

## Playing with the Autoethnographical: Performing and Re-Presenting the Fan's Voice

My article is premised on seeking to 'show' rather than 'tell' (Denzin, 2010; Ellis, 2004, 2009). In particular, my aim is to show fandom as performative, affective and varying in intensities, rather than tell through potentially reductive over-analysis and theoretical abstraction. My own traversing of the autoethnographic terrain has entailed a spectrum of affective registries; works have resonated, inspired, challenged, provoked, agitated, enlightened and frustrated me, often simultaneously within the same text. Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013a) note that "autoethnography creates a space for a turn, a change, a reconsideration of how we think, how we do research and relationships" (p. 21), with a salient aspiration characteristic of autoethnography steering towards "creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response" (p. 22). Moreover, Ellis and Bochner (2006) intimate that autoethnography aims to be "unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative" (p. 433) as a mode of inquiry, with these often explicitly 'messy' texts designed to provoke readers, to question, to (re)think, and potentially to act by being positioned as active participants (Denzin, 2010; Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis; 2013a).

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*Third and eight. Four wide receivers set on deep posts. "One-ninety! One-ninety! Hut, Hut!". The ball is snapped for Steve Young. Dropping back in the pocket, a pump fake to Terrell Owens buys some time. Scanning, scanning, but man coverage blankets the field. The impulsion becomes too strong. He pulls the ball in, Young is scrambling. Following his blockers to the left, Young heads down field, out beyond the first-and-ten marker. Going for the extra yard, he is crunched by the middle line backer for a gain of 17. He should have slid! But Young always makes the big plays. He did so for me on television, on the back yard and continues to do so through video game play. Indeed, he remains digitally 'forever young' on*

*my PlayStation; Steve Young ages, retires and then is reborn once more as the 'new' 49ers quarterback. As regular league MVP, he's led them to 15 straight superbowl victories. Young's precise passing game, exemplary quarterback ratings and the improvised scrambles for good yardage are televisual memories that, equally, are easily re-enacted on the console/screen. However, my most vivid viewing memories of the NFL are the cotton-wool like protection accorded to quarterbacks, something that was hard to fathom having been brought up on 'hard' representations of New Zealand rugby and rugby league masculinity. Not Steve Young. There was a pleasurable insanity in seeing a quarterback running lead blocks for his runners, squaring up for collisions on an improvised scramble or making tackles on turnovers.... "Hey older 49ers' fans: Joe who?"*

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### **The Autoethnographic Craft**

Autoethnographies offer a diverse body of works, with many often producing essentially autobiographical accounts of the self as both *researcher* and the *researched* (Denison & Markula, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holman Jones, 2005; Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013b). For Spry (2001), "in autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns" (p. 711), while Reed-Danahay (1997) notes that autoethnography is "both a method and a text" (p.6). Moreover, as a methodological approach, autoethnography is commonly associated with the 'narrative turn' in social sciences which, Sparkes (2003) suggests, recognizes that "writing is a method of inquiry, a way of knowing, a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 60). Thus, autoethnography is championed as introducing an alternative voice to traditional forms of knowledge construction (Bochner, 2001; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Denzin, 2013; Snyder-Young, 2010; Sparkes, 2000, 2002; Spry, 2011).

Encounters with autoethnography can move, provoke, or even misdirect and create misgivings. Re-reading Wall's (2006) early exposure as a doctoral student evoked memories of my own similar autoethnographic engagements. I, too, recall that intensely energised and unapologetic stage as an aspiring academic apprentice, readily embracing creatively crafted and explicitly personal, first-person works set against a previously abstract academic upbringing. Ellis and Bochner (2000) were one of my foundations, suggesting that “‘back and forth autoethnographers gaze, [...] focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self’” (p. 739). I was also made aware that diversity shaped the method and text, with Ellis and Bochner (2000) noting that approximately sixty variations of autoethnography were then in existence. Nevertheless, then as it is now, the field seemed to be overly represented by the autobiographical exposure of a supposedly 'tragic' self that Anderson (2006a) refers to as 'evocative autoethnography'. At its most personalized, this follows the example of Ellis (2004, 2007, 2009) by dealing with intimacy, introspection and emotions in a highly evocative way.

In time I have been moved by other authors and texts, the personal and the contexts, that evocatively spoke to me at different life stages. Farred's (2002) account of his 'love' for the Liverpool football club and seemingly obsessive form of fandom was tantalising close once to my experiences as a Formula One/Jacques Villeneuve fan. So, too, were the movements towards a teaching and academic life outlined in Holt (2001) and Pelias (2003), the current life as a postdoctorate captured by Humphries (2005), and I'm comforted by Herrmann's (2012) affirmation that the despondence felt trying to secure a permanent academic job is, regrettably, not isolated. Moreover, unexpectedly, Dowling's (2012) unfamiliar experiences as a waitress enthralled me, particularly the affective and seductive politics at play that now are rendered more visible when dining out.

