

Chapter 1

‘Storytelling the Multiple Self: Posthuman Autoethnography as Critical Praxis’
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Abstract

This chapter will argue for the autoethnographic-I and its use as a capturing of multiplicity and as a site for discovery. Drawing on Braidotti’s argument that we are constituted of a multiplicity of ‘others’ and that the notion of ‘self’ is ‘laziness of habit’, (Braidotti, 2013, p. 100) I extend these ideas to consider in more critical detail how the autoethnographic-I can embrace the idea of ‘non-unitary subjectivity’ (Braidotti, 2013, p. 93) whilst working within the humanist capacities that formed it in order to dismantle humanistic notions from within. Ultimately, this means a newfound definition and appreciation for what is meant by the posthuman-I, and an exploration of how storytelling the ‘self’ can allow an opportunity for acknowledgement of the entangled and distributed nature of self-as-emergent. Considering this in pedagogical terms, I argue that storytelling the multiple self allows an opportunity to radically reconsider what ‘self’ means and to disrupt humanistic hierarchies and the sanctity of the individual. Furthermore, I suggest that this aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of becoming-child, and that through the posthuman-I we are able to unlearn the problematic aspects of self, such that we might begin to recognise how to teach children and students in more deterritorialized ways. This piece will draw together both critical and

creative writing as an opportunity for different modes of expression that also breakdown binaries and boundaries between academic and affective writing. In many ways, this praxis will offer different insights into both lines of consistency and lines of flight. Rather than dismissing humanistic practices in their entirety, this work sees humanism as always-already entangled within us, and therefore a part of the assemblage of what we become. Yet by giving space to lines of flight, different provocations for the reader are intended to allow different journeys through the work.

Key words: Critical posthumanism, Writing as praxis, Autoethnography, Non-linear writing, Lines of flight

Not Fixed

This may not be my best writing. But ‘my best writing’ suggests that I ‘own’ it, in some way, and I hope this chapter will show how tenuously that is the case. This may not count towards the next REF cycle. This may not be deemed world-leading. But the concept of hierarchies amongst research is just another overthrow of a humanist structure; a suggestion of meritocracy, of linearity, of knowledge spaces and patriarchal values. This is an experimental explanation. An explanatory experiment. This chapter aims to take you on a journey of discovery, considering what posthuman autoethnography is, what it can do, and how it might be expressed. This chapter will argue for the autoethnographic-I and its use as a capturing (performing?) of multiplicity and as a site for discovery. Drawing on Braidotti’s argument that we are constituted of a multiplicity of ‘others’ and that the notion of ‘self’ is ‘laziness of habit’, (Braidotti, 2013, p. 100) I extend these ideas to consider in more critical detail how the autoethnographic-I can embrace the idea of ‘non-unitary subjectivity’ (Braidotti, 2013, p. 93)

whilst working within the humanist capacities that formed it in order to dismantle humanistic notions from within.

Stylistically, there are a few things to consider. In the below work I draw on certain ideas regarding writing as praxis. Writing is a way of formulating specific ideas, subjectivities and entanglements. As Cole (2006, p. xiv) argues, ‘storytelling is a way of experiencing the world’. This is important to note; from a posthuman perspective writing is not *representative* but *performative*. This is, of course, why the writing of the I is so intriguing—we use this language as a fallacy of construction, as a way of marking the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’. Language is ‘constitutive of the subject’ (Braidotti, 2014, p. 165), but that does not mean that such constitution cannot be changed. Braidotti argues that ‘[w]riting, even and especially academic writing, has to challenge and destabilize, intrigue and empower’ (Braidotti, 2014, p. 166) and this is where posthuman writing can be proactive and provocative in the consideration of a philosophy that aims to destabilise, disrupt, and decentre. By considering writing as praxis, then, we see the power that it has, *and we are able to intra-act with that power and channel it into other regimes*—we can move beyond the humanistic and individualistic and instead consider how these alterations can allow not only different *expressions* (seen perhaps as more *representative*) but different *performances* and therefore different aspects of a phenomenon, allowing different subjectivities and considerations of rhizomatic life patterns to emerge. We could give up on writing, give up on the I entirely. But, as I return to throughout this chapter, that would be to deny a constitutive element of who we are and how we have come to be. Better, I suggest, to revolt and rebel within those structures, to use them to articulate and perform different possibilities and allow those to be communicated in accessible, yet complex ways. Ultimately, this means a newfound definition and appreciation for what is meant by the posthuman-I, and an

exploration of how storytelling the ‘self’ can allow an opportunity for acknowledgement of the entangled and distributed nature of self-as-emergent. Braidotti (2014, p. 165) sums this up; ‘By exposing the compulsive and rather despotic inclinations of language, the writer thus forces upon the readers a critical reflection into the workings of power itself’.

