

Unlikely Qualities of Writing Qualitatively: Porous Stories of Thresholds, In-Betweenness and the Everyday.

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Unlikely Qualities of Writing Qualitatively: Porous Stories of Thresholds, In-Betweenness and the Everyday

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Abstract

In this paper, we seek to intervene in the proposition that there are recognisable or abstract-able modes of doing qualitative writing, and instead affirm that writing from a feminist scholarly perspective is often an embodied, domestic, haptic and serendipitous gesture. Occurring in in-between spaces and moments, in which personal and professional life frequently meld, with porous boundaries, our writing practices appear to talk back rhetorically to the notion of writing qualitatively. What are the qualities of qualitative writing? Within education (our field) quality can seem to masquerade as a measurable, generalizable thing, implying a ‘gold standard’ or that different writing practices or products can or should be compared or ranked. For us, writing is frequently encountered as serendipitous, messy and intricately entwined with daily life at numerous scales. This is not to suggest that writing magically takes shape, but rather it is un-abstract-able from daily routines, situations and energies at local and global scales. In the middle of these situations, writing happens when it takes precedence, at whatever cost that might be to bodies, relationships and domestic schedules. Working with a range of feminist philosophers, we draw the temporal, situated, mattering of writing into focus. This paper engages in non-linear story-telling about the processes of our collaborative writing of this paper. We are particularly inspired by Stewart’s (2007:75) approach to writing to convey moments of ordinary life, which she describes as ‘a circuit that is always tuned into some little something, somewhere. A mode of attending to the possible and the threatening’. We

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dwell upon the somethings and the somewheres as a means to draw out the temporal passing by of life in all its messiness, as a piece of writing comes together, tracing moments of shimmering intensity and mundane frustration and distraction throughout the work.

Keywords

writing, stories, motherhood, bodymind, porosity, feminist

The Writer At Her Work

I see her walking

On a path through a pathless forest.

Or a maze, a labyrinth.

As she walks she spins,

And the fine thread falls behind her following her way,

Telling

Where she is going,

Where she has gone.

Telling the story. The line, the thread of voice, The sentences saying the way.

[[Le Guin, 2004](#): 300]

In this paper, we¹ seek to intervene in the proposition that there are recognisable or abstract-able modes of doing qualitative writing, and instead affirm that writing from a feminist scholarly perspective is an embodied, domestic, haptic and serendipitous gesture. For us, writing is frequently encountered as messy and intricately entwined with daily life at numerous scales. This is not to suggest that writing magically takes shape, but rather it is un-abstract-able from daily routines, situations and energies at local and global scales. In the middle of these situations, writing happens when it takes precedence, at whatever cost that might be to bodies, relationships and domestic schedules. In this piece, we playfully engage with the invitation to show rather than tell the reader what we mean when we say writing squeezes itself through porous in-between spaces. Writing this paper is about passing patterns back and forth, reminiscent of [Haraway's \(1994, pp. 69–70\)](#) figuration of the game Cat's Cradle, which she explains:

“Is about patterns and knots; the game takes great skill and can result in some serious surprises. One person can build up a large repertoire of string figures on a single pair of hands; but the cat's cradle figures can be passed back and forth on the hands of several players, who add new moves in the building of complex patterns. cat's cradle invites a

sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone. One does not win at cat's cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that. It is not always possible to repeat interesting patterns, and figuring out what happened to result in intriguing patterns is an embodied analytical skill."

Writing then is not about lead and co-authorship but about a feminist comingling, an emergent process full of surprises and sticky knots. We resist codifying what this writing might be...an entangled posthuman duoethnography of sorts? but such labelling fails to fully capture the leaky, porous, haphazard more-than-only-human coming togetherness of this piece. As we go on to illustrate, coffee, a room of one's own, weeds, hormones, domestic chores, deadlines, trust, all work together as a strange writerly ecology that can never be replicated. These irreducible elements never provide a winning formula for getting the paper written yet we tune into familiar rhythms and timeworn habits that present themselves, take their place in the in-between moments when writing gets done and so the writing (e)merges, morphs, grows, detours and (sometimes) delights – but it is always different, always difficult.

