

Collaborative Writing as Inquiry

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Edited by

Jane Speedy and Jonathan Wyatt

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5540-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5540-2

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INTRODUCTION

What this book is about

This is a new and overdue contribution to the recently burgeoning literature of writing as a branch of qualitative inquiry (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; etc.). Much has been written about writing as inquiry, not least by Laurel Richardson who originally coined the phrase ‘writing as inquiry’; collaborative writing as inquiry, however, the intersection between participatory/democratic inquiry methods and creative and arts-based writing approaches remains an under-published and under-researched, yet vibrant and emergent inquiry space. Where publications in this field do exist they tend to be collaboratively written books that adhere to a particular approach (e.g. Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gale et al., 2012; Clandinin et al., 2007) or lack a literary and arts-informed practice and/or self-consciously transparent interest in process.

This book has been generated by the myriad collaborative writing groups that have emerged from the interdisciplinary research centre for narrative inquiry (NIC) within the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol. The NIC has an international reputation for, and interest in, both writing as a form of inquiry and, specifically, collaborative and participatory research methods. This book places a diversity of approaches to collaborative writing alongside each other and explores these methods and the spaces between them as critical arts-based inquiry practices within the social sciences. It is not intended or written as any kind of a handbook, more of a scrapbook, containing summative and rich prologues to each section, and substantive chapters (some adapted from work previously published in international peer-reviewed journals), fragments and snippets of ‘writing in progress’ as well as more extensive excursions into a range of approaches to writing collaboratively, including: collective biography; call and response (to people, to landscapes and to ‘what happens’ in the writing spaces); ‘take three words’; poetic writing; writing in scholarly communities and/or on retreat and writing between various twos and threes in a range of ways). This book seeks to illuminate but also to investigate and interrogate these emergent spaces, particularly as a critical gesture towards the individualised, market-driven agendas and neo-liberal practices of the contemporary academy.

How we wrote this book

The various chapters in the book were constructed by different collaborative writing groups associated with NIC between 2005 and 2013 and comprise much of what is unique and distinctive about that centre's particular, and particularly European, contribution to the expansion of the social/narrative imaginary; to qualitative inquiry methods and about what it means to 'inquire'. The majority of these writers were either University staff or students associated with NIC, with the exception of Susanne Gannon, one of the authors of Chapter 23 'Inquiring into Red/ Red Inquiring', a visiting fellow from the University of Western Sydney to NIC during 2012, and Tami Spry, one of the authors of 'Collaborative Writing in Real Time': a visiting professor to the centre during 2011. NIC has benefitted greatly from the time and energy given by visiting scholars to the centre: we have also benefitted during the time we were producing this book, from generous long or short-term visits by Cathy Riessman (Boston College University); Jean Clandinin (University of Alberta); Elyse Pineau (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale) and Bronwyn Davies (Melbourne University) all of whom, particularly Cathy Riessman and Bronwyn Davies, our visiting Benjamin Meaker professors, have contributed directly to the spirit of narrative, collaborative inquiry and to the particular commitments to writing as a form of scholarship that NIC engenders.

Some of these contributions such as 'Friend and Foe' (Chapter 20) and 'Remembering and Forgetting with Sue' (Chapter 15) were written by longstanding communities of scholars who had been writing together for a decade or more; other work was produced by 'one off' groups who came together in the moment, brought together by a particular interest or through the energy created around a particular visiting professor, such as 'Between the Four' (Chapter 18).

Once most of these chapters had been produced the process of collaboratively gathering and bringing together these texts into an interrelated body of work began. A group of nine scholars: Laurinda Brown, Christine Bell, Nell Bridges, Ken Gale, Mike Gallant, Ying-Lin Hung, Ann Rippin, Artemi Sakellariadis and Jane Speedy, went away together on a long weekend's writing retreat at the Ammerdown Centre—a retreat centre in rural Somerset, just outside Bath, nestled amidst wild flower meadows, next-door to a Georgian stately home—a worthy setting

