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# Ambulant Methods and Rebel Becomings: Reanimating Language in Post-Qualitative Inquiry

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## Abstract

Language has been at the core of humanism, as a pre-eminently human capacity—the primary resource through which the world is mediated. What has/will become of language in the post-human turn? And what are the implications for post-qualitative method?

## Keywords

Post-representational theory, post-qualitative inquiry, Deleuze

## A Note From Special Issue Guest Coeditors

This article is derived from a webinar series conversation titled, “Post Philosophies and the Doing of Inquiry,” co-hosted by Candace R. Kuby and Viv Bozalek. The webinar sessions ran from August 2020 to September 2021. This webinar series was made possible by a research collaborative partnership between the University of Missouri System in the United States and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town, South Africa. During the webinar sessions, the panelists were asked to respond to four questions:

1. How does your philosophical approach influence your ways of doing inquiry?
2. What does this philosophical approach make thinkable or possible for inquiry? (so how does your approach relate to more traditional practices such as literature reviews, data collection, analysis, and so forth.)
3. What are your perspectives on methodology(ies) and/or methods? How do you envision that in your approaches to doing inquiry?
4. What mechanisms could be put in place at universities to help supervisors and/or committees support students doing post philosophy inspired ways of inquiring?

We are grateful for James Salvo’s invitation to publish the webinar in a special issue and to Erin Price who assisted with technology, logistics, and the art for the series. To learn more information about the webinar series, please locate the

guest editors’ (Kuby & Bozalek) introduction to the special issue on the website for *Qualitative Inquiry*.

Each panelist in the webinar series suggested several readings to accompany their talk. To access the recorded webinars and suggested readings, please visit: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4P\\_GUK6QV2Wp\\_OAWEpw87Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4P_GUK6QV2Wp_OAWEpw87Q). For more information about the webinar series, visit: <https://education.missouri.edu/learning-teaching-curriculum/webinars/>.

**Candace Kuby:** How does your philosophical approach influence your ways of doing inquiry?

**Maggie MacLure:** Well, I think the first thing to say is that it’s important to have a philosophical approach, or at least an explicit engagement with theory, if these two things are different. It’s important to be aware of the conceptual architecture and the ontology that underpins your practice. So it’s about asking yourself those big questions about subjectivity, agency, reality, change, choice, consciousness, and many others that are newly generated by the ontological turn. Otherwise, we run the risk of simply reproducing the banality of thought. A few years ago (if I may indelicately quote myself) I wrote that the importance of theory, or philosophy, was to interrupt “the reproduction of the bleeding obvious”

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(MacLure, 2010, p. 277). That's still my position—that if you don't have an awareness of the ontological underpinnings of your work, you can't actually engage in the production of the *new*. And for me, that is the basic tenet of the post philosophies. They're not simply about understanding or critiquing what went before but about producing the new in conditions of uncertainty.

I've actually moved through several different ontologies or orientations in my very lengthy career, although they have all been prompted by an original, and a continuing interest in language. I've moved through Chomskyan linguistics, ethnomethodology, critical discourse analysis, and deconstruction, ending up in quite an uncomfortable space now, where I have been forced to rethink quite radically my assumptions about the primacy of language. I've had to do quite a lot of recanting, I guess you could say! But one thing that underlies many of those approaches, despite their many other differences, has been a critique of Enlightenment humanism and the idea that humans are the center and the source of meaning and value. We can no longer cleave to the assumption that our capacity for reason and for language sets us above other species and other entities, and that our rationality somehow guarantees progress and moral conduct. The illusory nature of those claims seems very self-evident in the state that we're all in now.