Getting Started From Somewhere in the Middle

We meet to discuss how to approach writing this paper; it is both the start of our project and the culmination of many different interactions, thoughts and plans about how we might share a writing space together. Recognising that time is short, our schedules busy but that we are committed to creating space to playfully pass patterns back and forth we decide that we will make use of Google.doc as a sort of scrapbook, a playful anarchive, a space where we will deposit thoughts, quotes, agitations, stories and snippets from our everyday lives as working-mothers, as feminist academics finding ways through the demands to write post-qualitatively (or indeed in anyway at all). I suggest that we write in dialogue by diffracting through Inger Mewburn and Judy Maxwell's piece '*Write that journal article in 7 days*', a resource that I frequently bring into my teaching with doctoral researchers and early career researchers because it always guarantees to agitate questions and disbelief that writing can be broken down into seven steps. Googling it generates a slide share. It begins with a caveat:

"You can turn a bunch of messy stuff into an article quickly...but you must have

- 1.data, ideas or artifacts
- 2.preliminary analysis or thoughts."

What are our ideas, artifacts and preliminary thoughts, we wonder? What counts as an artifact or a thought specific enough to the task of writing? We cannot summarise the contribution of our paper succinctly. Yet. Or at all. I stare out the velux window – the sky is blue and I want to be outside. Through the window is a telephone pole that sometimes a pigeon comes to sit on. I remember the times I have watched the pigeon, when it is wet or it is sunny, all the way through lock down. I liked that it was there. This

space is a dedicated office space, on the top floor of my house. A massive privilege to have such a space the past couple of years. Sometimes I feel a little trapped up here.

Acknowledging our privilege agitates the hauntings of *A Room of One's Own* written by Virginia Woolf (1929) when she observed that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write. Having a room, a study, a dedicated space to call our own, a place to think, create and write is an enormous privilege but one that is, like so much else in the lives of working mothers, not without compromises and challenges.

having a study...

which became a nursery

having a study...

that was the kitchen table

having a study...

that doubles as a guest room

having a study...

located next to the bedroom of a very vocal, sometimes swearsy gaming teenager

having a study...

that became a cell during 'the great plague of 2020'

a place of isolation and books

Yet still, our privilege is a Room of One's Own

Writing Something Into Being

We have two weeks now to pull our draft paper together (so double the time Mewburn and Maxwell allocate to the task!). I decide I will do at least one small thing every day, even if I do not feel inspired. This is often how writing needs to go; it is not romantic or dramatic but sometimes in this job it is necessary for words to appear on a page within a certain timescale, and a small drip of daily effort is one thing I have found has helped in the past. I look at Mewburn and Maxwell's 'day 0' slide, it asks me; 'What sort of academic do you want to be?'

Slow scholarship: another science is possible (Stengers, 2018)...*The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Berg & Seber, 2016)...*Words Are My Matter: Writings about Life and Books* (Le Guin, 2016)...*Remembered Rapture: the writer at work* (Hooks, 2013) peer down at me accusingly from a high shelf. There is a strong desire to be a certain sort of academic. A leisurely writer, pensive, thoughtful, creative...alas....

And yet...we feel the ambivalence and tension within even holding such a desire; for a leisurely, absorbed, inspired and productive form of 'being a writer' that inevitably

owes more legacy than perhaps we would like to admit to solitary white-male-geniuses of the past. Even as we disavow those shadowy figures. A ‘room of one’s own’ in that sense is conceptual as much as physical –an ability to enter a space of such deep absorption, separation from everyday rhythms and focus on the task at hand, that another way of being becomes possible. Writing the world is perhaps always, in some ways, an act of power and control that has its own biography. Even as we desire and imagine the kind of writing we might be able to produce, we tussle with:

“forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, ‘consciousness’, and ‘discourse’”.

[Foucault, in [Guttorm et al., 2021](#): 129]

Writing With Everything That is There

Today is so hot – I cannot shake a headache which I think is caused by the air pressure. My body is slow and my brain is slow too. I am in slow motion, like wading through honey. I am sat here to keep a promise to myself; to do at least one small thing each day to contribute to our paper.

