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## *Performing Wild Time Workshopping Friendship as Critical Autoethnographic Paraversity Method*

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### **Abstract**

*The focus of this autoethnographic paper is on its authors' experiences of running a conference workshop on Friendship as Method in Paraversity scholarship development. Using the workshop sequence as a framework and context for the paper enables a developing focus on a key emerging analytic issue. This is the tensions around the conception, use and management of time between the Paraversity and the corporate academy. The authors show how friendship-based relations can be crucial for personal and academic thriving in promoting critical sensibilities and reflexivity. They argue, however, that, because it is normally associated with ineffective and unproductive time use, friendship is neither sufficiently encouraged nor taken seriously as a methodological topic in the corporate academy. Moreover, the corporate management of time and relations can inhibit the friendship-mediated development of critical and creative academics, the expansion and exploration of knowledge, and creative ways of generating knowledge.*



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## Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2018

**Trude:** “Portishead has the second highest tides in the world”, Kitrina Douglas tells me. The thought fascinates me. The coastline of Portishead looks tranquil and trustworthy, with the shallow seawater splashing drowsily against its shore. And yet – all that power, possibilities and patterns hidden in the water. We are a group of people – workshop organizers and conference committee – gathered for lunch at Kitrina’s place, preceding “Re-imagining Experience”, the 5th British Conference of Autoethnography that begins tomorrow, in Bristol . I will be presenting one of the morning pre-conference workshops with Alec. The thought brings about mixed emotions. On the one hand, I look forward to meeting Alec again and to share some of the ideas we have been working on with the workshop participants. On the other hand, I also feel a slight air of apprehension. I mean, who travels across the North Sea to go to an international conference and talk about *friendship*?

**Alec:** As much as it would have been lovely to have met up with Kitrina, Trude and other old and new autoethnographic friends, I chose not to attend the Sunday lunch meeting. I wanted to use the time to keep my head clear to think about and do some final prep for tomorrow’s workshop, in the hotel that Trude and I are booked into. I’m so looking forward to being with her again. We’ve been working together since she first made contact with me in 2015, but haven’t seen each other in the flesh since last December. At that time, I was with her in Norway, running an autoethnography course for PhD students in Trondheim and an open seminar for academic staff and others interested in autoethnography at her university in Drammen. Tomorrow’s workshop extends on a specific aspect of our working relationship that we’ve published on, and presented in Norway.

We are later to hear from one of the Bristol conference co-organisers that our workshop, *A True Friend Stabs you in the Front: Friendship as Autoethnographic Method in the Paraversity*, is proving to be a very popular choice. The range of international participants bring together postgraduate students with neophyte and established autoethnographers, most of whom are currently studying in or employed by universities. I am keen for us to perform the workshop as a critical performance autoethnography in and of itself, and we make final arrangements about this when Trude arrives back at the hotel in the late afternoon.

## Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2018

**Trude:** The room hums with talk and the audience sounds engaged. Our workshop has just started and after briefly describing its structure and our ground rule of saving the main discussion to the last half hour, I ask the participants to discuss the following questions: How do you understand friendship? In your experience, what place does friendship have in academia/work life? Judging by the sound level and the atmosphere in the room, the topic seems to engage. Great. My fears ahead of the workshop have been brought to shame. First, I was worried that no one would come, that the topic would be judged as too light and not academic enough. Then, when many participants actually *did* show up, I was afraid that the workshop would not meet their expectations.

I do not know why I tend to do this. Maybe it is a result of having worked as a non-medical professional in mental health services for many years, and after this as a qualitative (and an increasingly critically oriented) researcher in a quantitative and normative research-oriented department in a hospital? I feel that I always have to defend my arguments and speak my case and that my ways of understanding and exploring the world are considered somewhat second-rate. I've had to reply to comments like "Oooh, that is so nice. It is sooo typically qualitative researcher", and "Don't you reckon that Plato-cave like stuff is a bit passé? Haven't we settled those questions long ago?" I often feel like the underdog, the odd one out. The one with messy hair, even if I've just been to the hairdresser.

The reflections from the participants seem to fit right into my own thoughts on the topic of friendship. Their thoughts are simultaneously partly similar and partly different from mine. They make me feel at home, that I am in the right place and that we share something, while at the same time inspiring my thoughts into new possible directions. What I thought I knew when we started the session is already becoming-different through our dialogue. Two lines by T.S. Eliot (1944/2001, p.20) pop into my mind:

*Here or there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving.*

I try to carry the participants' words with me, there in the room and throughout the following days. "It's about trust". "About reciprocity". "About not having a relation because you want something to come out of it; it is something that has value in itself." "I don't know... I guess there may be different kinds of friendship?" And to the second question: "It's risky; it might lead to nepotism". "Friendship doesn't really have a place in academia or work life. It could disturb your sense of competition, your hunger to succeed." "In terms of that, it's often considered to be contradictive to success". "Maybe that is why we need it? In order to resist? To survive?"

