part of the pulsing healthiness of punctuation; a time of easing forward after an enforced moving back. The figural nature of the stuttering locates it in, between, around and with the entanglements of body and words: as the body breathes again it is as if the words start to flow. Deleuze and Guattari say:

J: 'Language ... forms a bulb (and) ... evolves by subterranean stems and flows, along river valleys or train tracks; it spreads like a patch of oil.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 7)

K: Kathleen Stewart writes her book *Ordinary Affects* in the third person –

J: She describes it as 'an assemblage of disparate scenes ... not so much a subject position or an agent in hot pursuit of something definitive as a point of contact'.

K: In this respect it seems that her use of the third person somehow works to disrupt writing as a location that is often over coded by humanist discourses and phenomenological proclivities. Her bringing to life of the ordinariness of affect displaces emotion as some thing contained in and owned by the human body and places it, in relationality, with other people, in time as aeon and in connection with all other bodies and, in so doing, through the processual play of exogamy and endogamy, folds the inside world out and the outside world in. If affect can be understood in terms of Spinoza's conative bodies, as having the power to affect and be affected (1992) then Stewart's use of the third person in writing about 'ordinary affects' (sic) might provide collaborative writing, through an acknowledgement of and engagement with what Bennett refers to as 'agentic assemblages' (2010: 20), with a powerful means of troubling its location to and origination within the individual will of the author and of the construction of writing as an autonomous human practice.

J: The tendency of some collaborative writing, including our own, to be described not only as collaborative but also as 'autoethnographic' is a modality that intra-acts with those bodies who attempt writing collaboratively. Autoethnographic practice is often described as a form of autobiographical writing and research that displays layers of consciousness and that somehow connects the 'personal' and the 'cultural'. In earlier

work we have attempted to offer collaborative and collaborating modalities that, as we have written,

K: ‘place the category of individualised subjectivity and the differentiating practice of the individualising subject, of what has been referred to as the ‘autoethnographic I’, (Ellis, 2004) under erasure’ (Wyatt and Gale, 2013: 139).

J: In this approach we have tentatively posited an ‘assemblage/ethnography’ which, in the eradication of the ‘auto’, attempts to proffer a form of theorising as practice in which collaboration as method of inquiry does not involve, as Nietzsche says, a mistrust of ‘concepts as if they were a wonderful dowry from some sort of wonderland’ (Nietzsche, 1968: 409); rather, in working with Deleuze and Guattari it engages with the view that concepts are not seen as, as they put it:

K: ‘waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies ... (and that) (t)hey must be invented, fabricated, or rather, created ...’ (1994: 5).

J: Such an approach acknowledges and employs Bennett’s contention that agency is distributed, that, within an affective plane of immanence, every thing has power and that the existence of ‘agentic assemblages’, as vibrant confederations of discourses and materials of all kinds, have the power to displace our reliance upon the influence of the autonomous individual human agent. In describing agency as being ‘distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field’ she offers an account that can be seen to activate and animate the kinds of collaborative writing practices being offered here.

Jane Bennett says:

K: ‘The sentences of this book ... emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro and microactants: from ‘my’ memories, intentions, contentions,

intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or the particulates in the room ... what is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power.’ (2010: 23)

J: In this respect we are also feeling increasingly uneasy about the use of ‘ethnography’ within our elision of ‘assemblage/ethnography’: we are concerned about its observational inferences, the implied passivity of that being observed and the apparent neglect of the view that all assemblages are agentic.

K: It seems that given our previously stated reticence about old empiricisms and positivist constructions of data, we need also to look at assemblage qua the original French term, *agencement*, and to pay closer attention to the distribution of agency, the intra-acting and diffractive possibilities of assemblages and the interferences that the contingencies and heterogeneities that their coalescent transmutational energies ignite.

