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Citationality and collaborative writing

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**Starting in the middle:
citationality and collaborative writing**

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I am starting in the middle.

It's inevitable. I am starting this in the middle of our writing process, in the middle of time, in the middle of Edinburgh. In a room, a room much like the ones we met in throughout last year.

There are others with me here, in this room. I'm not in the middle, more at the side, though it depends upon how you work the geometry. I am at a classroom table (you'll know the type) with my back to the windows, turning to meet the afternoon sun. It's inevitable.

I'm in the middle of all-of-our-writings-so-far, steeped in them, working my way through the Dropbox folder and back again, working on our behalf to see if there is a shape I can draw with our words. Citing all the while. It's inevitable.

This text too, will find its way into that folder soon. At the moment I am holding onto it, not yet ready to place it where you can see it as it is emerging. But when I do, later this afternoon, it will still be emerging, still be in the middle.

Our contribution to this collection responds through collaborative writing to the editors' summons for writing that aspires to "free impulses to generate different creations and different connections" (p. 8). (There. Our first 'citation'. Though we were always already citing. Ourselves, each other, others. A bracket, followed by "Deleuze & Parnet, 2002", then another bracket, could have found its way into the paragraph following any one of those 'starting in the middle' mentions. Deleuze was always on about starting in the middle.)

From the Latin *citare* 'to move,' 'excite,' 'summon'... citationality is a "form of reanimation, the breathing of life into an event of discourse through another discursive act" (Nakassis, 2012, 626). There are always middles and multiplicities.

There were fourteen of us at the start, October 2014, though one never came; and nine at the end, depending upon how you count us. Nine at the end, that special time in June 2015, when we wrote together for not just two or three hours but over one long, warm June afternoon, the whole of the following day, and in our dreams between. Not just us but also Susanne, with us from Australia for a few days of a not-so-sweltering Scottish summer. All of us together for a day-and-a-half in, for a change, a paid-for, cared-for room, red-carpeted, red-lined, oak-panelled. A red room, "creat[ing]" as Gale et al say "a voluptuousness of writing" (Gale et al, p. 272).

The reanimating, reiterative discursive acts of this chapter emerged in that June writing workshop in Edinburgh where we set out, as we had been doing all along, to 'steal' (Phillips, 1998) each other's words or, rather, where we created conditions for language to reverberate. In a room draped in crimson velvet and shadows, around a circle of bodies perched on dark chairs, we wrote and read to each other, catching each other's words on the fly, folding them in to our next round of writing, and again, and again. We continue that here in this chapter, slipping through our many voices, folding writing together, draping ourselves in folds of language and

imagery.

We heard the call for such writing way back, we realise, maybe even before this book had been conceived, like we were feeling it before we could name it. We were hearing the imperative, as Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p. 265) suggest, to “write like a rat” (2004, p. 265). Write like a rat or not all. Writing like a rat is survival. We have to traverse writing with “strange becomings” (p. 265), and seek to haunt writing with twisted, vibrating language (Ulmer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), or we wither.

When I write, do I stay or do I escape?

Having written, and having listened, I feel more far from you now.

A collaborative escape.

I imagine a collaborative escape into doing.

I imagine us together, each, eating, sleeping, running, singing, doing without thinking of ourselves while doing.

Then I imagine us abandoning each other coldly and calmly opening the window, each, and jumping, flying off, each, to a different direction.

These are the quilted writings of a becoming-rat-pack, searching in the corners and crevices of the academy for spaces we could flourish, unseen yet known, surreptitious yet public. Alone, yet always in company; always indebted. Always citing.

Between October 2014 and June 2015, most of the authors of this chapter met each month as a group of collaborative writers in Edinburgh, for a funded project about (officially) how writing collaboratively impacts upon our writing and our sense of ourselves as writers.

We – students, faculty, and postdoctoral researchers – gathered each month to write in grubby institutional rooms and their faded, marked carpets, their patched, dented walls, and their chipped, groaning pipes. Each of us, alone but together, together alone, writing, reading aloud, writing, talking, writing.