Especially influential across my progression have been the sport-based works that are seemingly yet to be discovered in many autoethnographic summaries of the field. The sport texts arguably afford a more 'context-laden' perspective that both connects to the socio-cultural and reintegrates theory within such works (as do some of the aforementioned). Indeed these seem to answer Anderson's (2006a, 2006b) divisive call for 'analytical autoethnography' (see also Atkinson, 2006; Vryan, 2006) while retaining the evocative and autoethnographic in less realistic ways than he advocates (see Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Hence, these texts often deploy core emotive content while locating the 'subjective-self' in wider socio-cultural contexts. In turn, such works furnish reintegrating theoretical insights around spaces, practices, identities, embodiments or dynamics of power (see, for example, Denison, 1996, 1999; Denison & Markula, 2003; Markula, 1998, 2003; Newman, 2011; Pringle, 2001; Rinehart, 1998, 2003; Sparkes, 1996, 2003; Sturm, 2011; Tsang, 2000).

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*Sketched on a loose piece of paper, a set of questions I return to.*

- *How do I show 'my' affective fan performances, investments and intensities?*
- *How do I move the reader?*
- *Is it plausible to facilitate a playfulness between the social and the personal?*
- *Do I need to 'break hearts'?*
- *Can I open the approach up, re-inject theory, turn the gaze more outwards rather than necessarily inwards?*
- *What if there is a lack of faith in attempting to reveal the intimate details of a personal life?*
- *Must I reconcile a vulnerable 'tragic self'?*

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I am intrigued by the poststructuralist critique and revision of how autoethnography has been conceptualized. Gannon (2006) asserts that "although autoethnographic research seems to

assume that the subjects can speak (for) themselves, poststructural theories disrupt this presumption and stress the (im)possibilities of writing the self from a fractured and fragmented subject position” (p. 475). Hence, poststructuralist authors challenge the assumed knowing self-subject who, paradoxically, produces realist texts, adopts a coherent, continuous and cohesive role, and authoritatively is able to speak for him/herself (De Freitas & Paton, 2008; Gannon, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Kaufmann, 2010; Reinertsen, 2009).

Staged amidst the backdrop of a theatrical performance, Fleming and Sturm’s (2011) actor-characters provide an imagined, narrativized ‘academic’ conversation on the implicit problems and inconsistencies of the archetypal ‘tragic self’:

I think we have to start with the two things that we know we are not going to get out of any good autoethnography: the first is reliable self-understanding, and the second is revelation of a unitary subject.

Looking to expose either or both of these is to look for a knowledgeable speaking subject – the presumed ‘I’ in autoethnography – who constructs some kind of authority in the telling from a unified point of view. If instead we tell ourselves at the outset that we have no interest in, no confidence in, no epistemological grounds for accepting, that kind of authority then immediately we have to think of autoethnography in a different way. (Fleming & Sturm, 2011, p. 65)

The ‘I’, the ‘Damion Sturm’ as academic, fan and ‘subject’ is redeployed, recast and dispersed as a fractured and fragmented character across the remainder of this article. Herein, the real and fictional may be blurred to evocatively elicit variations of fan affect, performativity and intensities, not merely to trace an assumed coherent/real story of ‘my’ fandom and the feelings contained there. Rather, what are represented are fluid, interchangeable, shifting facets of an ethnographically-imagined self.

I am driven by Denzin's (2010) provocative performative challenge and by Gannon's (2006) destabilizing mantra: "I argue further for an explicit and disruptive poststructural autoethnography, for deconstructive textual practices that represent and trouble the self at the same time" (p. 477). Hence, "these performances are messy and pedagogical" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422), "move from epiphanies to the sting of memory" (Denzin, 2013, p. 125) and produce disruption by "blurring fact and fiction, challenging the dividing line between performer and performed, observer and observed" (Denzin, 2013, p. 126). There is no intention to either privilege a coherent speaking position, to prescribe linear meaning, nor necessarily to proffer a tidy conclusion on fandom *per se*. Rather, ideally, the vignettes *construct* the subject through an autoethnographic expression (rather than pre-exist that expression), while offering an evocative rendition that is context-laden and percolates with a post-structuralist sensibility (Fleming & Sturm, 2011).

