To offer a sense of fluidity and linearity before I side step such comforts, I'll briefly contextualise my research and this paper.

In 2017, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (now called Office for Students) launched the National Collaborative Outreach Programme which targets young people in multiple deprivation wards and underperforming schools to increase their aspirations for Higher Education. IADP is one of those interventions and the vehicle for my Ph.D. From Kosovo and the tyranny of distance I now explore three other tyrannies.

Tyranny of leadership: between Hayley - my IADP mentor in the U.K. - leaving and me having to establish new bonds with new mentors.

Tyranny of aesthetics: from post-conflict to secondary school contexts; between my practice and my research.

Tyranny of methodology: between 'objectivity' and embracing the self and delving deep, choosing to be vulnerable in research.

And finally, tyranny of distance: between how I feel and how I act; between leaders/educators and participants/students; between the expected and the actual. Between then and now.

This is a departure from my beginnings and a rupture in my 'self'.

<div align="center">*</div>

Hi.

My name is Arte
and this is an autoethnographic experiment.

I aim to show and not tell (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015); although, inevitably, I believe every story, theory, or account of anything has an element of telling woven into it. Showing is one of the purposes of autoethnography, the methodology I'm using in my research and my writing.

This means it's going to be a little messy and non-linear. This means it includes stories, vignettes, and poems, composite characters and pseudonyms.

This experiment contains memories, thoughts, doubts, fears, hopes, emotions, questions (lots of questions), and other similar things. It, like me, is "in the process of becoming" (Shadrack, 2017, p. 8), a "contingent result of an ongoing process" (Gale & Wyatt, 2013, p. 150) and it, also like me, is here, now.

Being present.

Consider this a blemished sacrificial lamb offending the phallic god of academia. Or consider it nonsense. Ultimately, you will consider it however you consider it and you will respond however you will respond. I could, as some suggest, say "I can't dictate how you will feel or what you will think when you [listen to] my work. Your feelings are not my responsibility" (Turner, 2013, p. 225).

And yet
I can't help but acknowledge my role in bringing you this showing-that-is-also-a-telling.

I'm the catalyst.

You can refuse to listen and leave but we all know what killed the cat – although fewer of us know what brought it back.

I may be numb.
I may get emotional.
Even with the knowledge that for those-like-me its uncomfortable to see those-like-me get emotional in a

          Public
            Professional
                 Capacity.

Oh well.

Let us (continue) to begin.

*

I walk through the door held open for me and offer a 'thank you' under my breath. As I stand in the large space that seems like the hybrid offspring of a sports hall and a 1950s school theatre space, I feel the cold begin to seep in. Shivering slightly, I briefly scan the rectangular room and see a stage set deep in one end with small wooden stairs leading up to it. I look to the other end and see several sets of double fire doors with chairs piled up in between them, messily ordered. Paintings, drawings, collages, projects, and philosophies of the school adorn the walls, some universal others more contextual. I smell the old smell of this place, mixed with the new daily traffic it embraces. Below the high windows – in between the stage and the fire exits – are a set of Pollockesque paintings, although they look more controlled than his, planned even. Opposite these paintings are trampolines lined up against the wall with gym mats strewn next to them. There is a piano in the corner by the stage, crouching like a subtle beast, age reducing it to ornament.

The nerves of a new day are cowed within me; we've been here before, we've run some of these activities before, we're good. I join the rest of the team by the piano and start to lay out the necessities for the day. We talk, we joke, we laugh. We've worked together before and we work well. Histories are mixed with uncertainties and we're fine with that. Questions asked, answers given.

My heart starts to pump a little faster as the young people arrive, 'our' percipients. I call out to those I've connected with in previous days and offer general greetings to those I haven't as they trickle in, a steady flow of excited reluctance.

Was that favouritism? Should it be one greeting for all?

First doubt of the day.

*

I started my PhD in December 2016 after a few hiccups with the Graduate School. I'd heard that doing a PhD was hard but I thought I'd be able to handle it. An inflated sense of ability and an over-eager need to please meant that I thought I'd be able to handle it. And yet at the point of writing this sentence I'm struggling, and have been struggling. I skipped a Masters and went straight on to a PhD because the stars had aligned and this was my time to shine

alone
lonely?
unsure
only
me
for sure
alone.

