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Writing Through and Writing Against: Materials of Resistance

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Abstract

This article concerns how writing, collaborative writing in particular, acts: how it moves, how it resists, how it does, the four humans writing alongside our co-authoring ‘materials’ – a guitar, for instance – and other more-than-human co-authors, such as affect, friendship, time. We explore writing against systems of oppression and writing through materials of resistance. Writing through can ignite the seething potentiality of a breaking through, and a writing towards the not-yet-known of other lives. We sense this as an unleashing that can act as a challenge to the self-perpetuating autopoieses that neoliberal autonomies and competitive frameworks require. Writing through materials of resistance offers an inducement to work towards the social capaciousness and the thinking with those collective orientations. Writing through refuses the surrender of freedom and offers, through practices of speculation, fabulation and experimentation, an animation of movement that can tap into the capacious fugitive energies of emergent and new collective futures.

Keywords

collaborative, writing, resistance, performance autoethnography, performative writing

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This article concerns how writing, collaborative writing in particular, acts: how it moves, how it resists, how it does, the four humans writing alongside our co-authoring ‘materials’ – a guitar, for instance – and other more-than-human co-authors, such as (in no particular order, and amongst others) affect, friendship, time.

We – the four men and our companions – have written with each other before, about writing *with* (Diversi et al., 2021); here we explore writing *against*, and writing *through*. As with our first article, this current text was first written for presentation at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI); the script for that presentation in May 2019, that collaborative performance autoethnography (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2021; Callier et al., 2017) is at the heart of what we offer here.

Three of us – Marcelo, Claudio and Jonathan – were physically present in Illinois in May, 2019; Ken was not. Marcelo’s guitar was not in the room either but, like, Ken, had an ‘affective presencing’ (Gale, 2021).

We begin with Ken (alone) writing 18 months after the 2019 conference before moving into the script of the 2019 conference performance, and end with Ken, again writing alone (but with all of us) in 2021. We were, and are, all present in the writing, as we move in and between times, between before and after, between then and now (or between now and now and now), between Deleuze’s (1990) *chronos* (time as linear) and *aiôn* (time as bent, elusive, slippery), as we write against and through.

Ken, 23rd November 2020, writing through

Yes, ‘we are here again’ ...

And again I am pulled to writing by the volatile energies of this space that our work together always creates. Can we write in advance of the troubles that beset us? I write here months, is it years, since our earlier calls to arms? I want to build bridges, to reconnect, to reach out, right here, right now, I am letting my writing do the talking; trusting the process, following its lead; write here, write now. I have always trusted writing to take me there. I trust this writing in its ability to make these connections and at the same time I always want this writing, to write with and to write against, to trouble and disrupt the major literature that make meaning, that legitimate critique and construct simple representations of knowledge. In this I allow and hope to accentuate the power of writing to both locate and dislocate. This is a paradox that I have never tried to avoid, I sense that it is a paradox that I have always tried to cultivate and perpetuate, and sense that an ethics of cowardice would dominate my life if I did not do that.

And so, always, deep down, I revel in the excitement of being the fugitive, the one that is on the run, the one that is always guerrilla writing, the one that might live in the university but the one who, increasingly, feels less a part of it. In this, I sometimes feel like those feral runaway people, those maroons who escaped slavery, then mixed with indigenous peoples and worked with collective energies to create separate cultures. I write to and think of our writings here, our performance presentations at ICQI and our other writings in the past. I love the wild, feral unruliness of those maroons, their

willingness to take lines of flight, flying not to escape but to disrupt and to re-create new ways, new writings, new languages and, in the doing, new communities. Although many of them might not have succeeded in their missions, they broke their bindings, they spoke out and perhaps most of all they tried. Most of all they tried.

