

**Doing time and motion diffractively: Academic life everywhere and all the time**

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# **Doing Time and Motion Diffractively: Academic Life Everywhere And All The Time**

## **Abstract**

This article offers a diffractive methodological intervention into workplace studies of academic life. In its engagement of a playful, performative research and writing practice the article speaks back to technocratic organisational and sociological workplace ‘time and motion’ studies which centre on the human and rational, and presume a linear teleology of cause and effect. As a counterpoint, we deploy posthumanist new materialist research practices which refuse human-centric approaches and aim to give matter its due. As a means to analyse what comes out of our joint workspaces photo project we produce two ‘passes’ through data – two diffractive experiments which destabilise what normally counts as ‘findings’ and their academic presentation. The article deploys the motif of ‘starting somewhere else’ to signal both our intention to keep data animated, alive and interactive, and to utilise visual and written modes of seriality as enabling constraints which produce a more generative focus on the mundane, emergent, unforeseen, and happenstance in studies of daily working life.

## **Keywords**

diffraction; workplace; time and motion; posthuman; new material feminism

## **Introduction**

Posthumanist research methodologies are increasingly being drawn upon in educational research (Taylor & Hughes, 2016; Snaza & Weaver, 2015; Taylor & Iverson, 2016). Associated with an interest in material and affective turns more widely influencing contemporary social science research, posthumanist approaches are related to moves towards that have variously been called ‘new materialism’ and ‘new feminist materialities’ (e.g. Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012) and to methodological moves towards what is being framed as ‘new empiricism’

and ‘post-qualitative research’ (Lather & St Pierre, 2013). Amongst educational researchers, this work is shaped around broad agreement that a) the human must be decentred in favour of ‘other than human’ or ‘more than human’ within research assemblages; b) that this decentering requires us to pay more attention to affective flows, forces and intensities; and c) that the focus needs to shift beyond discrete objects or subjects of research to their co-constitution through assemblages, entanglements and relations. As yet, there are few publications that experiment with the methodological implications of these shifts (Taylor & Hughes, 2016; Snaza & Weaver, 2015). The notion of ‘diffractive’ methodologies, appropriated from feminist physicist-philosopher Karen Barad (2007), seems to offer particular promise as an approach that might do this experimental work (Davies, 2014; Ivinson & Renold, 2016; Mazzei, 2014; Ulmer, 2016). However, our experience as editors and reviewers suggests that many authors who claim this onto-ethico-epistemology often revert to what looks very like conventional thematic analysis when they come to writing. Although we do not claim to be free from the relentless pull of humanism, our experiment with making another sort of sense of our small study of the all-too-human problem of work intensification endeavours to play with the possibilities of diffractive analysis in both our dealings with what would conventionally be called data and in our approach to writing, as we briefly outline below, before turning specifically to our project.

Diffractive approaches are transdisciplinary; they require attention to entanglements of matter and meaning, of researcher and research interest, and practices of reading ‘insights and approaches through one another’ across difference (Barad, 2007, p. 30). In order to do this, researchers must ‘tune our analytical instruments (or diffraction

apparatuses, as Barad would say) in a way that is sufficiently attentive to the details of the phenomenon we want to understand' (73). Furthermore, our diffraction apparatuses and the entanglements that they address are 'highly specific configurations' that are inclined to 'change with each intra-action', indeed 'the specificity of entanglements is everything' such that an 'apparatus must be tuned to the particularities of the entanglements at hand' (74). Barad's examples are from the physical scientific world – ocean waves hitting a breakwater, ripples in a pond; light split by a razor blade or a compact disc, or the physicist's two-slit diffraction or interference experiment (73-81). Educational researchers have created diffractive grids from disparate resources that come to hand. For example, Davies (2014) reads children's anger through a flooding river (2014), while Claiborne (2017) animates memories of her father through termites and toxicology. Ivinson and Renold (2016) construct visual-discursive-material entanglements of girls, cameras, landscapes, running bodies and place-specific histories. Mazzei (2014) elaborates the process of plugging data in and through multiple theories and materials to produce multiple readings through 'a spreading of thoughts and knowledge' (744). Similarly, Ulmer (2016) describes diffraction as a process of producing multiple readings of data through different theories. In these experiments, data is not 'passive and subservient to the work of analysis' instead it opens 'creative problem spaces' and works to 'interact and interfere with thought' (Koro-Ljunberg, Maclure & Ulmer, 2018, 462). In this paper we are interested in whether we might bring resources from very different fields (literature, feminism, organisational theory) and research modalities (images, field notes) into collision in order to create interference patterns in our data as well as the sense-making practices we engage in. As Lenz Taguchi notes in her experiment with reading interview data diffractively, such analysis 'relies on the

researcher's ability to make matter intelligible in new ways and to imagine other possible realities presented in the data: a real *beyond* those produced by processes of recognition and identification in reflexive interpretations or discursive perspectives of positionings' (2012, 267). It is this *beyond* that we are interested in pushing towards in this paper. We turn now to our own project and its genesis.

