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Draft

Where's the beat? An Autoethnographic Manifesto In Search of Rhythm,  
Music and Lyrical Understandings [word count 2755]

International Review for Qualitative Research

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Where's the Beat? An Autoethnographic Manifesto in Search of Rhythm,  
Music, and Lyrical Understandings

It's 1:38 pm on a cold, February afternoon as fifteen muscled bodies prepare to run onto Cardiff Arms Park, the home of Welsh rugby. The physios run their hands over one huge thigh after another, binding flesh together with thick tape and leaving traces of oil and antiseptic along chiselled muscle fibres. Oblivious to the hyperactive den in preparation beneath them sit a growing number of Welshmen, and it is nearly all Welsh *men*, shoulder to shoulder, man to man, dads, brothers and sons, donned in their Welsh flags and dragons. They know that in a moment or two, 15 heroes will burst forth from the bellows of the turf 'on-fire' and ready to spit blood, to link bodies and lock wills in a battle of power for their fatherland. For now, though, the crowd waits in anticipation, their number steadily growing as the minutes pass. At no appointed hour, a song rises from their midst, and in an instant, 40,000 Welsh rise to their feet and sing, '*Hollalluog, Hollalluog, Ydyw'r Un a'm cwyd i'r lan. Ydyw'r Un a'm cwyd i'r lan.*' Their voices echo round the stadium, the volume crescendos without a conductor, and harmonies ring out. It's a chill to the spine, a lump to the throat--an emotion difficult to describe but all too easy to be engulfed by and to surrender to. Something is going on. (adapted from Carless & Douglas, 2011)

It's an Oasis gig, a high point in the career of one of the most popular British bands towards the end of the 20th century. One hundred and twenty thousand fans face the stage at Knebworth Park as, returning to the stage for encores, the band start up the song Champagne Supernova. Midway through, in unison,

over 100,000 people raise their arms to the skies and sing the words back to the band.

'Don't you tell me,' says Noel Gallagher, the band's songwriter and guitarist, some time later in an interview, 'that song doesn't mean anything.' He's annoyed at comments made by one 'expert' critic who voiced his opinion that the song's lyrics are meaningless. With cool clarity and insight, the songwriter simply points back to those who were pointing at him, the 120,000 fans who bellowed out the song: 'Looks like it means something to them!'(Carless & Douglas, 2011, p.439)

It's December 6, 2015, less than a month after terrorists wreaked havoc on the streets of Paris. The Irish band U2 had been in Paris preparing for a performance the next day. Now the band has returned to Paris and are about to take the stage for their rescheduled gig. The TV cameras show band members Bono, Edge, Adam Clayton, and Larry Mullin, as they hover in the wings, form a huddle, pray, and then break and walk forward. As they do this, the cameras switch from back to front stage and zoom in on Bono picking his route through the crowd to the stage. At some point along this journey, he puts the microphone to his lips and begins to sing a 15-note, a cappella melody, 'oooo ohoo oooo, oooo, oooo ohoo, hoho, ho...'

Finishing, he turns to the crowd and lifts his arms. In unison, 27,000 people echo back to him the exact tune he has sung to them.

'oooo ohoo oooo, oooo, oooo ohoo, hoho, ho...'

Bono chants again, 'oooo ohoo oooo, oooo, oooo ohoo, hoho, ho...'

And the crowd respond, 'oooo ohoo oooo, oooo, oooo ohoo, hoho, ho...'

There are no words. Indeed what can be said at such a moment? How do we stand against terrorists? How do we begin to carry on? How do we mark the deaths of people caught in haze of bullets and who were, like this crowd, just attending a gig?

Drums, bass, and lead guitar join in—adding weight, adding depth. Long before a message arrives from the lyrics to ‘The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone),’ thousands of voices have created a pulse, a soundwave of unison.

Reflecting on these and similar moments that speak to me, I ask, *Where is this in our scholarship?*--this feeling evoked by moments I’ve attempted to capture in the scenes above. I wonder if insights derived from songs, music, and rhythms are missing. And if they are, how might we include them? As I think about ‘a manifesto’, my quest is for what—a beat, music, rhythms, songs, lyrics, harmony, and voices that join together—might bring to our scholarship, and for how we communicate and share our work.

In what follows, I outline a number of interrelated concerns, questions, and tensions that arise within me as I ponder these questions.

\*

Q: I wonder why music, songs, poetic representations, or performances are not included in our pedagogy in many areas of the social *sciences*

Statement one: In order to write a song, one has to go to music school, learn to read music, and learn to play an instrument proficiently. And the same steps apply to singing or writing poetry—one must learn to be a singer or to be a poet. And if one wants to act and

perform, one must go to drama school to become a connoisseur of the craft.

