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## ASSEMBLAGE/ETHNOGRAPHY: TROUBLING CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELF IN THE PLAY OF MATERIALITY AND REPRESENTATION

### INTRODUCTION

We have been writing together, and together with others, about and through collaborative writing for many years (e.g. Gale & Wyatt, 2009; Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2011; Gale, Pelias, Russell & Wyatt, 2012). In this chapter we make a claim for a new ethnography that both builds upon and challenges earlier influential models and practices that can be seen to have constructed autoethnography in particular and actively differentiating ways. We work to propose collaborative, spatially and temporally distributed ethnographic practices that destabilise, reconstruct and deterritorialise the existing theory and practice of the signified generalisation ‘autoethnography’.

In offering this we develop the theory and practice of *assemblage/ethnography* (Wyatt & Gale, 2013) that works to elude and trouble the potential discursive construction that the naming of a category of difference can create and, at the same time, offer a mode of practice that always brings the materiality of relational space into play as a method of inquiry. We take a lead from Haraway (2000) in seeing this as a space of ‘diffraction’ and ‘interference’, rather than one of reflection or reflexivity, from Barad (2007) in attempting to work with the ‘entanglements’ that inhere within, through and around the ‘intra-actions’ of material and discursive exchange, from Thrift in working with a ‘processual sensualism that a material schematism provides’ (2006, p. 139) and from Deleuze and Guattari in living with the creative challenges and anticipations that a world with no heaven for concepts can be seen to offer (1994).

In attempting to achieve this we display in the following pages a collaborative and collaborating modality of ethnographic practice that places the category of difference 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. In this we value the methodological leads offered by Foucault of ‘getting free of one self’ (2000) and of Lather of ‘getting lost’ (2007) and in so doing rhetorically engage with the fluid and transmutational qualities proffered by the Deleuzo-Guattarian figures and conceptualisations of ‘multiplicity’, ‘becoming’ and the ‘assemblage’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). To do this the chapter offers a

schematised series of exchanges, via emails and their attachments, that took place over a period of a few months.

In producing this account our 'ethnographic imaginations' work at the interstices at play between the flurried narrative accounts of our original 'writing down' and what presents itself on these pages as our 'writing up' (Atkinson, 1991) and in so doing works to both examine and trouble the material and textual constructions of the reality of our collaborative engagements into the not yet known.

Although we trouble claims to individualism and individual author/ity, a provisional hypothesis might be that in what follows Jonathan's writing is in italics, Ken's in plain text.

#### THINKING (NOT) OF SELF

I am thinking (not) of self and how indeterminate that is and yet how determining it also is. How that sense of self that emerges out of habit, out of discourse, out of not allowing diffractions to play a part: a part to alter 'concept, percept, affect' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 163).

I find you writing recently:

*I sign up to Deleuzian conceptualisations of subjectivity whilst I continue to write, both alone and with others, in the first person. I write about 'my' experience while I purport to disrupt the unified subject. How can a poststructuralist writing about personal experience be anything but ironic, and how can a therapist write about their clients ironically? It is 'my' body that sits – that sat – with clients and registered their rage and pain; 'my' stomach that growled indelicately. The 'I' that will die and be mourned and missed (or not) is not just some postmodern blob of subjectivity; it has palpable edges, a perimeter of permeable skin within which this writing happens. (Wyatt, 2013)*

This incessant *nouning* is so disabling because it is not really what we mean, or what we feel, or who we are or how we are.

*I am arrested. Checked. Isn't it what we mean? Or what we feel? Not who or how we are? Maybe it's that they are so very difficult to let go of, to mourn. When I call you, write to you, think of you, tell Tess that I'm writing this with 'you', there is at least a moment of capture: a press of the button that holds a you, today's you, this moment's you, the singularity of Ken, the you that is full of the recent Cadiz trip – effervescent, restless, excitable, passionate – in frame. I treasure that capacity: there is a Ken whom I am coming to know, the knowing of whom is always in flux – temporary, provisional, partial; a Ken(ning) who is different and distinct from all others, all other Kens, all other friends, all other people I have met, a sense of whom I feel that I have, 'trembling at the horizon of all that 'I' don't know about 'you'' (Pollock, 2006, p.93).*

*It is, I think and feel, naming that I wish to hold onto in our assemblage/ethnography. The possibility of stories. I am with you about saying no to 'nouning'*