**Alec:**

After the participants feed back their understandings of friendship, I elaborate on the concept to the room. Feeling excited and wired, I get into a kind of rap, prose poem mode, constantly modulating my voice to create a pulsing rhythm as I cover our key terms and concepts. This is the longest section in the workshop so I'm anxious to keep everyone engaged:

I begin by telling them about how Trude and I situate our autoethnographic work in the "Paraversity". This term was coined by Rolfe (2013) to refer to an interpersonal place of subversion, which seeks no unity of thought or acceptance of any grand narrative. The antithesis of the New Public Managed, Neoliberal, Corporate "University of Excellence"(Goodman, 2015; Rolfe, 2013),the virtual international network of people and ideas constituting the Paraversity is neither owned nor controlled by corporate interests, and can thus be subversive while maintaining relative invisibility.

The audience looks interested as I go on to talk about the role of friendship in our work (Klevan, Karlsson, Turner, Short & Grant, 2018; Klevan, Grant & Karlsson, 2019a). I describe how our academic relationship developed and morphed into one of friendship-academic. I say that we originally construed our relationship as based in a common cause and interest rather than in

relational intimacy, but that it's developed beyond the notion of "utility" or "guild" alliance. We now understand it more in line with what Vernon (2007, p.19) describes as a "virtuous spiral of regard", drawing, respectively, on the ancient Greek and Roman words, *agape* and *caritas* to denote a serious, enduring, close but non-erotic, reciprocal and caring relationship of loving kindness (Grayling, 2001). This gradually developed for us through our occasional in-the-flesh meetings and voluminous email correspondence.

I say that about two years ago Trude and I first connected the nature of our relationship with the principle of "friendship as method" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003): and that, following early work where we placed relational values, ethics and practices central in this relationship (Klevan et al., 2018), we have also striven to co-facilitate the opportunity of storying ourselves in open-ended, unfinalized, dialogic ways (Frank, 2010; Holquist, 1990). I speak about how we've also subsequently developed our understanding of the nature of our relationship beyond Tillmann-Healy's seminal model by incorporating New Materialist principles (Fox & Alldred, 2017). This has helped us make better sense of what characterizes our developing friendship-academic governed writing with regard to how it functions to disrupt culturally-entrenched, normative practices in creating diffractive ways of working.

I describe how the New Materialist terms, *assemblages*, *flows of affect* and *lines of flight* are key here, and attempt to clarify these terms briefly and in a simplified way: Assemblages are defined as relationships that emerge through, and are mediated by, affect flows. This latter term simply refers, after Spinoza, to a body's capacity to be affected in shifting, dynamic ways. A line of flight constitutes an escape route from normative practices and assumptions, which opens up hitherto untapped capacities for a body to *become-other*. Affect flows and lines of flight feed back into the creation of novel and shifting assemblages (Fox & Alldred, 2017).

I try to ground these abstract terms in our work for the participants and, judging by their nods and facial expressions, I think they get it. I tell them that through mutual engagement with our stories over the course of a 3-year relationship, we have never really known where our open-ended dialogue would lead in terms of its shifting topics. Nor did we always know where it was going to take us in relation to threats or otherwise to our existing institutional, disciplinary and professional allegiances and practices.

I stress that friendship-based stories are not just accounts of things that have happened; they are also a means of making new connections with others and with ourselves. In addition to holding something of the past and the present, stories also point forward. Thus, in the paraversity context they serve as to unite people in different spaces and times, both intra- and inter-personally (Klevan et al., in press).

I ask participants the rhetorical question, "what relevance does this have for our university work?" I assert that the neoliberal, or corporate academy works in the service of the "knowledge economy" where market forces determine and mediate social relations (Grant, 2014a), and where the pursuit of "excellence" is a legitimizing idea (Goodman 2015; Readings, 1996; Rolfe, 2013). My statement, that in this context the excellence concept refers to administrative

processes around units of measurement, such as “outputs” which better belong in toilets (Grant, 2017), provokes participant laughter.

I suggest that productivity is privileged over relationships in the corporate university, where the powerful and ruthless triumph over and – at worst – destroy the nice folk, and where self-interest Trumps the kindness that proceeds from friendship (Klevan, et al., 2019a). I quote Vernon (2007, p. 26), who argues that profit-motivated organizations generally “...are inherently suspicious of friendship...”, since this is often perceived as directly threatening to organizational productivity.

