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Diarology for beginners: articulating playful practice through artless methodology

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ABSTRACT

Here we set out to map, through epitextual moves, the first year of our practice-based research into ‘diary performance’, taking up Watkins and Krauth’s call for ‘new ways of “doing” and of “writing up” research that are discipline and form/genre relevant’ (2016. “Radicalising the Scholarly Paper: New Forms for the Traditional Journal Article.” *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses 20 (1)*). We offer the emergent methodology we call *diarology* much as it was discovered: chronologically, playfully and intuitively, through voicings, listenings, space for awkward silences and the serendipitous, and increasing attention to the métissage of our interleavings. We draw on the possibilities of playful practices both as means of inquiry and as sources of new knowledge, recalling Halberstam who encourages scepticism around modes of ‘disciplinary correctness’, suggesting they confirm the ‘already known according to approved methods of knowing [but] do not allow for visionary insights of flight or fancy’ (2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press). The outcome repurposes found materials to create new life narratives, each iteration finding form and gathering vitality within the extemporaneous/ephemeral architecture of ‘*essayesque dismemoir*’ (Murray 2017. “*Essayesque Dismemoir: w/rites of elder-flowering*”. PhD Thesis, RMIT University).

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22 March 2017

Dear Diary,

Good news! Today we received nonflab Seed Funding to hold what ST prosaically called our Diary/Pilot Workshop. She’s allowed to call it that because the workshop was her idea, but we need to come up with a better name toot sweet.

(NOTE: PM likes naming things, even calls herself a taxonomer; maybe she can have a go?)

Nonflab, of course, is code for non/fictionLab, the research group (centre? group?) in which we three putative researchers (ST, PM, KM) are currently housed. (Stabled?) Housed. The non/fictionLab is an ongoing endeavour within the School of Media and Communication

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here at RMIT. Its mission/manifesto is here (as noted on their website on June 11, 2018) for those who are interested:

The non/fictionLab is a research centre for scholars, writers and creative practitioners. We experiment with contemporary realities through story, dialogue, poetics and partnerships.

We foster collaborative research projects in partnership with fellow scholars and artists, and with industries and communities, local and international. We provide support for emerging researchers and a growing community of research students.

non/fiction Lab helps create events, projects, programs and public presentations that feature a diverse range of local and international writers, artists and academics.

19 April 2017

Dear Diary,

Tonight, the three of us met at MOAT to plan our first SYMPHONY!!!! (As you can see, we are already starting to play around with punctuation (!!!!) and nomenclature, and *Symphony* is surely better than *Diary/Pilot Workshop*?) It's actually not just Symphony, though. Can you guess what it is? We might keep you in suspenders for a while then, eh? Meanwhile, you can tell that we are also playing with VOICE, being keen to 'create a dialogue between theory and practice' (Brabazon and Dagli 2010, 36–37) that may lead to innovation in form. We are already sensing that, at least in this early stage of things, any likely 'contribution to knowledge is the methodology: a way of working that emerges from the incubation of and reflection on a project/practice' (Sempert et al. 2017, 206).

Do we need to tell you what MOAT is? Probably not. You know us too well, dear Diary. Yes, MOAT is one of our favourite watering holes, pardon the pun. It's a restaurant and bar, underneath Melbourne's temple to words, The Wheeler Centre. We like it a lot. Especially during Happy Hour.

So, that's where we gathered, to plot and to plan today. We had a few ideas to start with. Well, ST did. Turns out she's been following (mapping, charting?) some kind of worldwide movement. (Movement?) Well, phenomenon, as in of the zeitgeist. (Is that how you spell it and should it be italicised, like *zeitgeist*?) Anyhoo

ST, in her usual way, has even gone so far as to do some serious scholarly digging (a.k.a lit review, d'oh!!!!) in quest of critical writing about this phenomenon. Through this she found a reference to a certain Professor Lucy Robinson who, after reading aloud from her own teenage diary at a public event, went on to reflect in a later blogpost that 'it raised the question of who I thought I was writing for at the time' (2015). ST reckons that there was/is a veritable wave of these diary reading events, and she's arguing that they appear to have originated in the USA back in 2002 (hmmm. interesting just after 9/11?), but that they are still around, and continuing to draw participants eager to publicly share their testimonies and teenage angst. As reported in the Wall Street Journal, 'Real teenage diaries are becoming a form of public entertainment – often self-deprecating – in a number of places, as brave souls divulge details of unsatisfied crushes and lost