*and fixity and yes to fluidity, verbs, dispersal of the self, uncertainty – yes, all of these.*

*Let's tell stories. Tell me a story, Ken. Let's "go visiting" through stories, as Hannah Arendt (1982) encourages. Like the ones of you travelling across the USA in 1989<sup>1</sup>. The you in all your becoming then. The events in all their becoming then. Tell those. With their senses of place and space; the friend you were with, the cities you drove through, the escapades. Do these 'noun' you? Not for me. Not in my imagination and memory of your telling of them. I celebrate the sense they give me of a Ken, or, more accurately, the Ken-ing haecceity as "unique existent" (Cavarero, 2000).*

We have been working toward these human and post human senses of becoming and assemblage/ethnography and yet we seem tied to those very nouns that identify us within humanist and phenomenological individualism. As I open this up I am drawn back to thinking about identifications, representations and the discourses that work to bring these constructions into place. I started to write the other evening:

Slowly over these last few days I have sensed my self breaking away from another self that was constraining and forming me at the same time: a self that was becoming me and yet, in terms of living in relation to a me that I might live on some kind of plane of immanence, taking me away from that living, limiting, moulding, denigrating and disallowing a massive pregnant well spring that has been wanting to burst forth and flow out of me and into me for ages now.

I struggle with intensities that seem to emanate from the objective conditions that attempt to regulate me with their administrations, their legalities and their structures. I am on the cusp of divorce, of retirement and death and I swim in the whirlpools and currents that these conditions prevail upon me.

I know that the only way that I can live with and against these conditions is with a my self that is driven, that is focused, that needs to do, to act, to energise, to live. Without this I know that I am dead.

*I am here with you as you write, knowing something further, something now, of the 'singularity' of Ken? A sense of you, not one that pins you, fixes you, but one that suggests you are knowable, that prompts me from reading this to root for you, to wish for your happiness, to be beside you in the struggle you describe.*

As these concerns try to make themselves felt and heard, as passion and affect work to infuse and bring to life these writings, it is like a young body trying to live healthily, through the use of exercise and eating good food and still being covered in the disabling and scabrous effects of eczema or acne. The writing above is full of scabs; there is a profusion of 'I's', 'we's', 'me's' and so on. This writing is about infection: it is infected. Its sores are virulent; they seep all over the page, messing with its honest intent, staining its integrity with the irrevocability of their creeping presence.

*No, no, no, I cry: they are not scabs or sores; they are not virulent. The I's, we's and me's convey the vibrancy and struggle of Ken. Ken-ing. I don't want to lose that, don't wish that sense of you to be erased. Show me how we can.*

Paragraphs of writing work like teenagers squeezing unwanted spots. As one spot is destroyed by the pressures of frustrated fingers another shows its presence in a hitherto hidden manner. It seems to be impossible to exorcise 'I', 'we', 'you', 'our', 'us' and 'them'. If they are our spirits; if they matter, if our materiality of self is to live with representations and the pervasive discursive constructions that pollute lives like these, how are we to talk and write about them? In our *becoming-Ken-Jonathan* (Gale & Wyatt, 2009) we have reached this point of assemblage/ethnography. In our mappings and our 'between-the-two's' this seems to be significant. It seems that we have struggled to bring this to life and it seems in our becomings we are giving birth to something that wants to grow, wants to live and wants to disturb the comfortable habits, customs and traditions of those who live without reflexivity in worlds of identification, representation and wanton repetition.

And so, as time has elapsed, there has been space to think and feel and sense and perhaps value a writing that does not talk of 'I', 'you', 'we' and 'us' ...

*I am left, just now, finding that difficult. Writing this to 'you', from 'me', still has meaning. You say 'we' ('we have reached this point...we are giving birth'): it is not all of what I notice of/in me.*

*I hold onto the hope and the possibility of stories. Stories embroidered and imbricated within matter, flux, and provisionality.*

Beginning again through a fleeting remembering of Borges' essay/short story *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* in *Labyrinths* and in it the phrase which has always resided and never completely disappeared and so that when re/collection is sparked it appears in re/citation.

'upward behind the onstreaming it mooned' (1971, p. 33)

Starting to inquire into the nounless world that is *Tlon*, the feeling of pointlessness is ever present, lurking around corners, pregnant with anticipation, desirous to trip up the unsuspecting novitiate writing self into the world. When he speaks of those who inhabit *Tlon* Borges says, 'the world for them is not a concourse of objects in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent acts' (p. 32).