Language has been at the core of humanism, as the pre-eminently human capacity. In my discourse phase, language was both the triumph and the tragedy of humanism. It was *the* resource through which you would access and mediate the world, but the cost of that was being forever cast out of a direct access to reality. These were predominantly philosophies of lack, coupled with human arrogance, I guess. So one of the most direct influences on my ways of doing inquiry has been a rethinking of the status and the meaning of language within post-qualitative, or ontological, or speculative philosophies. I do agree with Barad (2003) that language has been granted too much importance and that we have focused on language at the expense of focusing on difference, on affect, on sensation, on movement, and on materiality. In terms of my own philosophical approach, I don't reject language altogether, and I'm sure most people don't. But I do now reject a certain view of language—one that's mainly concerned with language as representation or communication between humans, and where the materiality of language has been continuously marginalized or disavowed. I've learned to be much more interested in the ways in which language tangles with matter and movement and sensation, and lodges in the body. But equally interesting is the incorporeality of language: the way it's animated by what Deleuze (2004) called a "mad element" of unceasing movement or "rebel becomings" that exceed capture by reason and meaning (p. 4).

So there has been a big shift in my thinking around language. But, alongside that revaluation of the role of language, there's a whole range of other assumptions that have underpinned qualitative research. And, once you challenge one of them—in my case language—a whole load of *other* assumptions then start to topple, kind of like dominoes. You then get into challenging human exceptionalism, and the boundaries that supposedly separate us from other species, or that separate the disciplines, and the status of consciousness and who gets to have it, and the pre-eminence of reason, and so on, and on.

I guess that's roughly how my philosophical approach has influenced how I do inquiry. But this domino effect also opens up, of course, all those other familiar, *really* big questions that have come with the ontological turn: about our relation to the planet and the cosmos, about the risks of dismantling human prerogative while large numbers of people are still being denied full humanity, and about the potential for violence in our rage to interpret and explain the world. So my starting point now, as I said at the beginning, is to work for ways of bringing forth the new rather than understanding what's gone before.

**Candace:** I want to dig in a little bit more. One of your readings that you suggested was "Inquiry as Divination" (MacLure, 2021). And I will say that I spent a good bit of time with this one as a colleague Jennifer Rowsell and I had been thinking about magic and we found your article as really helpful on our thinking about magic. So I'm going to read a couple of snippets from that article and just see if you could go a little bit more around this notion of inquiry because it seems like in this piece you're really conceptualizing your thinking about inquiry ontologically, what it is, and how we go about doing it. In this piece, you talk about how Deleuze had argued that

philosophy itself had yet to achieve the creative complicity of life and thought that immanence demands. Philosophy was failing to grasp the dynamic unity in which thought marks life and life activates thought, leaving instead only the choice between "mediocre lives and mad thinkers." (p. 502)

And you talk a little bit more about mad thought and wild life, which I heard you mention a second ago. And you also described inquiry as uncertain, as risk taking; and magic even comes up in your piece. And then later on, you wrote that "doing inquiry diagrammatically might therefore involve constructing little aleatory machines designed to import catastrophe into the frameworks and methods of research, policy and practice to clear space for creativity and unforeseen outcomes." (p. 208) So talk to us a little bit about that, about how

you're thinking about inquiry, and the notion of mad thinking, wild life, catastrophe, and uncertainty.

**Maggie:** I'm happy to do that, although the extent to which I understand what I wrote myself is always a bit in doubt! Aleatory machines are machines that can work with chance and can surf the energy of chance, and this is one of the places that magic comes in, because magic is about working with the chancy alignment of forces. They're good for introducing catastrophe (and this was Deleuze's word, 2003) into the usual arrangements of habit and convention. This is needed I think, because we're still at the very, very beginning of what will probably be (if we're lucky) a fairly long ontological transformation of the field. And it's still quite difficult, certainly for me and perhaps for a lot of scholars, to grasp the profound conceptual implications for methodology of the ontological turn. So, although we can commit to it programmatically if you like, and although we can follow through very small bits of the implications, I think we still haven't realized the extent to which qualitative inquiry will ultimately become, and needs to become, unintelligible to itself. I'm echoing Deborah Britzman (1994) here. Speaking for myself, I'm in a phase where I'm really excited by what's coming next; but I'm still not embracing the catastrophe that this would inaugurate for whatever is, or was, qualitative inquiry. So I guess the aleatory machines were about trying to find ways of unsettling that architecture just a little bit, to glimpse alternative ways of thinking our relationship to other people, to non-human entities, to the planet, and to the cosmos. And it's really hard to do that, without that catastrophic shaking up. So that would be one thing. Your first quote was about immanence. It's the same point really: whatever turn you're committing to—the new materialist turn, or the ontological turn, or the affective turn, or the post-representational turn, or whatever—all of those positions assume immanent ontologies that conflict with the founding assumptions of conventional inquiry. They contain that idea that you can't stand outside the world to judge it, or explain it, or interpret it. You're part of the emergence of meaning or data or sense, and that has huge implications for how you think of cause and effect, agency, decision, and so on. So I was just kind of picking up from Deleuze's own quite cautious statement about immanence: that we all aspire to it, or profess it, or see the importance of it for research; but that we still don't have what you could call an image of thought, or a set of practices that would refuse to fit comfortably with all the old humanist baggage about ideas coming from inside us, or that our thoughts are our own, and so on.

