

# Writing 4 Cyberformance

**Karla Ptacek & Helen Varley Jamieson**

*This article was first published on the [trAce web site](#) and won the Process Award in trAce and Writers for the Future's New Media Article Writing Competition, Nov. 2004*

&lt;Karla&gt; pick up an avatar hen

just doing that

&lt;Karla&gt; ah, synchronicity within CMC

&lt;Karla&gt; â€™™Computer Mediated Communicationâ€™™

&lt;hen&gt; crappy mangled chat

&lt;hen&gt; crap miss-communication

&lt;Karla&gt; an innocuous acronym for what is usually a minefield

&lt;Karla&gt; of misunderstandings, misinterpretations

&lt;hen&gt; and tangents

&lt;Karla&gt; red herrings

&lt;Karla&gt; bogus disagreements

&lt;hen&gt; as if speaking a different language

&lt;Karla&gt; (Ien DOES speak a different language)

&lt;Karla&gt; insults, slights, insights,

&lt;hen&gt; each believing weâ€™™re understanding each other

&lt;Karla&gt; bogged down in prolonged, surreal exchanges where meanings are mangled and time & amp; the machine seem insurmountable

&lt;hen&gt; no body language or intonation to guide us

&lt;hen&gt; jokes misfire, irony lost

&lt;Karla&gt; Lol.

&lt;Karla&gt; thatâ€™™s our panacea: Lol.it means so much more than â€™™Laughed out Loudâ€™™

&lt;hen&gt; yes indeed

&lt;Karla&gt; itâ€™™s a crucial modifier. Softens the text.

&lt;hen&gt; yes, lol. itâ€™s key

&lt;Karla&gt; hang on, phone ringing

&lt;hen&gt; you know itâ€™s strange that we donâ€™t have more keys like that

&lt;Karla&gt; one minute Hen, talking on mobile

&lt;hen&gt; sure

&lt;Karla&gt; keep that thought

(pause)

&lt;Karla&gt; Helen?

(pause)

&lt;hen&gt; yes, emailing

&lt;Karla&gt; sometimes, you think youâ€™re having a conversation, explaining a great idea only to discover youâ€™re talking to yourself

&lt;hen&gt; yes

&lt;Karla&gt; the other person is disconnected, busy, afk

&lt;Karla&gt; This is the default condition of

&lt;hen&gt; not a problem, a fact of cyber-life

&lt;Karla&gt; collaborative online performance writing

&lt;hen&gt; absence and presence are closely entwined

&lt;hen&gt; e.g. lenâ€™s superb absence the other day

&lt;hen&gt; during rehearsal, when she was present, but mentally absent

&lt;hen&gt; lol

&lt;Karla&gt; Yeah. we hung around 4 ages wondering where she was, till she finally says â€˜can we get started alreadyâ€™.

&lt;hen&gt; Who knew she was there?

&lt;Karla&gt; in a manner of speaking, she wasnâ€™t there.

&lt;Karla&gt; and Vi really really wasnâ€™t there

&lt;hen&gt; ?

&lt;Karla&gt; wilderness moment

&lt;hen&gt; ah

&lt;Karla&gt; But itâ€™s more specifically problematic in cyberformance writing, because as a new genre of performance thereâ€™s an emphasis

&lt;hen&gt; what is?

&lt;Karla&gt; on visuals, subtexts, theatricality and metaphors

&lt;Karla&gt; which reference a huge range of cultural sources and multiple languages of theatre, film, video, tv,

&lt;hen&gt; what is more specific?

&lt;Karla&gt; its even different from online story writing, because performance is metaphoric language PLUS

&lt;hen&gt; back up k

&lt;hen&gt; what is more specific to cyberformance writing?

&lt;Karla&gt; CMC

&lt;hen&gt; there are specific online problems, you mean?

&lt;Karla&gt; yeah, problems we encounter in communicating during process is exacerbated by the nature of performance writing in general and cyberformance genre especially

&lt;hen&gt; yes

&lt;hen&gt; and nature of any performance writing, collaboratively, is also problematic

&lt;Karla&gt; now add stage & screen directions

&lt;hen&gt; visuals â€“ avatars and video streams

&lt;Karla&gt; audio from stage and screen text to speech plug-ins

&lt;hen&gt; divergent plotlines

&lt;Karla&gt; and the requirements of the proximal performerâ€™

&lt;hen&gt; RL interruptions

&lt;Karla&gt; the needs of a proximal audience

&lt;Karla&gt; yep

&lt;hen&gt; hangovers, etc

&lt;Karla&gt; which is different from needs of online audience

&lt;hen&gt; dialup, late buses

&lt;hen&gt; not to mention unstable technology

&lt;Karla&gt; and you have an immensely complex stew

&lt;hen&gt; indeed

&lt;hen&gt; we are crazy, really

&lt;Karla&gt; it says a lot about how much we desire to communicate though

&lt;Karla&gt; sorry

&lt;Karla&gt; my browser just crashed

&lt;hen&gt; ah

third time it did that today, dunno why

&lt;Karla&gt; did you get the animation link for the rough Prolog on DTN2?  
<http://www.avatarbodycollision.org/dtn2/DTN2prolog.html>

&lt;hen&gt; no time. Wot is it?