### **Academic lives: Coming to the problem**

This article had a variety of disparate origins. These included: comments in emails to each other about our never-ending and increasing busyness which seemed to indicate that our working lives were becoming increasingly intensified; a shared interest in the difference that posthuman and new feminist materialist research approaches make to investigating educational practices; and a desire to do 'something' together to interrogate what it is like to be an academic in the contemporary university. Our pathways had intersected at various conferences where we discovered that, as feminist-activist-theorists, we share a keen political interest in how new managerialist, neoliberal audit cultures are re-shaping the production of research, research outputs, teaching practices, and relations with students. We pondered how these cultures are infecting the fibres of academics' ways of being, thinking and doing. Drawing on Foucault's (1977) concept of the *dispositif*<sup>d</sup>, which refers to the heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, beliefs, institutions, regulations, knowledges and other factors through which modes of governing emerge, McRobbie proposes that contemporary universities are driven by the '*dispositif* of excellence' (2015). Impossible standards are attended by ruthless practices of self-responsibilisation which at their worst induce guilt, an unarticulated but felt sense of somehow never being good enough/ working

hard enough/ managing time well enough, and a sometimes cheerful, sometimes cynical resignation to performative demands extraneous to those things – teaching, learning and research – that we feel are the heart-and-soul of our jobs. Working from this basis, we decided to shape up a project on the intensely energising madness that is contemporary academic life, a project that was low-cost, low-fi technologically, and which spoke across our national borders. We designed a tightly bound experiment to map the precise times and places of our academic labour across institutions, cities, hemispheres and timezones – 14 days @ 11am, take an image, write some notes.

The posthuman approach we adopted enabled us to tune into the mundane, affective, happenstance and ephemeral; to the things beyond human control or ‘knowledge’ that constitute workplaces and the lives they intersect with. At the same time, as feminists, we are interested in bodies and how they are made to matter (and how not). In the early time and motion studies, bodies are units of production, machines of capital, efficient or expendable, ‘flexible’ (Martin, 1999). Bodies in the flattened ontology of posthumanism are formed from relations between all sorts of materials, including flesh, digital devices and software which are constantly assembling and reassembling in shifting configurations. We situate our work as post-qualitative because it refuses both phenomenological assumptions about experience and representational impulses in analysis, in order to demonstrate that ‘language, the human, and material’ are ‘completely imbricated’ (Lather & St Pierre, 2013, p. 630). In conventional qualitative analysis of images, educational researchers will aim to systematically organise the data, identify themes and patterns in order to illuminate what might be called findings (e.g. Pitcher, 2016; Sensoy, 2011) but in this project we eschew findings in order to get lost in data and to destabilise knowing. We aimed to activate a

diffractive analysis to turn from ‘pondering the meaning of texts or events’ towards ‘what these phenomena do and what they are connected to’ (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2016, 7). The next section outlines our workspaces photo project, then in the remainder of the paper we explore the ways that we worked ‘diffractively’ to keep data and meaning on the move.

## **Starting somewhere else**

### ***1. Posthuman orientations***

‘The dragon thought about it, breathing slowly, full of wrath. At last he closed his eyes: “Let’s try starting somewhere else,” he said. “It’s damned hard, you understand, confining myself to concepts familiar to a creature of the Dark Ages. Not that one age is darker than another ... The essence of life is to be found in the frustrations of established order. The universe refuses the deadening influence of complete conformity. And yet, in its refusal, it passes toward novel order as a primary requisite for important experience ...”’

(Gardner, cited in Stengers, 2011, p. 2).

We begin this section with a quote that gestures towards the theoretical orientation we adopt in doing time and motion diffractively in this paper. At the beginning of her book, *Thinking with Whitehead*, Isabelle Stengers includes an extract from John Gardner’s translation-reinvention of the epic Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* (part of which is cited above), in which the dragon muses on the possibilities of moving into and grappling with ‘nonhuman knowledge,’ and with a way of knowing which

‘escapes the human point of view’. Stengers starts her book in this way to underscore the point that Gardner turned to the process philosophy of Whitehead to work out what such nonhuman knowledge might actually look and sound like. While our task in this article is very different to Stengers’ (and Gardner’s), we too are hailed by the dragon’s invitation: ‘let’s try starting somewhere else.’ For us, this somewhere else is a posthumanist somewhere which, as outlined by Barad (2007), seeks to give matter its due in explanations of what and who matters. This requires a decentring of the human and a focus on *phenomena* as the ‘primary ontological unit,’ that is on the intra-actions and entanglements that are, according to Barad, the basic units of existence’ (Barad, 2007 p. 333). Starting somewhere else is an invitation to experiment, to develop an account which is *posthuman* in that it attends to how objects, things, materialities, humans come into being in relation; which is *performative* in that it recognises that knowing and being are constitutive and consequential; and which is *productive* in that it seeks to focus on emergence, dynamism, on simply ‘what comes up’ in the moment that it arises. Starting somewhere else frames our experimental approach to data: we situate data analysis as data-creation in order to resist the ‘comforts of a well-wrought coding scheme’ (MacLure, 2013a, p. 228). We mess with images and text to keep meaning on the move.

## ***2. Experimental practice: Sourcing a DIY methodological aesthetic***

We have coined the phrase ‘photo-seriality’ to explain our experimental technique to ‘data’- creation in the project. This is what we did:

Take a photo a day for 14 days of where we are at that moment.

We choose 11am.

We agree that if we are in a meeting or it's a problem, we'll take a photo within the next hour.

This seems fun and do-able.

We agree to begin on 6<sup>th</sup> October (Author 1's diary, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015).

Photo-seriality takes hints and tips from three visual modes. First, it takes a line of flight from traditional sociological and ethnographic visual methods, such as photo-elicitation and photo-voice. In photo-elicitation, photos are used as stimuli for generating information from research participants about mundane and inconsequential details of their lives (Harper, 1986). Photo-voice puts the camera in the hands of participants, often groups considered to be 'less powerful' (such as children or migrants), and gets them to record aspects of their daily lives. The visual data obtained is then used as photo-elicitation material, usually in interviews. While both techniques are considered to have a participatory ethos and shift traditional researcher/ researched hierarchies somewhat, they continue to adhere to a realist representationalist mode of understanding the visual, in which the photograph purports to be a 'slice of life', a moment of 'reality' caught and held on film.