friendships' (Frosch 2015). Turns out ST's read her diary aloud IN PUBLIC (mortifying) in front of STRANGERS (so embarrassing) on two occasions! Dear Diary, I'm sure you want to slam your own pages shut in shame, but read on (or – can you read on? When you are the thing being read? Actually, that's kind of the whole point of what we're doing! But we're getting ahead of ourselves ...) It's only recently, though, that she's become fully up herself and decided that such an act might be of 'scholarly interest' (YAWN), which is why she is so prone to quoting things like *The Queer Art of Failure* and suggesting that instead of just SHOWING OFF she was, in fact, disrupting 'the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children' (Halberstam 2011, 3). These events are really going off, she reckons, in America, but also in the UK, and have titles like *The Salon of Shame*¹ (sounds right), *Cringe*² ('reckon), *Mortified*³ (aren't you, just thinking about it, Dear Diary?), and others like *My Teenage Angst*, usually based in Denver, Colorado (that's the one ST did). Their common denominator, ST contends, is the sharing of unexpurgated (phew! that's a big word!) childhood diary entries before an audience, and the point of these events appears to be communal participation in a kind of ritual enactment or public experience of mortification. (WOW! Another big word, and one occasioning more than a *frisson* of excitement in a certain recovering Catholic. But that's for another article, in a parallel universe.) There must be something going on, because it seems that KM has also dabbled in the public airing of her dirty diaries, albeit vocally filtered through her 'band' leader and set to the sweet synthetic backing track of the Casio and Impulse (*'if-a-complete-stranger-suddenly-gives-you- flowers'*) ads.

Why is it so?

We want to know more, of course, but ST reckons that apart from Robinson's bloggery – which is presumably extra-curricular to her formal scholarship – there appears to be little research interest in the diary-reading phenomenon, and not much going on in Australia. Diary-writing as a practice, of course, is well covered elsewhere (Culley 1985, Langford and West 1999, Lejeune 2006). Hello!!! Gap in the knowledge-bank. Exciting. Meant we needed to order another round of drinks.

Anyhoo ... now that we've got this seed funding we have had to put out a call through nonflab and see if anyone in the group wants to come and play. We've crafted an email inviting them to excavate their juvenilia (including, and perhaps especially their childhood and teenage diaries) with a view to sharing their contents in the name of research.

Here's what we've put. NB Spoiler alert:

Desperately Seeking Diarologists!

Are you harbouring your childhood diaries? Cringe-worthy love letters? Or any other testimonies to teenage torture?

This is an official call to non/fictionLab participants to share their shame (over drinks and nibbles) at the seed-funded Symphony of Awkward, Urban Writing House, Thursday 11 May, 6-7.30pm.

The only criteria:

- (1) *You come armed from your archive and prepared to present your pre-formed self. The more mortification and serious shame shared, the better.*
- (2) *You are free and willing to attend the follow-up workshop, Thursday 25 May, 6- 7.30pm at the Urban Writing House, to brainstorm the academic potential and possible outcomes arising from participating in the event. We have some hunches but are interested in hearing yours.*

The finer details – and a calendar invitation – will follow, once we know how many angsters we have on our hands.

Angsters indeed! And note our brash use of the word ‘diarologists’ even in this second entry. Taxonomy ROOLS okay, and clearly we are serious scholars in our devotion to developing a new *-ology*, but this invitation also means we all have to go home and dig into our own archives, doesn’t it? And we also have to plan this workshop. Because that’s what it’s called. Makes us ponder, aloud, the diff between a *reading* and a *workshop*. Obvs in the latter the goal is to build or make something, whereas in the first one you just sit around and listen. We *angsters* like workshops, because we call ourselves practice-based researchers which means we get to do and make stuff, not just think about it. Doing often being less angst-inducing than just plain thinking. But that’s not quite right either. We do stuff *as a way* of thinking. Might need to come back to this with a raft of references? Others have said it so much better. Like Candy & Edmonds (2018), Kroll & Harper (2013), Gibson (2010), Sullivan (2009), Barrett and Bolt (2007), and Carter (2004). We’re sure it was Barbara Bolt who wrote that this kind of thinking generates ‘a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice’ (2007, 29). So there’s no point in trying to understand what might be mined by this practice of exposing oneself, without exposing oneself, right? We’re sure that’s exactly what Bolt foresaw.

ST argues there’s something in this, and we have enough funding to cater the reading event AND the workshop, but to do both within the ‘safe’ (LOL!) harbour of the academy. What will happen, we wonder, in the presentational and performative space as we show our pre-formed selves to one another? Eeeeeek! Will this practice, if conducted under laboratory conditions, prompt associative leaps and communal meaning-making, and if so, how and why? And will the act of sharing our juvenilia (there’s that word again) reveal (as Prof Robinson suggests in her blog post, 2018) anything about the creation of the original artefact, and the expectations of and for that artefact held by the self who created it?

So many questions. So little wine.

Anyway, we’ve planned the three movements – interactive and participatory, obvs! – of the Symphony (stay tuned!), and once we’ve workshopped the shit out of it the following fortnight, we’ll probably have an article out by lunchtime. Take that, to the max, gap in the field!

11 May 2017

Dear Diary,

Symphony of Awkward is GO!

Tonight we held our first salon in the Urban Writing House. It was weird and wonderful, though not as well-attended as we'd been led to expect. We had received about a gazillion expressions of interest beforehand!!!! But when it came to the crunch there was a heap of last minute apologies, and only eight of us in the room.