for a Jane Austen novel, never mind a collaborative writing retreat¹. At that first weekend retreat in 2010, we planned which pieces of our existing writing were going into this book and wrote some of the pieces that we saw as missing, including material for ‘Retreating out of our Selves’ (Chapter 2) and ‘Collaborative Writing from our Bodies’ (Chapter 16). After that retreat we gave ourselves a year to fulfil various book producing tasks and then planned another retreat in order to compile the various section prologues. However, in November 2011, Jane Speedy, the research centre coordinator, suffered a massive stroke, which brought a number of our centre’s projects, including this publishing project, to rather an abrupt halt. After Jane came out of hospital in 2012, we began to grapple with this venture again and in the early summer of 2013 we finally organised our second ‘editing and collating’ writing retreat at Ammerdown with another, overlapping, group of six scholarly collaborative writers: Davina Kirkpatrick, Sue Porter, Artemi Sakellariadis, Jane Speedy, Jonathan Wyatt and Tessa Wyatt. This second group set themselves the two tasks of integrating a more recently produced group of collaboratively written texts into the book and writing prologues to all the sections of this book, together with the epilogue.

How we conceptualise and position our work

This book represents collaborative writing as inquiry by both exploring and modelling the process of working collaboratively and presenting examples of collaborative work. This is reflected in the joint authorship and the editorship of texts.

The authors of this book represent a multiplicity of different voices in terms of identities, but also of cognitive disciplines, training, positionality, and theoretical and philosophical allegiances. Disciplines and professional practices represented, for example, include counselling and therapy, the creative and performative arts, education, business and management, social work and policy, psychology and medicine. The book goes beyond the espoused interdisciplinarity of much academic work, where the various disciplines are represented, each informing an area of inquiry. This book comprises a collaboratively produced series of texts in which the writing comes from embodied authors, each situated in a disciplinary area but contributing to a fully integrated end ‘product’, a

¹ Ammerdown features throughout this book, appearing as context, landscape, space, background—or, better, collaborator—for and in much of this writing.

text in which no disciplinary claim for ownership can be made for any one part. The texts are all situated within the overarching genre of narrative inquiry, giving attention particularly to the juxtapositions of time, space and relationships that Clandinin et al. (2007) would describe as the ‘commonplaces’ of narrative inquiry, and including different notions of mythical, autobiographical, fictional time and the reflective uses of hindsight as illustrated by Freeman (1998, 2010). Much of this writing sits comfortably within poststructuralist/feminist systems of thought, although humanist philosophers and researcher activists such as Buber (1970) and Marshall & Reason (2007) are also cited by some. Deleuzian concepts, particularly in relation to nomadic writing and rhizomatic research methods (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), are the main underpinning of the chapters by Wyatt and Gale and their ideas are scattered throughout these chapters, as are references to Derrida (1992, 1994, 2003) and Cixous’s foundational work on writing, difference and experimentation in liminal spaces. With Cixous (1986, 1993) we recognise the embodied, and sexual, nature of language itself, whilst (also with her) recognising the inadequacy of this. Kristeva’s (1984) work on poetic language weaves its way throughout this collection and in particular her work on abjection and the powers of horror we ascribe to our bodies (1984) has also been important in texts exploring the embodied nature of writing. All of which brings us to the huge, often unacknowledged influence on this kind of research of African American womanist/feminist experimental writing into (for instance) the inadequacies of using the master’s tools (language) to dismantle the master’s house (Lorde, 1984) and to develop a poetics of the people (Jordan, 1995).

Possibly the most influential works on these writings, in qualitative research terms, have been Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St Pierre’s texts on writing as a method of inquiry (e.g. Richardson, 1990, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) and St Pierre (1997) and Lather’s (1997) work on experimental and nomadic writing practices. The influence of much twentieth and twenty-first century experimental literature from other arts-informed fields can be equally traced in these texts (such as the stories of Angela Carter (1979/2006) and Paul Auster (2002) and the poetry and essays of Alice Walker and Margaret Atwood).

Richardson’s insistence on writing as an emergent research method is entirely consonant with the experience of collaborative writing in this group of authors, where writing was shared and sense-making emerged in the collective reading. As the participants wrote in response both to each other’s writing and to subsequent reflective conversations about the written text, the inquiry cycle was completed. This cycling between the

interior world of the writer and the exterior social world of both the group and the wider environment mirrors the co-operative inquiry approach of Marshall (2007) and Reason and collaborators (see Reason & Bradbury, 2007).

There is also a strongly feminist strand to the theoretical framework for collaborative ways of working within this volume. Several of the groups of writers have, for example, been heavily influenced by the work of feminist memory workers such as the pioneering German scholar Frigga Haug. Haug and her collaborators combined autobiographical approaches with political analysis to critique processes of female sexualisation (Haug, 1987). Others took up this tradition, the most influential being Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon and their collaborators, who have developed a genre of ‘collective biography’ that can be traced through their feminist work on constructions of girl and womanhood in Australia (Davies & Gannon, 2006).