I drove on as if the only important thing was to drive on, collecting the fabrics of others' and weaving it into a tapestry of not-quite-me-but-them. Wearing it made me itch, uncomfortable, it didn't fit right, it didn't smell right, it didn't *feel* right. I had to write from me, from my personal experiences so I could "understand more fully, more deeply, and meaningfully" (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015, p. 47).

For this presentation I heeded Jess Moriarty heeding Peter Elbow and just jumped in and wrote (Moriarty, 2013, p. 64). I also heeded Kitrina Douglas heeding Jonny Saldana and didn't really write with a message in mind (Douglas, 2013, p. 81).

I'm wondering if that was silly of me.

*

The soft hubbub of secret whispers echo off of the walls. I look around at the islands of potential, clustered together like so much land, oceans of thought flowing between them. My eye is caught by a couple of pupils-percipients-humans speaking in low but excited voices, showing their learned symbols that they themselves have inscribed, writing themselves into existence (Short, Turner, and Grant, 2013). As I stand there I wonder: are those stories infected with the stories that have been told about them, those stories that hold us back from growing (Grant, 2013)? My gaze floats over the group and I feel like an emperor penguin with his egg, not wanting to move in case I crush the life forming in front of me. I see the other workshop leaders moving from island to

island, cluster to cluster, talking, sitting, being. Suddenly, I'm aware of the teaching assistant standing next to me.

"Have you been in a group like this before?" I ask, hoping my hushed voice doesn't travel.

"No, not yet."

Before I can ask another question I see an island refusing to engage, their head on a bench. A leader sits by them, attempting to help, and looks to me. I shrug, eyebrows raised in concern, and trust the other leader. The teaching assistant draws me back by asking questions about the work, the activities. They go on to tell me about the pupils.

"That bunch over there, you know the ones together on the left?"

"Yeah. Although they seem a bit socially awkward, they're bonding pretty well."

"Yeah, we call them the 'Odd Ball Crew'," she smiles cheekily. And

i'm stunned
i open
my mouth
i close
my mouth
unsure
how to
respond
to this

and thoughts fly through my mind at a million miles an hour. Isn't this person responsible for their engagement and well-being? Is it right for them to say that? How do they feel comfortable saying that to me? Do I exude an attitude that encourages this sort of thinking? How would the young people feel if they-

And I'm brought back. In the 10 milliseconds that I've been thinking, a leader has drawn the activity to a halt, to hear back from the islands. I excuse myself, force a smile, and walk to the 'Odd Ball Crew', ever more careful not to crush any eggs.

*

I've only settled on autoethnography recently. After reading a couple of books (Denzin, 2014; Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015) and a few articles (Pinner, 2018; Polkinghorne, 2007; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Manning and Adams, 2015; Ellis and Bochner, 2000) I felt like my head was overflowing. I could imagine being in the position of Sylvia Smith when Carolyn Ellis told her that there's "plenty of time to read *about* autoethnography. I want you to *experience* autoethnography first" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737) and I realised I needed to read less theory about stories and more stories that are theory (Bochner, 1994). So I grabbed some books (Ellis, 2004; Short, Turner and Grant, 2013) that used an autoethnographic method and my world turned… different.

In accepting that we become the stories we tell and our lives are shaped by turning points, epiphanies, I started to recognize that my narrative, my stories, are worth telling; because on some level, they're not just personal and particular but general and universal (Denzin, 2014).

And through this methodology, I – whatever that is at this point – can be seen. I can be acknowledged inside and aside from my intersecting identities. I'm not quite sure what that means yet.

*

The sun meekly meanders through the top windows and I walk over to a group of percipients and sit down.

"So what've we got so far?"

Blank faces and avoiding eyes. My heart sinks a little.

The four boys are sitting on chairs, quietly subverting our instructions. George, the Ringleader of Disruption, is leading their private conversation. I look at each of them, faces seemingly disinterested, and I breathe in. I sigh out under my breath and turn to Layla. She makes eye contact and shrugs, letting her gaze fall to the paper and pen in front of her. I turn back.

"Lads. Lads, listen. How're we going to pick which rules we're going to keep and which we're going to lose?"

"Are you Jewish?"