### **Affective Fandom**

Through the autoethnographical representations outlined above, fandom offers up sites for the materialization of affect; with varying intensities, levels of invigoration and 'subjective experiences' possibly evoked, elicited, colluding with, collapsing into and emerging through the performative stagings and settings of fandom. Clichéd 'common knowledge' stereotypes of fans as seemingly obsessive, singularly-focused, consumers of media still abound (Hills, 2002; Farred, 2002). Problematically, however, this emphasis can present fans as one-dimensional, if not at times as also pathological, duped, cyclic, or overly consumeristic (see critique in Sturm & McKinney, 2013). Fortunately, other research has recognized the performative dimensions that shape fan identity constructions and their resulting array of social practices and relations (Osbourne & Coombs, 2013; Sandvoss, 2005; Sturm, 2011). Moreover, increasingly fandom is being conceived as an unexceptional and often mundane occurrence within everyday life (e.g., Crawford, 2004; Grossberg, 1992), particularly in light

of the diverse ways contemporary audiences engage with and potentially manipulate mediations across wide-ranging platforms on a daily basis (Cleland, 2011; Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007; Harrington, Bielby & Bardo, 2011; Jenkins, 2006, 2014).

Affect theory affords another useful layering for considering fan interests and intensities. Sturm (2011) notes, “affect offers a vocabulary for articulating the attachment to and investment in media objects/texts by fans, the affective relationships and practices fans engage in, and the temporal, spatial and embodied dynamics which underpin the intensities of such investments” (p. 225). Conceived as a broader attachment to objects, places and things, affect shapes our investment towards and in such things; specifically the levels of invigoration, intensities and energies that are ‘felt’ and enacted (Grossberg, 1992). Moreover, more recent works have suggested that affect articulates the sensations, movements and assemblages that intensify, circulate around and move through such objects, places, spaces and practices (e.g., Clough & Haley, 2007; Dowling, 2012; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010; Wyatt & Gale, 2013). That is, affect itself is not owned by, nor the property of, an individual, but materializes in things, nestling itself within objects wherein affective assemblages manifest and materialize (Fleming and Sturm, 2011; Massumi, 2002). Of course, affect is dispersed across diverse sites in diverse ways, impacting with differing intensities and levels of invigoration on a subject who is also always in flux.

This transposes neatly on fandom as, paradoxically, it accounts for the ‘messy’ phenomenon of individuated, contradictory, fluctuating and inconsistent fan relationships and experiences with such objects. For example, my own experiences with sports teams has not always been marked by any obvious ‘traditional’ geographical attachment but, rather, is steeped in mediation and orientated towards key star individuals and their fluctuating performances across Formula One, American Football and Australian Rugby League. Most notably, affect helps explain why the varying affective traces, attachments and assemblages

across fandom can be piqued and high in investment and/or invigoration at one moment, but then marked by low intensity and energy in another context, setting or time. Thus, within my own Formula One fandom there are the oscillating intensities of invigoration, which can be high in intensity such as when attending a Grand Prix, when driver Jacques Villeneuve provides a strong race performance, or when I win on video game races. In contrast, my levels of invigoration can ebb due to limited or negative media coverage of Villeneuve, through despair at the overt commodification inherent to this corporate sport, or may even result in my falling asleep during another professional Formula One race (see Fleming & Sturm, 2011; Sturm, 2011).

My article now turns to autoethnography as a writing, representational and knowledge ‘tool’ for the evocation and furnishing of affect. In particular, ideally the performances cater to affect nestling within, materializing through and being dispersed across the separate and collective representations of subjectivity and the body, as well as the varying, oscillating and fractured stagings of an autoethnographic fan. The following sections are also intended in part as a response to Fleming and Sturm’s (2011) provocation, in which they asked whether “autoethnographic writing can be a thing, an object, in which affect materializes?” (p. 67).

## **Performative Autoethnographic Stagings of the Fan**

### ***Vignette 1: JV and Me***

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*JV: Playfully manipulating the powerful machine, I’m enlivened by exploring and unleashing its prowess. Each of us follows suit, tempering quick bursts of speed with heavy braking, laying fresh tyre rubber down as we prepare our cars for the impending action. Gripping the steering wheel intensely, I violently hacksaw the wheel from side to side, attempting to generate some heat in the tyres. The drivers in front kick up a blinding spray as we accelerate*



*over kerbing and on to a fast section of the track. The lack of visibility becomes increasingly apparent, as does the sensation of rain splattering against my helmet and overalls.*

*Underneath, the greasy track is disconcerting: grip levels will be an unknown at full throttle.*