The swirling dementia induced by fleeting words and cries. The brief fragment of a scream carried across the crowdedness of a room. Sensing sighs in the silence of a brief moment. The tantalising encounters with momentary body smells in movements of passing on the street. It is 'body-without-organs' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988); always disembodied. The organisation of the body is at best a sham and at worst an artefact that disciplines and controls. Body is never fixed: it is its appearance; it is its representation, its identification that is fixed by name, classified through order and frozen by type. Therefore its fixity creates an illusion whose ephemeral qualities

gives perpetuity to myths and beliefs that rinse all magic from its reality and fixes the image in the repetition of the process, the different trays of chemicals, the certainty of different reactions. These replications are only the stuff of life that are wrapped up in the severity and machinic force of systems of power. The simple beauty of a Warhol silk screen that screams over and over again 'I am not the only one', 'I am not the only one'. Elvis says, 'I am not the only one', Mao says, 'I am not the only one', Marilyn says, 'I am not the only one'. The simple beauty that comes from the knowing that the process of silk screening can never produce the same image. The repetition of the process creates its own differentiation: each one is different.

Really, each one is different: though they appear to be the same. *Yes, yet they have names; they are/have stories that we tell of them.*

And so with everything?

Really, each one is different: though they appear to be the same.

And so with collaborative writing?

Collaborative writing as a method of inquiry?

Collaborating with whom?

Inquiring into what?

Into whom?

Collaborating with a person, someone with a name, someone someone knows, invariably involves collaborating with a cipher, a representation of a reality that always has to be displaced by the representations that bring it to life, that locates it within time and space. It makes sense to talk about *becoming-Ken-Jonathan* only because this hyphenated, Deleuze inspired trope carries with it certain associations, associations of plurality, of differentiation, of emergence, of liminality, of always becoming other. In these dust storms, these ever shifting sands, 'I' is always indeterminate, always unsure, never safe, its threats of fixed embodiment are always challenged by lost histories, by secrets that live unhaunted lives, by stories that never can be, never will be told. These collaborators are named: Davies & Gannon, Denzin & Lincoln, Wyatt & Gale and so on and what do these collective signifiers mean? Associated with each of these pairs are bodies of work, within these bodies, whilst protests might be made, are organised conceptual arrangements, there is rhetoric, critique and the humblest of invitations to question the artifice which makes each pair, with their associated bodies, recognisable, understandable and, dare it be said, citable. In this has the beautifully candid exhortation of Deleuze when he says of working with Guattari been lost?

Félix and I, and many others like us, don't feel we're persons exactly. Our individuality is rather that of events, which isn't making any grand claim, given that haecceities can be modest and microscopic. I've tried in all my books to discover the nature of events; it's a philosophical concept, the only one capable of ousting the verb "to be" and attributes. From this viewpoint, writing with someone else becomes completely natural. It's just a question of something passing through you, a current, which alone has a proper name.

Even when you think you're writing on your own, you're always doing it with someone else you can't always name. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141)

*So let us use these names; or let us use names in this way – Ken as a 'current passing through you'. When we talk about 'you' let us tell the stories of this force that is you at that moment.*

Bronwyn Davies says in her recent use of this powerful and potent quotation, 'By putting oneself out where thought is happening, one cannot always name whoever it is one is writing with' (Davies, personal communication). This carries great force. Though in the preceding sentence there are names that inevitably have substance and substantial tangible life within and through their representational and identifiable histories, this sentence of Davies' bares a pulsing naked and intelligible heart when it gives the words 'where thought is happening, one cannot always name whoever it is one is writing with'. There is a worry about the elision of 'oneself' and writing life might be more comfortable if the potentialities and transitions that are incumbent in the pregnant space that lives between 'one' and 'self', qua 'one self' were made more evident. And of course it is not simply the world of thought that is always becoming; it is the differentiations that are always emergent as the world of thought lives in and with the constant repetitions of those multiplicitous encounters with sense and affect, intuition and value. Nothing is fixed, there is always change. With assemblage/ethnography it seems so important that there is a living, not simply with a sense that 'one cannot always name whoever it is one is writing with', but also that there is a living with the intensities and senses of selves and others that in multiple and diverse settings of time and place coalesce and conflict, confer and differ, and sometimes reflex and also, inevitably, diffract. In the not yet known of these always collaborating diffractive possibilities there will be a subsequent and creative interplay of matter and discourse, body and words. And so it seems that this assemblage/ethnography cannot only be about the 'whoevers', it will also have to involve the withevers and in each of these both gain and attempt to convey a sense of what Kemmis has called 'happeningness' (2010, p. 417), of living in and perpetuating 'moments of being' (Woolf, 1985), and always in becoming alert to and present with the creativities, pluralities and endless possibilities of worlds of haecceity.