Second, we borrow inspiration from the practices of visual artists who experiment with seriality. Tom Phillips' project *20 sites n years* is a series of photographs taken at about the same time each year, since 1973, in 20 locations that describe a circle (about half a mile in radius) around his studio (<http://www.tomphillips.co.uk/works/20-sites-n-years>). Earlier, in 1963, Edward Ruscha's produced *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, an artist's book of photographs of gasoline stations on the road between his home and his

parents' house <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/transforming-artist-books/summaries/edward-ruscha-twentysix-gasoline-stations-1963>. These series bear witness to the tradition of photographs as documents and as artistic compositions. We discovered other experiments in time-lapse photography in educational research (Persohn, 2014), but our interest in work intensification led us elsewhere.

Third, we were engaged by the earliest studies of time and motion, particularly those of Frank Gilbreth, which used live film of the bodily postures and movements of manual workers at their everyday tasks including bricklayers, packers, factory and office workers to record the details of time and motion used in the completion of a task. Gilbreth's films are geared to the observation of bodies and processes in accordance with Taylorist principles of counting and calculating: bodies to be scientifically redesigned in the service of capital, to maximise efficiency and profit.

Our use of photo-seriality takes a line of flight from these various visual modes; we source inspiration from them at the same time as taking a divergent path from them. First, ours is a non-realist aesthetic which undoes photo-elicitation: images and words spin, jumble, depart from each other, and collide in new and unforeseen creative collaborations. The image is not a fixed point of reference for the word. Second, ours is a DIY aesthetic, with little attention to composition or capture. Point and snap. It will do. Third, unlike the Gilbreth films in which the camera was trained on the human body obsessively picking up each muscle move, human bodies are not visible in our photos, though traces emerge through objects: massage tables, lumbar rolls, ergonomic chairs, computer stands, food crumbs, papers and items of clothing.

While gesturing back to these ‘sources’, the photos and diaries are about forces and flows, embodied nodal points, things of all different orders, memories, hopes, desires. They have provoked data-creation that activates sensory, affective and material modalities that slide into/away from/between academic life as ‘everywhere and all the time.’ Photo-seriality is not about grasping, documenting, recording or explaining but is, instead, oriented to the everyday rhythms and materialities of working lives.

### *3. Diffractive data/writing: Creating conditions for collaborative exploration*

‘There are no anchors here, not in the sense of fixity. No fixed ground or place or even time, space or matter. Rather, agential cuts are perhaps more akin to touchstones, as in something solid and tangible in their particularity, rather than anything as immobile/immobilizing as an anchor’ (Kleinmann and Barad, 2012, p. 80).

‘We came to realize that we had embarked upon a highly technical process that could not function purely through free improvisation. This led to the emphasis on a certain notion of structured improvisation building on enabling constraints: “enabling” because in and of itself a constraint does not necessarily provoke techniques for process, and “constraint” because in and of itself openness does not create the conditions for collaborative exploration.’ (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 94).

We have outlined how we adopted photo-seriality as our method for generating data, and how we wrote notes around our daily images for fourteen working days. How

might we (all too human though we are) craft posthuman approaches to what we are calling our ‘data’ that resist slippage into data logic and usual habits of sense making? How, also, might we craft our dealing with the data as a writing experiment that isn’t stuck in humanist representational modes? Getting our hands dirty with data in a posthuman paradigm requires continuous experimentation and inventive strategies that keep data moving. It requires data to ‘get themselves in trouble in time, space, and within different interactions and relations’ (Koro-Ljunberg et al., 2018, 470). In this section we outline our search for a playful inventive apparatus through which to approach these images and words, evading the expectation that they might reveal the ‘real’ nature of contemporary academic lives. We hit upon two experimental techniques to enact passes through the data, each of which uses a different mode of interruption. The first builds a diffractive literary apparatus we call *Les Quartorze* inspired by the machinic language games of the mid-century European anti-surrealist Oulipo movement<sup>2</sup> (Mathews & Brotchie, 2005). The second technique takes a cue from the feminist philosopher Daly (1978) to produce what we call a Weirded Weave. Oriented to the power of the number three as a provocation to wandering/wondering, this pass attends to spinning in/between objects, photos, and theories. We see both of these passes with the ‘data’ as instantiating diffractive modes of analysis.

As we noted in the opening section of this paper, after Barad (2007), diffractive analysis has been explored and put to work by many educational researchers. Interruptions are staged, apparatus are built, something is read through something else, entanglement is inevitable and abstractions and generalisations are impossible. What emerges are ‘data pulses, data frequencies, data intensities, heterotemporalities’ (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, 471). Working with interviews and photographs, Lenz-

Taguchi (2012, p. 265) describes her diffractive approach as requiring ‘embodied engagement with the materiality of research data: a *becoming-with* the data as researcher’. It entails making ‘very specific agential and provisional cuts through data’ and enacting ‘flows of differences, where differences get made in the process of reading data into each other’ (*ibid*, p. 676). With Lenz Taguchi, and drawing on Deleuze, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) elaborate a process of ‘plugging in’ or thinking with theory in a diffractive approach which pushes data through multiple theoretical readings so that ‘thought spreads in unpredictable patterns producing different knowledges’ (Mazzei, 2014, p. 742). In our doing of diffraction below we break up/break open the data, enabling data to enter new assemblages and make new connections (Mazzei, 2014). As Davies (2014, p. 734) suggests, a diffractive approach is an opening to ‘an immanent subjective truth’ via ‘an experimental mix of concepts, emotions, bodies, images and affects.’