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*DS: I'm so excited! Months of anticipation and an 18 hour flight culminating in my 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience of seeing Jacques race in Montreal. Of course, I have seen him race closer to home (the Australian Grand Prix), but I have always wanted to be a part of this crowd. Even the dreary conditions can't dampen my spirits. Looking around the throngs of people packed into the hairpin grandstands, this feels like an interim 'home'. Here, for a change, it is not the Ferrari gear that is so pervasive. Today, a sea of Maple-Leafs and blue Quebecois symbols, as well as Villeneuve regalia, are the dominant spectacle. The bright flag colors and F1 apparel offset the sullen weather conditions. Despite obvious geographical and nationalistic boundaries, I feel I am among my fellow-countrymen, cheering as one for Jacques. I'm clear in my display of allegiance too, having donned a Villeneuve emblazoned top, his current Sauber team cap and an older BAR branded raincoat. For the first time, I don't feel like the rogue Villeneuve fan among the Ferrari masses...*

*The roaring cars resound from further down the track. We are so close to the start! Growing in aural intensity, the shrill of high-pitched engines becomes deafening as they now enter our section. In unison a cheer explodes around the grandstands as he appears before us. There's Jacques, the 1997 World Champion! The resplendent blue Sauber car and his bright multi-coloured helmet generating groundswell support. Pride and expectation flood my senses. Flashes of nervous energy tingles down my spine, my body awash with the emotional excess. "GO JACQUES!!!" I yell, my voice drowned out by other fan shouts and the incessant timbre of engine noise. "C'MON!" The F1 snake slithers away down the back*

*straight and out of sight, my eyes now transfixed on the large screen ahead in anticipation of the start.*

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*JV: We crawl around the last corner and file into our respective grid positions. I scan my mirrors, trying to relax and get comfortable within my cramped cockpit. Sitting stationary on the grid there's a surreal calm and silence that pervades in these final moments. It is a tranquillity which will all too soon dissipate into a chaotic ensemble of frenetic noise and movement. That first corner is summoning me as my eyes lock on its sequence. I tug on my safety harnesses for a sense of security. As always they are taut, locking me into the fixed position where I will remain for the next hour and a half. Once again I glance in my mirrors, the crescendo of engine noise now intensifying. "Stay calm, stay calm. Keep the focus. Now is the time," I repeat, as before me the light sequence becomes active.*

### ***Vignette 2: The Benji Step***

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*HT: "Tight as D boys, watch for their scooper" Henry instructs us, imploring that our defensive structures remain compact.*

*MK: "Stay intense boys, 'test match footy' today" Marcel chimes in, "treat it like an All Blacks' test fellas".*

*DS: "Or a Kiwis' test if you're a league head ay, bro?!" I retort, winking at the representative rugby league players in our team.*

*MK: "Haha yeah mate, just as long as you're not going to mention those Tigers. How did they go again?" Marcel sarcastically responds, giving me a playful punch in the arm while I become the butt of jokes from the others about another poor Wests Tigers season.*

*Henry's authoritative voice disrupts the banter.*

*HT: “Oiii!!!, let’s get out there and go hard,” he orders, while reiterating “no mercy brothers!”.*

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*A cacophony of chatter envelopes the field as we bark instructions at one another. “Hard D! Squeeze! Watch for the stepper! Shut, shut, shut!” constantly ring out on defence.*

*“Composure! Set of six! Get some go forward!” the seemingly repeated mantra on attack. Deep into the second half, having successfully rebuffed yet another attacking raid, we get a turnover 10 metres out from our line.*

*“Yards boys, nothing silly” I remind the younger players, pointing towards the left edge. “Go forward, take another hit”. The rookies march us down the field through their crisp three-man driving pattern. Meanwhile Namu slots into first receiver and nods knowingly at me. “Yip, blast, I’ll read off you” I yell. Namu heads across on a fast drag, latching his defender who is frantically in pursuit. Waiting for the ‘eclipse’ moment, I see the opening emerge and cut back on an arch as Namu simultaneously hurls the ball across his right shoulder. I’ve got it, I’m in the gap. “High knees, high knees” I mentally tell myself, focusing on pumping my legs as fast as possible. The ‘link’ defender shoots in towards me. Shaping to pass, I feign to the left before accelerating as fast as I can. The defender heads back out, falling for my dummy as I ecstatically race towards the try-line. “Sweet, that felt good! The sprint training seems to have paid off” I praise myself, recalling the numerous less-glamorous solo and sweaty shuttle-running sessions at the local park.*

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*I get to the sub bench and am greeted with high fives and praise from the boys. Slouched over hands on knees, I gulp in deep breaths.*

*PW: “Nice bro, looks like you’re running freely?” Phil inquires, patting me on the back.*