*Ah yes, I am with you here.*

How about a brief return to Borges and the world of Tlon for a moment of curiosity and temporary respite?

...the colour of the rising sun and the far-away cry of a bird ... the sun and the water on a swimmer's chest, the vague tremulous rose colour we see with our eyes closed, the sensation of being carried along by a river and also by sleep ...these ... can be combined with others ... the process is practically infinite. There are famous poems made up of one enormous word ... the fact that no one believes in the reality of nouns paradoxically causes their number to be unending. (p. 33)

*Even Borges could not write against nouns in his imaginary noun-less world without using them.*

*It is 4.22 p.m. In 10 minutes we will leave for the cinema, but I want to write here, to type into this shared electronic space, neither yours nor mine. Ours. Although it may seem disconnected to your writing here, the prompt is in the just-this-ness, the haecceity, of the clearing of our attic today, the handling, sifting, keeping and binning of assorted items accumulated over the past twenty three years in this house. Thirty bags of clothes, stored for winter or summer or for when they came back into fashion or for when weight is lost or gained; some twenty cardboard boxes, all empty save for blocks of polystyrene and clear plastic bags; five years' worth of my back issues of the football magazine '442'; my stamp collection from when I was a child; miscellaneous toys, cards, fairy lights and books, all belonging to the Joe and Holly, that they have stored as each stage of growing up has left others behind; and cases, sports equipment, curtains, cots, Christmas decorations and sheet music.*

*There have been five trips to the tip over the weekend and there will be more; we have two bedrooms filled with bags and cases to sort, items in piles, many – of mine, at least – kept for sentimental reasons when, two decades ago, I was unable to let them go. I have already begun to find it easier this time. There seems to be no point holding onto objects that had meaning, that I was attached to, that attached those selves to me, then. Letters from old friends, cards from my first classes as a teacher. Those students will be in their forties now. I have not looked at those things since I lifted the boxes up the unstable step ladders (which I still use) and placed them in the corner of the attic. I will not look at them again if I place them back there. Why not just wedge them into the back of the car and be done with them?*

*That is easy to write. I am not sure, when I climb the stairs later, that I shall be able to see it through.*

#### **'Ah yes, I am with you here'**

And yes it feels that treading carefully is what this nomadism is all about. It is the use of these 'me's' and 'you's', 'we's' and 'them's' that are potentially so disabling. The problem seems to be intractable, so for the moment I, yes I, am going to continue using them. There seems to be no choice.

*We walked, you and me, last Saturday afternoon, in the brightness of a warm October afternoon, in all the particularity of that day, above Ammerdown<sup>2</sup>, talking as we dodged the mud, climbing steadily until we reached the monument, the folly whose history I must have known at some point. We caught up, talked about writing, and paused to hail our fellow writing weekenders.*

*'You' and 'me'. 'We' did that. I use those terms with caution, aware of their provisionality, their contingency. I do not seek to fix - not you nor me nor them nor 'it': those moments, those haecceities.*

*Is writing like this 'disabling'? A 'problem'? 'Intractable'? Not for me.*

I am so aware of the way in which, in our nomadic inquiries, the smoothing and the striating still goes on: space is never still, never fixed because of this. As I smooth out the network of striations that might pre-exist I replace them with new ones and the realism of my ontology is happy that these are then further smoothed by new forces, by fresh winds that blow across and unsettle and disturb, as the desert becomes more populous. I am happy with this. I have an understanding. I am happy that this understanding is shifting, in flux, always open to change. I like it that this has the power to say that, that there is always an endless process of differentiation and that, therefore, my subjectivity is always in play.