An important element in this book has been notions of space and place. Several of the examples of collaborative writing are clearly ‘emplaced’, reflecting the physical locations in which they were produced. Space and place has become a ‘hot’ topic in much recent social sciences writing, and this is reflected in the text through the influence of Doreen Massey’s work with her emphasis on space as “a simultaneity of stories so far” (Massey, 2005, p.9) and place as constituted by an element of ‘throwntogetherness’ (ibid, p.140), a term which also goes some way to capture the experience of being immersed in a group with a collective pool of lifeworlds and the narratives which compose them. In a similar vein, the influence of Tim Ingold (2007) can also be traced in this book with his conceptualisation of place as a series of enmeshments and entanglements, as lines and threads coming together to constitute our emplacement. The connection between Ingold’s metaphor and the lines on our pages that make up our writing is hard to resist.

Our final Ammerdown gathering

The editing and collating group gathered at Ammerdown for a weekend in June 2013. We wrote, between us, on our first evening together:

‘Ammerdown’ is a newly-formed Dropbox folder that Jane just made, with chairs of various kinds and a flecked brown-ish carpet and a load of electronic gadgets and six bodies, all of which are now inside a rectangular golden electronic folder thing.

We’re immersing ourselves in a book, with chapters and parts and

titles and thousands of words that I don't feel I know yet. Though what does it mean to know? We're feeling our way in together, fingers on keys, after talking about it for 20 minutes. It feels—I feel—a responsibility, being in this folder within a folder of a book, surrounded by other folders of others' work, waiting to know how and what to write in order to stitch some together and then it all.

Maybe not stitch it together; maybe it's waving at each text, or flying between them with thread; or word baristas sprinkling chocolate powder on some and cinnamon on others.

Coming together, sharing a space, organising
writing, drinking, eating, chatting and doing,

Partaking, thinking, typing, snapshots of events
past and present, in this room, this building and elsewhere

People, in this group, others who were here before, drawing together,
finding, exploring texts

Drawing threads together, energy, technology, Dropbox

Weaving a path, structure, typing, exploring holes, pulling at the
fabric, stitching together.

Book in six sections:

What are we doing here?

Do I know?

As ever feeling a bit adrift, but quite relaxed. I like being here with the
five of you, the six of us.

Us, I like that, us.

Comfortable and stimulating,

like coffee ice cream, with bitter grains to grind between my back
teeth,

with a gentle curving bite.

Here to mix and lift, like dough. To turn and fold the chapters, finding
ways in, building signposts for those who come to the book. Here to help
the raising, spacing the dense texture of enfolded texts written between
friends, comrades, colleagues.

Here to make meaning for ourselves, in service of other's meaning
making. Lift, twist, expose the grain, open to the air, then crush down
again to mix some more.

Here to enact the we-ness of the enterprise, carrying the trust of those
absent, the hopes, the fears, the excitement. Making interleaves, like tissue
between pages, absorbing the juice of the writing and adding form to
dense text.

We are the bookmark, notes scribbled on a page to aid memory by
condensing sense...

I keep wanting to suggest getting out the black ink... I suppose I always want to take it back to an embodied making process. Feel more at ease and comfortable with a process I can label drawing rather than writing.

Eek I am here and I'm now 48 and I suppose that means I'm part of the collaborative writing group. Did I not realize I was part of this maybe not, because I'm surprised and delighted to be here and welcomed and part of this wonderful company?

The sound of fingers on keys... and a stopping time is announced and joked about and a need in me to keep on writing not edit... just let the words flow out and be enthused and healthily challenged by the collective focus of fingers on keys, thoughts forming, words forming sentences on screens falling into word documents and then a Dropbox folder to be shared and added to.

I love this, no procrastination just common purpose and energetic intensity and starting... the refrain of a song plays around my head: "food in my belly, a license for my telly and nothing's gonna get me down..."²

Ah yes, being in Ammerdown being fed and cared for... is that an integral part of this process, I wonder?