The question stops me. Not because I'm surprised – I've had people ask me if I'm Jewish before. So what if I am? I want to ask, "Does that change your opinion of me? Does your question have any relevance to what we're doing or are you just trying to disrupt this?" Mixed with this inner monologue is an underlying sense of being mocked. In that moment I'm transported back to being 14. The lack of respect, the mockery, the feelings of inadequacy, displacement, and frustration all begin to rise from that place where they've been forced down all these years. My heart begins to thump.

"No, David, I'm not. Why do you think that I am?" Great answer. In control.

"You'd look great with one of those hats on," a smirk plays on his face, the others chuckle, and I begin to feel myself getting angry. The implication that to 'look Jewish' is somehow funny, something to be mocked angers me, not because I'm particularly defensive of Jewish people but because being mocked is a universal plight – and I've had plenty of that. The playful racism coming from this young person doesn't surprise me but angers me. I've grown a lot since I was their age and my skin has toughened to insults so why is the British school environment my Kryptonite? Why does it pour salt into wounds unhealed, on memories pushed into the darker recesses of me? Why am I asking questions I already know the answers to?

I squint my eyes and tilt my head, choosing not to snap, remembering where I am, and what I represent. "Why would you say that?"

A brief moment of uncertainty flashes across his face. Did something show in mine? Was my voice too direct, too accusatory?

"I don't know," he mumbles and shrugs, the smile on his face a little unsure. Before I can speak, George takes the opportunity from me.

"Those lot talk well posh," he declares, wearing the ushanka hat from our props bag and playing with a wand.

"Which lot?"

"The others. They're all like from Oxford or something."

Again, I begin to feel my anger rising. Why do these young people feel the need to find problems with us? Why can't they just focus on the task and get on with it? We're here to help them. Why don't they want us to help them? Scratch that: do they even want our 'help'?

"Why does it matter if they do talk posh?" Time is ticking, and ticking, and ticking, and I feel the growing need to get the activity done or else my group won't be prepared. The very thing I hate I am bound to and although we 'plan to be flexible' there is only so much flexibility we can have. My annoyance begins to grow at the irrelevant questions, at them not taking the activity seriously, at my tiredness, at them sitting on the chairs, at the fact that my attention is on them not Layla as well, at my tiredness, at their smug faces, at my-

"Well, we don't talk like that," George responds, his face scrunched up. What is the purpose of this conversation? How do I move it on? Should I move on? Should I address the underlying assumptions? Do we have time?

<p align="center">*</p>

"Autoethnography is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011, p. 1). It offers "nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about *particular* lives, experiences, and relationships rather than *general* information about large groups of people" (italics in the original, Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015, p. 21). It situates itself in the postmodernist position and, as such, autoethnographers recognise the situatedness of the knower and that all views are only 'partial interpretations' of an event, person, or interaction (Richardson and Pierre, 2005) and in this vein the researcher becomes the researched (Short, Turner, & Grant, 2013). Autoethnographers also acknowledge that all ethnography is already relational (Ellis, 2004) and therefore aims to not avoid this inherent subjectivity but uses this position as its strength and its main mode of inquiry. Autoethnographers are guided by ideas, feelings, experiences, and questions (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015, p. 26), believing that research is a socially and relationally conscious act. They typically "foreground personal experiences in research and writing; illustrate sense-making processes; use and show reflexivity; illustrate insider knowledge of a cultural phenomenon/ experience; describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices;" and "seek responses from audiences" (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015, p. 26). Some autoethnographers are more concerned with usefulness of the research than 'fact', arguing that all ethnography is 'fiction' in the sense that someone has documented their own interpretation of an event and made meaning based on theirs and others' lived experiences (Ellis, 2004)."

I stole that from my improved research proposal. Although with a few edits.

I chose autoethnography – or it chose me (Ellis, 2004) – because

> *I*
> *feel*
> *deeply.*

I'm subjective and find it almost impossible to distance myself and become objective because

I
feel
deeply.

As Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt put it: "my subjectivity is always in play" (Gale & Wyatt, 2013, p. 146). Ignoring my selves (Denzin, 2014;) and my voices (Short, Turner, & Grant, 2013) is not something I'm able to do successfully so why not use a methodology that turns it into a strength? Become more reflexive rather than self-interested? Learn to hone my naval gazing into something useful?

