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# Regeneration: A Collaborative Writing, Making, and Moving Inquiry

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## Abstract

Nine members of the Collaborative Artful Narrative Inquiry network (CANI-net) gathered to explore a regenerative intention. This article tracks our interplay of writing, making, and moving together and questions that arose: How do we go about regenerating? Can we find openings to processes happening outside awareness? How does the refrain “now let’s write” act in relation to the un/intention of regeneration? Is our material, embodied co-presence regenerative? Answers were intimated through listening, touching hands, printmaking, and sculpting clay; in letting things be said and unsaid, writing as response, in making shapes and animal sounds, and dancing *Zorba’s Dance*.

## Keywords

narrative, politics and culture, reconceptualizing collaboration, decolonizing the academy, pedagogy, writing as method of inquiry, methods of inquiry, narrative, arts based inquiry

## We Came Together With Histories of Sorts

During that time of prolonged separation, the COVID-19 pandemic, CANI-net—the Collaborative Artful Narrative Inquiry Network—departed its place of origin in what had been the Centre for Narrative and Transformative Learning at the School of Education, University of Bristol and re-formed as an independent, virtual entity (see [www.caninet.com](http://www.caninet.com)). In the wake of these physically isolating events, nine of us—artists, writers, students, therapists, academics, and the like—tenuously affiliated through past experiences of collaboration, or drawn by the open invitation, gathered physically for a 3-day writing retreat in the Welsh borderlands at the end of June 2023, to feel our way back together.

To regenerate implies renewal and restoration; a return to life and liveliness following damage or disturbance, and the theme of “regeneration” seemed a fitting point of focus for our coming and being together. Our days were spent between scattered cabins, and an old stone house, between meals made with vegetables grown on the land, and restful spaces of withdrawal. In a pavilion with wide windows opening onto a Welsh vista, we came together in what became a rhythm of writing, sharing, responding, and writing together again. Into this rhythm came other movements too—playful embodied, sensory, and mindful inquiry. In this regenerative space, we found common purpose and activity, tentatively

re-entangling ourselves in an energetic process of *being in among others*. What exactly we were here to regenerate was a question we contemplated often. Regeneration moved, being at times about ourselves and at times about the act of artful, narrative collaboration. Regeneration occurred as a doing, a happening, and a processual event that might or might not require the presence of our awareness. Thus, our focus wandered across a multiplicity of instances where regenerative processes could be glimpsed.

We spoke together of our experiences, our relationships, our stories, then wrote for a while in response, then read aloud. Spoke and wrote and read again. To receive and have received in this way became a regenerative process. Our re-entanglement was both aided and represented through this process of *writing into the space* and later the writing

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worked further in an iterative process that took hold of us in ongoing online meetings, which we had not anticipated, but which we recognized as necessary to allow the work to finish in its own time.

Writing in *italics* below emanates directly from those 3 days, is compositely voiced and experience-close, finding echoes of presence in our interplay. Non-italicized text is written subsequently, in reflections on the process that are more individual, though they remain in dialogue with one another.

## Nature

*Here I am at the Collaborative Writing Retreat at Trealy Farm. What a beautiful place! We are writing after supper, in the pavilion, a beautiful building overlooking a beautiful view to the west—Sugar Loaf and Blorenge in the distance. And outside the wind rustling the trees.*

*The place itself is beautiful, crackling with life, long grasses and nettles, the buzz of insects, the power of the trees/ still standing/ reverberating. A natural pool to swim in/ to immerse our bodies in water. And the space we work in, windows facing out across the valley.*

*The warm, golden light.*

*The wind moves through, rustling leaves and whooshing curtains*

*the sound of leaves zittering.*

*Nestled deep in nature, the birds twittering as I write—sheep calling.*

*It's evening.*

*The sun and the whoosh of wind in leaves.*

*The sun is present, behind dancing leaves—a door frame frames the trees, and the trees frame space and sun. Swallows, swooping through their minds, and their own beingness—swooping to quench their thirst.*

*I swoop away from here, back to the river, my river. When I swam yesterday, a duckling circled me, close in, about a foot from my face—all around, checking me out.*

*The trees are taller here—a canopy. They have their history too. The lowering sun glows in from the west, inscribing our shadows writing earnestly on the back wall.*

*The act of walking in wild places reveals the path.*

*Solvitur ambulando (to be solved by walking) is one of my best friends.*

*The sun and wind are in the room with us.*

*I can't hear the wind in the trees but I can see it in the way the branches are swaying in different directions.*

*Wind picks up the tempo*

*the rustle of trees and the twitter of birds*

*The chiff chaffs have chiff-chaffed their last for now. But a distant wood pigeon calls again.*

I really wanted to be able to go on a CANI-net writing retreat again . . . something that, living far away and being parent of a young child had not been accessible to me. I thought I would offer to help make it happen, put time and energy into the process and have my dream of being able to write collaboratively again.