Sad face. (Interesting though.) Something about the anticipation of the potential mortification being just too mortifying to endure?

Is it because of these eleventh-hour jitters, then, that we arrived at a rule (or should that be protocol) for our salon? Regardless, maybe this is something that will set us apart from the other events we have named. This is an expectation that all participants will share. Yes, Diary. From this day forth, should you attend a SoA salon it is expected, nay, it is mandatory that you will SHOW and TELL! There are to be no voyeurs, no audients, no sightseers. This is a participatory event and anyone who comes along WILL BE REQUIRED to disclose or display some artefact of an earlier self or else!

So. That's RULE 1 and that's why it's in CAPITAL LETTERS which are HENCEFORTH VERBOTTEN. But apart from that ... No other rules. Yet.

Tonight's session was attended by a small but lively group of women.

And while we're talking women, should we acknowledge that, these days, gender's a more complex proposition, but given the twentieth century provenance of the archives, girlhood (ascribed or otherwise) cannot be ignored? And while we're talking demographics should we also acknowledge here that they were mostly middle-aged, white-coloured women of a lower to middle-class and high-achieving nature?

Everyone had mined their personal archives to unearth something suitably mortifying for the occasion. Artefacts on display included childhood artworks (awwwwww) and textual contributions ranging from fancy childhood diaries – often in unique bindings that were sold as suitable gifts for tween and teenaged girls back in the day* (do we need to give a rough timespan/age range here as well, YAWN?) – as well as more mundane newsagency-issued offerings such as ST's Whitcoulls' Diary for Girls (1977 model, NZ-flavour). There were also more distinctive contributions, including travel diaries (SP does Europe, DW does Indonesia) kept at formative moments in early adulthood, and photo archives documenting a startling array of late-twentieth-century fashion trends/crimes.

For this first workshop, it was more than enough to simply go around the room and hear from each contributor, in her own words, speak to or read from her archive in her own VOICE*!

*we're still capitalising that word VOICE, even though we are meant to not use caps – because they make things loud enough for noticing and remembering, and we want to come back to it, dear Diary, we do. There's something about the VOICE and the VOICINGS and the loudness or softness of them that we hope to revisit.

No other constraints or randomising instruments were applied tonight; the chief applications of this evening were bibulous and gustatory. (Ooooh, someone's got a thesaurus!!!). Yes, the wine flowed, cheese and bickies were scoffed and in what may well become our signature move, a Cheezel bowl was filled and refilled with lurid yellow Os. Was all that yellow food-colouring the invitation to regression? Who knows? But there was mounting excitement in the room, born from a heady mix of time travel, laughter, anxiety and sh-sh-sh-shame. The readings themselves gave rise to eruptions of a kind of full-bodied braying-weeping-guffaw that used to be called 'calm down, you're getting hysterical' by certain parents in the 1970s, and that delivered at least one diarologist* (is it too early to be overworking this coinage?) into a state of nostalgia for slumber parties and other feverish gatherings of her youth.

For this of course was the other revelation. All us girls, united, giddy, gleeful in our girly-ness! It made us all the more conscious of the gender skew of our workshop, which in turn set a certain tone for the *she*-nanigans (I know!!!!) of the meeting. Girls! Alone! Together! Whoooooohooooooo! Look out!

Hair was let down. And bleached and permed and parted and plaited. (We must write more about this gender skew elsewhere maybe? It raised lots of questions even on that first night. Like where were our male colleagues? Don't they have diaries? And why have we kept our diaries if they haven't? And *blah blah blah ...*)

So. What else did we do? Well, some bossy organising types (US!) had designed a whole ridiculous plan for a grand structure, of course, that they, as in we, had borrowed from musicology. We were going to put the 'symphony' back into the SoA, the Dictionary.com website definition of *symphony* being: an elaborate instrumental composition in three or more movements, similar in form to a sonata but written for an orchestra and usually of far grander proportions and more varied elements (emphasis added).

The word 'symphony' comes from the Greek idea of harmony and is built by compounding the prefix, *sym-* (often found as *syn-*) meaning *with/together* with *-phony* which we're guessing means (no NOT FAKE!!!) *sound*. The very idea of the symphonic ambitions of the naming is telling. Sounding Together. Do we have delusions of grandeur, Diary? Or is this structural *euphoniumism* (PM made that word up) expressive of some kind of longing on our part to make grandly-proportioned, variedly-elemental noise, and if so, why? Anyhoo, the three movements we had thought to have, but did NOT, as it transpired, were to have been as follows:

First Movement: a.k.a BYO Shame

Readers/show-ers own choice

Second Movement: a.k.a Diary Bingo

Random date selection

Third Movement: a.k.a Freeform

Repurposing of found footage

Which might look like establishing motifs and trying to connect them – control to chaos – or vice versa – except, dear Diary, we didn't get past the BYO SHAME, did we?

BYO Shame, bigtime. OMG. Mortified!!! The shameful, the awkwardness ... How we laughed/cried at/with our pre-formed selves. Where to begin and how to find suitable describing words?