I cannot help but believe in the post human possibilities that lie within the scope of bodies not ending with skin, of somehow living in these very real moments of knowing the heterogeneity, the contingency of self as subject, of knowing that my boundaries, my very edges are always shifting and breaking down, that there are these forces at play in and about me, that this very molecularity has the potential, through particularity, to be energising, creative and always renewing. And then I hear you cry in the near distance of my dreams and my unstable worlds of affect,

*A sense of you, not one that pins you, fixes you, but one that suggests you are knowable, that prompts me from reading this to root for you, to wish for your happiness, to be beside you in the struggle you describe.*

And I wonder about this sense you have of me and of course anyone, anything, being 'knowable'. I have shared with you and others my sense of trouble about this: I express concerns about representation, I search out the patterns of interference, the 'diffractions' that Haraway talks about and my body lurches and reacts to what this being 'knowable' says. I sense that the 'knowable' somehow relies upon representation and I sense that these representations have to be elusive and mercurial, always shifting: this is the nature of our becoming.

*Yes. 'A sense of you...one that suggests that you are knowable' – you, me, your children, mine – has the emphasis on 'sense' and 'suggest'. It is the sense of Ken, like the way I can picture you throwing back your head when you lose yourself in laughter, which hints at the possibility of 'knowing', at a something or somethings – flows, intensities – that mark(s) you as 'unique existent', which leads me as your friend to stay being curious, intrigued, involved, wishing to see what further intensities emerge and assemble. Maybe 'knowable' is not what I mean: maybe, in this sense, I mean 'narratable' (Cavarero, 2000).*

Without this we have what Foucault has called 'fixity' and with this comes the etching, the somehow forceful, deep cutting kind of fixing of the striation in a more permanent form; it forces through materialities, it incises and cuts deep and in this doing resists the reflexive and indeed diffractive energies that would smooth its fierce indentation.

I am wondering how we can move our between-the-two's toward the kinds of processes of subjectification that Deleuze (2004) talks about in *Difference and*



*Repetition.* I love the way in which the writing in that book shifts the attention away from the kinds of knowing that we have grown up in within post-Enlightenment thinking, a form of thinking that we have become so ingrained in that we can't think without 'I', 'me', 'you' and so on. In a way he starts with intensities and works from there. In doing this it seems to me that he is re/cognising the troubled, unstable nature of existent selves not as fixed beings but as contingent and heterogeneous elements in always becoming force fields of flow and exchange. He says that with intensity there is always difference, or intensities are always different and that through and with these multiple irruptions and eruptions of intensity differentiations are always produced that invariably create our sense of selves, of other selves, of matter and so on. The crucial element in this is that differentiations produce the 'I's', the 'me's', the 'you's' and so on, not the other way around. If we express it the other way around it seems that there must be at the very least the implication of or the inference toward essence. This is the logic of Plato's argument about forms which positions being as prior to becoming. Within this usage Deleuze also sets up a fascinating argument to support a reconceptualisation of empiricism in which the conceptualisation, say of self, of Ken, of Jonathan and so on is an 'object of encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an Erewhon from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed "heres" and "nows" (2004a, p. xix).

*I am left, just now, finding that difficult. Writing this to 'you', from 'me', still has meaning. You say 'we'...: it is not all of what I notice of/in me.*

Yes, I feel that I want to agree with you and in so doing I want these 'I's', 'me's' and 'you's' to be a part of the kind of empiricism that Deleuze describes, something that is beyond the kinds of 'anthropological predicates' (op. cit) that have the insidiously discursive tendencies to fix us in ways that are more suffused with the toxic addictions to representation than the healing antidotes to be found in the diffracting materialities of contingency, heterogeneity and flux. I sense that in the repetitions of our discussions, discussions that have been reverberating and enthusing our between-the-two's for many years now we have multiplicity and difference. Working with Difference and Repetition again I feel that these are our intensities, they are the intensities of an assemblage we have called elsewhere Becoming-Ken-Jonathan and I like that because it seems to have a freshness and a vibrancy of life that will never harness us to coded signifiers and representations of self that obscure and deflect by the stoutness of their rigidities. And so with Deleuze I want to 'make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always de-centred centre, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them' (op. cit).

*The I's, we's and me's convey the vibrancy and struggle of Ken. Ken-ing. I don't want to lose that, don't wish that sense of you to be erased. Show me how we can.*

Well we start with Erewhon! And perhaps in so doing, we do not do away with the I's', the 'me's' and the 'you's', partly because we can't! Instead we displace them,

we don't divorce them and we will not lose them. We will repeat them and as we do this we will do this always with the presence and action of diffractive possibilities, always in acknowledgement of and always in play with the exponentially existent possibilities of contingency and flux. We will be using this in intensity to activate and create further intensities.