The relational element of our inquiry was there for the exploring, but this was a very personal process. Little of what we encountered or consciously, deliberately explored, was at a group level. Our differences were laid bare though, as we shared our writing, and wrote again from this. Could we have explored individual relational challenges and differences, as and when they were exposed? I am drawn to the thought of some sort of family constellation dance with concepts and meanings not necessarily people and their own personal failings but stuff that comes up and is displayed in people in a group while on collaborative writing retreats. I see a play emerging. A powerful playscript of conflict and challenge and love and listening and beyond it all, a core essence of sticking it out, learning, being and becoming together. For this iteration of nine, it wasn't just those few days in June on the Welsh borders; it has continued and is continuing . . . perhaps we need to be brave and explore the grit of process, talk that talk we don't like to have. . . without judgment . . . a celebration of the richness that our differences bring to the space.

The environmental nature of our process and experience became perhaps a safer element to bring in, as doors, windows, landscapes and horizons, berries, trees, and birdsong, all made their presence felt.

We did not require agreement. The multiplicity of voices and experiences was/is always there. But this process, this becoming, this writing, this being together, mattered for each of us.

## Swooping Freely

*Traversing liminalities*

*A new group tentatively coming together through invitation to join in the moment, not knowing how it would be.*

*The writing we share legitimises silence.*

*Like individual prayer.*

*Strings of meaning making and unravelling*

*Ghosts invited themselves into our newly formed space.*

*We seemed to tolerate them.*

*There's power in the past that lends itself to the present.*

*And tension between rebellious rejection and gratitude for what's been enabled.*

*There is magic at play here.*

*Can we capture it? A sketch of a moment?*

*I am so glad that I'm a witness.*

*Regeneration is one of the words that means "return to" doesn't it?*

*We are artists, and writers, and students and teachers, and therapists and more.*

*I'm so glad that I'm a witness—each of us shifting. The connection between us here in this room reverberates, resounds, re-echoes and replies—again and again, in a better way—evolving and revolving.*

*I'm so glad that I'm a witness to the wonders of the world.*

## Human Between I

*We are artists and writers and students and teachers and therapists and more—each of us shifting. I was, I am, I'm hoping to be. The connection between us here in this room reverberates, resounds, re-echoes and replies. Nine people rubbing up against each other, each with needs and worries. I acknowledge that no one person here is necessarily more expert than the other. Some want more and faster, some want long and less. We are thinking and feeling our way together in the present with our pasts and possible futures. I feel uncertain and somewhat confused about what I bring but believe that without knowing it all, it is possible to contribute.*

*I sense our betweenness and this reminds me of Alan Macfarlane (2008) who writes that in Japanese, "human being" is made from two Chinese characters, one meaning human, the other meaning between. Compared with an individual or self-sufficient atom, the inference is the significance of relationship and the group which tends to claim priority over the individual.*

After the retreat, we continued to meet online—and shared our thoughts and writings virtually. There were no decisional processes overlain. We just carried on meeting, carried on writing. There emerged, more consciously with time, an ethic of care (Ellis, 2004), as we navigated sharing and drawing upon each other's words, eventually consenting to a process of making agential cuts (Barad, 2007) through our collective catalog of writings, to craft an array of layered pieces loosely aligned through felt senses of thematic narratives that mattered to their individual makers. We called these pieces collectively "The Underbelly," a

repository of themes that had apparently been in motion, that were now surfacing, or emerging into our awareness. Then we then worked with The Underbelly pieces again, each in our own way, cutting in further and stitching these smaller pieces together into what we called "re-mixes," then *patchworks*, compositely voiced re-narrativisations which we sequenced at random and read aloud, noting with delight the resonances and repetitions, across and between us. Something surprisingly, refreshingly, new to us was emerging—perhaps *regenerationally*—with the echoes and repeating threads, our collaborative process loosening our hold onto whose words were whose. The words no longer spoke directly of individual experiences but evoked more entangled matters, presences, and processes that emerged through our gathering. Ordering these into this article, alongside subsequent reflections from our more singular positionings, a further layer of narrative intervention invited reflexive contemplation of our collaboration as regenerative process as a whole.

## Skin Casting

*Something important is waiting for me to pay attention.*

*The feeling of discomfort. I'm going to make it wait.*

*I hear sheep calling. The sun and the whoosh of wind in leaves and we are high above in the pavilion; cedar wood floor.*

*The sun is present, behind dancing leaves—a door frame frames the trees, and the trees frame space and sun. The incomprehensible expanse is all there, in that beam of light seeping through the leaves. A door is opened or closed.*

*There's some relief here, in my body that's stretching for knowing. I can know and trust my gaze—my distant gaze that gives me the notion of not quite being in this room. Where the stretching continues.*

*I am beset by quotations. Time present in time past—time past in time present. We are creating our future, moment by moment, in presence. All our past is present in this moment.*

*We have time for remembering and casting off skin. And time for writing too. Strings of meaning making and unravelling. There is magic at play here. And we are a long way from home.*

*One minute I'm snuggled in bed, reading a favourite story for a third time; child in the nook of my arm. I smell wet grass, swimming pools, tomato sauce in the tight curls that twist into my face. And I hear the gentle sigh as they let go, falling gently, eventually into sleep. And I slip off.*