This writing as praxis, then, seeks to embody specific ideas of posthumanist philosophy. I draw on destabilisations of self, on entanglement with others, on the power of words, on the rejection of singular and embrace of multiple, on rejections of linearity and embrace of lines of flight, whilst also accommodating lines of consistency for the sake of (some) sense-making. Storytelling the multiple self in this way, and exposure to such ‘experimental’ forms of writing—and thus being—allows an opportunity to radically reconsider what ‘self’ means and to disrupt humanistic hierarchies and the sanctity of the individual. Furthermore, we must consider the importance of exposure to different kinds of articulations and possibilities of being to the project of ‘education’. Too often education means a *very specific kind* of education—educating people (both young and old) on *what* to think, not *how to think differently*. We pigeonhole, and punish when people don’t conform. I always think back to the work of Keith Johnstone on improvisation. He states, ‘Most schools encourage children to be *unimaginative*.’ (Johnstone, 1981, p. 76).

Torrance (1962) ‘has a theory that “many children with impoverished imaginations have been subjected to rather vigorous and stern efforts to eliminate fantasy too early. They are afraid to think.” Torrance seems to understand the forces at work, but he still refers to attempts to eliminate fantasy *too early*. Why should we eliminate fantasy at all? Once we eliminate fantasy, then we have no artists.’ (Johnstone, 1981, p. 76). Johnstone (1981, p. 77) continues: ‘most children can operate in a creative way until they’re eleven or twelve, when suddenly

they lose their spontaneity and produce imitations of “adult art”. . . . You have to be a very stubborn person to remain an artist in this culture. It’s easy to play the role of ‘artist’, but to actually create something means going against one’s education.’ And so, Johnstone (1981, p. 84) suggests, ‘Students need a “guru” who “gives permission” to allow forbidden thoughts into their consciousness. A “guru” doesn’t necessarily teach at all. Some remain speechless for years, others communicate very cryptically. All reassure by example.’ (As my over-citing of the text suggests, I highly recommend the chapter on spontaneity!) Whilst Johnstone is talking about the art of improvisation in theatre performers, surely the same is true of the role of storytelling in education, not only in early years’ education—for at this stage there are fewer inhibitions anyway—but beyond. Whilst I do not in any way seek to claim that I am a guru, at least in the traditional sense of the word, Johnstone suggests that the role of the guru is to demonstrate that ‘[t]hey are the people who have been into the forbidden areas and who have survived unscathed.’ (Johnstone, 1981, p. 84) There are then, perhaps, parallels between the ideas of acting requiring an unlearning of certain restrictions on behaviour and impositions of inhibitions, and the work of posthumanism and posthumanist writing as an unlearning of humanistic restrictions. Altogether more promising, though, for education at early years to circumvent such harmful restrictions in the first place. The work of Peter Cole (2006, p. xiii), whose book is for ‘those who went to residential school band school mission school public school and got miseducated dyseducated antieducated transeducated propaganducated’ demonstrates the political importance of such actions. As, Laurel Richardson (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 1411) points out, when demonstrating the cloying effects of certain educational practices, they have a detrimental effect on writing as praxis: ‘I had been taught, as perhaps you were as well, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, that is, until my points were organized and outlined. But I did not like writing that way. I felt constrained and bored. When I thought about those writing instructions, . . . I recognized that those writing

instructions were themselves a sociohistorical invention of our 19th-century foreparents.’ The damage that certain institutional ideologies have done, therefore, needs to be challenged, and examples of alternative expeditions through qualitative space that quantifies the ‘self’ should be made available. Similarly, Murriss and Haynes (2018, p. 70) argue that in our learning and teaching spaces we must not pass up the opportunity to ‘cut through the core of Western metaphysical subjectivity that has otherised child from the adult-Subject as an object of study and knowledge consumer, rather than knowledge creator.’ It feels to me as though this is exactly the sentiment that the above statements from Cole and Richardson capture: that in humanistic educational practices we are causing harm. This operates in a number of ways, and needs to be challenged in the ways in which we work with children, learn from children, and are guided by them. We need to move away from a hierarchical conception that believes, without question, that we are teaching children and students the *right* way of thinking or knowing, or indeed the right *knowledge*. We must then remember that, returning to Johnstone’s gurus, students who have not been taught that some thoughts are forbidden do not need a guru to ‘give permission’ for those thoughts to be let in—those students have never had that permission rescinded, or taught out of them. I suggest that Johnstone’s ‘gurus’ are perhaps those who have been successful in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualise as ‘becoming-child’. Becoming-child, Murriss and Haynes (2018, p. 57) explain, ‘is a process of unlearning that unleashes a particular active relationship to thinking . . . and it is this playful relationship with knowledge that comes easier for children who have not yet invested as much of their identity in what they know.’ This posthuman autoethnography is, in some ways, perhaps an experiment in becoming-child—unlearning the I, and actively playing with what it means, how it is performed and expressed. Kennedy (2013, p. 148) argues that becoming-child, ‘epitomizes, not a form of subjectivity, but in fact an “inhuman”, a non-subjective form, a deconstruction of what they call the “molar” world, and an entering

nomadic space, which is “molecular”. This space is affective, continually transforming, and means living ‘tolerantly’ with multiplicity, difference, polymorphism, polyvocalism, and with the absence of clear boundaries between self and other (Kennedy, 2013). Perhaps, when our educational structures are more decoloni(al)ised and posthumanised, there will be a future where harmful learning is not enforced such that it has to be unlearned. In the meantime, I hope for this chapter to demonstrate how posthuman autoethnography might go some way to demonstrate the ways in which becoming-child ‘deterritorializes and deconstructs the discrete’ (Kennedy, 2013) and embraces the multiple, so that our children and our educational practices have more opportunities and examples of expressions of becoming that do not conform to singular expectations.