We all found our way here eventually. To Ammerdown, I mean. From Cornwall, Wales, Bristol or Oxford, via Radstock, Midsomer Norton or possibly even Timbuktu, we all eventually got here. We gather together, once more. And as we ask ourselves what we are doing here and what we expect to do over the weekend, I find myself wondering if we are about to have a journey through texts in a manner not too dissimilar to our journeys on country roads this afternoon. Travelling alone or in pairs, revisiting routes that we've taken before or discovering new ones, exploring the familiar and the novel, steering towards a familiar sense of collective arrival.

Here we are doing the grown-up, joined-up, difficult, get-it-all-to-hang-together bits to do with writing. Not the arty-farty let-it-all-hang-down-over-the-sides-of-the-page kind of writing that we leave for the grown-ups to weave into something that makes sense. In collaborative writing groups we often write into some kind of space, but then somebody has to sweep up the space and gather the writing together into a piece of cloth. In Stuart Kelly's interview with the dying novelist Iain Banks in last Saturday's Guardian review³, Banks said that the trouble with writing

² Nutini, P. (2009) Pencil full of lead. London: Atlantic Records

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/15/iain-banks-the-final-interview>

fiction was that it had to make sense, not like real life: real life could be absolutely outrageous, but novelists couldn't get away with that kind of stuff. So what is collaborative writing? Fiction or real life? And why are they different? What if we ended up making some outrageous kind of sense?

There are six of us, probably the right kind of number... any less and we might feel we'd cheated on the collaboration factor; any more and we'd simply be too many. Six is a good number and even I can do all the dividings and multiplyings to do with sixes.

Davina Kirkpatrick, Sue Porter, Artemi Sakellariadis, Jane Speedy,
Jonathan Wyatt and Tessa Wyatt

June 2013

PART I

BEGINNINGS

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE TO PART I

DAVINA KIRKPATRICK, SUE PORTER,
ARTEMI SAKELLARIADIS, JANE SPEEDY,
JONATHAN WYATT AND TESSA WYATT

Beginning with our beginnings feels oddly perverse. We have just written, or at least placed together, the pieces that will make up the epilogue, so going now to the beginning somehow feels very conventional of us. We do not do conventional very well in this community of scholars, not because we set out to shun convention, but rather because we choose not to feel constrained by it.

Conventional is not a keyword in our lexicon, but we do like and honour the making of our own conventions and rituals.

There are three chapters in this section as well as this prologue: Ken Gale interrogating the simplicity of the notion of virtual ‘call and response’ writing; Mike Gallant weaving together the zig-zagged, face to face ‘call and response’ writing that began the weekend retreat at Ammerdown when this book was first planned; and the riff off Laurel Richardson’s ‘take three words’ technique for ‘anybody who can string three words together’ (<http://www.icqi.org/home/workshops/>), which a group of us took and played with on the social media site ‘Twitter’.

An invisible thread of interconnection between all these beginnings was the mixture of live yeast (in the shape of people who had accumulated experience in the various practices and ways of coming together in collaborative writing communities) and other ingredients for the dough (in the shape of people new to this genre). For the spirit of collaboration to rise there needed to be enough live, wild yeast (a yeast accumulated over the years) in the mix—alongside other fresh new ideas and contributions. All the groups in this book had slightly different ways of working and slightly different beginnings or methods of beginning to meet, write and interconnect, but all had strong commitments (often borne from a politics

of experience such as a feminist stance) to non-hierarchical ways of working. All the writings produced by these communities of scholars were forged through methodologies of the heart (Pelias, 2004), whereby spaces were explicitly left for readers to imagine themselves into and between the lives of the writers.

In some groups, mostly face-to-face communities, there was a shared convention to begin with ‘chat’ about the chosen topic and then to proceed to written text by consensus at a chosen time. Thus, a substantial aspect of the beginnings of these groups is lost to writing in the ephemeral context of ‘chat’ that nobody thought worth recording at the time. In online communities a certain amount of email chat has also been lost in the ether, but on the whole their workings out, as well as their answers to the questions, both appear in the texts in this section.

This is one of the real ethical dilemmas and pitfalls that people encounter as they talk about their research methodologies—leaving out a lot of what happens, or seems obvious to the cognoscenti, is something that often occurs when people report their research to others. Researchers of everyday life processes, like these collaborative writers, are in the business of ‘exoticising everyday life’ by making the familiar unfamiliar as much to themselves as others (Myerhoff, 1980). Many research texts involving group and community processes choose to leave out the messy bits, the rows people had, and gloss over difficulties and sticky times¹—all of which is essential background knowledge for anybody starting a collaborative writing community.