*There are anchors and history and winds blowing through open doors.*

*Where are our reference points? There's fluidity at play here and yet already we make a pitch for knowingness.*

*Sometimes, I realise that magic happens; words spill out of me coming from some other place, responses to others, yet deeply personal, an experience of release, the writing together has created a vessel in which to let go—to fill with my tears of grief and joy.*

*And as you read your words / I listen / we listen / it spills out.*

*Water / seeps / weeps.*

*The seepage between us and. . . what is the word? Empathy.*

*We will leave traces.*

We are in the process of reflecting upon our process of regeneration. We are processing. Yes, I prefer the active form of this verb as it resonates more with how I think about living in general. As we are processing, we are living our lives during our collaborative writing venture. In our own individual ways, we are thinking, talking, and reflecting on our truths while together today, formulating some end goals as an outcome. Whether we stay together as a group or not, has been mentioned. I cannot process that at this present moment. The individual truths that we create alone when we write are dependent on us being together in relationship.

## Moving and Creativity

*We have just done an exercise in threes with our hands, partly eyes open, partly eyes closed. It was a lovely experience and difficult to put into words—but that is the whole point of doing something non-verbal.*

*Moving together, I feel a connection through the body to each person bend and twist.*

*The touching of hands/ the slowing of time/ the shutting of eyes/ the links between tips of fingers/ blindly feeling pulse and beat.*

*In groups of three we mirrored our movements with our eyes shut, used our touch sense to explore a powerful connection.*

*Exploring      Three people*

*Six hands*

*Sensation/al*

*Previously unknown*

*Learn/ing something here*

*Fingers slid sometimes interlocking*

*Wriggling worms seeking contact*

*Thumbs included. . .*

*A quiet warmth, a glancing between us/ a recognition/ the stepping over from unsettled to acceptance*

*The three hands touching exercise gave us a new intimacy, another dimension, a different perspective through touching and letting go.*

*Communication seemed an important theme, how we communicated with hands in such interesting ways.*

*Moving freed different energies—we have gifts to give each other—the distances between us are like shadows and yet being present here now energetically shows new connections can be made in the present.*

*I loved doing the clay—working together on one piece, sometimes with our eyes shut, sometimes feeling the clay but also feeling each other's fingers. Up to our knuckles in clay and slime, shutting eyes and touching fingers.*

*I had a play with the baby printing presses too. I helped to put one together, and then did a print of an ivy leaf in blue, on some lovely Japanese-type paper.*

The space between us, our betweenness. How we relate with one another seems important. How alike are we? How different are we? Does it even matter? Our social etiquette has a regard for respecting one another whatever our differences. I've felt safe to air my thoughts knowing that they will be tolerated even if challenged. Equally, I have felt comfortable to withhold what I do not feel like saying. I hope we have all felt like that, which we have consciously been creating an environment to feel safe with one another whether in person or online. To pay attention, to be attended to. To challenge or be challenged. To inspire and to feel inspired. What is at the other end of this spectrum? I think it is to feel silenced or to enforce silence on others. I'm conscious of this having felt rejected when my teachers at secondary school silenced me by saying: "if you don't have anything interesting to say, don't say it at all." Did they know about the long-lasting effect of their words?

## Contact

*I hadn't thought about the standing before,*

*Us each making eye contact.*

*It's tricky with three—trying not to let your eyes leave either one.*

*I remember the energy between us, even as our eyes closed, and we moved onwards.*



*Threads loose, entangled and as yet unwoven.*

*We have gifts to give each other and the distances between us are like shadows. And yet being present here, now, energetically, shows new connections can be made in the present.*

*I fell gently into the collaborative space—like an invitation to experience a greater sense of connectedness.*

*My awkwardness and embarrassment with body, my body, never far from present. But through this, intense moments of resonance and unspoken intimacy. Here was the regeneration. Through the cracks. The twilight zone.*

*Touching, coming into contact, a shifting of modes and into the body—and being held and holding the body differently—like finding a way into the water.*

*I've been here before but this is new again. To write between—in the way that our hands flowed wordlessly in shared response to each other's touch.*

*Floating in a sea of hands—hands holding hands—holding.*

*Hands holding.*

*We felt our ways together. How would our voices, our words do this?*

*The times where we did not speak.*

*To know and not know; to notice the sounds of the outside, the murmurings, the space containing us. The edges of the wild bleeding in.*

*No sounds except the rustle of trees and the twitter of birds.*

*The whirr of camera. The chiff chaffs have chiff-chaffed their last for now.*

I want to be in an environment that creates opportunities to share our voices. And in our regeneration processing, if the voices in our writings merge, as we hear each voice, we honor them. Someone mentioned earlier that we are like a choir where voices merge as they sing together but individual voices can still be heard. Reflecting on our processing seems to have been about a space in which we have been sharing, respecting, and honoring each person and their voice.