DS: *“Cheers bro, yeah the bruised fingers are still a bit tender but my legs feel pretty good”*

*I respond.*

PW: *“Must have been the Tigers’ talk that spurred you on ay?” Phil queries with a chuckle, “show the boys a bit of Benji pace there mate?!”.*

DS: *“Haha yeah something like that. We’re humming today huh? Really on it!” I suggest with Phil nodding in agreement. “Oh speaking of Benji, do you ever see the Tigers game against the Sharks back in 2005?” I ask.*

PW: *“Nah mate, why’s that?” he responds.*

DS: *“Oh dude, everyone talks about the Grand Final and that flick pass but you should have seen this game; Benji stepped at least six players to run 40 metres and set up an easy try. Been working on my version of a Benji ‘step on a step’ which I want to unleash when we next are down there jamming them on their line” I enthuse.*

PW: *“That’s the way, keep the acid on them. We’ll try a sniper move if it’s on too ay?” Phil suggests.*

DS: *“Yip, sweet, I think you’re next up” I say, motioning towards Simon approaching us.*

### ***Vignette 3: A Vulgar Picture***

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*I’m gripping the barrier with all my might, my arms entangled around the steel structure to lock myself in position. Front row and centre stage. Literally only a metre away, the band kicks into life. Behind me the crowd surges forward, the collective masses’ energy and impetus now ignited by the aural and visual barrage. I am slammed into the barrier once more. It is a vortex of flailing arms, whipping hair and bodies as sweaty projectiles that constitutes my cramped surroundings. The physically larger late arrivals forcibly fight for a position at the front, casting aside those they can. I’m not budging! My body continues to be*

*crushed, twisted and slammed into as we frenetically 'mosh'. It sort of feels like being trapped in a rugby scrum, or perhaps that rag doll-like sensation of wiping out in the surf and then endlessly cartwheeling at the mercy of the ocean.*

*But I love this! Trevor is screaming out lyrics as we lurch one way and then the next, the crowd creating its own frenzied volition. I'm bouncing up and down on the spot to the relentless snare beats. One arm is extended and in constant motion, mimicking those rapid hits. The other remains locked around the metal barrier to hold my position. It is frantic energy all around. Our collective senses overloaded with, overpowered by, the abrasive wall of sound. Seemingly under its spell, all of us are compelled to move and unleash in this confined and somewhat claustrophobic space. Yet, it is this 'noise' and melee that gives us pleasure, a chaotic ensemble that affords the collective intensity. I love that snare! The relentless blast beats splattering like incessant machine-gun fire; a metronomic onslaught that invigorates and energizes me.*

*The first series of songs end. Telling us how sick the pit is, Trevor calls for more noise. A rapturous and frenzied response from the supportive crowd screams in affirmation. Trevor announces the next song, 'A Vulgar Picture'. "YEAH!" I'm screaming, as the band unleashes one of my personal favourites. Trevor scours back and forth across the stage, throwing his arms up, vocalizing his growls and acknowledging various 'sick' sections of the crowd. Returning centre stage, Trevor's eyes lock on me singing word-for-word. He leans down in front of me as we sing in unison "as though you'd never left my side, I hold your stiffened body" before presenting me with the mic to deathgrowl "so close to me". Trevor smiles, gives me a thumbs up, and heads off across stage once more. Meanwhile the surrounding crowd are cheering, slapping my back and rubbing my head. Even the munters behind who had been trying to oust me instead now celebrate my participatory moment and concede that*

*the space is rightfully mine. My hand and neck continue to flail in time with the snare blasts, singing along knowingly to each song.....*

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*Early the next morning, I'm walking through Wellington airport en route to the departure gate. Still blasting their tunes on my ipod, I notice that Shannon and the new bassist Matt are having breakfast at the table right in front of me. Showing no fear, and despite Shannon being one of my favourite and most influential drummers, I make a beeline for them. "Thanks for coming to New Zealand dudes, that was a killer show last night" I enthuse. Expecting merely fleeting small talk, I am chuffed when Shannon replies, "Thanks man, yeah I saw you at the front". The grin on both of our faces is priceless. "Wow he noticed me" I ecstatically internalize. We briefly chat about his drums, the two New Zealand shows and I make a final request that they keep coming back. I opt not to request a picture as the 'real' conversation feels more valuable than that. Bidding them safe travels, I head off to my departure gate. Glancing back, I notice that they seem to be casting a bemused stare in my direction. I wonder if once again it is the 'image' or lack thereof that catches people by surprise. Donning spectacles, a tidy shirt and dress pants, I do not seem/look like a death head who has spent two enjoyable nights travelling for, jumping around to and singing along with The Black Dahlia Murder.*