All the writing groups contributing to this book, for instance, had at least one community member trained and experienced in facilitating therapeutic communities and groups: not a necessary requirement, but a key constituent of the yeast nonetheless.

The three chapters in this section are positioned very differently from each other in terms of context. Gallant’s chapter talks about a way of beginning to work together as a face-to-face group, to zig-zag around the group in our calls and responses to each other’s writing, whereas the other two chapters are describing groups of people working together digitally at some geographical distance. It is not inconceivable that an online group could decide on a zig-zag order of call and response writing before starting to work together, just as the group taking three words to twitter agreed an order of writing; but this kind of structuring of the process would rather undermine the middle-of-the-night spontaneity involved in writing across

¹ See <http://writeinquiry.org/the-toolbox/starting-out/beginning-to-write/>

time boundaries and continents described by Gale et al. (2012). Were we to continue with an 'ideas for beginning groups' list, borrowing from Gallant, we could mention taking 'take three words' off Twitter, or trying out the kinds of interventions into each other's writing that Gannon suggests in 'Inquiring into Red' (see Chapter 23) or writing into social dreaming spaces, as suggested by Speedy in the epilogue to this volume (see Chapter 24). However, this would reduce this volume to a 'collaborative writer's handbook' and each constituent chapter to a shopping list of suggestions, rather than the series of exemplars of collaborative writing that we have sought to set out before other arts-informed researchers and writers.

This book is designed not only to introduce our readers to the practices of collaborative writing, but also to problematise and theorise those practices, within the context of writing as both an everyday and an extraordinary social inquiry space. Our intention is to extend the arts-based imaginary towards social and collaborative forms of inquiry, whilst simultaneously expanding the aesthetics and poetics of social and human inquiry. These are big claims for a small book, but they are claims informed by both our experience and our ethical know-how (Varela, 1999).

CHAPTER TWO

RETREATING OUT OF OURSELVES: SHARING AND SPILLING THE LIFEBLOOD OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING

MIKE GALLANT, LAURINDA BROWN,
CHRISTINE BELL, NELL BRIDGES, KEN GALE,
YING-LIN HUNG, ANN RIPPIN,
ARTEMI SAKELLARIADIS AND JANE SPEEDY

In autumn 2010, a group of nine academics, writers, educators and therapists came together to write collaboratively for a long weekend: a retreat in which to ponder their personal experiences of this form, to ask the apparently simple question ‘what is this thing we call collaborative writing?’ For some it was a continuation of the Bristol Collaborative Writing Group (BCWG), while for others it was simply a group of respected colleagues, associates and friends gathering to take up an opportunity to write together. If there were a shared plan, it was to explore the field of collaborative writing through collaborative writing; to push our pens together and create some record of what this process can be, to celebrate its nurturing, its developmental outcomes, and to work out some way of disseminating this joy to others who might be interested. With Derrida (2003), we are unhappy creating boundaries between differing forms of writing, regarding aesthetic forms such as writing itself as the essential performance or act, and being unable to dissociate thinking, teaching, and writing. This chapter is layered with individual writings from our residential weekend sutured by strands of reflexive and metaphorical musings.

We began the project by purposefully presenting, in spoken form, a short piece of individual writing about our experience of collaborative writing. We chose to present this specifically to one person in the room,

though in the presence of us all. This presence was as crucial as was the individuality of the ‘present’ we read to our one chosen colleague. Having received our ‘present’ we chose to whom we would address our own written words. Then, with a particular focus on the individual writing addressed to us personally, we wrote again—in whatever form and in whatever direction we had been moved to create. In lacing together the zig-zag call and response of nine inquirers we were able to draw from the wellspring of what Park (2005) refers to as the Riparian Zone: a metaphorical riverside plain often flooded by murky life-giving waters that leave a landscape of intense fecundity.