## Human Between 2

*We generate affect between and amongst our bodies, our words, the space, the swallows, the trees, the room, the balcony, the doors, the breeze. A need for harmony, to suppress the troubling, wanting us all to let go of the noise and connect. Embodied memory writing, unconscious beyond the spoken word, happens more easily in response to an energy shifting*

*movement activity or some art. Moving together, I feel a connection through the body to each person bend and twist. We communicated with hands in such interesting ways. It demonstrated so well the way we depend on each other to work well, and without having a fixed agenda that can't be moved. Moving freed different energies—we have gifts to give each other—the distances between us are like shadows and yet being present here now energetically shows new connections can be made in the present.*

I was in bed feeding my child to sleep urging them that sleep would come but my anxiety was flowing in my blood, in my milk and my heart was beating quickly as I would check the time on my phone. Would I get out of here to meet the others?

No, not tonight.

I was on the backfoot of parenting and writing and space holding something that was spinning away from the original vision.

There's a lost feeling here. I remember this from before (Mendus et al., 2022). But this is different. Lost feels urgent, like an urgent need to find the page before it all runs away without me.

## Human Between 3

*I look around, I feel around. I drift off and think of the swallows swooping into the pool for their morning drink as I swam this morning. Can I feel this. . .the bodies, the field, that we are all swooping through, and beyond and around, out through the doors. . . and back in again? We are creating our future moment by moment in presence. All our past is present in this moment. I found myself on a windswept hill in the drizzle. Suddenly I felt unsteady with memory, realising how vulnerable I had become, let myself, becoming open, through what I wondered? Was it touching others beyond my immediate family? Was it the writing and playing and being so intensely with others?*

*I'm back in the room now. The distant sounds of the aeroplane are a reminder that fondness, togetherness, interacted-ness, relationality and collaboration will always have its distractions. Co-insiding—still young, all young and wondering—new ways of being and belonging are emerging through the co-insiding of insides. Ours. And as you read your words/ I listen /we listen/ it spills out, water/ seeps/ weeps. The seepage between us and what is the word? Empathy. Stream of Consciousness. Becoming the Space. With-ness. Dropping back here. The seat by the door—liminal. Between outside world and people in the room. Coming in and out of focus. I come in and am in it and then pull back. Feel separate. When the tide comes in, the swimmers can swim. When the tide goes out, there is space on the beach to relax, be active, eat or sleep. Round and round we go, our witches brew, I want to reach up then down. And we do.*

We are writing about process. We have missed writing about process. Digging back into my memory of where we have been across the months, started by the few days in

Wales. Or are we writing about the few days in Wales? We've probably met for longer online than we were together for those few days. Recognizing my child-like need to know what we are doing and to do it properly. It is that part of me that feels unsafe and thinks that safety is in the getting it right.

I wonder, should I have stepped in here to say "Oi, what about me?"

We have talked about the individual or the personal versus the collective. Are these two separate universes? I think not. I cannot be part of the collective without bringing my individual self.

A silent vibrate, a message would come through . . . as I snuggled my child.

I often try to merge, to become, to be more like, so as not to annoy, stand out, piss off, or any such thing that makes me visible. This has never worked for me.

. . . other times once asleep I would run across the wet grass and creep into the quiet room of scratching pens and tapping keys and occasional sighs and try and catch up.

So, I need to allow and celebrate my individual, my personal. But I come to this with a willingness to let go, to feel my own response and ability to hold myself where needed, to speak up where needed, and contribute or not, depending on my capacity and my intuition of what might be needed in the group—but the latter suggests an omnipotence. How do I know what is needed in the group? All I can know is what I think I know is needed. We talk about the group as an amorphous thing . . . that is, a collection of individuals, but on collecting, does the group become its own living agential being?

## Collaboration

*collaboration/ co labour/ co work/ co existence/ co fessing/ co incidence/ in the sense of occupation of the same space/ coincide/ agree.*

*I wonder and wander into collaboration. Nine people rubbing up against each other, each with needs and worries.*

*Collaborative writing can create a space where you unexpectedly write into your vulnerabilities sharing often unspoken aspects of yourself with co writers.*

*I wonder again about "collaboration." Are we collaborating? At what point do we 'shift'—felt or otherwise? I want to reach further. When we hitchhike together and weave our made-upness in the moment.*

*"Hitchhiking through collaboration." I loved this phrase when someone put it on the table. When I used to hitchhike, I loved the freedom and unpredictability of it—cars, vans, lorries, big trucks. I particularly liked the high-up view of the road from a lorry-driver's cab.*

*So, what could hitchhiking through collaboration mean? A random approach but with a billboard stating a destination? A lot of waiting by the roadside? Some wrong turns, needing to backtrack? Finding company in unexpected places?*

*The writing together has created a vessel in which to let go to fill with my tears of grief and joy. When collaborating we engage with our own creativity. Moving together was another way of collaborating and seemed to regenerate us with new energy in the moment.*

When we met, I was blown away by our process that allowed us to become a community of regeneration. We began as distinct, and separate, some of us scared and uncertain, worried about how we would be welcomed, not welcomed, trying to prove our belonging or to identify with our separation. Yet slowly, slowly, mostly through our writing, but also through conversation, through art practice and through movement, we aligned, with all of our differences, or perhaps because of all of our difference, we aligned and we wrote as one. Sometimes we genuinely wrote as one. I was blown away. I was heartened. Ripples, repetitions, and resonances shone through. This process of moving where the energy took us, of hitchhiking through collaboration, became regenerative. I was regenerated through this alignment.