This might point to a reality-based fear held by some powerful stakeholders in the corporate academy, where friendship-based activities and relationships are seen as signaling time-wasting, nepotism, and other forms of potential or actual subversion. I’m mindful at this point that “nepotism” was danger-signaled by participants in answer to Trude’s second question, about the place of friendship in academia/work life, so I attempt to situate this issue in the stupidity dimension of our universities. Alvesson and Spicer (2016) suggest that work organizations are often characterized by restricted cognition at managerial and interpersonal levels. I’m mindful that restricted cognition might result in some organizational members feeling suspicious about the value of close friendship in the workplace. Giving it a blanket label of unproductive nepotism may obscure its advantages.

I go on to describe the upshot of restricted organizational cognition at a more general level. This is the refusal by senior management to adequately value the intellectual capacities of organizational members, and to encourage them to seek a justification of the organizational status quo. Alvesson and Spicer (2016) describe this phenomenon using the overarching term “functional stupidity”. This concept serves as a useful heuristic to understand the corporate academy’s investment in creating unquestioning employees who comply with a single, often tacit, master narrative of the organization and its purposes, suppressing more critical and negative voices. The laughter and nods of agreement at this point tell me that I’ve hit home.

In bringing my part in this section to a close, I talk about how Trude and I have tried to construct an antidote to all of this through our Paraversity relationship, in particular through “mentransgressing” (Klevan et al., 2019a). “What do I mean by this neologism?” I ask, then answer: “I mean academic developmental collaboration mediated by friendship, rather than imposed, controlling, or based solely on ‘instructive pedagogy’. I mean mutually and enthusiastically drawing on the experience, knowledge and wisdom of the other person in the relationship, without being too precious about one’s own experiences, knowledge and assumed wisdom. I mean letting one’s own scholarly and life stories, and those of the other in the relationship, grow and breathe (Frank, 2010). I mean striving for a flattened power dynamic in the relationship, where power organically shifts within and between each person, as the relationship and the conversation develops. I mean trying to do all this while always knowing you’re/we’re going to fail somewhat, while at the same time also being constantly, sometimes pleasantly, surprised about what unfolds. To draw

on the words of the late, great Irish Playwright, Samuel Beckett, I mean learning to ‘fail better’.”

**Trude:** I take over at this point. I hesitate a second before I start speaking, anxious about how to get my message through. What I am about to elaborate on are terms and concepts that are important to me. They are not “just words”. They describe and explore my journey as a becoming researcher and how this is entwined with ongoing relationships to other people and the worlds I am inscribed in. The words have been co-constructed by Alec and myself, to try to capture some of this dialogic process. I like the idea that our experiences somehow preceded the words. That they troubled the existing terms and settled the ground for new ones. What comes first, words or experiences? Without words, it would seem difficult to express our experiences, at least in the “head” way of communicating. But perhaps we can still feel them, even without precise words? Or, if words are all we have, do our words limit our experiences? I like to think that, at least in this case, our words and experiences have co-evolved and contributed to the enriching and becoming of each other and our becoming-friendship.

I start by telling the participants how the term “trouble-nurturing” arises from mentransgressing, Trouble-nurturing harnesses curiosity, and challenges and encourage someone to expand and rethink their framework, in the service of the development of a becoming-researcher (Klevan et al., 2019b). I say that, for me, trouble-nurturing is related to the importance of encouraging and supporting students, becoming-researchers, and, for that matter, more well established researchers. The term refers to how knowledge can be understood as always *becoming-*, and thus researchers and knowledge should always be understood as entangled, mutually becoming-other and co-evolving.

In this context, trouble-nurturing is connected to establishing and preserving academic communities that encourage the development of not only knowledge in itself and what counts as knowledge, but also ways of searching for knowledge. Support for friendship-based trouble-nurturing is crucial in creating space for thinking and researching outside the box, rather than simply reproducing knowledge through well-established methods and approaches (Colebrook, 2017).

I move on to elaborate on how understanding reality as thus *made* rather than *found* has clear implications for the philosophy of science governing qualitative inquiry. *Knowing* and *being* are always contextually situated, entangled with selves *becoming* in the world (Mazzei, 2014). Because ontological and epistemological issues are intertwined and co-evolving, the term *onto-epistemology* conveys that we are in fact dealing with practices of knowing- being- and becoming-in-the-world (Barad, 2007; Davies, 2016; Kaiser & Thiele, 2014; Klevan et al., 2019b).

An important educational aim of qualitative inquiry is, therefore, troubling *the world*, since the development of knowledge and research is not only about researching the world but also about the messy political business of the researcher becoming a researcher. But what does “becoming a researcher” specifically involve, I ask rhetorically. To me, although there appears to be no straightforward answer, it’s about being in a process and striving towards greater understanding. This involves reflecting, troubling, questioning,

reconsidering, and making choices. Thus, in doing research, being — or, perhaps more so, becoming — a qualitative researcher is also about troubling oneself and one's ways of reasoning. Being a becoming-researcher is about being unfinalized, and co-developing with the knowledge, and human and non-human and material phenomena entangled in this process.