Perhaps it is, as you suggest, in and through our stories that this will emerge.

*It is, I think and feel, naming that I wish to hold onto in our assemblage/ethnography. The possibility of stories. I am with you about saying no to 'nouncing' and fixity and yes to fluidity, verbs, dispersal of the self, uncertainty – yes, all of these.*

*I hold onto the **hope and the possibility of stories**. Stories embroiled and imbricated within matter, flux, and provisionality.*

*So let us use these names; or let us use names in this way – Ken as a 'current passing through you'. When we talk about 'you' let us tell the stories of this force that is you at that moment.*

I sense intensity in your words. I know what those stories can do. I sense how they bring together worlds of concept, affect and percept and I have a knowing of how their very presence substantiates the materiality of the relational ontology of our Becoming-Ken-Jonathan assemblage. So perhaps it is not so much the pleasure of the stories in their writing, telling, reading and listening it is more about what we do with them, how we use them how we instantiate them in our becoming.

*Tell me the stories, then, of the Cornish flag. Of your Cornish becomings<sup>3</sup>. I have often wished that I was 'from' somewhere, that I belonged to a place. I think that is why I spent much of my twenties in places – Liverpool, Newcastle – where people seemed so sure of who there were, not that this was unproblematic. I think it is why I have no loyalty to a football team. Manchester City? Only when they are doing well. I have been to Manchester less than half-a-dozen times; and to watch City there just once.*

*Tell me about your Reuben and Phoebe and Katy; and Rohan<sup>4</sup>. About America. Write about the struggles and joys of these current days. What I mean to say is: There is such a richness to Ken-ing. I am glad to name you. .*

### *Sleep-writing*

*I have been writing this in my sleep these last two nights; when its intensities have become too much, the writing has been waking me. I turn and turn, and it will not let me go. I am beginning this at work in my office, with an indecisive low sun of late autumn mid-afternoon causing me to raise and lower my blinds every few minutes, and I both welcome and am irritated by it.*

*A question has come into view, one that seems to be (at) the heart of this chapter, this assemblage/ethnography; even, perhaps, at the heart of autoethnography in general. I shall try to frame it:*

*To what extent can writers – people? – we? – lay claim to singularity? In our writing, in our lives.*

*No, that's not right. Well, yes, maybe, but perhaps this is better:*

*To what extent can we – do we, inevitably – create such singularity through writing; in writing between us; in this assemblage of (the verbs) Ken and Jonathan.*

*No, that's still not right. Yes, maybe it is; but there's more:*

*To what extent is it our political, ethical charge that we do so? That we must, because there is so much at stake.*

*You see, what, I think, is keeping me awake is how much these questions matter (in that word's various meanings) to me, to us, to the work. Here are today's answers to them:*

*However inadequate, however provisional, however misleading, we can and we must claim the possibility of singularity; we can and must aspire to, work at, creating such singularity through writing. It is indeed our political and ethical charge. We have to. When I talk about singularity I am talking here of the 'singular existant' of Nancy (Nancy, 2000), which "may be singular plural or something else entirely, outside of the order of the calculable" (Callus and Herbrechter, 2012, p. 246); a "haunted subject, haunted by what comes after it just as much as by what comes before", it can never be fully present to itself".*

*I am with Rosi Braidotti in viewing the subject as:*

*an entity fully immersed in the process of becoming, in productive relations of power, knowledge, and desire. This implies a positive vision of the subject as an affective, productive and dynamic structure. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 17)*

*You see, I am with her in seeing the subject as a – fluid, open, permeable – 'structure', an 'entity' (see also Brians, 2011) and, the term she invokes later, 'a figuration'. I am with her in a call to the notion of 'bodily materialism', the 'embodied or enfleshed subject' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 15), one that is always 'emerging out of a process of becoming' (Brians, 2011). With her in seeing nomadism as about 'becoming situated, speaking from somewhere specific and hence well aware of and accountable for particular locations.' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 15)*