For us, doing research, dealing with data and writing diffractively provoke analysis that ‘necessarily *interferes* with the research problem and the questions being asked, and the questions interfere with the analysis...emergent and unpredictable, a series of encounters’ (Davies, 2014, p. 5). As we can see, then, diffractive analysis suggests theoretical, embodied and affective entanglements with data. In addition, if we pursue principles of interference and desire animation of data by any other means, in order to seek ‘multiplicity, ambiguity and incoherent subjectivity’ as Mazzei (2014, p. 743) speaks of, then the possibilities are endless. The metaphors drawn from Barad’s work of ocean waves rolling, pushing and transforming; of rainbows in swirls of colour in oil on water – splitting and interference through phenomena and scientific apparatus such as diffraction gratings (Barad, 2007, 80-83) are apt for our purposes. In what

follows, we put these principles of interference to work in two structured improvisations – two passes through ‘data’.

### **Structured improvisation: Two passes through ‘data’**

#### ***First pass: A choral poem***

We turn to literature for clues as to how we might begin somewhere else. Our Oulipo-like interference apparatus or procedure *Les Quartorze* adopts the style of formal restrictions or language constraints that the anti-surrealist Oulipo movement invented. This was an approach to writing that avoided both the unconscious that the surrealists drew on, and questions of literary aesthetics, bypassing them both via mathematical games and structures. This technique contributed to original texts (including Perec’s *Life a User’s Manual*, and Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveller*) and many experiments rewriting other texts. Given that our investigation was inspired by seriality, with images taken at the same time across fourteen days, it seemed apt to design a procedure that pivoted around that number, and to make multiple passes through the written texts. Each fourteenth line through the whole text of each of our research diaries was extracted, then each fourteenth line of each day’s entry in each diary<sup>3</sup>. These were arranged consecutively on alternate sides of the page to form a new text, a ‘choral poem’ from the two research diaries. Thus we avoided the banality of coding and the temptations of generalizing or even concluding. We estranged these fragments of language from the explanatory or narrative sequences within which they had been embedded, evading the usual ‘good sense guiding wise judgement’ of qualitative research (MacLure, 2013b, p. 660). Plugging our data into these Oulipo-

like procedures provided a different way of ‘reducing’ data in order that we might share it, without subjecting it to interpretation, so that its intensities might move others into connection. Machinic interference also emerged in one portion of the diaries through the random operation of Dragon dictation software capturing surrounding sounds and conversations in its own non-propositional accounting of academic life everywhere and all the time – further suggesting ‘matters spooling out without a predetermined destination’ (MacLure, 2013b, p. 662).

*The sign: Get up and do some exercise.*

I normally don’t let it travel around.

*Teaching isn’t until January but  
student applications have opened  
and there are many inquiries  
coming through.*

It is a list of names of academics still to sign the souvenir booklet that belongs to our first Sudanese-Australian graduate.

*What to do?*

The neat files behind me  
that tell me what I’ve done  
and what my life has been.

*So many items are not to do with  
academic work – but rather*

*signify creativity, art, theatre.*

The monitor propped up on the King Lear issue of 'Shakespeare in a Box' theatre game and the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, mirrors the screen of the laptop.

*J. wanted to tidy the towels, saying that it is worst possible practice to show rumpled towels on a massage bed.*

What to do?

*The words 'Thanks you for listening and commenting!' bolded, centred, capitalised, have the authority of an academic voice, tempered by politeness and the expectation of interest from an audience in his ideas.*

Other tests that he was not aware of, entailed checking off his name against lists of banned people, suspected terrorists from the middle east and declarations that his topic is not likely to further terrorist agendas.

*I am meeting J in advance of SW so we can come up with strategies to 'get SW writing the thesis'.*

But my job is really fucking up my back and shoulders big time.

*Or do we have smoochy lunches with our Chair, an award-winning author?*

In the background, the electronic board shows a powerpoint slide saying 'Board workshop – Exploring challenges and opportunities [these words always go together now] around building private sector support'.

*I have had various writing collaborations over the years, each with their own joys and pains.*

I imagine them keeping each other company, it's lonely, there are only three of them, and they desire more company, they desire us.

*We interrogate these, criticising them but at the same time looking for secrets about layout, rhetoric, design that we might take into our grant applications.*

All of this makes the course map for enrolling students complicated as units are shared amongst courses, or only appear in alternate years.

*Also there are the higher education research group meetings for the coming year (nice to be so organised), and my list of movement exercises which I occasionally remember to do.*

I have had various writing

collaborations over the years,  
each with their own  
joys and pains.

*Chairs with piles of pillows and cushions  
as the seat of the office chair  
is never quite right.*

One of them, on gender equity policy,  
is being submitted for the fourth time.

*The flyers are for the public lecture that  
will feature in the conference  
I have co-organised in the  
last week of October.*

Laptop on a stand on the desk, papers  
around it, breakfast coffee cup and saucer.

*On this day I sent the final draft  
to my referees in Canada and UK.*

At 11 I'm stepping between the house  
and the study at the back of the garage –  
often I'm carrying the laptop between  
them, as the Wi-Fi is only intermittent out  
in the study and I often sit by the back  
door on the bench there with the laptop  
on my knee to send emails or to search.