At this point in the workshop, I set the scene for our within-workshop performance of a contextualised selection from the email exchanges over the last three years, which we find central to our friendship and mutual becoming-in-the-world. I tell the group that I do not know when or how our friendship really began. It is a story of many stories. Of seeing and being seen. Of challenging, confirming, transgressing and becoming. Stories are often understood in terms of a conventional structure, having a beginning, middle and conclusion, with one thing happening as a consequence of another (Christman, 2015; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1997). It is difficult to see the stories in which Alec and I are embedded in such a straightforward and simplistic linear format. Where do any of our stories begin or end? To me, they are constantly happening, as are we, in an open-ended way, and this is illustrated in our emails to each other. Friendship can serve as a gateway to dialogue with oneself and the other, which can enable reaching out and reaching in.

In setting the scene, I tell the group that during the autumn of 2015 I was a somewhat frustrated PhD student. I was struggling with how to analyse my qualitative interviews, and with what to do with my evolving notion that the knowledges and truths that were developing from the study, and ways of engaging with it, were entangled with my process as a becoming-researcher. The voices of the research participants no longer appeared to give a straightforward access to the truth. While my main supervisor took those concerns seriously and encouraged me to explore them, other academics in my institution were less engaged. Some suggested I should focus on finding a “proper method”. By accident and serendipitously, I came over a paper entitled “Troubling lived experience” (2014b). The author's name was Alec Grant.

### **Email, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Trude:**

*Dear Dr. Grant, I discovered your publications some months ago while conducting a literature search for my PhD project, and was rather thrilled. You give words to some of my thoughts and frustrations, and have also given me new reflections and perspectives.*

It was a long email. Alec replied the same day. Since then, we have written what must be hundreds of emails to each other. Gradually, the tone moved from the formal “Dear Dr. Grant” approach to a less formal and more personal one. We have shared academic papers and texts, but also reflections on academia and life, our frustrations with both these areas, and troubling ideas with poetry and humor. That first email – and the ones succeeding it – led to a journey across the North Sea some months later.

In April 2016 I first met Alec and his colleagues at the University of Brighton. This was my first face-to-face introduction to autoethnography. I can still recall how I found myself “doing autoethnography”. Or at least that's what

they said we were all doing at this seminal, round the table meeting (Klevan et al., 2018). The thought of being able to do something without knowing what “it” was, was somewhat mind-blowing. It went against most of what I had been thought so far in my doctoral training. It excited me and troubled me all at once, my desire for structure and my need for transgression colliding.

During my stay in Sussex, I would go for long walks by the sea by myself, my head bursting with a myriad of thoughts and colors. I would meet with Alec at the university, and he would also serve as my local guide of the beautiful Sussex surroundings. Along the winding roads of Sussex, we were friendshiping, and we found out that we were both born on May the 13<sup>th</sup>, Alec in 1952 and me in 1970. The sharing of time, and the small and large stories that we exchanged allowed us to become something more than a single storied mentor and mentee. The myriad stories we are co-entangled in have points of connection for us. Stories unfold, spread out – meet – and spread out again in new patterns and directions. Stories do not rest.

### **Selected Email correspondence, 2016 - 2018**

**Alec:** *Hi Trude, Just to let you know that I've mentioned your work in my last "Troubling Mental Health Nurse Education" blog, on the Mad in America website (Grant, 2016):*

*"...I think we need to work hard as educators to encourage our students to be acting to create new environments – in line with the psychosocial vision expressed by many in critical mental health... nurses need to learn about community co-facilitation of voice hearing networks, open dialogue and the kinds of deeply contextual community recovery approaches advocated by my esteemed Norwegian colleagues, Trude Klevan and Bengt Karlsson. This would dis-embed 'mental health' from traditional healthcare contexts and relocate them in social care. I think the idea of trying to instill virtue ethics in people to help them survive dehumanising environments to which they will be socialised is contradictory. Better to work at revisioning the environments. It's foolish to paint a car to make it look pristine when it keeps failing its MOT (UK regular maintenance check)!"*

**Trude:** *Hi Alec, I found your referring to Arendt in the blog interesting, about the constant possibility for all of us to participate in dehumanizing practices through uncritical rule following which makes us, by default, complicit perpetrators, rather than it being about people labelled "the others". Pleading humanity without constant self-reflection and reflexivity can easily turn into the opposite.*

*There is a Norwegian author named Jens Bjørneboe (1977/2006) who wrote a lot about the question of evil and how we are part of a shared guilt. He wrote a great poem called "Mea Maxima Culpa", about being part of a shared guilt and responsibility for mankind... I actually managed to find a translation of Bjørneboe's poem. It's not the greatest translation I have seen, but then again I guess poetry is hard to translate.(The last four verses have been omitted in this paper).*