&lt;Karla&gt; simple Flash version of the Prolog I made to

demo what it should look like, since Vi &amp; len donâ€™t read the scripts.

&lt;hen&gt; shit- the ghost voices have just started 4 me

&lt;Karla&gt; Vi prefers visual versions of texts, which is interesting. We could â€™writeâ€™ whole script in animations.

&lt;hen&gt; are you getting them?

&lt;Karla&gt; No. Wot are you hearing?

&lt;hen&gt; i hear your text fine

&lt;hen&gt; instead of speaking what i typed

&lt;hen&gt; it spoke something completely different

&lt;hen&gt; like it picked up an old piece of dialogue

&lt;Karla&gt; You know wot its like Helen?

&lt;hen&gt; wor?

&lt;Karla&gt; When the technology goes haywire like this

&lt;Karla&gt; Its like being in a deranged brain

&lt;hen&gt; itâ€™s a dangerous cocktail

&lt;Karla&gt; group brain as author. composed of words, images, movement, lag

&lt;hen&gt; not enough written about lag.

&lt;hen&gt; lol

&lt;Karla&gt; wot? we named a show after it

&lt;hen&gt; laggin with the lololos.

hello

&lt;hen&gt; hey douglas!

&lt;hen&gt; kiss kiss

douglas here

&lt;hen&gt; we have just finished rehearsal&amp; are chatting about our processes

&lt;Karla&gt; (and now I drop the thread because douglas, our programmer, has arrived. Unexpectedly)

&lt;hen&gt; do you have sound at the moment, douglas?

&lt;hen&gt; i am experiencing what we call the ghost voice

i have a bad habit of upgrading my software everyday

with whatever anyone wrote overnight

so sometimes sound and stuff stops working

&lt;Karla&gt; ah

&lt;hen&gt; at midnight nz time?

&lt;Karla&gt; (douglas is in NZ, Karla in London, Helen in Belgrade)

&lt;hen&gt; douglas do you mean the server is upgraded every night?

&lt;Karla&gt; (Its 11:13am London, and 12:13 in Belgrade and 10:13PM in NZ).

no, itâ€™s my computer

&lt;Karla&gt; Unlike most collaborative writing teams

i leave the server alone as much as possible

&lt;hen&gt; right, that was what i thought

&lt;Karla&gt; some members are asleep while others are awake

&lt;hen&gt; weâ€™ve just been talking about our twisted process

&lt;Karla&gt; some at work while others socialising. (UpStage is built in twisted isnâ€™t it?)

I think the sound problem might have to do with caching

&lt;Karla&gt; and some are steeped in winter doldrums while other lucky buggers are on summer vacation

&lt;Karla&gt; weâ€™re in different places

&lt;Karla&gt; time zones

&lt;Karla&gt; states of mind

&lt;Karla&gt; might as well say it

&lt;Karla&gt; weâ€™re in different worlds

Karla Ptacekâ€™s work spans two decades in New York City as a writer, performer and director in multimedia ensembles, involving over 50 performances Off & Off-Off Broadway. She holds an MA in Directing from Goldsmiths College, London, and a practice as research MPhil in Distributed Performance Practices, supported by a scholarship from the Arts & Humanities Research Board, UK. Together with Vicki Smith, Karla initiated World X in January 2004, a virtual exchange project between pupils in London and N.Zealand using UpStage. In her work with Avatar Body Collision she experiments with digital writing and performing formats. Her cyberscript, Screen Save Her (2002) introduced webcams into the companyâ€™s work as third performative stage for cyberformance. â€œWhat interests me is the diverse qualities of liveliness that occur across the animate and the inanimate in distributed performance practices.â€  
<http://www.artificialstage.com>

Helen Varley Jamieson has a background in theatre as a writer, director and producer, and has worked in digital media and the internet since 1996. Although she encountered chat rooms and MOOs early on, it wasnâ€™t until she met up with Desktop Theater in 2000 that she became excited by the potential of the internet as a venue for performance. She coined the term cyberformance to describe live performance using internet technologies such as chat applications. In 2001, her cyberformance presentation at the Odin Teatret, Denmark, caused such a commotion that she was inspired to embark on a Hunt for the Body and Emotion in Cyberformance. This search began with a research project, the[abc]experiment, and continues in her work with Avatar Body Collision. She remains optimistic, saying that she has always been able to smell her goal and every performance takes her closer. <http://www.creative-catalyst.com/>

## Links

Avatar Body Collision (globally distributed performance troupe formed in 2001 by Karla Ptacek (London, UK), Leena Saarinen (Helsinki, Finland), Helen Varley Jamieson (Aotearoa, New Zealand), Vicki Smith (Aotearoa/New Zealand). ): <http://www.avatarbodycollision.org/>

UpStage (open source software creating a web-based venue for cyberformance): [www.upstage.org.nz](http://www.upstage.org.nz)

Avatar Body Collision (Digital Creativity): <http://www.szp.swets.nl/szp/journals/dc143180.htm>

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