#### ***Vignette 4: Aca-Fan Performativity***

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*"Strategically, I'll make this presentation feel like a performance" I tell myself weeks in advance of the Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines conference.*

*"Furthermore, if I am going to merge theories of fandom, autoethnography and performance, then I should ensure that I embrace the roles that are being represented" I surmise*

*reflexively. To make the presentation multi-layered, I have pre-selected pertinent clips to run independently; these will then be overlaid with my own commentary as a performed narrative. I am hopeful that the overall effect heightens forms of audience engagement. Alas, it would all go so well in practice! The bricolage of playfully combining clips, the careful rehearsal of oral timings and the merging of commentaries and theoretical exchanges that sought to furnish intriguing performative layerings. The dynamics seemed to flow nicely and readily complement one another - at home.*

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*It is presentation day. I continue to rehearse the timings and the 'feel' of the pitch in the morning, before mingling with colleagues, taking in presentations and readying myself for the late afternoon slot. Our session has begun, with a variety of intriguing perspectives on sporting ethnographical approaches. Having pre-loaded my slideshow, I confidently now address the room and begin my presentation. "Good afternoon everyone, thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today. For my presentation I would like to reconsider both the role of autoethnography but also theories of one-dimensional fandom by playing with notions of performativity and representation. But, first, by way of introduction, let me show you what I mean..." At this point my first clip was supposed to commence, revealing footage personally shot from the grandstand at the 2005 Canadian Grand Prix. Intentionally, the clip would convey the deafening intensity of the accelerating race car, as well as the exuberant fan outbursts to local driver Jacques Villeneuve being fastest at that time during qualifying.*

*Instead, the screen remained blank, barring the error message. I attempted a few reloads and manipulations but to no avail. This had worked seamlessly earlier! Internally, the irony of the media/sport apprentice scholar struggling with familiar technology was not lost on myself. I quickly returned to the static image of the previous slide. Imagining that the clip was playing, I acted out the scene accordingly. I began improvising the sounds, sights and site of*

*the grand prix event, while intertwining my own fan experiences amongst the Canadian fans as if we were all witnessing the spectacle. Through the theatrical performance, I hoped that I could add vitality, movement and intensity to the displayed static image. Such a re-enactment would also be deployed for my static touch playing/rugby league vignette.*

*Throughout the presentation, I become my own spectacle. I became my own performative character. The academic conference presenter performing as a scholar-fan; the performance as a fan-scholar-as-character no longer housed within static images but brought to life through live re-enactments that took on their own form. Moreover, multiple performative levels and layerings were to emerge as, collectively, the live vignettes, the anecdotal evidence and the embodied display showed the blurred interrelationships between performativity, re-presentation, autoethnography and the fan/subject.*

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*Despite the technological glitch (or the media-sport scholar's own shortcomings), I was pleasantly overwhelmed by the positive feedback. One of my central theoretical tenets for the presentation had been the salience of affect for fans and how autoethnography can contribute to an evocative understanding of fandom as experiential, as multi-dimensional, as performative and as performed. Literally, it would seem, the unanticipated layerings of scholar/fan/character/vignette performativity (and subsequent audience laughter and enthusiastic bemusement) afforded varying affective dimensions to materialize!*

### ***Vignette 5: Playing with Dolls/Simply Ravishing***

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*Browsing my facebook newsfeed, Brian's post catches my attention. I haven't seen him since he moved to London over five years ago. "No, so sad today. The Warrior is dead! RIP the Ultimate WWF star!" I know Brian will be suffering, we were all big wrestling fans as kids. I*



*'like' his status, not that I like the news. For those few years, these kings of the ring meant everything to us.*

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*Seemingly out of nowhere, the WWF exploded in New Zealand, becoming the only subject on the playground – and in class - much to the chagrin of our teachers. We had the nicknames: Bad News Barclay, Karaka B Ware, Junkyard Jones, Manu the Mauler. Seeing 'Killer Carlos' driven away in an ambulance promptly ended the play-wrestling matches though. Million Dollar Murray's sleeper hold worked too well one lunch time. The school issued a clear edict after that: anyone caught wrestling would be suspended and parents were expected to enforce a strict 'do not try this at home' policy.*