Mary Cappello? Your time starts now!!!!

Awkward is gangly and out of place, it is the person unschooled in social graces. It evokes decorum but also the body as though certain *natural* rules, lost on some people, make them appear askew. Awkwardness's other might be grace, though awkward isn't as far along a continuum of difference as grotesquerie. Guilt could be involved, and the fear that something will be revealed about you, some truth will be laid bare that is usually kept under wraps and the burden of concealment makes you feel awkward, or appear awkward, which of course are totally different conditions. [...] Phrenologically, awkward would have to appear in a different part of the brain than those others, for maybe the

FEELING REQUIRES THE PRESENCE OF ANOTHER PERSON OR AT LEAST THE PRESENCE OF AN OBSERVING EGO (2007, 25) (emphases both added and in original: Cappello's italics, our underscore, our CAPS!!!)

Thanks, Mary. Nailed it.

The group will meet again before the end of May to discuss and to refine research possibilities, but several avenues are already appearing before us. These include considerations of digital vs. analogue archives, questions of the gendered nature of diary-keeping, notions of seeing and re-seeing, hearing and re-hearing, considerations of the developing artistic 'eye' and 'voice', and a further tantalising research strand around the study of Girlhood Hair Styles through the Ages.

To be continued.

PS: we have a lot of leftover wine and Cheezels. And still two movements to get through! Perhaps there are not such clear boundaries between the 'event' and the 'workshop' after all? Maybe we need to read more about this practice-based (led? based? led?) research. It's possible that we are less 'goal driven' than we thought, and are rather far more 'process driven', to use Smith & Dean's (2009) definitions. It does seem we may be in more playful and discovery-led waters, which 'is to have no particular starting point in mind and no preconceived end' (Smith and Dean 2009, 23).

25 May 2017

'I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train.' – Gwendolyn Fairfax, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by Oscar Wilde (1971).

Dear Diary,

Good old Gwendolyn knew a thing or two, didn't she? So, do we start with a serious scholarly wrap and write something like this?:

A further gathering of devout diarologists took place in the Urban Writing House tonight to consider avenues for situating and extending discussion of our juvenilia into a range of possible research frameworks within the field of creative writing, life writing and beyond. Contexts such as memoir studies and life-writing studies (Brien and Eades, 2018), ideas of reading and writing as therapeutic practices – yes, Diary, bibliotherapy is a thing, see Pennebaker (2004), Prior (2014) – and future forays into essayistic and documentary space were all under consideration. Wider readings will be sourced and shared as we tease out our understanding of the diaristic impulse – past and present, digital and analogue – as means to capture, to confess, and to confide (Murray 2017a).

Or do we cut to the chase, and talk about the sensational if preformed selves we encountered tonight because guess what, Diary?

K LOVES K!!!!

Do we stick with the big words and unpack the diaristic impulse? Do we delve deeply into the notion of diary-keeping as a (compulsive) practice, to ask: Do I/we *keep* my/our diary? Or does said diary *keep* me/we?

Discuss.

For while it is all very well to talk about Cheezels and pyjama parties and first crushes – and guess what K LOVES K (well at least until one of the Ks stops loving the other K. Love is, after all, short and lived to the max when one is 15 and 8 months). It seems that there is also so much more going on here than we at first imagined. These are not just diaries unplugged, they are diaries of girls who go on to become practising writers or artists or makers of one form or another. This becomes tricky to ignore as we delight in identifying the clues to future practice; the details and dialogue with which the future screenwriter renders her scenes (long before she knew there was such a thing or term as screenwriting), the water-obsessed entries of the novelist currently engaged in writing the voice of water, the photo album-cum-diary of the future documentarian. This is all an extra layer of fascination – but is that why we're here, Dear Diary? Is this a distraction from the 'real world' business (engagement! impact!) of why such events OVERSEAS attract a much wider representation of diary hoarders? Indeed, ST can find little evidence of these events *apart from* those OVERSEAS (mostly the USA and UK) and insists that her RIGOROUS RESEARCH has only unearthed public diary events in Australia that are premised exclusively on the

draw of public figures and established writers. In other words, the general public are involved only insofar as they are spectators. Examples include (we like a list! but this one's short): *No one understands me: teen diary readings from [celebrities] Marieke Hardy, Nick Coyle, Justin Heazlewood, Victoria Gay* (Wheeler Centre, 30 September 2011), *Teen Diary Readings [from celebrities]* in Sydney, 2015 and we-can't-believe-we-missed-this, *Dear Diary* at the Northcote Social Club in 2017, which APPARENTLY included 'a suitable retro soundtrack to match' and where attendees were also 'encouraged to dress as their teenage selves, or "of the era."' (from the YWCA website, May 23, 2018). How did this happen under our watch? And why were we not notified and moreover, invited?