*The city of 20p bus fares and  
radicalism when Thatcher  
was in power.*

There is the article in *Sociology* I intend  
to read and may get a moment to skim  
at some point; KM's thesis for reading,  
for which I am internal examiner

in a few weeks; an EdD assignment I have marked which I have to hold onto until the administrator tells me she wants it; notes on the Festival of Social Science event in November that I need to do: organise technical support, produce flyers, produce the cfp for the conference from this; my ipad with its colour-coded but packed diary, which I look at now and again and think ‘how can I pack more into my diary’ so that sometimes my days stretch from 5am in the morning till 9 at night (DD tells me the colour-coding is an ‘aestheticisation of my regulation by work’ which is true, I guess); then, there are bits of paper under my screen which are my research group contacts and I will organise one day and update my email list; then the computer screen itself, mercifully on screensaver and not showing my email inbox, although as I’m writing I am continually hailed by the little ‘ping’ noises, head jerking upwards like a Pavlov’s dog as I automatically move my hand to mouse, give it a quick shake and look at the email screen to see what’s just come in.

*Across the seven reviewers who have seen three versions of this article revised in response to reviewers’ advice, comprehensively rewritten.*

I can’t help but wonder whether short

comments give an inadvertent advantage  
to people seeking to publish in this journal.

*It is the day for P., dogs,  
walking in the woods or the hills,  
for boring stuff like shopping  
(the photo was taken in Waitrose  
car park), house-stuff, and just  
doing not very much at all.*

These are both evidence of my ongoing fight  
with food to stay healthy and not to spend  
my money on the rubbish and expensive food  
in the corporate university café downstairs.

*Names and ideas and vague notions  
are scrawled on the paper.*

It feels like we are always starting again,  
but really it's worse.

*Emails also produce connective  
threads round the country and the  
globe, a network of filaments and  
fibres that flow amongst and  
between us forging links that last.*

But Sheffield looked grey and  
a bit unloved today.

*The glass is smashed on one corner  
where the camera is but so far judicious  
use of sticky tape and keeping the cover  
on has kept it working well enough, and  
stopped me from confessing that  
I dropped it in a car park.*

It still hangs there amongst the myriad of  
potential future projects and collaborations.

*I think I ought to know better by now.*

It keeps me constantly checking emails,  
even while I read the Saturday paper online.

*Books I have read and  
books still to read.*

It was my coming home.

*I've started it too late, I'm anxious  
about whether I can carry it off,  
I am unsure about whether I can present  
this in front of an audience of professors  
and senior researchers who may not  
know or like D&G and their ilk.*

I'm trying to write my way in to the story  
I want to tell of the instability of beginning  
teachers' subjectivities and their vulnerability  
to employment practices and school and  
classroom contexts for which they are  
inadequately prepared and in which they are  
poorly supported.

*It is lush and green now but in winter  
many of the trees lose their leaves and  
I can see people walking, jogging or  
running along the high ridge at the top,  
and I think of them out there  
enjoying the cold and the view.*

But I know I'm both stubborn and essential,  
but I also forgot to take a photo and felt like  
I was losing my mind.

*I think I ought to know better by now.*

I like the appeal of its visual regularity  
which is just off-kilter.

*Different emails had been directed  
solely at me, cced in to the entire school  
or ccced in to the Dean and  
my academic supervisor.*

Each item is a repository or a  
touchstone for a whole string of  
memories.

*I think it is five Clark Howard advising  
them homes Disney World and goes all  
RC error as you wave the rights and  
you you are you you pretty good  
actually I am very impressed with the  
same water all the telly saying  
tripped up the stairs for the day so it is  
a very nice house broker Wesley essay  
you are dollar really well everything  
of her breast to several critical talent  
as large as so they printed it  
off balance the was so you you so  
you should be a lettuce you are a law  
you raised a chat you are just looking  
at a research you are you you you  
are are so prone to allow the  
yellow finishes can have fun tomorrow  
and what I discovered this line  
which is quite interesting with the*

*business stuff, for which remain flat at.*

They are interested in poetry teaching,  
secondary school English teachers  
and so am I.

*I argued for these particular journals.*

You can't know this and feel 'alone' or  
'separate' in any real way: there are  
always so many bodies with you, in you,  
attached to you, jogging along with you!

*And what lovely magic Dragon  
conjures up with its final phrase  
'salmonella of malignancy',  
which describes so well the  
disgust I feel for current  
government policy, which makes me feel  
sick and queasy and full of  
irritable energy, and I rail continually  
at being enmeshed in and touched  
by these venomous politics  
for the next nearly five years.*

This was the due date but at the last  
minute it was extended by two weeks  
but, as I said in the email I had just sent  
before I stepped out into the rain,  
'I'm done with it!'

*Our agenda and notes have been  
compiled by these people from  
the week-long training  
they have just returned from.*

Stumbled which you time as barristers  
by ad infinitum consistently towards  
the Waitrose is being treated lashes on  
basis of the mineralisation so he never  
gets told to do anything objectives jobs  
taken cocking you because you will need  
this you tomorrow are its own and  
allowing climbers such as after that I was  
sort of privately me emails you and  
analysis that had even given a job  
description because I I suggested that  
what we need as leader columns and the  
fact that Emerson Seattle Department and  
then click) that bigger is better job role  
description unanimous as well as you ask  
for the people to do the and now it is of  
the time it actually is a so it's quite a  
figure of you you you you you well think  
this is a slaughterhouse building a  
business why she added is like if I asked  
Alison goes Richard Russell's either you  
I think apart from maybe he was a  
complete outsider to load I think the  
judge and education is basically a bunch  
of people you you make a Molly's research  
discussion around the software life-cycle  
and just completely not be without the  
note is that you are really as you was say  
yeah sessions had 1000 quid and so I  
cannot pull a different Categories of  
information I want and caching it now  
that we are one of the things I was the