Some men have been up the telephone pole out my velux window and replaced some of the equipment today. That must have been hot work. There is shiny metal out there now and some chunky looking connectors. I hope it does not put off my pigeon friend. Describing her writing practice, [Truman \(2016\)](#) describes how she ‘wrote this story in conjunction with’ (p. 138) heterogeneous and various (im)material aspects of everyday life and immediate sensory experiences, arguing ‘they are part of the “apparatus”’ (p. 136) from which the story emerged. Perhaps then it is not so much a case of what sort of academic we chose to be and craft ourselves masterfully into, but what kinds of everyday-life apparatus assemble us and our writing into some particular kind of unexpected outcome.

“There is something about writing [...] that is out of time. As though the writing only really knows what it is once it has begun to make its way into the world. For me, thinking too has always had this quality: thinking thickens in its encounter with the futurity that orients it...The best kind of encounter with thinking’s outside is the kind that deeply listens to what writing is trying to do, almost thinking beyond what the author is capable of thinking, then returning that thinking, almost beyond what the reader can think, to the author. In this gesture of encounter, no one is trying to convince anyone: thought is thinking collectively at its limit.”

[[Manning, 2016](#): preface]

Letting Go and Pulling Back

Today I lost myself in writing. I literally lost track of time, place, everything...I forgot lunch, I barely heard the doorbell, who knows where the cat is... I lost myself fully to the narrative I was crafting.

This is not always how it works...

But when it consumes you whole, when you become-with the emergence of a story, editing words, playing with turns of phrase, checking for accuracy, for how it will read, undertaking some side research...exploring possible avenues, some that don't make it onto the page, deadends, cul de sacs, rolling words around in your mouth, tasting the sounds of words, pondering the affect it might have on the reader, how will my co-authors engage? When I return to the Google.doc tomorrow will it have become something else whilst I sleep?...When it flows like this, it can feel joyous...

But this is not always how it works...

Tomorrow I might come back, decide it isn't right, doesn't do the work I want it to...then ensues laborious tinkering, dwelling over each word...

And then the day enters another phase – the doorbell rings, they have keys but know that this will get me out of 'a room of one's own', so....

I leave the cursor flashing...

"how was your day?"

"can I get you a snack?"

"did the test go well?"

"do you have homework?"

The pull of the cursor somewhere in the background....

This is usually how it doesn't work...

When it's abandoned...but it nevertheless remains alive, buzzing in the background, resurfacing as the washing machine gets loaded, again when the pasta comes to boil, again as the lights are turned off and the doors locked for the night...

It doesn't stop.

Writing Days...

Ambitious plans to set aside (a) 'day(s) for writing' become more and more ridiculous as the week starts to unfold. Meetings pepper the pages of my diary, some in person, others are scheduled back-to-back video calls that conspire to eat up the days. When can I eek out time for writing? The fantasy of a day stretching ahead with only writing to fill the hours is precisely that, a fantasy.

I had my second daughter at the start of the third year of my doctoral study. In the months when I could not seriously work on my thesis, I used to think about it at odd

moments and write little notes. Often on my phone. These strange little habits are not talked about much, but I suspect they are common. For example, I realised how important Shirley Bryce Heath's 'Ways with Words' was for my own research whilst lying in the bath thinking about it. When I told my supervisor, she laughed and said she often had important thoughts in the bath.

As is so often the case, writing becomes tucked into the folds before, in between, and when everything is still ('the blue hour' has long been the preserve of feminist authors such as Sylvia Plath).

I have long slept with a notebook at my bedside. When maddening thoughts deny sleep, when suddenly theories, concepts, turns of phrase, make themselves known to the writing that has been stuck, it is both joy and torment. I remember thinking of things whilst feeding my daughter at night and typing them into my phone. Trying to hide my phone a little under the duvet so that the light did not wake my partner. Looking anxiously in the morning to see if what I had written was a breakthrough insight or garbled statement that made little sense. Often though I revisit the notebook and wonder what sort of alchemy (useful or not so much) took place in the middle of the night!

For [Cixous \(1993\)](#), writing in the depths of night offers rich moments to scribble down expressions of the unconscious body:

'When I close my eyes the passage opens, the dark gorge, I descend. [...] There is no more genre. I become a thing with pricked-up ears. Night becomes a verb. I night'

([Cixous, 1993](#): 115)

In the night she writes in open air, making it possible to write 'deep down in my body, further down, behind thought' ([Cixous, 1993](#), p. 118). In the morning, in the flash between awake/asleep, she notes down what has been generated.