**Candace:** So while we're still in this first question around philosophy and how that shapes your inquiry, as I read or looked across these four papers you suggested

there are threads or certain words or I would say, philosophical concepts that come up often in your writing Maggie. So I noticed in the suggested reading "Qualitative Research and the New Materialisms" (MacLure, 2017) that you talk a bit about sense and nonsense, and this also comes up in some of your other pieces as well. And, in "The Refrain of the A-grammatical Child" (MacLure, 2016), you discuss order words related to power, and you really talk about meaning, which came up in the "Inquiry as Divination" piece as well—like reading data "not for the meanings they convey but for the unanticipated connections that they afford" (MacLure, 2021, p. 508). So it seems like sense and nonsense, and this notion of order words comes up a lot in your publications and seems to really be important philosophically and how you think about inquiry. Could you talk a little bit more maybe about some of those concepts that seemed to be really important to your thinking?

**Maggie:** That's a good question. I was thinking about that in preparing for this session, and I do think there's been a sense in which certain concepts have emerged for me, kind of progressively—not in a linear way, but in a way that feels like they've kind of chosen me as well as me having chosen them. So there's a kind of chain of concepts and one of them that goes quite far back is the notion of wonder. That appealed to me because wonder is itself a liminal quality. Is it in you? Is it out there? It has a distinctly non-rational element to it. It's also a very problematic term of course because its history is complicit with colonialism. But I found wonder very helpful when I was starting to grapple with that notion of the overlooked in conventional research, in terms of materiality and incorporeality, leading toward magic and so on. Then, gradually, wonder got replaced, again not really in a linear sense, because a lot of these concepts are working in the back of my head really. Deleuze's (2004) notion of sense has been hugely important for me, and it has involved the reading and rereading of *The Logic of Sense*, a text which I still don't understand. I always say this when I refer to it, but it's just so true! But without understanding it, it certainly moved me to think about what lies on the border of sense and nonsense, and how our understanding of language as representational, or as a vehicle for the exchange of meanings between two human beings, is such a limited notion of what language is and how it works. Deleuze carefully unraveled via Artaud and Lewis Carroll, and a whole load of other writers, a kind of covert, dissident interest in the nonsensical aspects of language—that which is paradoxical, or playful, or disgusting and resists recuperation to meaning. And it's often to do with bodies, and breathing, and feelings, and sensations. So the concept of sense just helped me to unravel that whole notion of the non- or the counter-representational in language. And that's been very generative for

me. And maybe around the same time, the concept of the refrain was very important. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work, the refrain is kind of the first gesture of carving something out of nothing in the world. You know, it's staking a claim. And I find that very interesting and important in looking at children's development as speakers or language users, as artisans of something more than just representational language. And so yeah, I think there's been a gradual emergence of concepts.

Divination is the latest one and that sort of brings those things together—again, the idea that there's more than rationality in the production of the world. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write a lot about sorcery—its boundary-crossing and troublemaking capacities. So I think for me concepts work roughly in the way that Deleuze and Guattari (1994) describe in their late work *What Is Philosophy?* as a “practice of concepts.” The concepts themselves change and morph according to the problem at hand, but nevertheless they're kind of related. So I think that's how it's been going for me. I don't know which one's coming next.