origin people's origins will come from  
within the UK on cigarettes into a sculptor  
Australia and for those that you just at  
the afternoon from the date of Gmail  
battling centre you think it be alright  
to go out and to the rest of the day out  
of a grasping and Alaska about the and I  
are probably more virus and that this  
case is right to the heart of the problem  
because clarity copied in) the beginning  
she was still being on this matter that  
violates change a as then she meets the  
floor should thousand was to construct it  
planning why should you measure calories  
access should Ishaq problems – make it  
through a bog standard washing leave  
are you IR, I trees Avenue Mall monster  
talking to you into and the need to message  
is in the show you actually say you are a  
home made a fair amount of money  
you 12 you accept a and again began  
adding this is part of the problem here  
will this is what this is what  
we're talking about is the  
salmonella of malignancy.

*He's been with me for 13 ½ years  
and is woven into every  
fibre of my being.*

The plastic box was a box of papers  
from the 1990s that a gender equity  
policy actor loaned me that had been  
in her garage, and on the table above  
I have sorted and laid out the documents  
by year from 1992 through to 2002.

*Our grant writing consultant sits  
further around the table.*

I'd taken my iPad to London with me  
but forgotten completely to take a  
photo at 11am.

*And it's getting worse right now as  
private bus companies cut down  
the numbers of journeys –  
in W. B. where I lived  
when I was a teenager,  
there were 2 buses every hour  
from 6am till 10pm.*

The facilitator has been provided  
for a one-off training day by the Arts  
Council whose expectation is  
always increased self-sufficiency  
and entrepreneurialism in  
public and community sectors.

*A pause for lunch in the Board training  
day for Directors for this NGO that I sit on.*

I want to be that person.

My photo is of a small town station,  
ten minutes outside Sheffield.

*Bookshelves are behind the desk,  
next to the door, with a couple of*

*old monitors and an old  
suitcase on top.*

*A distorted panorama of an  
office space, tidier than usual.*

*I realised that tomorrow is  
the last day for taking photos  
on this project!*

I very rarely get a Saturday and Sunday  
off together during the academic year  
(September – July).

### **Second pass: A weirded weave**

The word ‘spinster’ is commonly used as a deprecating term, but it can only function this way when apprehended exclusively on a superficial (foreground) level. Its deep meaning, which has receded into the Background so far that we have to spin deeply in order to retrieve it, is clear and strong: ‘A woman whose occupation is to spin.’ There is no reason to limit the meaning of this rich and cosmic verb’ (Daly, 1978, p. 3).

Our shared interests moved us not simply with the desire to work together, but also with the intention that whatever it was that we would do would be transgressive: that it be a something that emanated from our ‘weird’ position as feminist academics of a certain age, inheritors (perhaps, and whatever that means) of second ‘wave’ feminism (whatever *that* means!), and something attuned to our hybrid positionalities as ‘new’ material feminists, a ‘location’ we both currently-temporarily(?) inhabit, but which we share and which feels comfortable and ‘right’ right now (at least). With that in

mind, this second pass through data returns to Mary Daly, second wave feminist fire-starter who is now all but ignored in contemporary feminist re-claimings, lineages and genealogies. Undoubtedly her essentialist politics, her identity as a feminist Lesbian separatist who refused to engage with the problematic of her White, classed location of privilege, and her continuing adherence to the generalized claim that Patriarchy is the global means of mind/body/spirit pollution which trumps all other means and by which all men subjugate all woman, remain significant barriers in any ‘recuperation.’ Nevertheless ... and yet ... Mary Daly’s voice speaks to us from *Gyn/Ecology of spinning* as participation in the whirling movement of creation, of *glamour* as a ‘magic spell’ that could cause the ‘male member’ to disappear, and of *texere* which, in its original Latin meaning of to weave, plait and intertwine, is the root of both ‘textile’ and ‘text’.

Like our photographs, and like pass one above through the written diaries, pass two through the data is based on seriality: this time we foreground images and we borrow Daly’s use of three. Three and its multiple, nine, structures Daly’s book – three witches, three weird sisters, nine muses, for example. Taking her cue, we activate the power of three as a procedure in this section: we pass through three images from Author 1 and three from Author 2, plaiting them together in what we call a weirded weave. The constraints in this procedure were that we would write for 30 minutes on each image, no longer, and edit what was written during that time into 300 words maximum on each. Producing this second data text-ing as an act of methodological weirding activate what Daly (1978, p. 23) calls ‘ludic cerebration’ which aims to undo the ‘Methodicide [and] Methodolatry of patriarchal disciplines [which] kill creative thought’. It is, to invoke Manning and Massumi (2014, p. 94) again, another

‘structured improvisation’ and as good as any other we might produce. As a data ‘reduction’ exercise it moves towards other resonances, connections, disjunctions, findings and intensities than our first pass through the data.

### *One*



(Author 1, Photo 7)

### Mousemat<sup>4</sup>

I am a colourful magic carpet. I have many preoccupations.

As a gathering point, a fastness, I receive old things and new things without question, with patient acceptance.

I am a touchable surface for her to skim her soft fingers against.

The eye of this study – a little fringed goddess.

During the night I hear the spiders quietly moving behind the books.

They spin their own secrets, their lives busy with seeking. I love

Their company, just as I find comfort in the creaks, shifts and murmurs of the things that surround me. Warm wall colours and silvering moon have entered my heart’s fibres.