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*"Bring home all the action, you'll get more satisfaction". How timely that advertisement was as WWF action figures hit the market. Hours were spent in this safer pursuit. Not surprisingly Brian had the Ultimate Warrior, as well as Jake 'the Snake' Roberts I think. I liked playing with these figures, when Brian would let me, especially their movable parts. Still, I preferred my own larger, solid and immovable action figures; a tactile pleasure in bashing George 'the Animal' Steele to a pulp with either 'Macho Man' Randy Savage or Hulk Hogan. So many matches and tournaments took place in our bedrooms. My dad would smirk at us when peering through the open door. He obviously derived pleasure from mocking us. "Put down your dolls, boys, and get ready for dinner".*

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*Neither of our dad's 'got it'. "It's not real, they are not real athletes!" Brian's dad would say. That would infuriate us as we were judging them on their physiques and skills in the 'squared circle'. I suppose it helped desensitize us to the displays of violence though. Our first viewings included the Macho Man getting attacked from behind by both Andre the Giant*

*and the Million Dollar Man Ted DiBiase; we also witnessed Outlaw Ron Bass brutalizing Brutus 'the Barber' Beefcake, continuously raking his face with spurs. There was immense relieve when my dad explained to us how this gruesome spectacle was reliant upon fake blood. The Macho Man attack was important too, giving rise to the subsequent Mega Powers vs Mega Bucks main event at SummerSlam 88 (and my purchasing of the Macho and Hulk figures). We excitingly gathered at Murray's place when he was the first to obtain a taped copy; vivid memories of straining and persevering through the grainy footage, twelve 13 year old boys enthralled and energized by our first big event. With every latest tape acquisition the gang would come together; even older siblings, uncles and their friends would be part of the viewing group on occasions. Those halcyon days of the WWF.*

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*Boys watching semi-naked men. It was the personalities and the bodies. Brutus, Bret 'Hitman' Hart, Ravishing Rick Rude, Macho... "Oooh yeah, from my nose to my toes, yeahhh"! I would talk like Macho and pose like Hulk, Brian would run around like the Warrior, Murray and Carlos alternated as the tag team Demolition or Powers of Pain. The bodies were attractive, aspirational, desirable. Our definition of real men.*

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*I messaged Brian and empathized with his sentiments. The Warrior certainly had one of the most impressive physiques. "For sure Brian, he was a beast and those rivalries with Rude and Hulk were standouts". I also mention the Warrior/Rude pose down competition – both physiques on display and "ripped to shreds" as Jesse 'the Body' Ventura would say. Brian agrees, adding one more to the list - the British Bulldog, Davey-Boy Smith. Shared memories of our ideal wrestlers' bodies.*

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*The interest in wrestling has long since passed. Rude, Davey-Boy and the Warrior are all dead from steroid abuse. Macho from a heart attack. Meanwhile, Hulk Hogan aged, broke and broken, limps around on re-runs of reality television shows...*

### ***Vignette 6: Tungsten Titans***

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*I should be writing. I know the deadline is pressing, having cleared other commitments for the week to get this piece over the line. Instead I am procrastinating. The 2013 Darts World Match Play final on television is proving to be a worthy spectacle, particularly for one presently easily led to distraction. Perhaps, also, it is the commentators' reassurance that this is the best Match Play darts final that they have ever witnessed that makes me linger. I know I should switch the television off, so I reach for the remote. Instead, I find myself turning the volume up and reclining further on the couch.*

*It is a marvelous display of darts, two talented players continually top-scoring ("180!" the match official booms yet again) to peg the other back in a see-sawing contest. My thoughts drift to my own guilty pleasure in watching darts, a seemingly recent endeavor. Scouring my memories of darts, I recall my first unorthodox viewing as a youngster. The 1980s 'Not the Nine O'Clock News' British comedy had a skit where Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones mocked the sport, simulating the darts throwing action while reaching for one of the bevy of drinks laid out before them. They were scored according to the alcoholic beverage they obtained and sculled.*

*Upon reflection, the skit was probably apt for the time; the pub culture setting with connotations of beer-guzzling players ripe for ridicule. And yet, its recent televisual transformation has intrigued me as a media/sport scholar. The contemporary makeover and advances which reproduce darts as sporting spectacle seems to equally bemuse and entertain*

*my students when I discuss it in classes. Nevertheless, while its constructedness is overt, it still can resonate for its viewers. Indeed, while I wouldn't classify myself as a 'darts fan', it does, on occasions, provide a compelling spectacle that I find myself engrossed in. This is proving to be the case today.*

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*The enthralling match continues to disrupt my writing. Adrian 'Jackpot' Lewis is starting to make up ground on Phil 'the Power' Taylor midway through the match, both players counter-punching with a succession of 180 and 140 scores.*