*"Mea Maxima Culpa"*

*I know not where I heard it last.*

*"Who is a human being and is not conscience stricken?*

*Who is a human being who knows not  
that he should live in dread of justice?"*

*This is my summation of all I have seen:*

*I hope God lets mercy substitute for justice.*

*I hope God in Heaven will say*

*Justice, children, that we can forget.*

*Ask me about "guilt." It is a cruel word.*

*Everyone is to blame for all that happens on this earth.*

*In shame you can turn your face;*

*what one has sinned, we all have done.*

**Alec:** *This is beautiful Trude. Thank you. Next time I see you, hopefully in Norway, I'll bring a copy of the book of Hugh MacDiarmid's (2008) poem, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, as a belated birthday present for you.*

**Trude:** *That would be a great present, just have to work really hard on my Scots until then!*

**Alec:** *Aiblins ye'll nae unnerstaun ilka wird, But ye're gied ane helpfa glossary sae ye dinna get scunnered ower quick an gie up on't. I hae the hale o the New Testament in Scots which, like yon chiel Mcdiarmid, is muckle grand tae spak oot loud.*

*On a serious note Trude, reading MacDiarmid, will help you with: intertextuality (Dostoevsky, and loads of other, modernist writers - and critical Romantics like Burns - are alluded to or explicitly appear in his work); the sociological imagination (Wright Mills, 1959) (MacDiarmid was writing at the*

*intersection of his/Scottish history and Culture/s); cultural critique (he was scathing of both “Tartanry” and “Kailyard” cultures, which both trivialised the idea of Scotland and kept them under the English yolk; re-storying self and culture (just as Shakespeare invented the psychological human, so MacDiarmid did for the Scottish national renaissance); the use of literary tropes, especially metaphor, in writing in which the human and social sciences meet the humanities; and the anti-humanist containment of good and bad as dueling polarities in a single subjectivity (as Nietzsche also did in his work). In the Scottish psyche and literature, exemplified in MacDiarmid’s work, the combination of opposites in a single subjectivity, a single person, is referred to as “Caledonian Antisyzygy”. All of this will help you develop as a social researcher.*

**Trude:** *I read a bit about MacDiarmid, who sounds like a headstrong and interesting character. Must be something about these Scottish people, I guess :-). I did actually think he reminded me somehow of you. I guess a lot of us are a combination of opposites, even though for some reason this does not appear to be the most popular way to regard the person. The coherent and autonomous person seems to have a larger fan club, at least among mental health/education workers. I actually find it quite uplifting and reassuring – thank god I’m not the same person all the time. Would be boring.*

**Alec:** *You’re right. The coherent self only makes sense in liberal-humanist terms. It’s a kind of convenient fiction for lay people and mental health professionals alike. I don’t think society, mental health practice or the academy could cope with the idea in practice of fragmented, contingent and contradictory selves. Which is strange, as the concept of identity, or rather subjectivity, as discursively and situationally contingent is supported in social cognition, postmodernism, poststructuralism and literary studies.*

*Who “I” am depends on who I’m talking to, in regard to both real and imagined audiences, including myself as audience. Social desirability bias operates in the service of constant retrospective attempts to achieve narrative coherence in verbal and written accounting and representational practices, just as it does in participant interviews and doctoral theses. This throws up issues of representational ethics: the presentation of self and others is a constant work of fiction, since life as narrative allows for no bottom line of fact or transcendent “really true” single story. (As I’m replying to you, I realise that I’m representing myself as a coherent response to you from a single coherent self (bit of irony there)).*

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**Alec:** *I like the paper on Munch that you sent me very much. I wonder if he was familiar with Kierkegaard? (standing on the edge of the abyss). I once lost an hour in front of Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ*, in a Dublin art gallery. I believe it was a numinous experience. I spent an hour, stood transfixed in front of it with no awareness of the passage of time.*

**Trude:** *Thanks for sharing your experience, Alec. That’s a strange thing about art – it sometimes can make time stop. When my father died very suddenly in 2009, I used reading as a way of hanging in there. I remember reading the Norwegian poet Kolbein Falkeid. He lost his daughter in suicide and has written some*

*very powerful poems about that. Reading his poems of grief, loss and loneliness comforted me and made me feel that I was not alone, more than talking to and being with family and friends did. It's amazing, the way art can cause connectedness.*

**Alec:** *I think one reason for that is that art activates the numinous – the connection with... “God”, or Ground of all being that is outside timespace. This is the paradox of poetry: while using words, it is beyond words (and the equivalent is true for pictorial art, literature). I'm reading about Buddhist enlightenment right now – a decades-long pre-occupation. I think (in line with posthumanism) that the “self” is bound(ari)less. It is relational in the widest sense; to non/humans, organic and the material. A recent UK poet laureate, Andrew Motion, said that “poetry is a hotline to the soul”.*