Practically, then. In the following chapter there are a few things to note. The text is nonlinear. Nonlinearity itself becomes an act of resistance, because linearity is an imposition. Cole (2006, p. 21), who writes with creativity and resistance, states that ‘the idea of chapter is anathema to who I am as an indigenous person it implies western order and format as “the” legitimate shapers of discourse the presumption being that the universe is ordered into rationally constructed geometries’. Hein (2019, p. 83) argues that ‘Nonlinear texts are organized in a way that fails to meet the modernist demand for a linear, internally coherent, and unified narrative. Being a traitor to one’s own writing involves writing against any stabilizing sense of identity and against other modernist categories and boundaries.’ This notion of being a traitor to one’s own writing is defined as ‘against any stabilizing sense of identity’ (Hein, 2019, p. 84). In my previous autoethnographic work this has signalled more accounting of the primacy of ‘others’ in my entanglement. My work on the avatar-gamer as posthuman subjectivity embodied the shifting negotiation of a subjectivity that was at once me/her as well as we/us. ‘I’ variously meant gamer, avatar, and avatar-gamer dependent on

the moment of articulation, and the affective and agentic experiences of embodiment between a physical and virtual body (for a negotiation of that posthuman autoethnography as methodology, see Wilde, 2020). In this chapter I seek a different style and explore the possibilities of expressing multiple encounters.

This piece will draw together both critical and creative writing as an opportunity for different modes of expression that also breakdown binaries and boundaries between academic and affective writing. This draws on the role of autoethnographies to be evocative texts, which is itself an arguably feminist posthumanist standpoint to take: rejecting linearity, coherence, and rationality in favour of affective writing that ‘moves’ the reader. This mode of writing is there to appeal to, and resonate with, our lived experiences rather than attempting to attract the reader through a series of complex cognitive tasks for the purpose of ‘validating’ our knowledge. But, of course, affects are complex too, and cognitive too. We cannot draw boundaries and binaries where there are none. Cognitive complexity and affective complexity weave together through the articulation of feelings, and thoughts, of being embodied and entangled. I hope to appeal both to the humanist who holds on to the safety blanket of the I as well as the posthumanist who aims to seek new discursive practices. We need both; we are both.

In many ways, this praxis will offer different insights into both lines of consistency and lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Lines of flight offer a diversion, a detour, and an opportunity for the disparate to be articulated, they are about off-shoots, out-bursts, and inconsistencies. Rayner (2013, npn) suggests that ‘[l]ines of flight are bolts of pent-up energy that break through the cracks in a system of control and shoot off on the diagonal.’ And Usher (2010, p. 71) suggests that lines of flight are ‘a metaphor for everyday resistance . . .

opening up contexts to their outsides and the possibilities therein. They break-down unity and coherence.’ Whilst they suggest that these lines of flight might diverge in any direction, I have grounded my lines of flight in just a few directions. This is because of, or engendered through, the lines of consistency, those that ‘connect and unify different practices and effects and by so doing establish hierarchies and define relations between center and periphery.’ (Usher, 2010, p. 71) Whilst lines of flight are seen as where there are ‘possibilities for change and movement . . . the means of escape from the repressive strata that are everywhere.’ (Usher, 2010, p. 71) I suggest that not all lines of consistency are repressive, and some can, at least for now, still be useful. Rather than dismissing humanistic practices in their entirety, this chapter sees humanism as always-already entangled within us (me?), and therefore a part of the assemblage of what we become. Thus, lines of consistency are entangled within us, too. Yet by giving space to lines of flight, different provocations for the reader are intended to allow different journeys through the work. ‘From the side of intensive multiplicities, machinic lines of flight tend to deterritorialise semiotic processes, to open them up, to connect them to other matters of expression,’ (Guattari, 2011, p. 120) which function as performative (p. 129). They enact ‘deterritorialization and destratification’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); it is a decolonial move to remove oneself from a specific path, when that path comes with a history as problematic as the catastrophic effects of Western imposition. This could be linked to Braidotti’s work on nomadism without moving, which ‘refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour’ (Braidotti 2014, p. 182). Such a move is necessary when we consider the pervasiveness of the violent interjections in cultural, social, and historical thought that Western culture is responsible for.