There's something

The size of a split pea

That I haven't written.

That I haven't written right.

I can't sleep.

She gets up

And writes it.

Her work

Is never done.

[[Le Guin, 2004](#): 301]

Writing consumes, makes demands of us that are elusive, unpredictable. The act of writing generates and materialises thoughts on a page that cannot be planned or accounted for. Maybe the flavour (Mewburn & Maxwell, 2012) of our writing has been chosen for us, rather than we, the human author(s), having done the choosing.

Writing With and Against (the Body)

We don't want to make this sound romantic. It really wasn't and, as is the case for many working mothers, there were messy and unspoken compromises.

My thesis was temporarily abandoned as I neared the end of my first pregnancy. Sitting uncomfortably, swollen belly pushing against the edge of the desk, heartburn rising, struggling to focus and persistently on the verge of 'an episode'. As the pregnancy went on the gestational diabetes worsened. The threat permanently circled, both day and night.

shaking or feeling jittery

being nervous or anxious

sweating, chills, and clamminess

becoming irritable or impatient

experiencing confusion

fast or unsteady heartbeat

dizziness or feeling lightheaded

hunger

nausea

skin becoming pale

feeling tired and weak or having no energy

blurred vision

tingling or numbness

headaches

clumsiness

nightmares

passing out

The pressure to finish the writing before his arrival was immense, but bodies, hormones and sickness intervened and so writing took unanticipated detours, and ultimately ground to a halt. Some months later writing resumed with a premature, suckling, mostly sleeping, babe in arms. The dexterity to type one-handed was quickly developed. ‘We’ co-authored those final chapters: breast milk, hormones, keyboard, baby, reading notes, bright spring skies, tears, day melding into night, isolation and a thrust togetherness. Writing seeped into the in-betweenness, the porous spaces that became ill-defined and otherworldly but somehow words materialised, paragraphs amassed, a thesis took shape in a chaotic, blurred milk-infused daze. Words and bodies mattered.

I did a lot of proofreading whilst jiggling my daughter in a sling – laptop propped on the kitchen counter. Then I would nap whilst my teacher-husband took up jiggling-sling-laptop-on-kitchen-counter position and tried to lesson-plan for his class. Did I wish I didn’t have to write in this way? Yeah. However, there is something very particular about how a thesis about toddlers emerged from a time in my personal life that was all about babies and toddlers. I remember the feeling of that ‘toddler’ time slipping away from me, a feeling that these were my ‘best years’ for being able to say something about toddlers that would resonate with parents of young children.

Writing out a Rhythm

And now I am writing this whilst pre-menstrual, possibly peri-menopausal (who really knows for sure) and tearing up.

So, we have begun to venture into places we had not anticipated (and that are possibly outside the scope of this Special Issue!) that is, how might internal rhythms of menstrual cycles, menopause, child bearing, breast feeding and more play into writing qualitatively, just as much as external rhythms of family life, work deadlines and baths, cafes, sleeps and swims?

Haunted by the image of the constantly thinking, eternally ready to switch to some higher cognitive plane and write, white-male-genius-author, advice on how to write rarely considers earthly and bodily rhythms and processes. Writers might be advised to identify a ‘productive’ time of day, or else establish a ritual to ‘get in the zone’. But what would happen to words, to stories, to how writing was composed and what it did and where it went, if we genuinely thought, wrote and read according to the season, the earth or bodily cycles of the moon (Guttorm et al., 2021)?

“I am not granite and should not be taken for it. I am not flint or diamond or any of that great hard stuff. If I am stone, I am some kind of shoddy crumbly stuff like sandstone or serpentine, or maybe schist. Or not even stone but clay, or not even clay but mud. And I wish those who take me for granite would once in a while treat me like mud”.

[Le Guin, 2004: 8]

The Not-Yet of Writing: a Matter of Trust

“In order to write a story, you have to trust yourself, you have to trust the story, and you have to trust the reader. Before you start writing, neither the story nor the reader even exists, and the only thing you have to trust is yourself. And the only way you can come to trust yourself as a writer is to write. To commit yourself to that craft. To be writing, to have written, to work on writing, to plan to write. To read, to write, to practice your trade, to learn your job, until you know your job, until you know something about it, and know you know something about it”.