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**Alec:** *Re friendship. The fact remains: there are friends and friends, Trude. I experience a lot of my (Quaker metaphor) friends at worst as mean-spirited, lacking in generosity, defensive. Dead.*

*That said, in terms of the Buddhist principle of dependent arising, I wouldn't be me without them, so I strive to be polite and helpful, and sometimes we laugh together even, because we go back a long way. The fact remains: I can have more interesting conversations with many more junior autoethnographers/scholars, whom I mentor, than I can with some (not all) of my senior autoethnographic friends. These are friends who don't read or write much, feel threatened by the junior people, and with ideas they are not familiar with (because they don't read enough), and don't offer them much support or help. I find this irritating, ironic, a moral affront, and sad, but I have to live with it. I was waiting for a good time to tell you all this. Maybe you sussed it out yourself, though :-)*

**Trude:** *I think it is like you say, we wouldn't be ourselves without the people surrounding us. But there is an edge to that – we also remain who we are not anymore or don't want to be anymore, because they can't let go of their picture of us. My mother still thinks I am the same person I was when I was, say, fourteen. “But Trude, you are not like that..” I sometimes catch myself thinking like that about my own children. I have this idea about who they are, when in fact, I don't really know anything. They are very much “in the becoming” I think – and I try to let them be that. I guess that when you are young, the process of becoming is moving faster than in my age. Although I do find myself to be in the becoming as well – but it is something one has to strive to be. It is easy to be whom one always has been and who everyone else thinks you are, but it is rather dull.*

*To me, it's a matter of maintaining my curiosity. If I'm no longer curious about the world or other people, I run the risk of categorizing or dehumanizing. Now, I don't mean to sound incredibly altruistic and noble. You know I'm not. But curiosity is my defense against categorizing and othering others and against feeling overwhelmed by ignorance. Sometimes it works.*

*I think it is great with friends who nurtures your curiosity, who let you be in the becoming, who has the generosity to allow you to do so and to be happy for you. Your friendship means a lot to me in that manner. You make me strive towards being a good version of myself and not to slumber in comfortable self-satisfaction. I found you generous and challenging simultaneously –which is a good thing. A kind of raggedy gentleman (hope raggedy works in English, I do of course not mean it literally and it is meant to be a compliment).*

**Alec:** *Thank you, Prinsesse Trude of The North. Raggedy Alec – that has a nice ring to it. Being friends with you means a lot to me too. We get each other’s humour and mutually provoke in good directions.*

### **Participant discussion and feedback**

Most of the comments that are made in this last half hour of the workshop are positive, supportive and non-controversial. The general consensus is that the topic as we presented it is engaging and highly relevant. However, one significant issue emerges for us: in spite of our attempts to carefully clarify the precise nature of the lived experience of our friendship, a few people raise the possible danger of falling in love when engaging in such close relationships. Although experiencing some degree of irritation, neither of us feels particularly disconcerted by this, as we respond non-defensively – explaining that we have always considered our friendship to be of the agape and caritas kind (elaborated on previously) and that we have never had concerns about this happening.

Later, over dinner, we talk about this, recognizing that the issue and question were on one level reasonable and innocent, coming from people motivated by understandable human curiosity. But we agree that we also heard the voice of the academy implicit in their words; the voice that whispers suspicion about the assumed equivalence of relational intimacy with professional boundary breaking and possible hidden and unspoken agendas. Would the question have been posed if Alec as a male was the younger one, or if Trude as a female was in the mentor role? We make sense of this in the context of the restricted cognition of corporate academia and talk about a missed opportunity: perhaps we should have reflexively said this at the time, rather than taking the issue and question at face value and responding politely.

### **Discussion**

**Alec:** It’s been a few weeks since our Bristol workshop, Trude, and we’re both back in our respective homes, and work and life rhythms. When I look over this paper-in-progress, as we ‘ping-pong’ it back and forth between each other in successive edits, I see lots of interesting analytical themes. However, one stands out for me as most important: the theme of *time*; more specifically the politics of legitimate time-use that marks out a key tension between the corporate academy and the paraversity.

I’m fascinated by Jay Griffiths’ (1999, 2006) distinction between “wild” and “tamed” time, which I believe can be mapped on to time spent in the paraversity and corporate academy, respectively. The idea of wild time has appealed to me for quite a while now; people and ideas coming together in a playful way, outside of fenced in, institutional clock-and deadline-watching (Sorly, Karlsson & Grant, 2018). Griffiths (1999) describes wild time as limitless and unfenced, carnivalesque, transgressive, playful, risky, creative

and artistic; and ethical in the sense of the play ethic being essential to civilization.