Unfortunately, many of our current technologies of writing and reading are not suited to finding different ways through texts, and so the options for expression of (what Braidotti terms) nomadism here are limited not only by the desire to convey a meaning (itself problematic) but also the desire to convey that meaning in a printable way. There are lines of flight within this chapter, signified by the indentations away from the margins—away from the boundaries. But the lines of flight are there too within the potential of making choices as a reader—you need not follow any flight, and certainly not to its indented end. You might wish to follow the lines of consistency—the neatly margined, conforming paragraphs. Hierarchies are, indeed, formed here. Yet, as this chapter will show, our writing is entangled and emergent, and therefore it only follows that our reading is too. For those whose reading practices are entangled with screen readers, which may enact a specific agentic journey through the text due to its layout, please contact Springer Nature directly to obtain differently structured versions if preferred¹.

Not Me

There is something specifically ironic about having put together an abstract for this chapter, discussing ideas of multiplicity, lines of flight, storifying the self etc., and then my having followed it with my short biography. This bio, of course, serves as a reassurance, to anyone who reads it. A reassurance that I am capable, trustworthy, reliable. That I have the necessary knowledge and expertise to deliver on something that I propose. And it is just one story about the ‘me’ that I ‘am’, and the ‘me’ I might ‘become’. Furthermore, the bio I write speaks nothing to the processes by which I write, the self-proclaimed ‘keyboard bashing’ I do. How

¹ In 2021 the Springer Nature Group signed up to The Valuable 500, and is committed to improving accessibility across their business and publications.

much of my writing is luck? How much is ‘me’? Like Cole (2006, p. xiv), ‘I do not see my writing as having been composed (least of all) by me’ yet ‘the typing hands type on’.

Terry Pratchett, the renowned fantasy author, in his book *Men at Arms* (1994) writes of ideas as falling dust from the sky, aiming for the right brain to land in. To me, Pratchett’s ideas of inspiration speak much more to the convergence of multi things than the ownership of the ‘author’. Ideas streak, sometimes unbidden, across my brain. Perhaps part of being an academic is knowing which to grab hold of, and which to let go?

When ‘I’ write, then, I do not always have a sense of ownership over what I am writing. For me, it is always as much of a process of discovery. Writing *is* praxis, and autoethnography is no different. The process of writing is a process of creation, and part of that creation is an understanding of ‘my’ experiences, but it is also much more. It is not introversion, or the ‘navel-gazing’ that it can be accused of, that creates the story of autoethnography. It is a process of multiplicity—of being entangled and of *expressing that entanglement*.

I recently read about someone dictating academic work and was baffled by, yet marvelled at, the process. There is so much thought that occurs between my fingers and the keyboard and the screen, that, whilst acknowledging my own limited and able-bodied perspective, dictating has never worked for me. Where does a story start? How does it happen? How does articulating through voice, or hand, or keyboard, or any other mechanism or device augment and alter the story that is told? I have autoethnographic notes on paper, but I never felt the flow of these in the same ways as at my computer (doubtless some others feel the exact opposite). I wrote about this in my autoethnographic thesis—I questioned whether it was because the research was computer-based (in videogames) and the entanglement with my laptop was, therefore, more. . . what? Important? No. Integral? Imperative? Obvious? Adam Clark (2008)

makes similar reference to the flow between words, person, page, 'tool'. Here it becomes evident that what we claim of as a 'tool' is no mere appropriation of technology, but an integral apparatus in the process of writing.

As Nayar (2014) explains, where most humanistic traditions suggest a focus on 'being', posthumanism allows a re-articulation, a shift to acknowledge instead multiple 'becomings'. We are in a constant state of flux and movements, shifting subjectivities, and responding, changing, adapting to, and intra-acting through and with, our environments and others around us.

I imagine this as though we are a three-dimensional constellation of stars, each star embodying different points on the webs of our connection. As we move into different spaces, places, moods, environments, abilities, the constellation-us shifts, and different 'stars' come into focus; a different pattern emphasised. Yet, the other stars are still there—those connections are not lost, they do not disappear completely from view, and the web-that-we-are remains connecting to a plethora of 'things' not immediately in focus. This analogy itself is flawed though—it suggests a distinction between each star, an individuality of each node that retains that humanistic desire for separation.

We are entangled, enmeshed, overlapping, a giant Venn diagram of experiences and encounters. This is why the 'I' is an issue. From what point does it speak? Where in the constellation? Where on the diagram is this I situated? If we are always in a constant state of becoming—or, perhaps more accurately, *becomings*—then what place does this I have, and hold?

This notion of becomings as plurality strikes me as important—a demonstration of the outward ripples that all aspects of posthumanism must have. It is not enough to drop a stone in the centre of the static world and only expect the ripples to extend so far.

But, perhaps, that is what I am trying to do, retain the island of I? I do not think so. I do not suggest that I is not affected by the undulations of critical posthumanism. I only question how we make use of that in a way that acknowledges humanism as a part of the entanglement. A diffractive reading would read posthumanism through humanism, rather than against it. Or perhaps the other way around?