*I am with Kottman, talking of Cavarero, when he describes how she:*

*insists that the self is narratable and not narrated. It is an existence that has not been reduced to an essence, a 'who' that has not been distilled into the 'what'. In short, for Cavarero, it is the unique, individual existent – who is in constitutive relation with other existents, and who is not yet, or no longer, a subject – who takes 'priority', so to speak. (Kottman, in Cavarero, 2000, p. xii)*

*This is why I am calling you, calling us, to stories in (this) assemblage/ethnography. Cavarero, like you, like me, is against categorisation, simplistic representation, fixity, all of these, but argues that "narration reveals the finite in its fragile uniqueness, and sings its glory" (ibid.: 3). This is why I keep coming back to you to tell stories*

*– not ones that are simplistic and unitary but ones that provide, create, something of the embodied, the embedded, the particular. You. Us. Me: writing this here, troubled, disturbed, angry, passionate, joyful.*

*You see, in part I am fuelled by how I experience you. The theory you espouse is not how I find you (the verb), today, in this moment. I don't believe you want to live without calling on 'Reuben', 'Phoebe', 'Katie' and those intimate others in your life; I don't believe that you want to live without telling me – you, others – how intense was yesterday's swim, say, your body's immersion in the waves, its pull against the currents, the thrill; ;you will always call on your trip to the US in 1989. You talk about yourself and your life, your histories and your futures, your longings and desires, your fears and anxieties – and so you should. You must. Dosse (2010) talks of Deleuze and Guattari's 'intersecting lives', and tells their complex, nuanced, incomplete stories. You and I joke about Deleuze's dodgy hair; we speak of their differences, and of Guattari's work at La Borde and of his influence of upon their collaborative work.*

*Intensities, haecceities, flows, assemblages, all. I can't quite believe you would want to live in Borges' world, though I know it only from what you have told me. I wouldn't want to.*

*I am writing in a different but connecting space, in a file with a different name about no longer counselling; and I am with the stories of those I saw in my consulting room over ten years; I am writing into their haunting. There, as here, I am with Gannon in arguing for 'a relational autoethnographic [or, rather, assemblage/ethnographic] subjectivity, a self that is contingent on the recognition of others, and a self who finds voice through that relation.' (Gannon, 2012, p. 1). By 'self', I mean that which is – echoing you above – a "contingent result of an ongoing process" (Brians, 2011, p. 132).*

*We must hold onto the possibility of the personal, the personal pronoun, the person, the relational. There are politics at stake here. For Braidotti, memory and narrative are crucially linked to 'practices of accountability (for one's embodied and embedded locations) as a relational, collective activity of undoing power differentials'. To not do so is disabling and nihilistic: 'The world without me, the-world-without-us...(is) the folk tale of the end' (Callus and Herbrechter, 2012); and it is to abdicate responsibility; to fall, ironically, into self-referential indulgence.*

*This is where I will end today. I will not place the personal pronoun in inverted commas.*

*It's now Saturday morning. I'm at home. Tessa<sup>5</sup> has gone out for a day with her fellow students and tutors on the Masters programme she is so much in love with. You have sent me more writing that I have glanced at but now want to engage with fully. You have sent me an email about your antics last night, and about how much you enjoy Friday nights, which I do too – better than Saturdays by far, I agree. Now I must wrest myself from this writing and take in some air. And get coffee.*

## WONDERING ABOUT OTHERS

*... effervescent, restless, excitable, passionate – in frame. I treasure that capacity: there is a Ken whom I am coming to know, the knowing of whom is always in flux – temporary, provisional, partial; a Ken(ning) who is different and distinct from all others, all other Kens, all other friends, all other people I have met, a sense of whom I feel that I have, ‘trembling at the horizon of all that ‘I’ don’t know about ‘you’”*

I am coming to something here.

We talked on the phone recently about other matters that have troubled us, that have lurked within our assemblage for years now and have configured it in uneasy, wriggling and tenacious ways. That sense of forces that are there, that sense of sensing that sometimes is so highly pressured and that at others is so slight that we blithely drift through our everyday, oblivious to the play that is upon our bodies, in ways that in our bareness we hardly notice: the sun in its grace pours on our bodies, giving us energy and we offer nothing in return. That’s how it feels sometimes.

I am coming to something here.