J: It therefore feels that in this writing there is an emergence of what Barad has referred to as the ‘onto-epistemological’. This collaborative immersion of bodies through writing provides, through the constant processual flow of concept forming, a means of creatively enriching and bringing reality to life in always different ways. There is an excitement in this movement of the writing of Deleuze, Barad, Haraway, Bennett and others into the here and now of these collaborative practices and through the way in which the materialist complexities of this writing works to intensify our own.

K: In earlier collaborative agonistics we considered Maggie MacLure's observation that 'the space opened up by language is an ambivalent one. It is both productive and disabling.' (2003: 3) The quotation that she includes from the writing of Derrida is both illuminating and infuriating in the way in which it also adds complex energy to these considerations. Derrida writes:

J: 'Without the possibility of *différance*, the desire of presence as such would not find its breathing-space. That means by the same token that this desire carries in itself the destiny of its nonsatisfaction. *Différance* produces what it forbids, making possible the very thing that it makes impossible.' (Derrida, 1976: 176)

K: In these agonistics we search for each other's presence in our writings: it seems as if we always have done. And yet as we engage in this there always seems to be something alluring, always enticing, and invariably incomplete and ambiguous that drives our collaborative writing as a method of inquiry forward: it is as if as the entanglements become more mangled, as materiality and discourse shed their separate skins and morph into each other, as becoming-Ken, becoming-Jonathan is imbricated more and more in becoming-Ken-Jonathan, it is less and less possible to avoid engaging in talking about our work with each other, with others and with other bodies in the aeons and multiplicities of relational space as assemblage/ethnography: how could it be anything else!?

J: There is a sense of the power of memory working here. The convolution of memory activates a lack of cliché. It is like re-kindling an affair to bring MacLure's thoughts back into play here some years since we first engaged with them. This repetition is of course difference: without this the affective influence of respect and the concentration

of animate lucidity would be dead. And so with this licence it is possible to remember Irigaray and to use and adapt a quotation of hers that we have considered before in relation to her argument for *parler femme*:

K: '(They) are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible, for whoever listens with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. For in what she says too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished...When she returns it is to set off again from elsewhere...One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an 'other meaning' always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words; but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them.'

(Irigaray 1974: 29)

J: It is possible to adapt this passage and use it in relation to the multiplicity and intensity of our troublings of assemblage/ethnography. This passage can be read using 'we' instead of 'she'. There is no need to hi-jack or contradict the intensity or rhetorical force of her words; they can be repeated application and, in so doing, it becomes possible to show respect for them and argue for the difference of the 'and' that allows for them to be used with energy and force within collaborative space and with that of other bodies. In this re-cognition and application of difference there is a moving away from the influence and the locus of reflection and reflexivity. So often a mirror is held up to selves in relationality, vainly trying to gain a knowledge of self within the reflective illusions of the metaphysics of being; it is within this practice that we try to make sense of selves and a sense of these selves in relation to one then

the other. Living also creates space in looking out and in at these ‘temporary, provisional, partial’ selves and, in so doing, there is a sensing of, as Della Pollock writes, ‘a trembling at the horizon of all that (we) don’t know about (us)’ (Pollock, 2006:93).

K: It seems that trembling at these horizons is like swimming in the rising and falling of the surf, always anticipating the next big wave, treading water, looking out over the swells, waiting with an energising nervousness for its slowly rising arrival, being ready for it and then quickly turning, body moving to be in an instant at one with its tumbling flow. And in the intensity of these moments there is always interference, always the thrilling uncertainty of not knowing where the ride with the wave will take you. Haraway, in troubling the somewhat dominating influence of reflection as a trope for self-knowing argues for the use of the optical metaphor of diffraction. She writes:

J: ‘So what you get is not a reflection, it’s the record of a passage ... (a)s a metaphor it drops the metaphysics of identity and the metaphysics of representation and says optics is full of a whole other potent way of thinking about light, which is about history. It’s not about identity as taxonomy, but it’s about registering process on the recording screen.’ (2000: 103/4)