And what a fallacy it is, to write as I-now, and I-later, and I-before, all the while from different ~~points along~~ places within and through my becomings (points along suggests a linearity that is only partially ‘true’). When I continue writing tomorrow, my ‘being’ will have experienced things my current embodiment of becoming has not yet. Who knows how ‘I’ or the world may have changed, and aren’t those two the same things anyway?

Let me be clear—the Venn diagram, the constellation-us that we emerge from, is not merely made up of different ‘bits’ of a thing named me. For any aspect of myself to be eminent, I am constituted through, and with, those others. As Irigaray has argued, the notion of an ‘I’ or ‘me’ is itself constituted through difference—‘I’ am ‘me’ because ‘I’ am not ‘you’. Yet to critical posthumanism, this is not enough. I am not only me because I am *not* you, I am me because of and *through* you, too (Irigaray, 2017, p. 51). Each of the multiple subjectivities that we embody are enabled, enacted, and entangled with others. If we remove ‘other’ elements in this phenomenon (as Barad would call it), the phenomenon is irrevocably changed.

As Nayar (2014, p. 17), drawing on Irigaray, argues ‘We need to think of a more fluid sense of the self/identity’ and that is most certainly true.

However, to suggest that we are not entangled with our histories seems, to me, problematic. Perhaps I am not a radical enough posthumanist—as I cling to the ‘I’.

Is it fear? The great unknown that holds me back? The concern of who am I without the me? I think, in fact, it is worse than that.

Perhaps I make this as an excuse for myself, but I do not know how to think without an I. I blame this, of course, on the ‘others’ that have made me—societal, cultural, historical. I have been created a certain way which demonstrates the Frankenstein’s monster I am. Made from other parts (albeit conceptual ‘bodies’ rather than entirely physical ones—yet how can they be separated?) ‘you made me, and you left me to *live*’. That those others are problematic does not mean I can deny their presence within me, their operation through me, my embodiment of them. I am entangled with humanistic practices, with neoliberal assertions, with capitalist economies, with meritocratic attitudes. To denounce them is not to be completely removed from them, when/if they shape the societies we live in. In the same way that it is not enough to be not racist, one must be actively anti-racist; one must situate oneself in the society they are in and bear the responsibility of ethical improvements.

What I seek, then, is an incorporation (not unproblematic) of these broader facets of these cultural issues, and more, in my work. And, just as language evolves, what we do with it can change. Braidotti (2014, p. 163) agrees, and suggests that ‘more conceptual creativity is necessary, and more theoretical courage is needed in order to bring about the leap across inertia, nostalgia, aporia and the other forms of critical stasis induced by our historical

condition. It has become like a mantra to me: we need to learn to think differently about the kind of subjects we have already become and the processes of deep-seated transformation we are undergoing.’ The ‘I’ therefore needs more conceptual creativity, whilst acknowledging the falsity of the demarcations it has often enacted.

Not Mine

Autoethnographies are viewed with scepticism in a variety of ways. Their reliance on ‘self’ and experience of the self are problematic to humanists too, who suggest that self is not enough (in an apparently un-egotistical move), where posthumanists would suggest that self is ‘too much’ (egotistically). There is an–apparent–clash of philosophical standpoints between autoethnography and posthumanism, captured by Warfield (2019, p. 149) thus: ‘the term autoethnography is premised on the humanist notion of the “self”–an “auto” upon which we can reflect and write–and posthumanism is premised on a decentered subject or the becoming of the subject’. I have therefore faced some scepticism of my methods. I have had people question, is it a reliable method if it *only* is about the self? There is no only. There is no self. If only it were that easy.

Braidotti draws on the ways that a variety of thinkers and philosophers have suggested we use language in ways to deconstruct the very power that language, and the written word, seeks to enforce. She suggests ‘exposing the compulsive and rather despotic inclinations of language’ (Braidotti, 2014, p. 165)– and I suggest that that is what a posthuman autoethnography can do. By using nonlinear and creative language to push and critique the parameters of language, we can begin to articulate the fallacies therein, or move to a rearticulation of what those things mean–e.g. what do we mean when we say ‘I’? For some, this seems like a reliance on humanist constructs and boundaries–a tactic that falls short of