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*The constructed pseudo-event of exaggerated figures with their fabricated personas equally interests and amuses me. There is the pre-match announcement and entrance, an obvious derivative of the hype of a boxing fight or the excess of the WWF, with the players 'striding' like prized fighters to the ring. Often clichéd and banal, the irony for these physically-dubious male 'athletes' (in reality obese middle-aged men) with their individuated themed music, imagery and effects is explicit. Hence the 'tungsten titans' or other throw-away descriptors add to the hyperbole of these literally larger-than-life characters. "Just imagine if you made them do shuttle-runs between their set of throws!" I often quip to my classes.*

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*My attention is again drawn to the screen as Lewis throws his eighth 180 points score in eight legs. "They certainly can play, brandishing extraordinary accuracy and consistency at the oche" I acknowledge in passing. The crowd, predominantly sporting themed attire, raucously cheer both players on. The majority of them seem suitably lubricated with alcohol.*

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*I recognize the artifice and yet allure of transforming the bland players into colorful characters, the offering of media-inflated, identifiable and engaging personas for*

viewers/fans to support and follow. I find that I do pay occasional attention to the progression of select individuals yet would consider my relationship to be an affectively weak form of spectatorship (would fandom even apply here?). Thus, I keep tabs on how James 'The Machine' Wade fares, one of the younger generation who looked a little different when he emerged with spectacles, stubble and the noticeably absent, yet almost obligatory, beer belly. Here, I thought, might be my 'Jacques Villeneuve' of the darts world. However, since 2009, he has piled on the pounds and, regrettably, is an inarticulate and insipid post-match interview. He is no Jacques Villeneuve! And then of course there is the champion. Phil 'the Power' Taylor's dominance and brilliance has seen him crowned an unprecedented 16 times world champion. He is featuring yet again in another darts final.

I reflect on Taylor's negotiation of the new heavily mediated age for darts. In recent years Taylor seems to have worked hard at cultivating a more likeable personality, although his ruthlessness and single-minded competitive streak tends to make such a projection paper-thin. Glancing back at the screen, I find my attention is drawn to the 'power' tattoo etched on his right forearm. It is alluring. Magnetic. Affective. A reminder of a (paradoxically constructed) persona long established before the new television deals for darts. The tattoo connoting the older bar-room brawler stereotype for a generation whereby such displays were less commonplace, but now resonating for a younger generation prone to inking their skin in highly visible ways. It's a prominent marker and testament to his darting legacy.

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Before me, that burly, tattooed forearm is once again in motion, producing a smooth and seamless release of the tungsten. Steady under pressure, Taylor checks-out to win a record-breaking 14<sup>th</sup> World Match Play Title. I find myself applauding the televised image, acknowledging yet another major event that I have seen him win. Rising off the couch, I now plant myself in front of another screen to re-focus on the writing.

## Final Remarks

*Did such an approach furnish the materialization of affect? Were affective assemblages evoked, 'felt' and/or enacted via the varied uses of autoethnography, performativity and the assumed individuated fan representations? Did these autoethnographic stagings reveal diverse sites and layerings for affective invigoration, investments and intensities?*

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While I am intrigued by the possible answers, posing such questions is not usually how an author should conclude her/his work. A tidier summation might conclude that my article has demonstrated that, through the methodological and representational device of autoethnography, an evocative understanding of fandom as experiential, as multidimensional, as performative and as performed has been afforded for the reader. Moreover, my performative stagings intimate a context-laden self that navigates and anchors himself in the practices, structures and concrete contexts of daily life. The series of affective performances strived to disrupt, if not repudiate, the dominant discourse of fandom as one-dimensional, intense and always 'on'. Rather, while at times clearly intense, the intention was to *show* how levels of invigoration, intensity, energy and degrees of affective fan investment move through and fluctuate with diverse objects. Therefore, it can be asserted that specific fan moments resonate with the affective traces, assemblages and 'splashes of color' by which intensities materialize and investments manifest themselves on an individuated level everyday.

However, this author-subject-fan, himself an assemblage of characters and constructs, cannot draw any such conclusions with conviction. Such a summation is not evinced explicitly by the text, nor can it be categorically asserted as a truth statement by an assumed 'authoritative' academic author. Rather, my article relies upon the work, the judgment and any accompanying resonance, sensibilities, reflections and emotive verisimilitude residing

with, through, of and by the reader. Ideally, this performative autoethnography contributed to such resonance; provoking (an) evocative response(s) while illuminating fragments of a fan's life as blurred subject, the fan in flux, the 'messy' text via eliciting affective traces. Indeed, perhaps affect potentially materialized within unexpected objects, places and contexts, as well as in unanticipated ways that challenged and moved the reader. To some degree, perhaps the strange was also made familiar?!

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