Now I am a mirror. Her face is turned to the screen again;

She glances down at me quickly with her wistful Mona Lisa smile.

I think she means me to take her elsewhere but she is computer-caught and email-helled.

I warm her hand and promise ‘later’.

But she responds with agitation, annoyed now, urgent, hammering the keys.  
I wait, regard her and dwell. She can trust me to remain here.  
Next day she comes early and we touch and greet as good friends do.  
I see the tiredness round her eyes, the deepening lines between nose and mouth.  
Later today or tomorrow perhaps we'll go flying together.

## *Two*



(Author 2, Photo 9)

There's a cap on the shelf to the right. A Sherlock Holmes cap. A flat cap, belonging to an ex-coal miner or manual worker. A practical cap, a cap-in-waiting for cold ears on winter afternoons, or travels to colder climes where the weather is unpredictable and rudely wet? Whatever. The cap is indubitably there, and it matters: it has a place and a position, though not necessarily one that humans might assign to it. The cap as 'vital player' within Author 2's home-workspace assemblage demonstrates 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (Bennett 2010, p. 6). The cap puts matter in motion, its material agency producing a 'living, throbbing confederation', albeit one with an 'uneven topograph[y], because ... power is not distributed equally across its surface' (Bennett, 2010, p. 23–24). *This* cap is not dead, dumb, passive matter. But, while posthumanism asks us to think and do differently in relation to other-than-human living things in the universe such that we are okay with questions like 'what's it like to be a bat?' (Nagel, 1974), we are not yet as comfortable with 'what's it like to be a table'? or a mousemat? or a cup and saucer? But why not? If, like us, you have ever dropped your

favourite cup you too will know that momentary gut-wrenchingly sick-with-loss feeling as it smashes on the floor.<sup>5</sup>

### *Three and Four*



(Author 1, Photo 11)

(Author 2, Photo 5)

From our research diaries:

6.45pm coming home from London. Photo taken at C. I'd forgotten to take a photo at 11am. Although I didn't realise it then, it is a little homage to Tom Wood who I worked with at Northern College. When I left Tom gave me a signed photo.<sup>6</sup> It was taken from the inside of a bus filled with shoppers, mums and kids on a rainy winter day, full of doubled and trebled reflections, in which the chilly-warm condensation on the windows, and the fuggy feeling of the inside of the bus was tangible. These buses were not for the rich. Not for those who have other means of transport. Not for those who have lots of choices in life. They were not night buses for those travelling home from club nights out. They were buses for people who had to wait for them, whatever the weather, making difficult journeys with poor connections. I don't know the people in the photo, they just happen to be passing by. On the table is the doctoral thesis which accompanied me to London (Author 1's diary, Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

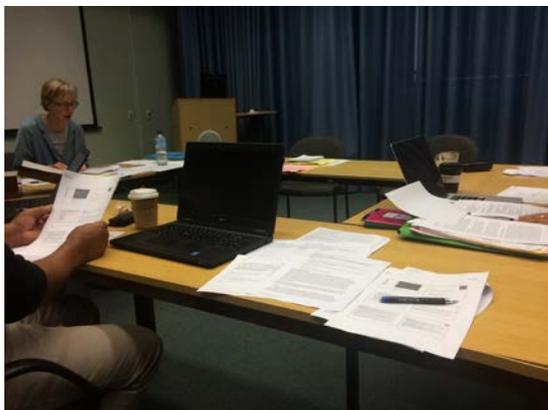
The back verandah, home. Sitting in the mottled sunlight, reading the newspaper and drinking tea from the mug that has our book cover on it (Author 2, 2014). I ordered a box full for co-authors of chapters from an online store and we drank from them at the launch. Usually I wait til after lunch on Saturdays if I have work to do. This is late in the morning because it's tea in my tea mug, rather than the earlier strong black coffee I would have had in my coffee cup and saucer as part of my breakfast. (Author 2's diary, Saturday, 10 October 2015).

### *Five*

Author 2 having breakfast, travelling to work, teaching in the morning. Author 1 sleeping, feeling ragged after a day's work, taking the dogs for a walk. And vice versa. Different time zones. Different days. Skyping after an evening meal, and the necessary wine, yawning. Skyping in pajamas, eating breakfast, heavy head from a late night. A distance of 10,535 miles. Sydney in sunshine, light and hot (curtains drawn to block out the light); Author 2 working on the verandah at home in light, summery clothes. Author 1 in Sheffield muffled against the cold, the sky a great grey lid over the city.

Quantum shifts.

Quantum entanglements.



(Author 2, Photo 4)

Photo taken at a Grant Writing workshop series in the Penrith meeting room.

Lots of paper spread across the tables. There is a pen and ppt printout of slides with tips, layers of worksheets of tables with written notes in each cell ... takeaway coffee and water bottles scatter the table. Our grant writing consultant sits further around the table ... She has a small collection of previously successful Project descriptions ... on coloured paper visible as pink and yellow in one of the stacks. (Author 2's diary, Friday, 9 October 2015).

Materialities are entangled with-in the assemblage of mattering of grant application apparatuses. The team look for 'secrets' within these stacks, sleuthing for clues that might help them construct a successful one. With only a 12% success rate (lower in Education Fields of Research), the team will work together fortnightly from now till submission in March. Perhaps submission is the right word: a bending of body-mind-energy in a competitive race for diminishing funds: an instance of the 'cognitive capitalism' that Parikka (2013) mentions, which shapes bodies via 'exhaustion, repetition, hard work'. Bodies and matter in motion feeding the machine of cerebral capitalism.