I wonder how we are conditioned by these binaries. Are we too polarising in the play that we are acting out here? May be it is not about whether or not we expunge the personal pronouns from the writing that infects our ‘we’s’ and our ‘us’s’ and our ‘our’s’ maybe it is about accommodating them within and by the use of our ‘ands’. As I have been feeling my way in to your most recent writing and as I have also gone back over the to-ings and fro-ings of our recent correspondence, a powerful sense of feeling fine about you using these personal pronouns in relation to me, you and us is beginning to emerge. When you talk of having a ‘knowing’ I get that, I get that in relation to what seems to happen in our assemblage/ethnography. This feels real and whilst the signifiers have to represent, that is what they do, the representations seem less likely to carry out the kinds of tasks that I have been railing against in my recent writing. I gain a sense that in this assemblage/ethnography we have a collective ontology that is realist and that wouldn’t allow for representations to dis-able, control and mis-represent how we go about things. I might be (mis) representing us in ways that others might consider to be fallacious, incorrect and even naïve and if so I am always open to the diffracting possibilities that this might offer but for the moment this feels better.

Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardised codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognised function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. (Arendt, 1978, p. 4)

It feels to me that you and I write in ways that are not designed to protect us ‘against reality’. It feels to me that we immerse our selves in reality as a way creatively enriching and bringing reality to life I am excited by the movement of the writing

of Barad, Haraway and others into the here and now of our own and by the way in which the materialist complexities of this writing works to intensify our own. I am drawn back to earlier struggles in our work when we considered Maggie MacLure's observation that 'the space opened up by language is an ambivalent one. It is both productive and disabling.' (2003, p.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:

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, p. 176)

We search for each other's presence in our writings: it seems as if we always have done. 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. We can no longer avoid talking about our work with each other and with other others in the aeons and multiplicities of relational space as *assemblage/ethnography*: how could it be anything else!?

*There seems to be no point holding onto objects that had meaning, that I was attached to, that attached those selves to me ... I will not look at them again if I place them back there. Why not just ... be done with them ... That is easy to write. I am not sure, when I climb the stairs later, that I shall be able to see it through.*

I too am sensing the power of memory working on me this morning as the bright autumn sun illuminates my home and works to pull my body out into its glow and its freshening radiation. I love the lack of cliché that living with the convolution of memory activates. It is like re-kindling an affair to bring Maggie's thoughts back into play here. This repetition is of course difference: without this the affect of respect and the concentration of animate lucidity would be dead. And so with this licence I also remember Irigaray and want to use and adapt a quotation of hers that we have considered before in relation to her argument for *parler femme*:

(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, p. 29)

I now want to adapt this important and well known passage and use it in relation to the multiplicity and intensity of *assemblage/ethnography*. I want the passage

above to be read using ‘we’ instead of ‘she’. I don’t want to hi-jack or contradict the intensity or rhetorical force of her words, I want to repeat them in application and in so doing show respect for them and argue for the difference of the ‘and’ that allows for them to be used with energy and force within our collaborative space and, I would argue, with that of others. It also feels to me that in this re-cognition and application of difference we are also moving away from the influence and the locus of reflection and reflexivity. So often in the past we have put the mirror up to our relational selves, we try to gain a sense of our becomings, we try to make sense of our selves and a sense of our selves in relation to one then the other. And, of course, all that is great and at the same time it is not enough. We also live looking out and in at those ‘*temporary, provisional, partial*’ selves we talk about above and in so doing sense a ‘*trembling at the horizon of all that (we) don’t know about (us)*’ (Pollock, 2006, p. 93).

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 (2000, p. 103–4), in troubling the somewhat dominating influence of reflection as a trope for self-knowing and whilst not against self-reflection, argues for the use of the optical metaphor of diffraction:

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.

This has great force for me. I sense the powerful liminality of self that both literally and figuratively trembles at the horizon, feeling myself into the differences that are always in between and endlessly becoming. I am learning as I write to trust you in your use of ‘me’, ‘you’, ‘us’, ‘them’, ‘Ken’, ‘Jonathan’ and so on. I am slowly getting this in relation to 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, 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 our 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 (our) assemblage. So living trustfully in the

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critically affective concern of this tentative usage, writing here, with you, in these moments, I am feeling better.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jonathan teases Ken about his regular allusions to this epic trip.
- <sup>2</sup> In October, 2012, we participated in a collaborative writing weekend in Ammerdown, a village outside Bath, UK.
- <sup>3</sup> Ken was born and brought up in Cornwall and continues to live there.
- <sup>4</sup> Ken's children and grandson.
- <sup>5</sup> Jonathan's partner.

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