She argues in contrast that tamed time – in the context of our work the form of time favoured by the corporate academy – is commodified, having money as its alter ego. A few years ago, I wrote about some of the ways in which neoliberalism has saturated university life internationally (Grant, 2014a). I argued, after Davies and Petersen (2005), that this has resulted in academics being socialised to manage their time in the interests of working harder in increasingly enterprising ways. The point of this, for the corporate university, is to sell knowledge as commodified information and qualifications, in environments where “excellence” takes on a new meaning, relating more to business expediency than scholarly worth (Rolfe, 2013).

It seems to me that conventional time conformity, or entrapment within the tamed time of the corporate university, was what you and I were both more or less subjected to prior to you making contact with me, and which our unfolding relationship has been all about challenging, including our giving each other the affectionate nicknames, Prinsesse Trude and Raggedy Al.

As an independent scholar now I’ve retired, I seem to function and thrive exclusively in wild time. But I sometimes wonder what it must be like for you still having to manage to temporal contradictions between your commitment to your full-time job as an associate professor in your university and your sometimes work with me in autoethnography?

**Trude:**

When people from outside academia ask me about what I do in my job, I still have to search for the answer. I often tell them that, partly, I do student-related work, such as teaching, planning and leading courses, and mentoring, and that the other part of the job is connected to research and academic writing. Following that, I also tend to tell people that I am rather new to the job, and as such, I am still focusing on finding out what my job is actually about, and furthermore, how I want to shape it. Perhaps one of the advantages of being new to a job is that you do not really know what is expected from you or what the job “is”. You can still believe in the possibilities of becomings. I try to cater for that “in the becoming” part – of both the job and me. The idea of worlds and humans becoming through encounters with each other grants me the feeling of some kind of freedom. Gale (2018, p.166) refers to the coming together of human/non-human as being about composition: “Composition is not fixed, it is always becoming. It is the energy and intensity of individuation where the elisions of movement and moments are the processual driving force in life”.

Linked to this and based in the work of Manning (2013, in Gale, 2018), Gale elaborates on the practice of choreography. Choreography in this sense stretches beyond the field of dance. It is about how movements create a response in the affective space of world and making. Thus, choreography is a relational concept that is also connected to assemblage. I am not a good dancer. But I like to think that through our academic-friendship, our movements in the worlds we inhabit bring about a movement in the other and their worlds. As such, your existence in what you refer to as “wild time”, Alec, might serve as an assemblage that also invites me into this form of time.

Like you say, academic life is often predominantly lived and acted out in “tamed time”. However, through friendship-based relations it is possible to shift between these time spheres. With some of my colleagues at the university, we sometimes draw a distinction between what we have to do and what we want to do. Autoethnographic and related work may be placed in the latter category, as it may be related to wild time and not considered good use of time in the corporate academy. However, it is possible to get some credit for wild time activities. As long as you publish, you are good. Publishing appears to Trump anything. Although I find pleasure in writing autoethnographic-based work and diving into critical approaches in qualitative inquiry, there is also a possible dark side to this: Do my wild time activities run the risk of becoming tamed if they are accepted as something that “counts” in the corporate academy? Is there a risk that I (mis)use wild time activities to promote my corporate career? Is it even possible to draw a distinction? Following this reasoning, the whole practice of doing the workshop can be understood as a mixture of wild and tamed time. We talk about wild time but even so, doing the workshop “counts” as “giving a speech at an international conference” on my CV.

**Alec:** I think you raise some excellent points, Trude. To regard wild time and the paraversity as distinct from the corporate university/time is a simplistic binary. They mutually co-exist and segue into each other. Still, I think it’s useful to write about them as if they were distinct for heuristic purposes. I agree that my now sustained position in wild time invites you to dance with me and others in this self-choreographing assemblage, as a kind of playful break from the strictures of corporate academic life. It’s also encouraging that being new to your job gives you some degree of freedom and time to shape it (I wanted to shape mine too, over twenty years, imagining myself doggedly resistant to enculturation into the corporate academy!). I was also interested in your remark that you and your university colleagues are clear about the distinction between what you all have to do and want to do. I’d urge caution here; there’s a constant danger of what you all want to do being more or less usurped by what you all have to do, in terms of how you and your colleagues are constrained in managing your time. Any wild time that you enjoy now may become colonized by the dominant corporate culture, to the extent that your activities may indeed be tamed, and frittered away.

To put this in context, at a general level, from an organizational functional stupidity standpoint, it seems to me that the corporate academy is often characterized by soul-destroying, conventional time wasting. This is why I came up with Oscar Wilde’s epigram, “A true friend stabs you in the front”, as the title of our Bristol workshop – implying that being stabbed in the front is a provocative act of love and respect. The corporate academy, in contrast, insidiously stabs academics in the back in its pursuit of what is euphemistically described as “excellence”. It does this by limiting, sometimes killing, their creativity and criticality, through keeping them locked into its business agenda and everything that goes with this, including the “administrivia” of incessant organisational housekeeping and auditing (Grant, 2014a).