*Words, phrases
stand out stark,
jump off the page
and into me
'near him'
'the weight of words'
'text puddles'
'gathering basin'
'words in the middle of us'
'you are little'
'I was little'
'fragments'*

*'a finding place'
'sharing'
'the question will kill the answer'
'what is good enough?'*

*Something from each of you,
from each of us.
Small pieces of thread and fabric,
of selves sharing,
reaching out into the spaces
between us,
between ourselves and our selves.*

*'You are little'
'I was little'*

*These phrases return,
call to me,
evoke a response,
call my body to respond,
to open arms and gather in*

*Gathering in,
gathering others,
gathering ourselves,
gathering pieces.
Quilting with words.*

*Writing in a room
with all of you.
I see us flying
on a quilt,
a quilt we made by magic,
by reaching out,
which is a kind of
magic...*

*Something alchemical
in the process of meeting
and being met.
'Becoming'
'Connected'*

*'Words in the middle of us'
Words in the middle of us,
in the body of us,
in our bodies.*

*Out of our bodies? No.
From our bodies,
with our bodies
Words as arms and hands,*

*words that touch and hold,
push and pull,
 grab
 catch
gather...*

Gathering...

*The gathering basin.
Flying on a quilt of words.
A finding place.
A hiding space.
This yearning for connection,
for words as threads
between us,
in and out of us,
to and from us.
My therapist says there's
a thread ...between us,
that she hopes I feel her there
still at the end of that thread,
even when she travels away,
goes far. I do.
I am often far from home
these days,
jumping-
 in-and-out-of
life in this big city,
learning to find softness
and connection,
threads of tenderness
in amongst the
hardness somehow of life here,
moments of meeting
... amidst the rush of the Academy.*

*Here in this room,
sitting on the wooden floor,
I feel tenderness,
threads of connection,
threads of meeting.*

*'I am glad of it',
glad to be quilting here like this
with you.*

That afternoon in June 2015 brought 'citationality' into view, vivid and unmissable, late in our project, though it had always been with us. We each brought a text we had written during the collaborative-writing year, a piece-of-our-own from

those months of writing together that had stayed with us, that still spoke to us. We sat in a circle. (Always circles. Infinite.) We sat in a circle of red chairs, reading our texts aloud, in turn, in no particular order, as had become our practice; and we wrote in response to what we had heard, what we had taken in. As had become our practice.

We found ourselves quilting with each other's words and phrases; not only with these, but also with the presence (and absence) of each other. We took cues from each other's movements and gestures. Our processes were iterative, relational, affectively responsive: tightly-bounded understandings of citation fail to recognise the ubiquity of the direct and indirect citational practices in which we all are continuously involved. They don't recognise haunting.

In our academic training, citationality is usually presented as a skill to master, indicating proper academic reasoning and argument. Acknowledging someone else's thoughts, someone else's words – always already the authority of the already expressed elsewhere, and provoking the unfurling of confidence in the fear of that most dire of academic crimes – plagiarism. As Nakassis (2013) suggests (see, another proper citation – someone else has always had these thoughts before us, better, more precisely), ...as Nakassis suggests “[t]he citation is a play of sameness and difference, identity and alterity, an interdiscursive calibration of an event of citing and a cited event” (51). Quotations, and their associated formal indexing strategies (e.g. punctuation, introductory clauses – such as ‘As Nakassis suggests...’ and so on), are the “canonical citational acts” (Nakassis, 2013, 54). Here we take up and we abjure conventional citational practices. We selectively quote apparent authorities and we recognise and mobilise affectively subtle and relational modes of citation. We mask our citations as much as we mark them.

My name in my mother tongue means life. When people call me back home, they cite life. By citing it, they call it. Here, in a foreign tongue, I do not have to live up to my name. I can be what Derrida says in your voice: a stranger to my name.

During the year when we sat to write, given a theme (for example, “loss”) or an instruction about how we were to write that day (“write for five minutes, then move on”, for example), we didn't then only write ourselves. We were aware of the breaths and sighs of others, someone crossing out a phrase, moving in their chair, and these movements and sounds all carried something affective, emotionally resonant. Some of what we felt came from ourselves, but some from others, and how we felt in our bodies in the room with those other people writing then came out in our writing. How much of what we wrote can we then claim to be our own? When we wrote of loss, found ourselves weeping softly, were those tears all our own or had we – in that space and place of meeting and connection and openness to the other and to writing what came – imbibed something of these others? Our emotional and written responses were surely a tangled mix of experiences from our own lives and resonances of, attunement to, others in that collaborative writing space.

On that final June afternoon, one of us quilted what follows, making a dream-like pattern with *every* text we each had brought:

We try to plug in, each of our fingers, prongs. We sit in circles of straight lines; like a wood turner's bowl our edges are jagged and rough. Stories of restraint and resistance.

Dagmar brings an image of a tree; bark hacked from root, leaving knife or dagger in the space-in-between. Recently I have been loving moss, she says, and now I understand why. It vomits green cushions over splinters and shards and cracks.