the radical movement needed to deconstruct anthropocentric thinking. Yet, some other options we have are, I find, as anthropocentrically problematic, when approached from a Westernised perspective. How can we (by “we” I mean those of us who are so deeply entrenched in, and shaped by, histories of Western, humanistic, anthropocentric thought), for example, write ‘as’ something we are profoundly *not*? How can I write as a bird, or begin the process of articulation of being-bird when I am not? We can use narrative forms to ponder, to philosophise, to imagine and to invent, but to suggest that we have attained anything more than that (transcendentally) is—can be—another fallacy. As Kohn (2013, p. 21) argues when introducing the importance of his ethnographic work on the Runa people of Ecuador, ‘we are colonized by certain ways of thinking about relationality. We can only imagine the ways in which selves and thoughts might form associations through our assumptions about the forms of associations that structure human language. And then, in ways that often go unnoticed, we project these assumptions onto nonhumans. Without realizing it we attribute to nonhumans properties that are our own, and then, to compound this, we narcissistically ask them to provide us with corrective reflections of ourselves.’ We must therefore think of ways in which we can decentre our humanist ways of thinking whilst not suggesting an alternative form of elitist transcendence. Instead, we should acknowledge that to explore ‘otherness’ is not an exotic (commodified) adventure but a path that many who have gone before us, with closer entanglements and less problematic pasts than many Western subjectivities, have trodden and are far more culturally equipped to do (see Kohn, 2013, p. 96 re perspectivism).

It follows, surely, that we must become critical of the limits of posthuman expressions of self. The critique that posthumanism fails because it is seen as a philosophy about humans, for humans cannot be negated by merely pretending we are (entirely) other than what we wish to escape from. Western models must reject the boundaries of humanism, but not reject the way in which it has shaped Western societies, and the

warning lessons there. To write as ‘other’ when so deeply formed by Western humanism would be not only arrogant but anthropocentric too—there is a danger that suggesting that a human *could* know the experiences of that which we are not enacts a lingering sense of privilege, knowledge, and mastery. I do not know what it is to be not-me *entirely*, but I know that ‘me’ is not ‘me’ entirely.

This expression of self is articulated through the keyboard of the machine I type on. I do not know what words will come next; I write and flow and see what comes out. I type with two fingers only—my index fingers dashing about over the keyboard, tapping out a rhythm that has little to do with purposeful composition. And then, I pause. I look across to my 8-month old kitten (I smile) she is climbing up the new cat tree that I bought her, dangling herself precariously. She is spectacular. I pause. The rhythm that was there three lines ago has changed. The (I look out of the window) keys that I tap have nothing left to say. Perhaps it is time for coffee. And think! How that fuel will change ‘me’ again! As Pepperell (2003) explains it, humans are fuzzy edged beings. With all that we put in and expel out, how could those boundaries ever be drawn.

Instead, then, we must find opportunities in language to express and articulate the entanglements that we are embedded and embodied within. We must speak to shifting relationships, a provocation and consideration of ‘I’ as a discursive fallacy or misnomer, as meaningless as any other word whilst also being so meaning-full. To explore the fullness of the meaning of ‘I’, then, we can use it as an operational enactment to break out of the individualistic suggestion it makes, and to embolden it as a critically reflex becoming through which we make sense of how we experience the world. The ‘I’ is the being one-yet-many that Blackman speaks of in her work on immaterial bodies—we have individualistic, embodied

experiences, yet within this ‘one’ there are many—both many aspects to ‘us’ but also all of the others than enable ‘us’ to emerge. Sometimes that might mean a creative incorporation of different elements of the ‘I’ in our writing; sometimes that might be about the freedom to express creative multiplicity. This can be about the rejection of the static self and the assumption of a need for a single viewpoint, perspective, or, indeed ‘answer’. To be more honest in our accounting of our selves and stories, to be more knowledgeable about our place in the world; is that not about expanding viewpoints and horizons, including ‘our’ ‘own’?

Not Linear

The process of posthuman autoethnography is not—cannot—be fixed—for if it were then it would deny exactly the multiplicity, entanglement, and nomadism that it seeks to engage or allow to emerge.

It is the process of laying my fingers on a keyboard, tapping away in a specific manner to see what words occur on the page in front of me. It is accounting for the ‘thing-power’ (Bennett, 2010) of those keys as an integral aspect of the articulation, the ideas, the words, the nuances that appear. It is looking at the words appear on the screen in confusion and uncertainty. It is adopting a half stare into the middle of my keyboard where, whilst the periphery of my vision dances around to follow where my two fingers tap, I take little in of the visual.

It is the process of articulating the shifts in selves and thoughts and feelings that occur within and beyond and through me.

It is the process of accounting for the fluidity of ‘I’ and translating my intra-action with other(s).

In my previous use of posthuman autoethnography, I used it as a way to account for the feeling of/with/through an avatar, while playing a videogame. I

used autoethnographic fieldnotes to explore, explain, and embody the experience of being entangled with her—my avatar, Etyme. The subjectivity in those fieldnotes, like in this piece, was still partial—bracketed off to focus on a specific intra-action in order to explore it further, rather than attempt to account for the full extent of everything that made ‘us’.

I still think of her.

It is understanding writing as an immanent practice, a way in which a certain something emerges but not where it ends—a non-static suggestion of expression, emergence.