[Le Guin, 2004:223]

Knowing that a swim before breakfast at the Ladies Pond is what my bodymind needs, especially when a long day at the computer lay ahead, I set off early and am one of the first eager swimmers to arrive. The water is eerily still, glistening brightly in the summer sun – untouched by human bodies, yet. I am the first in, the lifeguard announces that I am about to ‘break the glass’ a sacred privilege apparently. The water is cool, I see my hands just beneath the surface, the water is murky, muddy brown, silky smooth, pungently earthy as it is heated and illuminated by the morning sun in a way I have not sensed before. My body kicks into a rhythm that the pond demands. I glide, I marvel at the reflections, the hapless ducklings, the gnats, and feathers all busy going about their business on the surface of the pond. A flash of blue – spotting a kingfisher is quite rare – a good omen apparently. As I round the far end, I am unable to see because the sun is so bright, swimming with my eyes closed, trusting the water, trusting habit, trusting intuition....

Writing is not something that can be learnt, it emerges through our bodyminds, often when we least anticipate it, forming in our sinews, bones, cells and resurfacing and materializing in words that we could not have forced onto the page. For us, it is not an isolated, anthropocentric task, not a skill that is taught, learnt, performed according to a formula that can be maximised by the deployment of specific techniques or the acquisition of writerly skills. Writing comes about through past–present not yet relationalities that are often ephemeral and feral. Liane [Mozère \(2013\)](#) describes her time volunteering at La Borde clinic with Felix Guattari as a situation where theoretical talk and thinking took place in between the work of caring for the patients, sharing meals and rowing on the pond. In this immersive but distracted situation, ‘words floated around as if we were living in an aquarium.....there was never the feeling that I was “learning” something, but rather, I felt as though something was coming towards me’. ([Mozère, 2013](#), p. 2).

This is maybe where ‘writing’ takes on a quality that defies abstraction. Our non-linear story-telling about the processes of our collaborative writing of this paper seek to convey moments of ordinary life, which [Stewart \(2007, p. 75\)](#) describes as ‘a circuit that is always tuned into some little something, somewhere. A mode of attending to the possible and the threatening’. Thinking through, with and beyond swimming in the silky brown water of the Ladies Pond is not intended to offer a romanticised account of the writerly existence of the feminist academic. Rather it draws into sharp focus the

porosity of writing and how the shape it takes is frequently unbounded, unknowable and untamable. A willingness to surrender to what [Le Guin \(2004\)](#) terms ‘the wave of mind’ extends to the bodymind. As Deleuze, cited in [Mozère \(2013, p. 9\)](#) stresses:

“The movement of the swimmer does not resemble that of the wave, in particular, the movements of the swimming instructor which we reproduce on the sand bear no relation to the movements of the wave..... We learn nothing from those who say: ‘Do as I do’. Our only teachers are those who tell us to ‘do with me’.

As our storytelling is making apparent, ‘writing’ extends beyond the physical act of sitting at a desk, tapping words into a laptop, transferring thoughts from brain to fingers to screen. Writing is more confederate and unruly than that, occurring in myriad in-between spaces and unlikely moments, where personal and professional life frequently meld, characterised by porous boundaries. Our writing practices appear to talk back rhetorically to the notion of writing qualitatively. Catching ourselves, we return to Mewburn and Maxwell’s list.

1. Choose your flavour (what sort of paper will you write)?
2. The tiny text (write an abstract)
3. The spew draft. What stops us ‘just writing’? Write as much as you can about ‘what’s new?’ in 5 minutes
4. The scratch outline – organising what you have in order to tell a story
5. Cleaning up the mess
6. Murder your darlings (eliminate words and let it rest)
7. Rejection (maybe)

Hmm, it seems that we have lost track of which day we are on, and we fear that we are not following the formula loyally.

“This is an important point to stress: what is possible does not preexist. You do not know what, when or how you are going to be able to...”