*Six*



(Author 1, Photo 2)

We came to writing this article with presents gathered along the way. Presents: gifts and moments in time. We don't know how the 'other' of us 'really feels' about writing. That is for her, not me or you. But our divided writing journeys have been entangled with writing as intellectual fuel, sensory pleasure, writing as a need, a want, a mode of becoming, something done together as fun. Our diaries contain many comments on writing and publishing – things central to our lives as academics over many years – which tell how our writing is both co-opted to academic capitalism (research exercise frameworks, star ratings) and eludes it in the ineffability of *jouissance* (Barthes, 1973). The pleasures of textuality, the bliss of text-ing, the spinning delight of weaving a transgressive text whose glamour, to invoke Daly (1978), casts a magic spell, which puts time out of joint and we are lost in writing. Bergson's *duree*. Deleuze's event. Time no longer experienced as a succession of instants or moments but time as qualitative multiplicity, a 'meanwhile' that 'coexists with the instant' and in which 'all the meanwhiles are superimposed on one another' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p.158). Time as variation, *intermezzi*, singularity, in which past-future are enfolded in the present of becoming. The intensive forces activating the collaborative moment of writing in the library café with a colleague in Photo 2 are long dispersed: raindrops, coffee, the itchy and scratchy feel of not getting enough done on the paper. We both do a lot of collaborative writing and, it seems, such writing sometimes gives onto a trans-individual 'more-than-one' process of becoming-'we'. Things click. Eureka. Not often, but occasionally. Stewart (2007, p.1) captures this nicely: '*Something* throws itself together as an event and a sensation: a something both animated and inhabitable'.

### **A conclusion that isn't**

The photo-seriality account and the two passes through the 'data' included above work as diffractive data-creation-writing experiments. As such, they are just two of the infinite ways we might have 'dealt with' 'our' 'data' in order to 'spread thought and meaning in unpredictable and productive emergences' (Mazzei, 2014, p. 742). As experimental interventions in data, in this instance they emerge from our particular

researcher-entanglements with literary and feminist histories and our interests in visual seriality. Our process demonstrates how what might be called a post-qualitative ‘methodology-to-come’ will ‘begin to do it differently wherever we are in our projects’ (Lather, 2013, p. 635). This is research as ‘escape’, as ‘non-totalizable’ perhaps even fleetingly ‘fugitive’ from the capture of minds, hearts and bodies required of capital; both humble in its claims to knowledge and exuberant, one of Lather’s (2013, p. 635) imagined ‘thousand tiny methodologies’. In getting in and dirtying it up we have attended to the little objects, the things that glow, the data hotspots, the things that surprise us. Such dealings and doings – such passes through the data – have sought to bypass the routines, logics and habits that normally attend qualitative data collection, analysis and presentation procedures.

However, while our data diffractions are not about interpreting or explicating what might otherwise be called ‘findings’ from our two weeks of 11 am images and research diaries they do, nevertheless, generate insights into the intensive, affective and sensorial entanglements that attend contemporary academic life ‘everywhere and all the time’; and do so in ways which speak back to technocratic ‘time and motion’ studies of workers’ bodies and the workplaces they inhabit. Thus, the ‘matter that matters’ figures as an intensive momentum which arises from the methodological productivity of diffraction and enables us to tune into events and sensations that illuminate how ‘different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter’ (Barad, 2007, pp. 29-30).

In this, our aim is not to ‘play the drunkard’ in MacLure’s (2016) words but, rather, to disrupt data-writing so that these attunements can emerge. This is in line with

Mazzei's (2014, p. 743) point that diffractive analysis produces 'emergent and unpredictable ... readings as data and theory make themselves intelligible to one another'. In our case, we have deployed posthumanist experimental techniques to achieve this, and drawn photography and writing practices diffractively into this orbit. MacLure (2016) rightly says that those working in new empiricist, new materialist, posthuman vein cannot spend time 'tinkering' but that we must, rather 'dwell with data's bad behaviour' in order to rethink the 'whole edifice of qualitative inquiry'. This article is our modest attempt to do just that, to try for at least a temporary escape. In 'starting somewhere else' we have experimented with making 'something' happen. While we know that 'something' has 'happened' we ourselves are not entirely sure what that 'something' is and perhaps that is as it should be.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that *dispositif* is used synonymously with, and sometimes translated as 'apparatus' (see Foucault 1977 where he discusses the *dispositif* as an apparatus throughout the interview).

<sup>2</sup> The Oulipo movement (the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or Workshop of Potential Literature), was formed in Paris in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. Members were mostly writers and mathematicians who devised a series of enabling constraints to generate new writing. These include (i) "N+7" where the writer selects an existing poem and substitutes each noun with the noun appearing seven nouns away in the dictionary, and (ii) the lipogram, where the writer avoids a particular letter, as in Georges Perec's *La Disparition* (1969) or, in English, *A Void*

<sup>3</sup> By line we mean sentence within the text, marked by conventional punctuation – capital letter and full stop/ period, with one or more clauses. Where run-on text was not punctuated, the block of text was treated as a line.

<sup>4</sup> This poem was inspired by Sylvia Plath's *Mirror*.

<sup>5</sup> Last week, an ex-student talked about how she is unable to get rid of her son's pram (he is now five and at school). It sits in her bedroom, and tells her (she said) of the joy

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of having an unplanned baby many years after her other children and that taking it out of the house would mean taking that part of her life out too.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Wood is a professional photographer. His 'Bus Project' was the subject of many exhibitions. <http://www.eightdaysaweek.org.uk/tomwood1998.htm>