But seriously, why the lack of more participatory (and non-celeb) take-up from Australia? The most recent version comes in the form of the *Bad Diary Salon*, which is by invitation only to published writers, and is enjoyed as a 'before they were writers' style literary event. So is it any wonder that Nicole Krauss is angling to get a word in edgewise:

Writing had begun so differently for me. At the age of fourteen or fifteen I'd grasped it as a way to organise myself – not just to explore and discover but to consciously grow myself. But if it had been a serious occupation, it had also been playful and full of pleasure. And yet as time passed and bit by bit what had been only an obscure, idiosyncratic process became my profession, my relationship to it had changed. It was no longer enough for it to be the answer to an inner need, it also had to be many other things, to rise to other occasions" (2017, 75; emphasis added).

All of which is to say, Diary, that the Second Movement of the Symphony of Awkward was another rowdy affair in the Urban Writing House characterised by some kind of inchoate encounter. Between whom, with what, we cannot say. But there were tears. There was laughter. There was that same messy combo of the two ... *Lears? Taughter?* A foundational reading list was also begun around ideas of narrating the self (Ochs and Capps 1996), and life-writing (Kacandes 2012) and autobiography studies (Cardell 2017). Most significantly, we realised we were far from done. There were many questions and, as yet, no answers. Moreover, there were still many more servings of cheap wine and yellow food. It became apparent that further exploration of our performed childhood diaries necessitated opening of our adult ones (or digital calendars) to schedule a third session – nay, a THIRD MOVEMENT! 'Such an approach' note Smith & Dean (2009, 23) 'can be directed towards emergence, that is the generation of ideas which were unforeseen at the beginning of the project' (23).

14 July 2017

'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.' – attributed to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855).

Dear Diary,

Tonight we staged our Third Movement of the Symphony of Awkward in the Urban Writing House. The membership is starting to settle, with mostly the same diarologists

in attendance. Trust has grown, but of course we do not want to foster trust at the expense of the necessary risk that good research requires, do we? We have therefore selected the word 'staged' quite deliberately and used it above in place of 'held' because in order to work on Søren's 'lived forwards' bit we have introduced some playfully randomising instruments into our proceedings, thereby taking measures to unseat and unsettle the control-freaks and pre-planners among us and to move towards a greater performativity in our exertions.

Yes, Diary, tonight it was time to Spin the Wheel!

We had talked back at the start about employing experimental measures to orchestrate some kind of freeform re-purposing and fresh assemblage of what we have since been starting to speak of as 'found footage', our archives being so inviting as to compel us to the 'following of materials' that Tim Ingold exhorts (2010, 92). We had also talked about using di (i.e. dice, but plural) and spinners from childhood board games (remember Twister?) or even downloading a randomising app to use on our phones. In fact, we had even imagined we might have got to this as the second and first movements of the enterprise back at our very first meeting in May. (See entry for first meeting in May).

Anyway, then one of us – all right, it was KLK – remembered that she had a toy bingo wheel, part of a left-over party-starter from a farewell soiree she'd had some years before. Those were heady days. So, for tonight's rendition we employed *bingology* as method.

(We know, we know, but can there ever be too many *-ologies*? We think NOT!)

This was such an interesting experiment, dear Diary. The wheel was spun, and each new spin delivered a number that was then translated or interpreted by the assembled into either a date, or into some other *numerological* (told you!) signpost towards a reading or showing. This methodology involved a high degree of subjective interpretation and self-selection. One of us then offered a contribution from an archive corresponding to said date, or to said number – for instance, for one reader the figure translated into a specific month and a year, for another it portended the street address of a childhood home, and for another it required that one revisit oneself at a certain age – so that these randomly – not so much *selected* as *summoned* – diary entries, childhood artworks and photographs were, over the course of the exercise, patched together into a kind of faulty fugue.

A FUGUE!!!

Diary, don't you see that this is a pun proportionate to the practice, having both *musico-logical* (told you!!!!!!) and *psychiatricological* (sorry, but once we get started, we can't stop!!!!!!) readings as follows:

In music, fugue denotes 'a polyphonic composition based upon one, two or more themes, which are enunciated by several voices or parts in turn, subjected to contrapuntal treatment, and gradually built into a complex form having somewhat distinct divisions or stages of development and a marked climax at the end.' (Definition from Dictionary.com, viewed on May 18, 2018)

In psychiatry, it denotes 'a period during which a person suffers from loss of memory, often begins a new life, and upon recovery, remembers nothing of the amnesic phase.'

NB: comes from the Latin, 'fuga' meaning flight – as in tempus fugit.

Our faulty fugue is both, perhaps, in the one articulation? It is 'enunciated by several voices in turn' and it is gradually building its own 'complex form' though we have yet to see the climax at the end!!!! (Snicker, snicker. Pass the Cheezels!) At the same time, could there be something going on here with the recovery, or not, of memory, or of voice, or perhaps the creation of new memories, new voicings from the interleavings of the old? One of us (PM) is getting particularly excited by all this. Something about her own research and *essay-esque dismemoir* about which she does go on sometimes (see Murray 2017b), and *blah, blah, blah ...*

We still don't know where we are going with this, but there is something so compelling about our experiments that we simply MUST continue to meet, and to diarise our sessions as well, towards some kind of co-created research outcome, and possibly, in due course, a public (WTF?) event.