This zig-zag writing¹ uses pinking shears that minimise fraying at the edges of connection, paradoxically cutting and protecting the delicate contact boundary between the secure material of woven warp and weft, and the uncertain drifting space where the cloth has left traces of past patterns; patterns of thought and of practice, of grand narrative and academia. We stitch our bespoke wardrobe with shared words, tailored, safely held (and sometimes hidden) as our own and yet simultaneously belonging to others:

I have already filled a sheet of paper by listening to you all. Relationships. The miracle of falling in love. Writing together. Side by side. Shoulder to shoulder. Sliding between the two. Bouncing off each other’s work. The quality of the relationships. The interconnectedness of the writing. The interconnectedness of the people. The writing together, in the face of inordinate calls on our time. Scratching pens together, in the face of tiredness. Side by side with tiredness, shoulder to shoulder with other pressures, with a work/life balance in which each—the work and the life—pull you, yank you, in opposite directions, leaving a space in the middle for the writing to emerge between the two. A parting of the seas (so Moses has descended from the shelves and is in this writing too²) parting of the seas, creating the space, enabling the writing to blossom. “Hood up” writing or “hood down”³ writing, we all become leech-like—drawing

¹ See Guttorm et al. (2012) for a description and theorizing of a variation of this zig-zag writing method.

² This is a reference to the predominantly religious and spiritual content of the library in which we met.

³ See Chapter 7: we had identified a metaphor of hiding our radical and critical writing from the closed circuit cameras of academia in a similar way that young people might deploy the hoods of their clothing to escape identification on the street. This metaphor had the strength of uncertainty about it, in that there was at

from others—and allow others to draw from us. Sliding beneath the radar, being badly behaved, and being inordinately fond of it. The writing also, occasionally, being badly behaved. It may hang in space for a while before it lands and connects. Or, if this is anything to go by, before the seas reconnect and swallow the writing up for good until, in time, it evaporates into the cloud of the unknown.

For the record, this was the writing that came off my pen when I was too exhausted to even think of saying “I am too tired to write”. I remember my last morsel of alertness registering that I am writing this for us, not for publication.

We have been practising a methodology of the heart since before Ron Pelias named it so. We have developed our very own ways of being/ becoming-talking-writing-connecting. We have valued the collective, put our values into action and oh, if Artemi at Ammerdown may be allowed a Deleuzian term, we have dared to deterritorialise academia’s stronghold: scholarly writing.

Artemi S

I am focusing here not so much on establishing facts concerning collaborative writing, but rather searching to create understanding through what Mair (2012, p.184), in his final work, described as Enchantment “arising from the marriage of feeling and imagination”. Our shared experiences certainly reflect an embodiment of feeling (see Chapter 16) and a heartfelt (cf. Ellis, 1999) creativity, freely and transparently given by each to each other. This presence we experience, a sense of gift-giving and receiving, may be that which leads to what others (see also Chapter 19) have named “Gerald”, a group experience of relational depth (Mearns & Cooper, 2005), as Geller (2012) has proposed. She suggests that four aspects go to make up this presence that leads to the shared, and therapeutic, experience of relational depth: “being grounded in one’s self, being immersed in the moment with the other(s), being connected to a larger sense of expansion...’, and ‘being with and for the...’ other (Geller, 2012, p.178). This description seems to resonate with our experience of synchronous collaborative writing practice. Individual simultaneous

the time of our gathering a political move from the British Conservative party leadership asking that the public “Hug a Hoodie”—a move to shift the entrenched socio-political assumptions about a class of younger people typified as wearing hooded garments and assumed to be involved in anti-social behaviour—and to bring them back into (Conservative) mainstream culture.

experiences of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992) in this environment contribute to the overall sense of this enchanting experience:

As I listened to Ann yesterday I was aware of picking up words and running with them, almost taking them like a thief. Taking them, squirreling them away, burying them in the pages of my notebook, then later, digging them up and out and in so doing regurgitating them in some strange, half-digested way, using my own take, my own line of escape, almost selfishly translating them with the venomous sting of my own bile.

Today I have found myself listening and writing in flow. I have loved listening to the ring of 'shoulder to shoulder' talk, feeling energised by the talk of 'edginess', smiling fast at the pregnant indistinctiveness of the spaces in between, the happy curiosities emerging out of being lost in intensities. Mike, finding himself jumping sideways into the writing; Sue finding herself saying things she couldn't say elsewhere, sensing her writing 'hanging in space', before sending it; Nell, memorably, saying 'You never know what it is you are going to find out'.

I love all this indistinctness. It says so much. It is the misty morning: it is where the sharpness of feeling seems to hang.