So, process. I think that our writing shows our process. It reflects the difficulty, the ease, the coming together, the falling apart, the need for separation, the need for unity, the need for each of us to find our mutuality in difference, and respect for sameness.

## We Will Leave Traces

*And as you read your words/ I listen /we listen/ it spills out—water/ seeps/ weeps*

*The seepage between us and. . .*

*what is the word?*

*Empathy.*

## Solitur Ambulando (Solved by Walking)

*I can't hear the wind in the trees but I can see it in the way the branches are swaying in different directions. Different trees doing their own dance, seemingly not caring which way their neighbour is moving. I can't see any particular rhythm, they're free dancing. I'm free writing now. My brain's trying to focus like it's swaying in the wind. I'm dancing around on this page. I'm comfortable to dance and sway, this way and that.*

*I once knew the name of the trees that make that particular sound. It's the tree that sound recordists seek to record the sound of wind. The middle voice—the sound of leaves*

*translating the sound of wind. I think it's the Black Poplar whose dark triangular leaves chatter against themselves when they move.*

*This is an animal space. Horses and hares. I squint now. One eye is enough.*

*Time for remembering and casting off skin.*

*Messy superfluous details.*

*We step gingerly into trust and vulnerability, testing the water, splash water on our faces, our bodies learn. There are openings (of generations). I bracket that and slip down the futon frame further. I have moved already—into the wilder place.*

*I found myself on a windswept hill in the drizzle. Following the pull of my feet up the hill, through the gate and past the nettles directing my path away from the edges towards the polytunnel and the thought of a handful of tart juicy currants.*

*Once I managed to work out the gate, pull the bolt out of the old partially rotten hole, navigated the protruding plants, I found myself in an enclosure. I felt longing for the fruit.*

*Suddenly I felt unsteady with memory, realising how vulnerable I had become, let myself become open. Through what, I wondered?*

*Was it touching others beyond my immediate family?*

*Was it the writing and playing and being so intensely with others?*

*I wanted to lie down on the black plastic mats, to soak up the warmth, be close to the earth and cry.*

*We walked the same path in silence—but inside I was not present—I did not know what this walk was achieving. He said, "we have often walked in silence." I replied that it was different then. I had lost the connection and wondered if it had ever been real. "It was real," he said.*

*I step out of the past into the embodied moment of now and remember the berries. Pulling back the netting I climb into the tunnel and find my favourite white currants. I grab a handful, climb back out and find a place to rest. Sitting on the hillside, I slowly savour the currants letting the juice drip down my chin and the tears gently slide down my face.*

Do I need to dig back into my days of understanding group process from a transpersonal, psychodynamic perspective? Thinking through Gestalt, Heron (1999), and other great writers on group process? This does not feel congruent to me. Thinking through (or with) new writers, on when matter comes together, with individual agency, but then intra-acts (Barad, 2007), and changes, or perhaps becomes through these intra-actions; this feels more pertinent.

This makes me think of the space. Aligning with space, with land, with matter, human and nonhuman. Aligning but enjoying difference. Not separate, not even discrete, but agentially aligned (Barad, 2007). Being okay with difference, this is for me an internal deeply personal process, where I need to be OK with my own capacity to allow my difference. When I can do that, I can then welcome others. Agentially aligned. I'm interested in this idea. What happens when we are agentially mis- or dis-aligned?

What's coming now is the sense of body. To what extent is this material aligning only possible when we include the body? In my mind, this is crucial. Is it not the materiality of the body that speaks with the materiality of nonhuman also?

I realized that my issue with process in this group . . . was about my access to the space in which to write . . .

. . . how does a parent who is needed at bedtime and overnight and at other times of the day write in-person with others if their child is not nearby? They need me . . .

. . . the energy and the drive were different. I realized . . . the space and the group in its regeneration was beyond us . . . wanted more writing time into the evenings to make the most of these moments together. Greedy? Definitely hungry, after so long writing virtually, to be together in the same space. I understood the need; it was exciting, invigorating and inspiring. I just could not be there; I had to let go.

It hurt.

Sometimes, I realize that magic happens, words spill out of me coming from some other place, responses to others, yet deeply personal. An experience of release. The writing together has created a vessel in which to let go, to fill with my tears of grief and joy. I realize that reading our words aloud has an important role in our time together. The words written to be heard not read. The tone and pitch of our own voices, the differences and similarities, the patter and connections between us all. I began to think with affect theory and think of Erin Manning (2010). As each person in the circle shares their thoughts and reflections we have an e/affect on each other in the space—the bubbling pot of the moment. A disagreement, a transition to eat, a change in the weather affects that moment and if we do not write or share in that time and space, that moment is lost but not the affect as it permeates into our being, into my fingers that type these words, now affected by each of you.