But it's not always comfortable in here and Jonathan's patrolling teacher, Miss Panopticon, makes sure we stay in rows; fingers spread wide apart dodging the affect that wraps and weaves between them and us. Corrienne with two rs, two n's and two e's but not in that order needs to be able to write with both hands in case one becomes affected, gone. Stay in rows – slow slow click click slow.

We tentatively try reading aloud, offering each other steaming bowls of text. But we walk on eggshells afraid that the offering will not satisfy, that we will be the arthritic finger and so I find myself self-policing my honesty in case I confess to something I didn't know I'd done.

Anthea sits in a wooden row. She knocks over her steaming bowl of text and it makes text puddles on the floor. Slow slow click click slow. Miss Panopticon stops and turns around. Anthea says, it wasn't me; this is a case of mistaken identity. But she too drowns in text, losing herself and us in awkward words and screwed up bits of paper. But she is not alone.

Jonathan sits in his row and dreams in class. He dreams of inviting gardens and of home the other side of the hills. Miss Panopticon likes her boys like puppets on string and dreaming makes boys' noses grow longer. After all little boys who can't be good may just as well be made of wood.

But it's OK. Zoi brought the wood turner. He will turn all wooden rows and wooden boys into musical instruments. Between us we have resources and we could escape through puddles of text and over the hills if we try. Dagmar brought the sturdy boots and Lisa and Sue brought the maps.

But outside has dangers too and there lurks a dangerous kind of freedom. We may hate the wooden seats but they are at least familiar. Naomi cites Jeanette Winterson (2011, p. 40),

"A tough life needs a tough language",

We need to be tough to shovel through the mess. It's not a hiding place out there; it's 'a finding place' ... and we don't know what we will find.

There may be an abundance of rich text that will pour from Jan's Royal Doulton cup and Jonathan's royal blue ink. Blue was the most expensive colour of paint. That is why the Virgin Mary always wore it. There are riches out there, like Jane Speedy says, "there may be haiku in the hedges and tanka in the trees". It's the simple little things of connection and gentleness.

Maybe I could find myself out there. I didn't bring my voice to this. I wanted to bring something shared, to resist processes of subjectification. As Jan says, I don't want to own it, I don't want to possess it – I just want to be a part.

Tim Ingold (2015) talks of how it is more familiar to conceptualise persons as blobs, individuals who take up space to differing degrees, bumping into each other as we go. Ingold suggests persons are more lines than blobs. He says it is lines that connect us – (the cut of) the umbilical chord, the spider hanging from and connected to its web, the tadpole, the cell and flagellum and everywhere around. We throw out lines to each other and are meant to cling. Everything is entangled with everything else. Citing is a means of throwing out a line, clinging, entangling.

Naomi flings out a line to Winterson – drawing her words towards her, to us – bringing them into the room: “A tough life needs a tough language”. Fiona picks them up – cites Naomi’s words and inevitably we are entangled.

Everything is entangled. Everything is always and already imbued with, given over to, the other (Butler, 2004), nothing ever new exactly, or our own, never an ‘original contribution’ in the phrase so beloved of doctoral examiners, but always indebted, always a re-iteration, always a re-appropriation, and all the more useful for that (Butler, 1993).

We hear ourselves speak Butler (at least we gesture towards her in passing), hear words we have taken down, on account of their resonances, to disperse over the page, from/to/for each other. To the Other. We speak them in a tone we know to be our own, and yet recognize their dispersal is carried on an intonation that can only ever be a pretence. We say ‘pretence’ but cannot really give an account of its significance. Could it be that what we term ‘pretence’ shies away from ownership, from colonization, appropriation, not because it is not desirable, but because of its floating significations? Is it not so that what we give way to is an acknowledgement of discursive authority through which the ‘we’ – the singular assemblage – who writes now makes sense of the citations we spoke some time ago? That the other is always Other?

A house and a room and no one else there. I don’t want to own this story but it’s mine and it’s his and it’s several others’ since, always divisible down to one.

I had a house deep in a forest by a coral sea. I say ‘I’ but it started as ‘we’. We had a house in a deep forest, not far from a sea and very far from anything like a town. It was a home-made house, its living space level with the canopies of the rainforest trees – burdekin plum, ylang ylang, some wetfooted eucalypts, the sorts of figs that grow into curtains and cathedrals, a mango out by the water tank.