K: This passage has great force. In affect it is possible to sense the powerful liminality of self that both literally and figuratively trembles at the horizon, feeling self into the differences that are always in between and endlessly becoming. It is possible to learn in collaborative writing to trust the use of ‘me’, ‘you’, ‘us’, ‘them’, ‘Ken’, ‘Jonathan’ and so on. This can be seen to work within and around the differentiating repetitions that energise the diffractive possibilities of our ‘touchings’ and settings off in other

directions. However, I remain uncertain and concerned about this usage as I activate my senses on the edges of this assemblage whilst also becoming consumed within others, feeling hesitant and nervous as others name me and exercise their reality through representations that I find opaque and often oblique. In the becoming of relational space, where affect and percept seem ascendant, I sense also the powerful growth of concept, where knowing through naming exercises a forceful particularity and possesses a realist ontological force that is illuminating, vibrational and creative in the ceaseless haecceity of what we hesitate to call assemblage/ethnography.

J: We describe the encounter between a 4x4 and someone we name 'Jonathan', not to 'identify' but to energise the diffractive possibilities of their 'touching', to see what the encounter sparks, to go with where it takes us. We tell the story of a collaborative writing group that rebels against the system by bringing banned substances into its space of encounter to witness how it and we can step aside from ourselves and set off again from elsewhere. Materiality and discourse shed their separate skins and morph into each other.

Towards an ending of sorts

J: So, as we draw towards an ending of sorts, in the middle, in between, we are aware that our discussions of collaborative writing and inquiry in this paper, despite our best efforts, tend towards the anthropocentric, with reason and affect centered on the human and on human modes of thinking, feeling and being.

K: Even as we write about entanglements and assemblages that encompass the more or other-than-human, even as we experiment with philosophers that might help us think and

write otherwise, it is difficult to think beyond our human habits and histories. What are the implications for collaborative writing as we push towards posthuman modes of research? The posthuman subject is, in Rosi Braidotti's words: 'materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded... firmly located somewhere' (Braidotti, 2013: 188).

J: Braidotti suggests that a posthuman orientation requires an ethics of 'experiment[ing] with intensities', and an 'enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including non-human or 'earth' others'; it promotes a 'strong sense of collectivity and relationality' and sees 'a central role for creativity' (2013: 190-191).

K: We might ask what does it mean to bring moss or concrete to the writing table and start from there, as we did in a recent collaborative writing project with Susanne Gannon and other colleagues (Gale et al., 2013)?

J: How might moss or concrete – or more ephemeral qualities of breath or air or light – provoke writing otherwise and in relation?

K: How might these incite responses and provoke imagination in ways that are not already overcoded with the human?

J: How might writing change into some form already otherwise? And in this we might look to visual, literary and poetic forms rather than the tired old forms of academic discourse.

K: Foregrounding materiality will also be part of what this does, including paying explicit attention to the materiality of the technologies we use to write. The ubiquity of print – on paper and on screen – makes it hard to see how its linear and alphabetic dictates produce readers and writers in particular ways and not in others. How might we felt texts together

in radical and multimodal ways that produce different sorts of readers and writers, and different – perhaps more open – knowledge: minor, not major, literatures?

J: Early in this paper we declared our enchantment with Deleuze. We thought we would leave the final word with him too, our always-already-present third, fourth, fifth. Except that we won't, because to 'quote' him is to do disservice to him. He is already present in our words, in these bodies writing, in these material spaces, in the morning light that catches the edge of a kitchen table, as we grasp for what might be possible, what might be opened up, what might become-other, for where working at the wonder might take us:

K: because what matters is 'not the points – [Ken, Jonathan, you, here, this] – who function simply as temporary, transitory and evanescent points of subjectivation – but the collection of bifurcating, divergent and muddled lines which constitute this [paper] as a multiplicity and which passes between the points, carrying [us all] along without ever going from the one to the other.' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: vii).

J: So we bring this paper to a close by refusing a conclusive ending, by continuing to question where collaborative writing might take us, by always working with each new conceptualisation of collaborative writing as an event and, through our continuing engagement with these practices, to offering a theorising of collaborative writing that is always open, fluid, creative, and working at the wonder.

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