Past participants, who have co-created with the ideas that constellate the network, cast shadows, leave traces, remain significant in spite of a desire to make afresh. The new is not new but a re-making, re-creating, what has been. I want to cut up and splice it and tag it and craft something new. We will leave traces.

What about parenting? Maybe we do not need to write all the time, let us hang out more? But it did not seem to be the case . . .

It continued after, I felt I had to be my advocate: I can not meet at that time of day, it is dinner time and I have a small



child. Although many people are parents in the group, I am the only one with a small child just now so I know it is not part of people's immediate worlds, but in a world where we are striving for inclusion, I am asking to be remembered as well. Parents of small children can be part of collaborative writing groups when the space allows.

### *I Was, I Am, I'm Hoping to Be*

*The conversation has made me regenerate*

*There is a therapeutic value to the collaborative space.*

*When collaborating we engage with our own creativity, share our writings, write alone in response—together,*

*alone,*

*together,*

*alone.*

*There is a tension in the room.*

*I wrote down the word unspoken yesterday.*

*We are troubling the old.*

*Shaking it out in gestures and movements. Seeking to create new geometries.*

*And we are a long way from home.*

*Hitchhiking through collaboration.*

*Together in one room, we breathe the same air and hear the same sounds—the wind, the birds, the sheep.*

*Nine people rubbing up against each other, each with needs and worries.*

*Being prepared for the journey, which may take some time,*

*A coming and going, forwards and backwards.*

*Joining in and drawing away and may take a devious or circuitous route?*

*We return to the collaborative space.*

*And a need for harmony, to suppress the troubling, wanting us all to let go of the noise and connect.*

*At the very least it might mean having a sense of adventure and being prepared for surprises.*

*We will leave traces. . .*

*And as you read your words/ I listen /we listen/ it spills out*

*water/ seeps/ weeps.*

*The new is not new but a re-making, re-creating, what has been.*

*The seepage between us and*

*going Places*

*we couldn't get to without*

*the collective.*

*What is the word?*

*Empathy.*

*Suddenly I felt unsteady with memory, realising how vulnerable I had become.*

*When the tide comes in, the swimmers can swim.*

*When the tide goes out, there is space*

*. . . stumbling into articulation. . .*

*Threads are loose, entangled and as yet unwoven.*

*We ask [again], what place are we being taken to that we couldn't go without the group?*

*Moving together, I feel a connection through the body to each person*

*bend and twist, regenerate us with new energy in the moment.*

*the touching of hands/ the slowing of time/*

*the shutting of eyes/ the links between tips of fingers/ blindly feeling pulse and beat.*

*I curiously lost contact*

*I want to reconnect*

*But*

*n o t a l w a y s*

*I trust the process. This is good stuff.*

*I am aware not everything was said*

*But that is not a bad thing*

*A quiet warmth, a glancing between us/ a recognition/ the stepping over from unsettled to acceptance*

*Bodies remain connected, transcending time and space. The words written to be heard not read. Feelings move, finding frequencies, leaves rustling, vibrational fields. The tone and pitch of our own voices. The differences and similarities, the patter and connections between us all.*

*We have regenerated something made before, made in a new way.*

*In only the way we could.*

*The only way we could.*

*Moving together.*

How does our writing from that time reveal the regenerative process? Reflecting back, theories of embodied/ying consciousness (Damasio, 1999; Dolphijn, 2021), and of being and doing horizontal group relations (Bion, 1961; Mitchell, 2023), intermingle with ongoing theoretical evolutions from absent members of the network who have collaborated through artful narrative before (Kirkpatrick et al., 2021). The fresh, spontaneous gestures of those present, (re)produced ways of being that were familiar to some, new to others, (re)encountering a process that processed us, a little less, a little *more*, (re)animating a sense of being with(in) matters more than human (Braidotti, 2013; Whitehead, 1929).

The staying present with one another was difficult, and yet there was a strong sense of everyone wanting to be there, to be together, in all our quirkish difference. Someone expressed surprise that “we” did not take the opportunity to explore individual relational challenges and differences, as and when they were exposed. I did not feel there was permission, or energy, to attend to individuals in this way.

Each step of the way, on the retreat itself and then after, we talked about what was next, or took turns to introduce an idea to try out, through an evolving ethic of sharing our personal concerns and desires and then trying to find a line, a next move forward, that each of us, in our different ways, could get behind—this was the challenge—not the personal reflexivity of the therapeutic encounter, or the heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) or autoethnographic (Ellis, 2004) inquiry, or some other expression of a single subjectivity on a journey of becoming, but still a kind of inner work—the challenge to each of us to internally supervise (in Casement’s (2013) language) our own responses, to “stay with the trouble,” as Haraway (2016) would have it, that we each evoked in one another, to relinquish to some degree our personal investments in having the wider world (or the group process)

structured a particular way, in order for it to satisfy particular desires or unmet needs within us.