And whose idea was it to set homework for next time? YUK!

Write a diary account of tonight, 14 July 2017. And the same task can be given to those that weren't here – what were they doing instead?

This was CGB's idea and we loved it – what associative leaps, we wondered, might be made from hearing all the different perspectives of what happened within and beyond the room? Later we discovered that by engaging in this we have inadvertently situated ourselves within an interesting essayesque (PM™) and diaristic-like community of practice, originating perhaps in 1994 with French magazine *Nouvel Observateur (mais oui!)* For their fortieth anniversary edition, so reports Ander Monson in a 2018 post on website 'Essay Daily', the magazine commissioned 240 writers to write what happened on 29 April 1994. At the time of writing, the 'Essay Daily' is inviting contributors to submit their version of the exercise, a project called 'What happened to me on June 21, 2018'. As self-proclaimed diarologists, we will be heeding the call, obvs. And, luckily, we've had some practice, having already contributed to the collection we might now call 'what happened to me on July 14, 2017?'

'The presence of an observing ego,' indeed. We blame you, Mary Cappello!!!!

23 August 2017

Dear Diary,

Tricked you! Tonight wasn't a Symphonic gathering or a Public Event at all. It was a boring old research activity called Situating One's work within one's Community of Practice, and in order to do this in the name of contextualising and positioning our research we HAD NO CHOICE but to sit down with a pair of sister diarologists from Bad Diary Salon. Of course, we had NO CHOICE but to do so during boring old HAPPY HOUR at boring old MOAT. (Sorry about all the CAPS!!!!).

The history behind their event all begins with a tweet from JA: *are there other published writers out there who have kept their bad diaries?* She got a huge response ranging from 'yes, I have 60 volumes', to 'no, I burned them.' JA's own experience was also influential. She had started an anonymous blog and published her 'bad 80s diaries' about a 'bad relationship' there. People were gagging for it, she said!

PM later went along to observe their next event held at the Abbotsford Convent and filed a diary account soon after which could possibly go in here, thereby beginning the temporal enfoldings that start to point towards/give shape and voice to what we will later come to name the 'lasagnification' of our lives. It may look something like this:

Tuesday, 19 September, 2017. BAD DIARIES: Trips

I arrive early and grab a drink. A couple of tonight's readers arrive soon after. They produce their artefacts and laugh about them. There are five readers tonight. Three read directly from original journals ... it looks like they've gone through and marked them up with Post-it notes. Only one seems to read a long extract that does not leap in time. It's like a short story. Two have typed things up for the occasion.

There are rules – no writing to purpose, no huge editing, the expectation that the writer is reading from the original, ten minutes per writer – with "organic" Q & A around this if necessary – and no recording of the event.

Most were diaries from early adulthood. There were some very literary accounts of adventures, and some readers who could not resist asides and quips. I was struck by the very well drafted pieces and writerly voices - some seemed to have been written after the event, as it were, as a kind of retrospective or summing up of experience (Murray 2017c).

Back at the MOAT, we celebrated the diary as a 'dying artefact' and clinked glasses in agreement over the gendered skew of our gatherings. JA and JR shared the underpinning premise, 'before she was a writer', but are also actively mining their networks for bookish blokes.

Tuesday, 19 September, 2017. BAD DIARIES (continued):

All the writers seemed to be friends and had brought along other writer friends. And the whole tone of the event was very different to ours, simply because of the extracts read, and the ages of the writers when they wrote them. There were moments that were cringe-worthy, but nothing like the level of awkwardness we've found in our teenage diaries (Murray 2017c).

As Happy Hour draws to a close (last drinks!), we agree to keep in touch, but are unsure yet as to how we might collaborate. Might we join forces for one of their themed events? Or may The Bad Diary Salon be a major case study for us intrepid diarologists?

After attending their event in the name of fieldwork, PM wrote to JA and JR, sharing her observations of the literary voices:

One wrote back: I'm also interested in why people are reading from their adult diaries ... The themes to date have been MISTAKES and TRIPS and maybe they are more adult oriented? I am keen for people to read from younger years, but we may have to theme them accordingly. It might be the case, though, that even writers who are happy to reveal themselves may draw the line at really bad stupid stuff. It will be an ongoing thing ...

And the other added: Yes, I noticed a distinct trend towards diaries that make the reader look reasonably good. People seem prepared to reveal embarrassing things they've done, but not embarrassing writing. Wait 'til I read my 13-year-old diaries! all that will change! (personal email communications, September, 2017)

7 September 2017

Dear Diary,

Epic fail! None of us managed to take notes for this meeting or if they did diarise it somewhere then we can't find the entry. (Curious idea, the idea of a diary-account of something as an *entry*? Should we tease that out, and if so where?)