When I discovered autoethnography with its emphasis on subjectivity, being vulnerable, emotions, storytelling, and social change (Ellis, 2004; Denzin, 2014; Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015) it felt like I'd found a part of me. In this methodology the researcher *is* the researched (Short, Turner, & Grant, 2013) and the observer *is* the observed and, as the researcher/researched, I'm fully aware that I'm choosing what to share (Turner, 2013). In my wandering through the academic desert I found the autoethnographic manna that revitalised me, that gave me new life. By becoming the researched, the observed, and using my personal experiences as data to be analysed, as a platform to critique culture, I have begun to discover myself-as-always-becoming.

*

I perch like an eagle, prepared. My eyes scan the group of huddled kids-children-young people as they prepare to follow a leader into a new activity.

I spot her instantly.

Her fretful gaze and half-cocked head alert me to danger. She tries not to touch the others but they are excited and boisterous, bumping into her, so she turns to the shelves and begins to scratch. I swoop, aware of little else except my child-who-is-not-my-child.

"Mary, do you want to come and sit over here with me?"

A side-glance and a short succession of nods that make my heart ache. I turn and walk towards the single sofas, young one in tow, and place one chair opposite another. There isn't much privacy in this open plan, glass walled space but we sit behind a noticeboard so we're at least out of view of the others.

She's tense and wringing her hands something horrid. In this moment I'm reminded of her short poem from an activity the week before and it gives me an idea.

"Mary, can you give me pi to the 30th-decimal place?" Her face lights up, her hands stop, and she nods.

"3.141592653589793238462643383279," she rattles off the numbers as easily as I do the alphabet.

"Wow! What else do you know?"

"I know the periodic table!"

I sit there amazed as she recites the periodic table with all the pride she can muster. I feel proud of her for allowing me to dip a toe into her world. I consider how often she has the opportunity to express her love of science, specifically – as she tells me – string theory and Einstein's theory of relativity. I confess that I know very little of either and she happily educates me. I listen, absorbed by her animation and passion for science. I consider the possibilities for her

future, some she may not have ever considered, and wonder if the school system is holding her back.

5, 10 minutes pass, I'm not sure, and the conversation begins to falter. I quietly ask if she would like to join back in with the activities. She looks up, smile on her face, and nods enthusiastically. Her infectious smile draws mine out and we re-join the group.

*

I write to understand (Richardson and Pierre, 2005).

I write as a way of bleeding the thoughts onto something else, onto somewhere else, other than me. The walls of my mind have been written and re-written with the same stories over and over. Like a prisoner kept for too long, the writing on my inner wall is too long and demands a space to breathe.

And I share it now to see what this methodology means for me, for those who hear it, whether we find what others have found in hearing it heard.

*

I stand near the centre as the percipients play with props, crafting stories, and rehearsing actions. I turn to walk to a group as teacher materializes beside me.

"It's good to see them doing stuff like this."

"Yeah, they really get in to it," I reply.

"They need this more than their exams, you know?" I stay silent, waiting for them to continue. "The skills they seem to get here, the confidence, the social belonging. It's needed," she looks around. "That group over there have bonded pretty well, haven't they?" she says and I smile, nodding as she picks out the inappropriately named crew. "Apparently a few of the others have been more confident too," she finishes.

"Have you worked in schools long?" I ask, after a pause.

"Oh yeah. I've been a teacher for over 25 years. I've only been at this school a couple, though."

"And how do you find it?"

"It's getting harder," she sighs out, "I don't think I'll stay many more years, if I'm honest," I nod, always amazed at the level of honesty strangers are willing to be with each other. "But this… this is good work," she continues. "They'll get a lot out of this."

I nod, again, but am plagued by doubt. Does this work help? Does it just offer a momentary oasis in a sea of cynicism? Does the short-term seed-spreading work?

*

All theory is story (Bochner, 1994) and a story told is not the same as a story heard (Denzin, 2014). Autoethnographic stories need a response (Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2016) and this is no exception. I have one more story to show-tell before I finish and I'd like to ask you to consider how this presentation has made you feel. What response has this evoked in you? One of similarity or difference? Is this useful to hear or am I just indulging in self? Kitrina Douglas writes that reading stories to others is when the truth of the story is made known (2013) but in the act of reading – as

with all interactions in the social sphere – we are at the mercy of the interpretation of others (Short, 2013). So, in the words of John from RocknRolla "Don't 'urt me Arch. I'm only littol."