And so, the neo liberal universities for whom we all work require our labour as teachers and researchers, as academics and yes, increasingly as administrators. In this there seems to exist another paradox of location and relationality, in that, whilst we all need this employment to pay our bills, to support our families and to provide certain securities in our lives, we feel challenged by the institutional ethos and the constraints the universities are built to create and sustain. I think again of the maroons and how, in order to avoid capture and an enforced return to slavery, groups of fugitive maroons would resist, not by engaging in confrontation or direct attack, preferring to use methods based upon surprise and oblique or subversive guerrilla tactics to resist, on their own terms, the strict and regimented strategies of their colonialist masters and would be captors. So, in these immanent movements and moments, in this writing here and now, I sense that the doings of our 'boy band' (Diversi et al., 2021) are not simply 'writing with, to and against' and that somehow they are *writing through* the narrow individualising practices of the neoliberal university. I sense that in this *writing through*, there is the creation of a strain upon the fabric and the tendency to tear a resistant skin. *Writing through* can ignite the seething potentiality of a breaking through, and a writing towards the not-yet-known of other lives. I sense this as an unleashing that can act as a challenge to the self-perpetuating, autopoieses that neoliberal autonomies and competitive frameworks require and to also offer an inducement to work towards the social capaciousness and the thinking with those collective orientations; the sympoiesis that Haraway (2016) simply and emphatically calls 'making kin'. The *writing through* that I am positing here can animate what Manning and Massumi (2014) refer to as the movement of 'thought in the act' a whole 'ecology of experiences' that can be animated by *writing through* the barriers and constraints that are put in place by our day jobs. *Writing through* can provide a means of breaking through the skin that insulates, ossifies and ultimately controls the individual within the institutionalising tendencies and forces of the neoliberal university. *Writing through* refuses the surrender of freedom and offers, through practices of speculation, fabulation and experimentation, an animation of movement that can tap into the capacious fugitive energies of emergent and new collective futures.

May 2019, International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Illinois, USA: Writing against

K (M)¹: Friends ... friends ... emergence, becoming-friends.

Active, animate, men-ing. Men-bodies, men-becoming, what can these bodies do? Men-in-friendship, four bodies, in coming together in one: what can this body, this body of friendship, this men-in-friendship, do?

J: We wrote about writing *with* last year, about how we are always writing *with*, with not just each other but with others, many others. As I write now, Ken's presence in this writing is more immediate than ever. It's like Ken is right here, across from me, speaking his usual animated and fluent Deleuze and Spinoza. (Yes, my friend, you may not be standing with us, but you're still in this four-piece boy band; you're still our effervescent crowd-pulling front man.)

C: The tensiveness

of

The materiality of our bodies, meat, bones, viscera

and

The materiality of our writing

Represented in the craving for an embodied performative writing that refuses the impossibility of physical contact and yet misses the hugs and kisses, the intimacy of touching, the hope, concrete and imagined, experienced in our encounters...

I don't write alone no more, even when it is only me in the solicitude of my kitchen

Writing with Marcelo, Jonathan, and

Ken, specially Ken...

J: I am thinking and writing not only again with this, with writing with, but also with writing against.

M: I wasn't feeling well before reading your words, Ken, Jonathan, and Claudio. Suddenly, I feel better, encouraged, with that warmth inside that makes me get out of the dark and solitude for a moment, feel that zest for life, for a moment. I miss that zest. Reading your words and writing with you bring me back to a brighter place. For a moment. I am grateful for moments of light like this.

I have been feeling overwhelmed and discouraged by the rise of Trump in the US, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Brexit, and the far right in several global democracies in the last few years. Bolsonaro, the Brazilian president elected in 2018, recently announced that his government plans to eliminate sociology and humanities from federal public universities in Brazil. Entirely. His anti-LGBTQA agenda is already being felt on mainstreet through outright violence and exclusionary practices at all levels of society. Here is what he said about indigenous peoples in Brazil in 1998 and during his presidential campaign in 2018: 'It's a shame that the Brazilian cavalry hasn't been as

efficient as the Americans, who exterminated the Indians'. *Correio Braziliense* newspaper, April 12, 1998. His neo-colonialist narratives symbolise, to me, the return to times of rationalised exclusion of the Other. 'The Indians do not speak our language, they do not have money, they do not have culture. They are native peoples. How did they manage to get 13% of the national territory' *Campo Grande News*, April 22, 2015. For so many years I worried and studied and wrote about the environmental and social violence that damming the Amazonian rivers would bring to its ancestral peoples. Those concerns, now, seem like things of the past, and without much of a future. The 'new Brazil' is now on a full-throttle mode to dam, mine, deforest, ranch, and develop the entire Amazon basin. It has been difficult to think about the consequences of this neo-colonial ideology. At the earth systems level, well, personal experience is now catching up with decades of climate science. Droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, heat and mega storms keep beating records at a pace even more dramatic than earlier models suggested.