Anyway, notes from said session must be extant, and somewhere. Someone? ST? KLK? PM?

What we know we did do is/was to read out our homework, because we had all composed 'diary' accounts (a.k.a entries) about the previous SoA gathering on July 14 and it was here, perhaps, through this layering of temporalities and enfoldings of textures and voices that something new began to emerge and take form.

At the same time, some dots were being joined as something even more terrifying entered the diarological space. It's such a frightening addition that we can hardly bear to name it, so we will take a tilt at it by quoting from ST's diary contribution, but with space for your guess work as follows:

'I think the pleasure of the diaries for me lies in the same place for me as my pleasure from July 14th, 2017. I genuinely enjoy hearing from others, just as much as taking the mic. In both cases, the more awkward, the better' (Taylor 2017).

Can you guess, Diary?

Then let us give you a hint.

DBK.

D is for Diary.

B is for Bingo.

K is for ... ?

KLK?

28 September 2017

Dear Diary,

Where do we begin to tell the story of how great a love can be, the sweet love story that is diarologyyyyyy? Where do we start?

How about with: Symphony of Awkward does Rice Queen! (*Don't go there, girlfriend!!!!*)

Tonight the Symphony of Awkward left the house and ventured to the 'hood. And we will go there, because Rice Queen is, in this instance, 'an airy pan-Asian venue with colourful kitsch décor and lanterns, plus a private karaoke room, located at 389–391 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.' The restaurant proclaims itself a proponent of food fusion, so where better location for a first experiment in the welding together of Diarological Activity determined by the spin of a Bingo Wheel and underscored with Karaoke à la Mode?

DBK (Diary Bingo Karaoke!!!!), then, is a southern-fried fusion of reading with calling with singing through the – not quite a collage, or assemblage – but more perhaps through the métissage or cross-breeding of Diarology with Bingo and Karaoke, where, '[a]s a research practice, métissage embraces creativity and difference,' (Scotti and Chilton 2018, 359) by being 'committed to interdisciplinarity and the blurring of genres' (Chambers et al. 2008, 142).

Break it down, sistahs!

Diarology is a branch of knowledge dedicated to the study of practices of diary-delving, diary-keeping, diary-reading a.k.a OVERSHARING. It is based on captured and materially-extant records of events and observations, activities reflections and emotions, kept, if not daily, then at frequent intervals, and typically in writing.

And

Bingo is (noun) a game in which players mark off numbers on cards as the numbers are drawn randomly by a caller, the winner being the first person to mark off all their numbers.

It's also defined as a form of lotto in which balls or slips are drawn at random, and more broadly, as a social gathering at which such a game is played. Definitions abound, we don't have time to look into the history, and there is no doubt abundant scholarship on the subject to be found.

And

Karaoke, from Japanese meaning *empty orchestra* (LOVE IT!!!), is a form of entertainment popular in clubs, at parties etc., in which individual members of the public sing along to pre-recorded instrumental versions of popular songs, the lyrics of which are displayed for the singer on a screen in time with the music (as listed on Definitions.com on June 2, 2018). Again, scholarship abounds.

Happily, we have an early booking at Rice Queen so no hipsters are harmed by our presence, or by the fact that our karaoke room is not soundproofed to industry standards. It also means that we can be bold in exploring our research questions of the moment, to whit, what happens if we:

- (1) Read our diary entries while using selected music as backing tracks?
- (2) Read our diary entries while other people sing Karaoke versions of our selected song?
- (3) Read our diary entries using microphones without cueing a song?

Truth be told, though, Diary, findings-wise, it was all a bit clunky, and dominated by the technical issues we encountered. Some of us women *d'un certain age* found the poor reading light in the space made just about everything impossible, including deciphering our own childhood scrawl (*graphology* being another interesting subject upon which we hope to expand at some point). Volume control problems and unfamiliarity with the technical affordances of the space (a.k.a microphones) detracted from the awkward intimacies and the comfortable artlessness – the kind of adolescent naiveté and joy of previous sessions – and we don't think it was just our singing that brought an extra helping of self-consciousness to the night. (Or perhaps it should be all put down to the LACK of CHEEZELS????) Nevertheless, and in spite of all of the above, we made certain discoveries, notably that there are particular popular songs (*Down Under, Mamma Mia*) that are way more accommodating of raw diary readings than others.

Whatever it was that occurred in this DBK experiment, testing and trialling (a.k.a failing) is the path of the methodology. It's what filmmaker Andres di Tella refers to as 'the eloquence of mistakes and failure' (2012, 40). This collision of the 'idea crashing against reality can express the truth of that idea or the reality of that project' (40). It was an interesting foray and gave further momentum to the imperative we are starting to feel, as researchers, to think beyond/around/beside the practice, and to ask what it means to be doing this work, and how it might have value, in this cultural moment? We are increasingly cognisant of its capacity as a form of critical autoethnography, which, as Tony Adams and Stacy Holman Jones have argued, 'theorizes the dynamic relationship between the personal and the cultural' (2018, 153). Further, we are becoming aware of the autoethnographic commitment that '[d]oing critical autoethnography engages us in processes of becoming and because of this, shows us ways of embodying change' (Holman Jones 2016, 229).