*

I get up from the couch where I've spent most of the day trying to forget the hurt from the viva voce. The Man in The High Castle allows me to stop feeling, to stop thinking about what I'm thinking about. I look down at the sweet and chocolate wrappers, evidence of my desire for comfort and a reminder of my weak will; they're a poor substitute for human affection. I clear up the rubbish and take my empty glass and mug through to the kitchen. As I turn the light on I consider washing up the bits on my side of the kitchen - a fleeting thought as it nears 10pm. I shove the rubbish in the bin, pushing it down so I don't have to be the one to empty it and put my drained drinking utensils on the side. I walk swiftly out of the kitchen, expertly catching the light switch on the way. I stop before leaving the lounge and turn the sofa away from my corner TV and against the wall. It makes the room feel more open and removes traces of my slobbishness. Light off and door open, I fly up the stairs as I do most times, reminding myself I'll appreciate it one day. I swing around the circular knob at the end of the landing feeling the smooth painted wood under my hand and walk the short way to my room, running my hand passively along the wall. Opening my bedroom door I feel the need to capture the thoughts flooding from my mind. I sit at my desk, grab my mouse, and wiggle it. Nothing. I push the power button and remove the items from my pockets, barely recognising where I place them on the desk. I type my password without really looking and feel like an accomplished writer already. I click on the word document still open from earlier, Ctrl+N, and begin to type.

What does it mean to feel as an applied performance practitioner? What does this mean for the temporary relationships created? What does this mean for me as a person with multiple privileged intersecting identities? What benefit can we gain from introspection within applied performance and can it be a way of resisting the narrative of cold 'professionalism', those 'useful' parameters that help us from suffering under the weight of our own empathy? Should surface acting ever be used in applied performance practice or should deep acting be the way? Is being an applied performance practitioner a way of life or merely another job to be filled? What role does emotion play in applied performance? What does it mean to ask that? What am I even asking?

I consider saving it as a journal entry and decide to write it as a story, considering I need to increase my skill and start to view my work in stories. I get a little excited writing that line.

I'm hot.

I hear the sounds of the street outside, a through road between main roads and I feel a mixture of emotions from the past two days. I feel sad, lonely, unsupported, but also supported, rebellious, determined, empathetic, and like I want to cry. I remember the previous day and like a weight being lifted I am relieved the viva voce is over and yet that weight is paradoxically still tied and I consider what I need to do with no master to guide me. I've often looked for masters, I ponder. I can pick out numerous points in my life where I have been drawn to certain people, to follow them, to be loyal to them, to give them my fealty. I consider the relationships with my father and

mother and acknowledge that could be a source of my desire. It could be my (wavering) faith as a Christian.

Sadly, I think to myself, they weren't everything that 11-year old me needed them to be.

I feel annoyed as I hear my housemate going in and out of his room, his noises disturbing my concentration and my peace, the well of anger bubbling. That ancient well passed down from parent to child to parent to child… Trauma is passed down to the third generation so what of rejection? Hatred? Lovelessness?

Voices outside my window distract as I type. As I enjoy the steady rhythm of the keys I'm reminded of a time in the previous year where I

> *can't*
> *can't cope*
> *i rock, i rock a*
> *rock in my chest a*
> *crash in my chest i*
> *can't cope i*
> *listen to the tick*
> *the tock*
> *the tick*
> *the rhythm*
> *it rocks*
> *my heart*
> *to sleep*

and I realise how much I've grown since then. A highly functioning mess that has mummy issues masquerading an adult. I smile to myself at myself trying not to take my self too seriously but as my therapist said I laugh when I feel something 11-year old me doesn't want to feel. I feel too much. I think too much.

But I'm learning how to live with both.

I re-read the last line and feel my tiredness creep up on me. My typing becomes a little less accurate, my eyes a little less looky, and I know it's time for bed. I feel sick from the sweets and chocolate, upset and elated at the PhD, and frustrated at myself.

I feel 'normal', then.

*

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