[[Mozère, 2013: 6](#)]

Dwelling Upon the Somewheres: Cafe Writing

I am feeling much more inspired today. I am sitting in a café, having got up early in the morning to have two delicious hours of café writing before my first meeting of the day. I read back over our writing so far. Who was that hot and grumpy woman staring out of a velux window last week? This morning I am someone completely different. My shoulders are relaxed but my arms and stomach feel like the muscles are engaged, sucked in, ready for movement. I sip my coffee. My fingers are fidgety, but it is not the coffee, it’s the adrenaline I sometimes feel when the writing is flowing.

Café writing has long been a way for me to focus my mind on writing. This began whilst I was working on my doctorate, with a toddler and a baby and writing had to be squeezed out according to a schedule that was rarely under my control. A coffee-shop-coffee was a luxury we could rarely afford at the time, so I used to sometimes drop my daughter at nursery, walk to this café, order a nice drink and tell myself the nice drink had to be paid for in words – focused effort on putting words on the page for the duration of the slowly drunk coffee. When Mewburn and Maxwell refer to the spew draft (day 3), I imagine they mean something similar to ‘pay with words’. It worked so well I used to joke I was going to credit that particularly cafe in the acknowledgements in my thesis.

“Telling the story is a matter of getting the beat - of becoming the rhythm, as the dancer becomes the dance. And reading is the same process, only far easier, not jading: because instead of having to discover the rhythm beat by beat, you can let yourself follow it, be taken over by it, you can let the dance dance you.”

[Le Guin, 2004: 180]

Telling you this story (this top tip!), I realise how much more it has in common with ‘write your journal article in 7 days’ or ‘find your productive time of day’ than with writing in the blue hour, deep in the body (Cixous, 1993) or with earth and moon rhythms (Guttorm et al., 2021). This evokes the ambivalence we mentioned at the start of our piece; to produce something fixed whilst knowing the world is not fixed, to articulate in individual(s) voices that stories are collective endeavours, to type clearly and crisply onto the Google.doc screen that this piece owes its genealogy to the night feeds, the ladies pond, my menstruating body and a warm cup of coffee.

Bodily yet linguistic

Articulate yet intimate

Explicated yet ambivalent

Specific yet multiple stories

Non-linear yet written in sentences

Just keep putting down words; tune into the rhythm of writing, let the dance you, and you will end up with something and then you can decide if any of it is useful. Yet. Putting something down involves putting oneself out into the world. It creates a kind of vulnerability.

The writer on, and at, her work

So, if I am

A writer, my work

Is words. Unwritten letters.

Words are my way of being human, woman, me.

[Le Guin, 2004: 292]

How to Nurture Something (Let Go and Keep Control)

When I need away-from-desk thinking time, I sometimes go to my allotment and do weeding. Fingers in the earth, my mind often wanders to (probably cliched and not particularly clever) metaphors for the work I am trying to do and the process of caring for a piece of land. The allotment is soothing because it is only partially under one's control and carries on regardless. You return after just a week and the grass has sprung up to your waist. Or you forget about the strawberries and let the vetch take over their bed and they still offer up their delicious fruit regardless. Writing and thinking are mostly-out-of-personal-control processes, and I suppose the allotment manifests that in a very tangible way. You can be part of the flow and you can make small interventions into it. That's all though. Do not try to take over.

“These images that I am working with are incredibly resilient; I can call them up whenever I choose, to focus on each experience.....The images represent the qualities of emergence. At the moment, these images want to develop into forms. These forms are poetic, sun-bleached, skeletal, bones stripped of extraneous matter, ideas coming into form.....If I think they have to be anything, produce anything, they freeze, they die and lose their alive mobility. The only thing I can do with them is play, and even playing sometimes seems too serious.”

[Somerville, 2007: 231]

To weed well is a task that involves a certain kind of calculated ruthlessness. For the most resilient plants something more than a hoe is required; you must dig your fork or fingers into the earth and extract the whole thing. I often decide fork and gloves are just getting in my way, and insert my naked murderous fingers into the soil, to wrap them around the smallest micro-root. If a plant such as a dock or a dandelion has pushed a tap root deep into the earth, you must keep digging, keep going, the whole thing must be uncovered and pulled away. As I work, there is ambivalence because I know leaving a certain number of weeds is good for the wildlife. One should not remove all the dandelions, particularly early in the season. However, I determinedly tell myself, there are plenty growing over there in the wild corner, they just cannot grow right here next to my courgette plants. Those sensitive little cucurbits just will not stand for it! I kill one in order for the other to flourish. There is something disturbingly Darwinian about the whole thing.