At the personal level, well, it has been hard to stay connected with some family and childhood friends. I have worked hard not to cut anyone off completely. But I have not been as engaged. I have not cultivated those relationships as I used to. So the general despair from the larger macro-level of politics and policies has been exacerbated by the additional isolation in my private life. I imagine I am not alone in this aloneness.

For the first time in my life, at 50 years of age, I have turned to objects, symbols and historical stories of resistance to stay afloat. I have held my guitar closer than ever. I don't think I play more guitar than before. But having my guitar with me, next to me, by me, most of the time, has been a source of comfort. I look at my guitar and think of how this too shall pass. The guitar in my office, slung over my shoulder, next to my bed, doesn't change the neo-fascist reality out there. But it gives me an anchor of hope. It feels good to hold it, to tune it, to care for the wood, the strings, to know I can play well-known and obscure songs of resistance and hope, to make up my own words of resistance and hope.

J: I'm writing with pushing, pushing back, pushing away. How the keys press back against my fingers – just lightly, allowing, giving permission, resisting enough for the movement to happen, for writing to take place. Laptop on table, the table pushing back; table on wooden floor, floor pushing back; weight of arms on sleek metal, metal pushing back; back against wooden bench, weight of body on wooden seat, wood pushing back. Strong, affordant, material resistance; materials of resistance that make this possible. That make possible writing *with*; and make possible further writing against.

K (C): Four-body-one-does in space-making that makes the world differently, that, in emergence, in relationality, creates difference, that on the page, these page words, on this vital stage of dance, of energy dance, the synaesthesia of these sensuous eruptions/irruptions, make worlds that have never been seen before, worlds that reach out, that shift, that in momentous movement, spark, bubble, pop and ...?

C: It may have come with life, my life as a product of a broken family, always filled with absences

Of fathers and mothers

Of moving in and out with Grandma Alda, Aunts Zeze and Ana

Of crossing border and geographies...poor child, janitor, professor

Of imagining the proximity of my kids leaving my house in a place that is not my home

Of always experiencing life in the absence of a body dearly loved!

Writing with and writing against always

I believe I have been writing against my whole life, with more certainty in my academic writing. Writing against a life of being a labouring child receiving half of the minimum wage

Half human

Half citizen of two countries

M: Along with my guitar, I have been carrying my favourite book by Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, published in 1845. His book has been in my workbag for the last two years. The book, the material thing, the pages, the words, the details in the long preface, the cover, the colour, the size, the smell of the book, all of it makes my senses relax a bit—I am still mindful of all the horror of the present—makes me think: If Frederick Douglas could write with so much hope as an American slave in 1845, I must find a way to stay hopeful, to stay strong.

J: These materials of resistance make possible further material practices of resisting. There is much of that to be done.

M: I am working to resist, to be calm, to maintain an intellectual hope.

C: Writing against quasi narratives of being

Quasi scholar

Quasi human

M: I don't know where we will be in a year, or five, or ten years. But I suspect that each of us will still be dealing with the rise of the global right, with blind and exclusionary nationalism, with refugee and climate crises, perhaps even nuclear escalation. I confess that, right now, I am more concerned with crude old survival. Writing with my boy-band buddies is at the centre of my survival. I hope enough humans of our times continue to search for ways to cultivate kind friendships and connections. At work. At home. In the classroom. Everywhere we go.

K (J): In the always eventuality of duration these volatile events have their sustained durability in the incessance of love. Jonathan, Marcelo, Claudio ... oh yes, and Ken, we, yes we, the posthuman we-ness of assemblage-us, lives on in the insistent affective presencing of this four-body-one-does.

C: Writing against narratives of not being enough

Not performance enough

Not literate enough

Writing against narratives of hate and violence

Writing against ideologies of domination

Writing against the genocides of the past and present

And writing for the right to just be

Full human

Tensiveness

Yes, Ken, Jonathan and Marcelo, we are here again

Ken 1st April 2021: And then there are the becomings of returning ...

How appropriate that there is a breaking through the solidities of silences on April Fools' Day, I like that ...

And so ... returning, eternally returning, the Eternal Return ...