I am struck by how our autoethnographic story of the workshop is replete with references to the legitimate or otherwise use of time. You had doubts yourself, on the day before the workshop and in its opening moments, about

“friendship” as a legitimate topic for an academic conference. I think this directly mirrors for me *the* most significant participant response issue: our having time for friendship in an academic relationship. Think about the comments that focused on nepotism, and friendship segueing into romance and threatening individual competition, tacitly regarded as necessary. I still wonder whether these comments were simply innocent questions or directly illustrative of the power of the corporate university in socializing academics to its assumptions? Diffractive, exploratory and rhizomatic meandering rather than goal-directed activity signals a form of transgression and time-wasting that’s both difficult to audit or constitute as legitimate output? Us sharing our emails within the autoethnographic performance that was our workshop, and this paper in and of itself, might no doubt be seen by some as a self-indulgent and solipsistic exercise; an illegitimate use of time.

I think the issue of legitimate versus illegitimate uses of time is further analytically enhanced by John Christman’s autobiographical philosophical work on narrative selfhood. Christman (2015) argues that, to the extent that we are the stories of our lives, a story told in one cultural location may not make sense or be as well received as a story in another. The public language of surrounding time and space-bound cultures are critical in such reception. Christman asserts that people and community groups have variable relations with the public language of the dominant meta-culture within which they have to exist. In his words (p.122), at worst, often “publicly accepted standards of character and virtue are imposed on them.”

Mapping Christman’s argument onto the idea of wild versus tamed time, I think about my longstanding obsession with what I’ve described as “narrative entrapment” (Grant, Leigh-Pippard & Short, 2015). This boils down to the story of a minority or marginal group being dismissed and trumped by the dominant story of the more powerful. This issue is important for us and our work, perhaps for you more so, given that – unlike me now, you live simultaneously within the two worlds of the corporate academy and the paraversity, thus in the two time zones of wild and tamed? I continue to be troubled by the question of how one maintains fidelity with, or at least survives in, the time-space of the far more dominant and powerful corporate academy while staying true to the Paraversity ethos over time?

A related concern for me is – despite its good reception at face value, with participants giving us generally extremely positive feedback – the extent to which our workshop will have lasting impact, as opposed to being mediated and subsequently neutralised by at least some of those participants who might have been listening through corporate academy ears. Christman (p.135) highlights the importance of “temporal trajectories”, or sustained attitudes, of life narratives. For me, this distinguishes serious-minded critical autoethnographers from those whom I’d describe as “weekend warriors”, who pay lip service to critical messages at events but revert to normative type and time when back in their home territories.

**Trude:** In academic work and the research and educational practices involved, there is a constant demand that our work should be “evidence based”. The million-dollar question remains; what counts as evidence? As always, google gives us the answer: *Evidence is the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.* That is not too helpful, as it just raises new questions. For instance, what counts as facts? The participants in the workshop seemed to agree that friendship in academia is important in order to thrive and to survive. The good atmosphere in the workshop, the feeling that we were simultaneously talking about friendship and doing friendshipping is something worth catering for. To me, it connects to the idea that we are not alone. There are many of us questioning the practices of the corporate academy, its effects on education, development of knowledge and the people working and studying there, which has been the implicit sub-text of our workshop and dialogic exchange. Brooks, Franklin-Phipps and Rath (2018, p. 134) argue that community is crucial to resistance as it refuses the production of individualized, so-called “entrepreneurial actors”. Instead, community favors solidarity and thus it provides the conditions of possibility for collective resistance to unsupportive or oppressive practices.

I have no good answers, Alec, to your question about whether the workshop will have any lasting impact or if its spirit will be neutralized by corporate practices. I don't believe in turning points. Rather, I believe in processes and the possibilities for new compositions and choreographies-in-the-making. There are most likely reasons why the participants chose to go to this particular workshop. It could have had to do with curiosity, frustration or recognition. Of looking ahead or looking back. Regardless of the reasons, they can be understood as parts of processes. According to Andersen (1988), change knows its own time and its own paths. Maybe the workshop in itself will inspire some change. Maybe it will inspire some participants to read a book, ask some questions or write an email to a person they met at the conference. Maybe they will go to a new conference next year and participate in an inspiring workshop. Even the “weekend warriors” that you refer to, may still, at some point become more or less full time warriors.

I think key here is the sense of community, or perhaps better phrased as open-ended communities. The experience of not being the only one has in itself potential and possibilities for becomings. I realize, while writing this, that this may seem like a naive and “everything will turn out fine” form of argumentation. Maybe it will not turn out fine. But there aren't really that many options. Either we have to give up or we have to resist. Resistance and change can come in many versions: Troubling, questioning, discussing, writing, workshopping, friendshipping... Among these practices, friendshipping stands out as crucial as it is, simultaneously, a practice of resistance in itself and an important prerequisite for the others.

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