Change? What kind of change? And why is it important? We will need to do some more reading and thinking around this going forward (and backward, and sideways) and forward again.

music followed through a dodgy speaker. Where we knew the words, most sang along. And then the wheel was spun and the next reader read and then we did it all again and again and

WOW!

Symphony of Awkward became Polyphonic Performance.

Something profound entered the space, and some kind of ritual of mortification was initiated, enacted and completed. (PM may have more to say about this in her fixation on the idea of congregants and wit(h)nesses (Ettinger 2006)). Something about a kind of spiritual *awkwardness* delivering us into the all but *ecstatic*. (Cappello, where are you when we need you?)

So instead let's ask Richard Schechner what he'd make of all this in the context of performance theory. He might draw on Jane Belo's (1960) work on trance and the 'urge to be low' to posit, 'To be low is to take the physical perspective of a child [...] to be low is to escape from rigid social mores – being low is a way to be free' (Schechner 2003, 199–200). We think Halberstam might then join the chorus in vehement agreement, to remind us that it's important for scholars to '*Privilege the naïve or nonsensical (stupidity)*' (2011, 12) (emphasis in original). No problem with that, J. Jack.

Unstable voices, voices unformed, voices false, imitative and derivative, voices pompous, voices unschooled, voices of longing, of judgment, voices of aspiration, of self-deprecation and self-loathing, voices of hope and hubris soared and fell away, were released and relinquished through the *métissage* of text and song in an architecture of call and response, tiphony and antiphony, delivering a kind of extemporaneous choral symphony and an Ode to (Juvenile) Joy.

(Hey. If it's good enough for Beethoven)

Diarological dodecahedron!!!!!!

What we made and indeed, more to the point what we performed, and at the same time gave audience to, in a simultaneous act of voicing and listening, of seeing and being seen, was a faulty fugue.

10 November 2017

Dear Diary,

'Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back' – Krapp's final words, in the play *Krapp's Last Tape*, by Samuel Beckett (1965)

This paper has adopted a diarological imperative to give form to the process of thinking through making, and to embody our commitment to play as research and to arts-based modes of inquiry and the delivery of findings. 'By turning possibilities into action, into performances', as Schechner points out, 'whole worlds otherwise not lived are born' (2003, 208). In this spirit, we have attempted to make an exhibition of ourselves on the page. This, as Murray (2017b) has argued elsewhere, may be construed an act of activism on behalf of our ageing selves.

It is also quite tiring, and it is time to let it go.

The Symphony of Awkward met twice more through 2017. A 'Pre-Christmas Special' was held in a private home of one of the diarologists and featured song and readings from juvenilia as before, as well as excerpts from set 'homework' – reflective 'diaristic' accounts of the previous meeting. Oh, and a culinary 'Ode to Joy' exemplified in the Cheezel-laden frittata. With each iteration of the process, and through what we now describe as the 'lasagnification' of our lives, we observe a complex layering of voices within an ephemeral architecture that one of us insists is a kind of *essayesque dismemoir*, a template for a ritual performance, each w/rite delivering a more sophisticated exposure of the temporal strata and interleaving of memories and lives against the social forces that shaped us. By semi-replicating the conditions of public diary readings, we forge a path, via participatory investigation, where we generate 'the capacity to provoke a kind of creative fever, inciting us to 'catch' others' little thoughts on the fly in a spirit that sparks ideas and refreshes our practice, while also affording us a thirdspace in which we may transmit ideas *contagiously* towards something unexpected and new' (Murray, Sempert and Taylor 2016) (emphasis in original).

We are aware of the further research ahead of us. For instance, when discussing public diaring, it's impossible to ignore what some might call your successor, dear Diary – the status update, the tweet, the post. We asked ourselves, has the practice of diary keeping been replaced by social media – or not?

And still, we keep asking ourselves, Is the practice of diary keeping inherently gendered? Is it about becoming visible? Audible? Memorable? What? And is the impulse to publicly share the archives because 'Ruminations that now seem ridiculous had once seemed profound to those who had written them down' (Frosch 2015), or is there something more to it?

At a final meeting on 14 December 2017 at yet another writerly shrine, Mr Tulk, the restaurant at the State Library of Victoria, the three originating symphonists agreed to carry the project forward into 2018 so as to extend our fieldwork in more public-facing ways, and to confirm *diarology* as a meaningful communal and material practice for generating collective and performative autoethnography through acts of 'relational, collaborative and inter-subjective endeavour' (Adams and Jones 2018, 145).

Watch this space.

Notes

1. See <http://salonofshame.com/>.
2. Based in the UK, with Facebook and Twitter pages, and a publication: Brown (2009).
3. See <http://getmortified.com/>, and note they have also branched out from live events to podcasts and television.

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