I sense that every return to and in our writing is a kind of pilgrimage. I have never been on a real pilgrimage, whatever that is, but that is how returning to these pages, to our writings, to the 'affective presencing' (Gale, 2021) that takes place when I say, 'Marcelo', 'Claudio', 'Jonathan' and when the 'pen gets on the scent' (Woolf, 1985, p. 93) to make those connections again, when that collaboration breathes another intake of breath, when eyes start to sparkle and juices begin to flow.

In these returnings, the wanderings are always different, the wondering that animates the writing with and to is ever present. In the writings that emanate from these wanderings and wonderings, I sense the force of this Nietzschean 'eternal return'. Here recurrence does not simply refer to an endless repetition of specific events, but rather to a continuing ontological returning to inescapable general circumstances that are constitutive of living and doing in the material world. Perhaps this is how we 'write through' knowing that in every repetition difference is made: this is where the materialism of these resistances can live. This where force takes on form and the frictional play between them makes heat and light that fizzes and sparks.

I return again and read Marcelo sharing with us feelings from that time of Trump:

I have held my guitar closer than ever. I don't think I play more guitar than before. But having my guitar with me, next to me, by me, most of the time, has been a source of comfort. I look at my guitar and think of how this too shall pass. The guitar in my office,

slung over my shoulder, next to my bed, doesn't change the neo-fascist reality out there.
But it gives me an anchor of hope.

And in this return to Marcelo's words, I think of Woody Guthrie's guitar that had written on it, 'This guitar kills fascists', and I believe that. I believe that every time you pick up your guitar, every time our pens get on the scent, every time you play a melody, every time we write to, write with and write through, every time we stand on the podium, bodies arm and arm and do our thing, something happens, there is a movement towards and, in the frisson of every speculative touch, in the excitement of every 'What-if?', a potent and highly capacious force is unleashed. And so, perhaps, in our 'writings through' we have helped in writing off Trump. Whilst he leaves terrible damage behind, he is gone and with the ever present possibilities of these speculative doings, and in the delights of this eternal return, we can revel in the creative delight of 'this too shall pass' and the 'Don't give up' of fervent and wicked inquiry that asks such questions as, 'Who knows?', 'Shall we?' and 'Why not?'. It has been a long time since words have been written, eternal returns can be a long time in the making but, in their potency for recurrence, they are always there, immanent alive, good to go.

Here there is what I have been calling an 'affective presencing'. I write your names here and tentatively hold them within inverted commas. Your realities exist in my imagination; affect is always at play, bodies abound unbounded, you are there, I am here: that is matter; that matters. As my becoming-Ken is imbricated with your/our becomings, it is ontogeneses that is always on the move. I want to say that your bodies *spirit* themselves in to mine: in these *spiritings* world making is coming to life. In this there is a processual, always moving towards, in which the individualising subjectifications of 'Marcelo', 'Claudio', 'Jonathan', 'Ken', through this activation of *spiriting*, is the becoming of collective assemblage, animate in the always more-than. These imaginings, these visualisings, these fluid ontogenetic movements take us always beyond the narrow, restrictive and reductive Cartesian constructions of 'me' and 'you' and the names we give each other. *Spiriting* 'Marcelo', 'Claudio', 'Jonathan', 'Ken' is joyful differentiation in which the 'now you see me now you don't' (Gale, 2021) of the narrow confines of discursively enforced subjectifications and identifications has to give way to the fluidity and excitement of notyetness and the always not-yet-known. And so *spiriting* is forceful in the frictional energising of these differentiations; it is a force which disassembles the constraining conformities of form. It is, in animation and activation, as Manning (2007) would have it, 'in-formation', always on the move, in becoming always 'more-than'.

And so, in the incessant becoming of these eternal returns, I sense that *spiriting* and the ontogenesis of this becoming-Ken in relation to the compositional becoming 'Marcelo', 'Claudio', 'Jonathan', 'Ken' is a force to be reckoned with. We are still here, that guitar still gently weeps, that pen still gets on the scent, I can see smiles on your faces, I sense a child-like excitement in the tantalising provocations of 'what-if?' that will activate and animate and the assurance that 'this too shall pass' ...

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Note

1. Ken's words at the conference were read by one of us, the brackets indicating by whom (Marcelo in this case).

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