In the absence of predetermined pathways, desires became visible through the longing. The desire lines that we treaded point the way to ongoing developmental journeys, separate yet intertwined.

It happened . . . without planning, that there was enough pull, an investment within each of us to remain present, in spite of the difficulty of . . . well . . . each other . . . no one wanted to be left out, even if that meant enduring the challenge of allowing others to be as they are . . . not attempting to negotiate our group relation itself, but relinquishing—that word again—an idea of how things should be, in order to have movement, in service to the regenerative process itself.

For me, the process became one of regenerating this capacity to be with others, and I experienced that as a political longing in myself; is this the heart of democracy? To allow others to exist with their own perception of events, their own priorities, moralities, while finding ways to move forward with mutually significant, meaningful endeavors? Finding lines along which mutuality flows: perhaps we can each bring ourselves to that place, and no further. Let internal challenges that result be personally managed, without being made the business of the collective.

The work that emerged has a quality that we experienced as posthuman, in Braidotti’s (2019) sense that it “assumes radical immanence, i.e., the primacy of intelligent and self-organizing matter.” As Barad (2007) put it “there is less an assemblage of agents than there is an entangled state of agencies” (p. 23). Perhaps I am describing the experience of being in the entanglement, the challenge to a singular subjectivity of holding with posthuman knowing of being a “relational embodied and embedded, affective and accountable entity . . .” (Braidotti, 2019).

We move forward, yet there is repetition. We find ourselves over and again returning, and in this way, we learn what matters. The repetition re-iterates moments, accentuates, and significates their passing. This becomes part of what I understand by “doing” theory, “the act” (Manning & Massumi, 2014) reanimates Deleuze’s (1995) words:

“I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentered center, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them” (p. xxi).

I have a strong memory of the sense of infinite space peeking through the leaves, sparks along a sunbeam. Relentless precision of flow. Time folding into softness, sunbeam, and gently warming my arm that day. I remember sunbeam, spectacular. Remember how to be, to be with one another in connection, without troubling. This forgotten art of being. I remember now.

The recognition of interconnection and interdependence as material fact, a matter (in fact) of nature, may undo

urgencies that spit psychic realities into opposing forces one body at a time, and many bodies in time.

### The Lowering Sun Glows in from the West

*... inscribing our shadows writing earnestly on the back wall. Four more minutes to think and not think, to know and not know; to notice the sounds of the outside, the murmurings, the space containing us, the edges of the wild bleeding in.*

*We . . . talked about embodiment and affect and it . . . immediately brought my younger self into the room. . . many painful memories from those early years as a junior doctor, a kind of suffering. I came to know the racing of my heartbeat. . . feeling sick. . . trembling. . . sweating cold sweat. How I felt. . . could make me cry. . . there's power in the past that lends itself to the present. . . we are thinking and feeling our way together in the present with our pasts and possible futures. I feel uncertain and. . . confused about what I bring but I'm okay with discomfort and uncertainty and believe that without knowing it all, it is possible to contribute.*

*I feel the tension between rebellious rejection and gratitude.*

*The present moment. . . hard to be there. . . the pain of separation screamed. . . I know what we would have done but I do not know what I want to do.*

*Touching, coming into contact, a shifting of modes and into the body and being held and holding the body differently—like finding a way into the water, the initial phase is trepidation, a change of mode, the transitional state that raises shackles, before the release of arrival. It's safe.*

*When the tide comes in, the swimmers can swim.*

*When the tide goes out, there is space on the beach to relax, be active, eat or sleep.*

*. . . to be floating in a sea of hands, hands holding hands, holding. Hands holding. I am thinking with Luce Irigaray (2001) in this writing. Of being two, of being rooted in relation to two. Of being three, third, to be me. To be three.*

*We have all entered an abandoned house, a space to explore that is new to us but has a history of its own. . . chattering voices in and out. . . conversations and discussions, their breath plastered to the walls, penetrating the bricks and mortar. I can cross the thresholds. . . of old, crumbling, empty houses. When I step into one. . . I see fragments of previous lives—an upturned chair, a rusty metal bed frame, faded and frayed bits of material that once decorated a shelf. I hear the voices of people long gone, their laughter, their anger, their togetherness. . . their loneliness. They're here.*

*Regeneration is finding myself where I am.*

*Not lost, found in pissed off, found in frustrated, found in somewhere I don't want to be. Found somewhere I can't speak*

*of. Found in territory out of bounds . . . Found where no one . . . wants to travel. Where no one. . . wants to cross the liminal to reach. Found here . . .*

*I found myself*

*on a windswept hill*

*in the drizzle*

*I felt unsteady with memory, realising how vulnerable I had become. . . I wanted to lie down. . . to soak up the warmth, be close to the earth and to cry. . .*

*I am waving the flag for lost. . .*

*I was lost earlier and made tea and toast. And waited on the sun lounge.*

*Perhaps. . . lostness was escaping the frame—the tension between framework and meandering plot finding a knot that needs rubbing loose.*

*I am a little sad thinking about loss, loss of connections, embodied, bodily ebb and flow*

*And joyful at this deep fingertip embrace*

*My words become unspoken again.*

I am moved by this incantation, this weaving of voices, of writings and repetitions, light refrains, and echoing motifs.