The house sat by a tiny creek and you had to know the exact curve of the dirt road across this creek and the slight scoop in the road where it was possible to pull in your 4WD, and where the green tin roof could be glimpsed through the trees. Here I would write, I knew when I first saw it, how could I not I thought as I looked across the shoulder of the grizzled guy who was selling it to us, into the deep green outside. I would find my way and find my voice in this house that was ours, for just that year, before we divided into one, and one, he being the one who went off into the world and into the forest on his own path away from me. I would set myself up with my favourite notepads, the fine artline pens that I liked to write with. I’d need to stock up on supplies for the months when the road was impassable and the rain never seemed to stop. I would take up my writing position perched under the open shutters of the one room of this house that was suspended up above the forest floor. In my dreams of writing in our house he was never there, though I would have needed him to start the generator, change the fuel, deal with any snakes that might slide in, come with me to the outside toilet in the dark and in the rain.

Though I said I was sorry when he left, though I raged and wanted to wreak revenge, he didn’t feature in my dreams of writing, or my fantasies. There was never really a two or an us or a we or an our house in the forest, or anywhere. I never wrote or slept or lived in that house, or achieved my dreams of writing, but sold it on to another stranger.

Together/alone we started in the middle. Together/alone, we continue to return to that middle, where the emergent writing, from the side table of a classroom in the middle of Edinburgh remained emergent, still in the middle at its end – which is why we all could say ‘I am starting in the middle’ when we sit together, or we read our work aloud standing at the front of a classroom at conferences, as some of us (on behalf of us all) have done.

We stand in the ‘middle’ and recall the circles, always circles, we came to find ourselves sitting in. Technically, we are always in the middle when we sit in a row of chairs in a circle, because no-one can be at the side in a circle. And, if we stand in the middle of the circle we are in the centre. Derrida warns us to be wary of the notion of the centre (1966) – see the line we fling out to Derrida now? We bring him in to speak with our text, to speak with us, to help us bring closer what is far – but we think Derrida might be at ease with the type of ‘centre’ we create, where we find a ‘middle’ that can work at the laws of geometry, disrupt and transform what will become an eerie, almost haunting-familiar ‘slow-slow-click-click-slow’ of rows of Miss Panopticon desks, and which allows us to turn wooden boys and wooden desks into music.

Just four of us travelled to a classroom of a conference in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, to read aloud a version of this text, which opened, “I am starting in the middle”. Only one of us was in the classroom in the middle of Edinburgh when we wrote the text “I am starting in the middle”. Yet, somehow, all of us who sat in the circle of red chairs, writing, then ‘reading our texts aloud, in turn, in no particular order’ are a ‘we’ who leave a mark, a trace (a non-present remainder) (Derrida, 1988) behind.

We are always a little bit alone. Whatever I do, I think, there is always something in me that is alone. Writing with others, moving in between and through others, leaves me full, but at the same time, yes, at the same time, just a bit empty. I empty myself; I have emptied myself. With others. Alone. Into other. Into Other.

Citational acts fail “all the time”, says Nikossis (2013, 53). Plagiarism, falsity, misunderstanding or even taboo are likely to happen because “for citationality to be possible, its impossibility must also be in play, its seal must be split and doubled” (2013, 53). In writing this chapter, in writing in the red room where we began to catch words and images on the wing and put them to new purposes, or even before then in the scuffed grey institutional rooms where the doctoral writing group met for all those months, we opened the seals of citations, doubling, tripling, quadrupling and more. Taking someone else’s words to start another unfurling in another text of something more, something different again. Energising, surprising.

Either stop writing or write like a rat, to return to Deleuze and Guattari: we must write our collective passion, the passion of the pack, even if feeling alone, or we must not write at all. Communicate silently. Slow, slow, click, click, slow. ‘Do’ together without thinking of ourselves and then afterwards coldly and calmly abandon

each other like rats have a tendency to do with sinking ships. Or hold on to lines and threads and rats' tails and tales.

These were the quilted becomings of a becoming-rat pack, searching for places, spaces where they could flourish.

*Last week I walked home from the cinema in the dark and it was snowing. I was the first person to walk down the road I live on. It was only **my** footprints that trod on the thin carpeting of white sparkly snow. I liked it. I liked being the only one to walk on the path. I liked thinking about the way the snow glittered like crystal... like Dick Whittington, I thought, at the time, where the streets in London are supposedly paved in gold. When I got to my house I turned around and looked back up the road to see the line, the track, that my boots made. The pavement was tarmac grey next day. Snow melts. It's inevitable.*

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