Statement two: In order to represent our participants, we should only use those skills and communication strategies that we have highly developed. It would be an injustice to perform a half-baked play or to sing out of tune. What damage it would wreak! We should write only 'proper' prose, only write scientifically, and if we don't have training, then we need to collaborate with people who have!

Statement three: There is only one way to know: Cognitively- analytically- objectively.

Really?

Or

Who speaks?

From the shadows of  
a collective consciousness

comes a voice

you can't sing, dance, hum, clap a rhythm, write poetry, make music,

it's not science and you aren't skilled

and the voice of silence replies,

I can't sing

I have no rhythm

What beat?

I don't suppose I can even write a story!

And I ask, do you accept this cloak too readily?

How do you know you can't sing?

That you have no rhythm?

On whose authority?

bubum, bubum, bubum

A heart beats for us, until, we have our own.

ultrasound? What type of miracle is this? Capturing

a beating heart within a secret place

So, bébé, you come into being with a beat, a rhythm,

with a soundscape, rhythms that rise and fall

who told you you have no rhythm?

Look to your heart.

There is much to suggest that part of being human is to know something of rhythm. Consider the cave dwellers, or tribal drums, and whistles and clapping hands. The manifestations take different forms, but they are everywhere--old and new, familiar and strange:

Mambo, zavin, canto livre, forro, salsa,

boi, banda, flamenco, bunraku, calypso,

dansband, decima, enka, lambada, fado,  
gandrung, ghazai, kriti, capoeira, tambo, cajun,

rap, hiphop, jazz, punk, celtic, rock,  
blue grass, blues, acid, funk, blues, synthpop,  
techno, trance, latin, reggae, grunge, soul,  
house, garage, country, folk, indie rock,  
metal, psychedelic, rag

I am not alone in attempting to include and recognise the importance of rhythms, music and songs to our lives through qualitative inquiry. Researchers such as Arthur Bochner (2014) allow them to weave through his life stories as does Stacey Homan-Jones (1999a, 1999b, 2010) while David Carless (2010, 2011, in press) writes from the perspective of a song-writer making sense of events in his life through rhythms, music and lyrical imaginations. Recently, to mark the significance of songs, Bryant Alexander led a symposium at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, *The Song Book of Our Lives: Lyrical Autoethnographic Performances* (2015). Along with Robin Boylorn, Devika Chawla, Durell Callier, Anne Harris, Stacy Holman-Jones, and Tami Spry, I was given the opportunity to share a song I had written as a response to studying the lives of women over 60 in Cornwall (Douglas, 2012, 2013, in press). The response from audience members to these very different types of performances was testament that what my co-presenters and I felt and shared about songs resonated with others. Songs, it seems, have the power to say what cannot be said in other ways, to say multiple things at once and to lessen the space that separates us (Josselson, 1996), a worthy goal in itself (given that at the time of my writing this, my country



is verging on separating itself from Europe and Scotland wants to cleave away from England like the Basques want separation from Spain. Cracks are appearing everywhere).

Aside from these contributions, song *writing*, is a very embodied practice that can open a channel to a different way of knowing and communicating (Carless & Douglas, 2011, 2016). That is, lyrical, rhythmic, and poetic processes make it possible to access and privilege things that the songwriter may not have been aware of, or didn't know she knew. Writing a song makes it possible to generate different types of understanding—or to get closer to accounting for—what is missing when we privilege rational, logical, cognitive, and scientific ways of knowing.

However, this manifesto is about more than understanding, performing, or recognising the power of songs and song writing, important though these skills are. I'd like us to think about roots, about how music, rhythms, and songs connect us not only with each other but with 'the street' and our aim for autoethnographies to be politically charged, aimed towards social justice and to contribute to pedagogies that provoke social responsibility and civic engagement (Denzin, 2003; Giroux, 2014).

Let me backtrack for a moment. The rugby fans' singing in the first scene above was not a planned event but rather an emotional response—a physical, embodied act. Inclusion was not dependent on being talented, chosen, or schooled in singing or harmonizing, and the fans did not read from sheet music. There was no invitation. They just did it. The audience members at the U2 gig, likewise, each played a part in the opening soundscape, but there was no selection criteria before they joining in. The band members of U2 and Oasis provide yet another important example of the alumni of the street, artists who have learned their craft in the process of 'doing it' in back rooms, bedrooms, garages, and on the road. There may be critics who write that some song lyrics make no sense (to them), or that they aren't 'good' songs, but regardless, in the above examples, the songs are connecting with people on the

street. And this seems to be relevant as we think about our research – its not so much, is it skilled writing, but rather, is it making a difference to the people whose lives we are researching? Do they ‘get it’. Sometimes, like Harry Wolcott (2001) wrote, the novice researcher communicates something in her rough, ready or raw state that the well accomplished, published researcher has missed.