Could we look at this process as a series of translations? An imperfect copying from one set of instructions to the next, recast in each iteration?

Each of us have a different idea of what has been said or not said. Each of us understand differently. *Kulaktan kulağa*, Turkish for “from (one) ear to (another) ear” or a whispering game—from one mouth to another mouth, the meaning is transformed. What follows from the first seismic event is a series of after-tremors.

I am struck for a moment about the speed of tapping to my right. There is something satisfying about the physicality of writing side by side; even in the sounds and the smells, even in the sharing of breath.

When I listen . . . I want to shift some of the words. Rub them out with a board rubber and chalk different ones over the messy chalkiness left behind. For me it is not so much about relinquishing our individual writing—each part of the writing has come out of lived experience, and it remains rooted to that. But as the passages are placed alongside other passages their meaning shifts. I think of it more as building a layered, multifaceted, enriched, and shining entity. Like individual voices in a choir, distinct, forming a whole thing of beauty to fill the architectural space.

## Entanglements

*Threads are loose, entangled and as yet unwoven. What are these threads? Can we even see them? Each thread has a meaning that some want to keep, others to discard,*

*I love the work of entanglements. I see multiple threads between us all. I'm also seeing this complexity, this interlocking of threads weaving something new and beautiful.*

*And Japanese Kintsugi golden into the cracks. Like Leonard Cohen (1992) told us—it's where the light shines through. There's the entanglement of voices that I'm drawn to.*

I got quite excited by making connections with the politics of collaborative writing as a model for the wider world and links with democracy. It resonates with some work I have been doing helping groups to deal with the fall-out from the Israel/Gaza events. Everything is so polarized at the moment, with the expectation that we have to be on one side or the other—and whichever side we choose, we are supposed to make banners, march, join vigils, write to MPs, and so on. I have been co-facilitating workshops in different contexts where we sit in a circle and tell our stories with others listening and not interrupting—nor diving off into heated discussion, which tends to polarize. Two in-person ones have been moving and appreciated; one on Zoom still to come. There is interest around, so more may be in the pipeline. The method is similar to many circle conflict resolution processes I have used in the past.

The process of the writing retreat deliberately did not go into exploring group relationships in depth. I was grateful for this, as I have sat through many T-groups in the past, which I found frustrating—it is easy to get a group into conflict, but so difficult to find a way out or forward. To be together as a group, accepting our differences of history, outlook, aims, and so on, seems a new way forward that has something to offer in these polarized times.

I was also interested in our discussion about contributing our work to a larger whole but not feeling that we had lost our individuality. Many years ago, I wrote a chapter about work with a women's group in which they all contributed a piece written by themselves (Liebmann, 1997). I remember saying, "Of course I'll change all the names for confidentiality," and being quite surprised when they said unanimously, "No way—we've worked hard and we want our names there."

## Conclusion: Dancing Zorba's Dance

Nonverbal explorations of embodiment felt apt and necessary, to mark and ease the journey out of physical isolation back into attuned co-presence. We shared gestures and movements, marking turns, processing challenges and delights nonverbally, regenerating our physical relation to one another.

Talking about how we might move together, the dance we know as 'Zorba's Dance,' created for the film *Zorba the Great* (Theodorakis, 1964) found its way into our discussions.

*'As Nikos Kazantzakis states, [his novel, on which the film is based] is more than anything a dialogue between a pen-pusher and a . . . folk person. . . between a lawyer of the "Mind" and the great soul of the people . . . Zorba's stories are more connected to the body than to the brain. In such contexts, folk dancing becomes. . . a primal non-verbal behavior; an authentic voice, a "deeper body language."*' (Hnaraki, 2009).

As we concluded our time together, the dance seemed a fitting way to end, and so we performed it together.

*"Zorba . . . has an enviable quality that the educated European lacks: He is in tune with himself. The metaphor is one that would have appealed to Plato, for it is through the means of music and dance, a language of the body (soma) as well as the mind (nous), that Zorba. . . achieves a secure sense of his place in the universe."* (Holst-Warhaft (1997), quoted in Hnaraki (2009)).

Perhaps, through our embrace of movement and embodied forms of dialogue, we tapped into ". . . a language that cannot be interpreted, but felt. Zorba taught Kazantzakis to love life's trouble and not to be afraid of death. Through movement, with no fear and no hope, the writer shall be free!" (Hnaraki, 2009).

Momentary challenges of (and to) our embodied co-presence, could be tempered by these reinvigorating (or regenerative) dialogues between body and mind, between wild, natural spirit, and the containing forces of language and reason. To know and accept both parts of ourselves and one another . . .

. . . this deep fingertip embrace . . .

Regeneration . . .

. . . finding myself where I am.

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