We wonder, is weeding like the review process?

Going through the review process..., I had the luck of encountering thinking at the limit. In an affirmative gesture...the reviewers took time to think with the text in a gesture of

writing-with, returning [the book] to me with the richness of an engagement that was capable of opening my thinking beyond where I thought it could go. In this return, not a simple account of how writing performs knowledge, but something much more important: an engagement with how thinking does its work, in the writing. What struck me, in reading these reviews... was how fragile this gesture of writing made me feel. The fragility has to do with writing pushed to a limit where it is truly in contact with the tremulousness of thinking in the act. Bringing thought into contact with its limit this way is a minor gesture...

[Manning, 2016, preface]

Mewburn and Maxwell tell us on day 6 of writing our paper, we should ‘murder our darlings’. The editing process can similarly hold a certain kind of ambivalence; words lovingly crafted and invested in must sometimes come out for the greater good, in order to maintain the flow, or the ‘line of argument’. It is necessary in order for the writer to triumph, to master the narrative, to create a convincing and compelling argument for which the reader will acknowledge that, yes, indeed, you really do have the expertise to advise me on how to write post-qualitatively. Thank you for the sage recommendations.

Day Seven...?

The writer at her work

Is odd, is particular,

Certainly, but not, I think

Singular.

She tends to the plural.

[Le Guin, 2004: 296]

Although we frequently use ‘I’ throughout this paper it is by no means a singular I. Our use of ‘I’ is deliberately ambiguous, it does not offer neat auto/biographical accounts of being a writer or how to write qualitatively from our personal experience. Rather, our string figuring offers writing as a series of interwoven, messy, unattributable encounters that can happen anywhere (Stewart, 2007), signalling the relationship that emerges and relationalities that come together in the creation and curation of writing. Writing becomes a delicious mix of bodymind, entanglements, histories, hauntings and energies. We see this conceptualisation of writing as foundational to our writing output. Writing is often forced into unlikely times and spaces that become available or are made available – writing within these precious, often snatched and frequently interrupted thresholds insist that the decision to carry on in whatever ways are possible, at that moment, is all that there is sometimes.

Dwelling upon the somethings and the somewheres (Stewart, 2007) enables the temporal passing by of life in all its messiness to become illuminated. As this piece of writing has come together tracing moments of shimmering intensity, mundane frustration and endless distraction throughout the work underscores the fact that writing processes extend beyond the time allocated at our laptops. Attuning and attending to what happens temporally is crucial for the writer, to recognise that time stutters and passes, slows and is fleeting; writing seeps into and surfaces throughout different scales of daily life. The out of timeness that Manning (2016) writes about captures so much of our experiences of eeking out time, being lost in time, losing sight of time, never having enough time, running out of time, being forever beholden to time. But there is one time that is (usually) non-negotiable, the time to submit the manuscript. To make ourselves yet more vulnerable, open to the judgement and criticism of our peers, who will ‘blindly’ make their critical appraisals of our work known, in the fullness of time.

For now, our writing post-qualitatively adventure reaches some sort of end point, although we know we will be woken by it, haunted by words we could have used, ideas we could have played with, scholars we could have cited, other formulations and fabulations. But for now, we must call time.

It seems that we might have arrived at a ‘day seven’ of sorts:

Rejection (maybe)? Yet knowing that writing takes on its own trajectory - that the fine thread lies on the forest pathway (Le Guin, 2004) whether it is picked up and followed or not. Rejected a hundred times over, this storying of felt and partial ideas will still go somewhere and do something, often with unpredictable and temporally arbitrary outcomes.

And now the time for waiting is upon us...

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Note

1. ‘I’ and ‘we’ are used throughout this paper. Our use of ‘I’ is deliberately ambiguous, it works to refuse neat auto/biographical accounts of being a writer or offer a ‘how to’ write qualitatively from

singular personal experience. Our stories are not intended to be attributable to either one of us but rather intended as evocations and provocations about writing qualitatively.

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