I sense in a strange kind of way how all this seems to be about me. It is as if I am able to write this because of that. It is as if I wrote down my notes when I listened to the others because it was me that was saying what they were saying. I could only write down what seemed to be my words. I can only say this now because it is only now that I am beginning to recognise this. It is as if the words of those in the group actually wrote me. I sense a becoming-Ken in the words that I heard and hurriedly wrote down. As I write these words now it seems so clear that the collaborative writing, listening, talking, listening, writing, talking, reading is energised somehow by the words that I want to hear: it is as if, to use Mike's phrase, I am drawing blood from others' creativity and in so doing transfusing, giving some form of life to my always emerging and always incomplete self. As I write, here, now, I am aware of my battle with my sense of self and desperately search for words... the blood of others but somehow the blood... it is as if I am hearing these words in a way that I want to hear them, it is as if they are flowing in and out of me...

Ken G

Flowing in and out and through the liminal spaces of minds, bodies, pens, keyboards, physical place, carpet, smell, book titles, the air we breathe, the shared particles of bodies left on paper and inhaled into another's lungs uncritically and unconsciously: it is only when we stop and

ponder the layers and the sweetness of our desert that we begin to understand our process. We sense that we need other people to help us think (St. Pierre, 1997). Like puff-pastry preparation we fold and fold again, adding the rich butter that holds, separates and gives distinctive texture; we play with our material, allowing the folded layers to build as we prepare our chosen filling. With salivation we choose new fruits from our orchard, caramelise their sugars by taking them to the searing heat of another mind-body-spirit, a hotbed of critique and nurturing, before placing them with care into the waiting arms of our proud pastry. The apple and cranberry turnover is in the oven, ready to be savoured, contemplated and shared.

Collaborative Writing: it is what it is and it defines who we are, sometimes hiding who I am behind the barricades. Is there interdependence? Is there gratitude? Is there plagiaristic leeching? Or is it osmosis as through the shell of your egg?

When my written word is accepted as worthy of being part of your written word we are as children in the playground, platonic lovers slitting our wrists and mixing blood in a revolutionary bond. And yet I walk away, allowing the s/p/laces for considered connection. I am not devoured, I am enabled, lace bobbins twisted and manipulated to construct the celebration shawl that warms despite its transparency.

Scratching away—scratching a way down a longer road.

Mike G

Writers meet their writing as rupturing events cutting through the writing place that is itself created within space. It was Badiou (2007) who coined the term ‘esplace’, translated as ‘splace’, to describe this essential coming together of place in space (a structuration of reality?), and then went on to consider how events rupture this comfort. Our writing cuts through this splace with a freedom that is only contained by reflection from (on, to, with, beside?) our colleagues, troubling our own attempts to define and understand, setting us free to experience something more, that is both me and us, mine and ours.

SHE WANTS TO WRITE WITH ME

(on writing into conversations about collaborative writing)

*Rats in the rafters, dropping ball bearings, eavesdropping
Eavesdropping....playing ‘Chinese whispers’...*

Catching fragments snippets, intensities

*Drawing blood
Thrill, bounce, fantastic
Together*

*Couldn't do without
Each other, the
Chinese do it differently
Still about connection, friendship
Left field, exposure, excessive practice
Hoods up and down and the miracle of falling
Falling in love
Sue wants to write*

With me...

*Blood filled thrills blood spills
Excessive exposing, inordinate fondness,
Falling, falling, falling for you, hoods up and hoods
down,
Doing it with you, doing it without you, doing it the Chinese way
She wants to do it with me,
I want to do it with her*

*Jane wants to do it in twos and threes and lots of groups, Jane's a
floozie she's so up for this,*

*Jane wants to do it with everybody, Jane wants to do it in Ammerdown,
Laugharne and Llanishen and Northumberland and Goosenest and
Sifnos, Florence, Hawkswood, and even in Marina's garden in front of
the foxes, and tame radiologists*

*Oops
I wonder if I've gone too far, got carried away again,
I'm supposed to be making theory, but I'm back in the unisex toilets
with Ali McBeal again and the Buddha and the dancing babies⁴.
I'm not making any sense
I'm breathless, out of control Speedy,*

⁴ Ali McBeal was an innovative American TV comedy-drama series originally screened from 1997 to 2002 with Calista Flockhart playing the eponymous lawyer, occasionally indulging in spells of magical realism.