It seems in the academy, we ask (or tell) students who are interested in playing an instrument or singing that they should take a music degree. Those who like acting and want to go on the stage are advised to take a performance or drama degree. And this is all fine, to a degree. But if it means the sport scientists (that I teach) feel they have no right to sing, dance, write poetry, and perform or that these skills might not be helpful (or essential even) to understanding others’ lives, or communicating that knowledge, or that insights gained in the process of creation might not be epistemologically and ontologically rich and important examples of coming to know, and for sensitising us, then I have serious concerns for social justice, and for what we become and what our students become in the process of their studies (Denzin, 2003, 2010; Giroux, 2014).

I understand we may advise an individual unskilled in the arts to reach across disciplines, (Jones, 2006, p.71) rather than try to produce something alone. This is sound advice. Collaboration with a singer, an actor, a producer, or a musician, for example, ensures performative work has, ‘polish and the ability to reach our intended audiences in an engaging’ (Jones, 2006, p.71). While this can be true, it still seems important for that individual to explore the ‘data’ personally, in an embodied way, in order that they, too, tap into and experience a different way of coming to know.

Reaching across disciplines then, can also rob autoethnographers, or young scholars, of an experience that may change them, or that may sensitise them to others’ vulnerabilities, or that provides them with a way to learn about their own vulnerabilities. It robs them of the

step towards expanding their own creative repertoire. It may make it impossible for them, at some future time, to experience a moment of awe and excitement, the joy of creation and bridge gaps or make connection with others that didn't seem possible.

Elliot Eisner (2008) wrote about this more than a decade ago, reminding us that knowledge comes in different forms, even while 'the forms of its creation differ' (p.5). So, when a novice begins to write a poem, even when others may not see value in what they produce, something will be happening. A process has begun, a window towards aesthetic inquiry and the type of somatic, pre-linguistic, and embodied knowing that Dewey, (1989/1934, cited in Siegesmund, 2013) wrote about—a process about learning, recognising and privileging 'felt sense.' Perhaps, too, to accept that this knowledge and 'art' doesn't have to be observed in a gallery or on a stage before it becomes 'good.' If we take seriously Denzin's (2003) call to reanimate life with our scholarship and engage the 'living in the everyday' (p.145), our role in this process is to fan the fire, not to extinguish it because the student (or member of faculty) is not in the right department, or they don't (currently seem to) possess the necessary skills to write a poem, write a song, or otherwise perform. These states can and do change. Street art and folk music are two examples that show how outsiders have come against the exclusive practices that make it look like 'the arts,' or academia are only for the chosen few, or that one has to get a stamp of approval.

I am mindful, of course, that there are numerous problems, tensions and risks associated with these aims. David Carless (2010, 2011, in press) alerts us to the dangers and risks of writing a song. He notes that fears about inadequacy, incompetence and lack of ability can be enough to stop someone from participating. Listening to great songs, or music, and watching skilful performers can be intimidating to the extent it is debilitating. So for David, it took a "*leap of faith*" (Carless, in press) before he began to write songs. And it took

another leap before he was prepared to write songs from research and yet another leap to perform his autoethnography, 'Mathew & Me' publically (Carless, 2015).

But, I wonder what we become when we refuse to take these leaps? Or, more specifically, what our students and colleagues and research becomes if we don't develop these ways of knowing? Unsurprisingly, students want to pass their exams. They want good grades, and many seem to want to follow instructions because they seem to guarantee success. In response, methods books that give clear instructions for how to collect, analyse, and present data are welcome while organic, uncertain, experimental, creative processes that seem to offer loads of anxiety and tension, and opportunities to get it wrong (while also exposing our vulnerabilities) are to be avoided at all costs.

Despite the problems, risk and dangers associated with 'getting it wrong' there is a reward of something magical on those occasions when we get it right.

The sacred moments that are felt and experienced (such as when attending a Welsh rugby international or a gig) are emotionally charged and can be the types of moments that dissolve differences that separate people, evoke care, compassion, love even—a change of heart? These types of moments too can also remind us, in an embodied way, of injustice, evoke passion and provoke advocacy.

We have to find spaces within our institutions where people can experiment and find different ways of knowing, living, and relating. It doesn't have to start with something as complicated as writing a song, or a piece of music. To begin, perhaps a beat is all that is required.

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