As Hein (2019, p. 83) argues, ‘For Deleuze, writing is nonreductive, destabilizes meaning, and undermines a thematic reading. More specifically, it rejects a sense of beginning, middle, and end; subject-object distinctions; subjects who are developed according to a structure; and a sense of identity.’ There is not, cannot, be one way of doing this. And, depending on the writing and its ‘purpose’ we might not manage all of those things at once. But to use rather than abuse storytelling, to consider the praxis as itself educational, rather than only the content as being so, there must be some element of this destabilisation. ‘A posthuman orientation towards researcher subjectivity sees subjectivity as entangled amidst the material, discursive, and affective complexities of its nomadic situatedness, and so the researcher subjectivity relationally becomes amidst a myriad of moving parts’. (Warfield, 2019, p. 153). It is only ethical to consider the self as no more important than the next thing. To write as an uncomplicated-I becomes extremely complicated. It signals inertia, and compliance to regimes that have been violent in their dismissal of others. By considering ourselves as ontologically entangled, emergent phenomena with a multiplicity of being, that which makes us ‘distinct’ becomes blurred at best. Kohn (2013, p. 16) argues that this, therefore ‘changes our understandings of relationality; difference no longer sits so easily at the foundation of our

conceptual framework, and this changes how we think about the central role that alterity plays’.

And so, expressing entanglement is never easy.

Not Narrative

Telling stories is, apparently, a natural thing for human beings. We understand ourselves in reference to the great narratives around us, drawing on them as models by which we can make sense of our own lives.

Questions abound, now, as to whether we can untangle our sense-making practices from our affective experiences—whilst affect may, technically, precede the ‘sense’, is that gap something we can lengthen? Can we pause in the in-between? Is there such a thing as a difference between thought and feeling?

These might include aspects of Todorov’s (1969) narrative theory: narrating our lives as moving between equilibrium, disruption, recognition, repair, and the new equilibrium. Of course, we do not wait to narrate our lives at the end, an epic eulogising from our deathbed, but continue to articulate and rearticulate, casting different moments in different lights depending on what our experiences tell us; what first seemed a new equilibrium, might later be cast as the start of the next disruption. Perhaps we draw on Propp’s (1968) *dramatis personae*, casting ourselves in the role of a specific character, consigning the others in our life to fulfil the roles of villain, donor, helper, princess, false hero, dispatcher or hero. Or are we always the hero of our tales?

I’m reminded, here, of the film *Sucker Punch* (Snyder & Shibuya, 2011). At the end, after orchestrating an adventurous escape from a mental facility our ‘hero’ remains with one other who we have seen as a sidekick. Their way is blocked, and the main

‘hero’ character, the one we have followed for 1hr 34mins to this point, realises the missing part of their plan to escape is that she is, in fact, the decoy. She must be caught, so that the other can escape. She is heroic in her self-sacrifice, but she isn’t the one who gets a “happy ending” to her tale.!

Narrative structures are all around us and behind us, historically reaching back to the great epics of ancient Mesopotamia, and back further to cave paintings depicting discoveries, battles, and tales of heroism. Yet, within the context of a Westernised, colonialist, and anthropocentric worldview, we have lost sight of the many ways of storytelling that can move beyond self, beyond trope, beyond linear narrative (an issue this volume seeks to address). We rely on certain structures *as if they were real*—what an alarmingly harmful concept! Stories rarely have a beginning, a middle, and an end—we just fool ourselves into thinking they do; to conforming to boxes and categorisations.

Elsewhere I have written of the experience of nostalgia as itself inherently posthuman, that nostalgia ‘troubles this temporal figuration by not seeing an event as finite. This enacts a dissolution of linearity: looking back is not only an act of remembering but an act of reconfiguring, and in that way works as a practice of viewing the “self” as emergent.’ (Wilde, 2017)

But we often *are* fooled, we talk about overcoming battles, as if it were mastery of human will. Cole (2006) expresses this narrative fallacy thus: ‘the idea of beginningmiddleend genesis exodus revelation *testa corpus coda* are ways of linearly encoding a western vision of the world ways of encrypting experience so that little by little we are all molded into believing unthinkingly that there are beginnings middles ends believing that experience can be diagrammed graphed morphed thus’. It is this encoded Western vision of the world, this unthinking belief that needs disrupting, destabilising, dismantling.

Not One

I have argued for the autoethnographic-I and its use as an enactment of multiplicity and as a site for discovery and of becoming-child. I have extended these ideas to consider in more critical and creative detail how the autoethnographic-I can embrace the idea of ‘non-unitary subjectivity’ (Braidotti, 2013, p. 93) whilst working within the humanist capacities that formed it. This allows the prospect of dismantling humanistic notions from within by demonstrating an exploration of the work that can be done when we accommodate for lines of flight as the expression of the multiplicity of ‘self’ in our writing. As Braidotti has argued, ‘Writing is living intensively and inhabiting language as a site of multiple others within what we call, out of habit and intellectual laziness, “the self”’ (2014, p. 164). The ‘others’ in this piece are other ‘me’s and different subjectivities, but I have tried to demonstrate how my writing, and therefore my ‘me’s are made up of others. Human—the theorists I draw on, the authors I cite; animal—my kitten making a guest appearance, if not being fully present in the words then certainly in the rooms they were written in; machine—the laptop I write on, the keys I tap, the screen I find myself frowning at.