*Un-professorial to say the least, possibly orgasmic,
Will I catch fire in the library under the gaze of Hildegard (of Bingen)
and her sisters...?*

*Oh Patti, Patti darling⁵, we've gone too far again, you and I, we've
strayed into the realms
the realms of voluptuousness, abundance and excessiveness*

*Too far, too soon, too quick, too hot, too rude... and much much too
overexcited...*

*But I do have to say to those boys... the ones with the comb-over
fetish...*

Bugger bodies without organs,

*I want my bodies stuffed with an abundance of ample, fully functional
organs...*

I want my writing to rush out throbbing and whooping and screaming

I want

I want

I want

to write

together

with you

and then collapse into a heap of messy crumpled texts

and maybe light a fag...

Jane S

⁵ Referring to Patti Lather, currently professor at Ohio State University.

Gestalt figure and ground illustrations of two persons meeting, their faces in silhouette leaving a space between, only become illustrative by their framing: it is only when contained within a clear boundary that the distinctive shape of a vase appears between them—the paradox of the container being dependent on containment. The paired writing between two people, as repeated call and response, appears simplistic when set against this zig-zag format that passes on words from one to another, and then again and again, through and to the full group. The two-dimensionality of the vase/faces illustration becomes multi-dimensional and the framing increasingly complex. And yet it is this framing, this containment that allows the reverberations to bounce off the complex surfaces of this ‘space’, to recognise the paucity of causality and beautiful profundity of coming together (cf. Bachelard, 1964).

There's the writing in pairs and there's the writing in groups. The writing that takes you in unexpected directions, like bouncing off a trampoline. But it's more than the writing. It's about the relationships. And it's the way the writing keeps the relationships going.

We talk.

We write.

We talk about writing.

We write about talking.

We talk about the talk that we wrote about.

We write about the writing we talked about.

We talk about the talk that we didn't write about.

We write about the writing that we didn't talk about.

We talk about not writing.

We write about not talking.

And then we write again.

We write to each other.

We write from each other.

We write alongside each other.

We write around each other.

This way and that way.

Writing, talking.

Bouncing in unpredictable directions.

Words trampolining.

Not colliding.

How is that?

When we speak, the words inevitably collide, and divide.

We stay in entrenched positions, more often than not.

When we write the talking gets better.

Nell B

Ann talks of this as political action, of being chosen by others, accepted, invited in so that we can hide behind each other's words ("hood up") while others talk of lovers meeting face to face and subsequently turning to their shared world side by side. I am reminded of the comparison between Levinas's and Lacan's views on encounter and co-construction of self, and the concomitant ethical positions posited: am I creating my self in the image of another so that I take on their emotion, their suffering, and indeed their responsibility (not to take on responsibility for them, but to be responsible for their responsibilities), or is it that I construct my self from the other in such a way as to become their competitor, as Lacan would have us believe (Fryer, 2004)? I want to align myself with Levinas, and yet I sense a closer fit with Lacan's position: so how can I accept this competitive element within collaboration? Only by noticing the paradox of its existence and letting it become an ingredient of this exquisite cuisine.

I think of the politics first of all as external to me and then without thinking I realise I am folded into the very living, pulsing bloodstream of power; it is impossible not to do this, there is something compulsive about this collaborative writing thing! Somehow I am finding my experience of this different to Ann's. Politics does not seem extra or excessive to me when I think about collaborative writing. I am forging them in to my practices, in this respect I am coming out. I am beginning to grow the confidence to say that this is what I do. I repeat it when the incredulous ask: 'Yes, collaborative writing as a method of inquiry'.

So this appeals to my transgressive (or is it subversive?) inclinations; I rather like the 'fuck off' that sometimes comes with the repetition, when I say again, 'collaborative writing as a method of inquiry'. The more I say this, the more I do this; the proposition becomes a prescription. And I begin to see unexpected others doing this too!

Ken G

Certainly this process troubles a narrative of repeating personal meanings that are inextricably linked with a conservative (and conservatising) understanding of identity. Instead of the developing symbolised story (words against background—figure and ground) being based on pre-existing personal archetypes, in this collaborative writing

together we permit others' personal, sub-cultural and cultural archetypes to intrude, contain, rub up against and metamorphose our own meanings.

How are we gonna convince them that writing in a group excites us and inspires us? And then invite them into the collaborative writing world? Can they understand the pleasure and the excitement of writing together? To be honest, writing in a group is the only chance that I can hear the scratching sound.

Ying-Lin H

I hope we have. I hope you can. As for now, the scratching sound is calling me again.