I am frowning because it is hard not to think that the way I have captured any of these ‘others’ above does not adequately capture how much I am *of them*—how much any of the ‘me’s present, or absent, from, in and through this text are only able to emerge from the chrysalis of their concentration. The form I take—bug or butterfly—is merely boundaried in a momentary suggestion of stabilisation, before disintegrating, dissolving, and then evolving, emerging differentially formed moments later.

But beyond that, those that have not made explicit appearance—every encounter with everyone and everything, some so fleeting, yet some so deeply entrenched that I feel them in me with every breath and thought. The environment around me, whilst writing this piece and

watching the field next to my house become a lake, transforming one ecosystem into another, the animals that traverse it changing from humans and dogs to ducks and, for all I know, displaced fish. The cultural context of Brexit, and Covid-19, and the storming of the Capitol and Biden's inauguration and the knowledge that what is making the 'news' is done with such a Western lean that genocide is happening elsewhere around the world with more care shown for Meghan Markle's court case. The connections beyond this machine that take these words and transport them to a cloud, not fluffy and white, or heavy and laden with rain, but huge industrial monstrosities in the sea, there to be kept cool by the oceans that lap around the structures. I am there and they are here and the acknowledgement of that intraconnectedness and impact is, and should be, alarming.

Of course, these lines of flight are incomplete, and they too are fallacies. '[T]o write as a traitor, a traitor to all, is a difficult task: It involves creation, the establishment of a line of flight—writing against any stabilizing sense of identity and against other categories and boundaries that are dictated by modernist writing' (Hein, 2019, p. 87). As Deleuze emphasizes, 'the experimenter is a traitor' (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 41; in Hein, 2019, p. 87). I'm not sure if the experiment has 'worked', I don't know that the treachery has been complete. Honan (2007, p. 533) suggests that '[r]hizomes do not have clearly identifiable beginnings and ends. It is impossible to provide a linear description of the journey taken through and across a rhizome'. I believe it has been possible to create something of a linear journey through this text—is that to the detriment of its rhizomatic possibilities?

As I type into this document, as I try to articulate the thoughts that are 'mine' yet come more from without than within, I am in a consistent mode. To offer you an experiential aspect of

lines of flight would be to include all of the in-betweens. The breaks, the pauses, the conversations, the coffees, the beings in my home and outside of it.

An email pops in, about UKRI resources. (*like this*)

And this would be a more complex and nuanced demonstration of the shifts and changes, the flights and consistencies. But, I believe, perhaps foolishly, that we still need to utilise those sense-making practices that we are entangled in, to reconceptualise, to rearticulate, to reframe. To find journeys from where we are to where we want to be. My mind might change. In 10 years—or two!—I might disagree with what I wrote here. But it is the writing of this that will have *allowed* my mind to change—or not. To allow my ideas to develop, even when I know they are not ‘mine’ at all. As Braidotti (2014, p. 163) explains, ‘Writing is an intransitive activity, a variation on breathing, an end in itself; it is an affective and geometrically rigorous mode of inscription into life.’ This piece has been a breath or a breathing. An articulation of some form of becoming. A suggestion that to decentre the human does not mean to disavow the pitfalls, problems, prejudices of humanism but to work with them, through them, against them. To be ‘responsible’ and ‘response-able’ to them.

This is why our stories could—should?—work within, against, and through the I, at least for those of us entangled in its complexity. In order to consider what that I is, let us not immediately turn our backs on it but explore it as multiple, entangled. Let us see what it can do if we break the boundaries and binaries of self and other.

Murriss and Haynes (2018, p. 13) argue that ‘for posthumanists the concept “child” is not abstract enough. Each person (of whatever age) is more than his or her body, always connected, embedded and embodied, dynamic and active. The concept “child” does not express an object in the world, but a complex material-discursivity relationality.’ Let us

abstract the concept ‘child’ through learning from them, and their abstraction of themselves, which we can consider in light of the sentiment expressed in the Foreword to this volume, that referred to the ways in which children’s ability to relate to things ‘belies a cognitive flexibility’ that exceeds adult expectations, and notes ‘children’s ability to embrace the more-than-human world in a deeply personal way’ (Blyth & Aslanian, 2022, pp. vi). From this perspective, children *already* think in more fluid ways. It is our ethical responsibility, then, to not teach this fluidity out of them, but also to unlearn the rigidity that we have been exposed to. Let us explore our own becoming-child as a ‘line of escape [that] interrupts, escapes from the system’ (Murriss & Haynes, 2018, p. 57) and thereby enable emancipatory modes of expression and education. Let us be mindful of what we show our children and students, what we tell them and story them about those connected, embedded, embodied, dynamic and active ways of relationality that are possible—even when using the I.

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