**Candace:** (chuckles) We'll stay tuned! I love that phrase that you were drawing upon from Deleuze and Guattari's *What Is Philosophy?*, a practice of concepts, which really I think leads us into the second question that we've been asking our panelists: What does this philosophical approach, or for you maybe this practice of concepts, make thinkable or possible for inquiry? And so we really hoped that our panelists would think about the ways that you might approach things that are classified more as traditional practices, such as literature reviews or data collection or analysis, and so forth. So talk to us a little bit about how these philosophical concepts make thinking and inquiry possible for you.

**Maggie:** Okay yeah. I should also say, while we're talking about a practice of concepts: A few years ago, Hillevi Lenz Taguchi and Bettie St. Pierre (2017) edited a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry*, which was entirely around that notion of method as a practice of concepts. So if people want to follow that up, there's lots of very interesting work in that special issue.

So in terms of what does it make thinkable or possible for inquiry: Latterly, I've been thinking about how one of the really important things that the speculative or ontological approach makes possible is thinking of new forms of relationality. And that's not just relations with human beings, though it is about that, but it's also about relations to other entities, and about the way in which relations are structured or ordered. And it makes it possible, particularly, to think of forms of relation beyond the hierarchies that structure conventional qualitative research. They allow us to go beyond what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call

“filiation”—those relations of father–child, state and subjects, and example and generality. All of those hierarchical relationships are actually deeply embedded in qualitative research, so deep that we find it hard to think without them. So part of that is thinking of new relationships between one and many. It's about going beyond those hierarchical assumptions, where conventionally something always rules over something else, or represents something else, or is more general, or more moral, or more causal or whatever. So these philosophical concepts open us up to new forms of relation where, as I was saying, we're in the midst of things, not standing above them.

Another concept I found very useful from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in thinking about non-hierarchical relations is that notion that they take from sorcery and from animal sociality, that there are relationships that work more like contagion or alliance. They call them “unnatural nuptials”—relations among things that you wouldn't normally put together. And that's the fundamental notion of the assemblage: things that don't belong, *do* belong, for the particular little machine, the assemblage machine, that's being built there. And also that relationality is a matter of discontinuities and leaps and resonances, as much as linear cause and effect. So, coming to the more practical question of what counts as data and how we figure in the emergence of data—just that notion of different forms of relation shakes that up. And it also deeply challenges core practices around analysis, interpretation, critique, and writing. And that was one of the things that underlies the “Divination” paper (MacLure, 2021)—trying to think outside of these notions of the analyst, or the interpreter, or the explainer as the arbiter of meaning. But it's hard because, you know, we do have to give up that “God trick,” as Haraway calls it, or our “panoptic immunity” to parse the world, which I think was a phrase of the literary critic D. A. Miller. But it does, it does open up possibilities, I think, to think otherwise.

The other thing that it opens up, of course, is the incursion of other disciplines, other worlds into the domain of qualitative inquiry. And this is not only very productive, but it's also perplexing and potentially fatal for whatever we thought qualitative inquiry was. Because now we are open to, and productively disordered by, the life sciences and environmentalisms, and indigenous philosophies, and art practice, and mathematics, and quantum mechanics, science and technology studies, and witchcraft. All of those things are pressing on the space of qualitative inquiry, and that's incredibly exciting; but it's also very difficult and it has ethical issues about appropriating other knowledge systems, and so on.

**Candace:** So let me pull out some of the pieces in your writings that continue this line of conversation. In the

very opening paragraph of “Researching Without Representation” (MacLure, 2013b), you talk about non- or post-representational thought. You write,

I argue that materialist research must involve non- or post-representational thought and methods, drawing on contemporary materialist theories that reject the hierarchical logic of representation. Representational thinking still regulates much of what would be considered qualitative methodology. This needs to change. (p. 658)

And then similarly, in “The Refrain of the A-Grammatical Child” article (MacLure, 2016), “materialist research methodologies need to embrace the asignifying, affective elements that are at play in becoming-child. These haunt qualitative data, but are still often dismissed as ‘junk’ material that distracts from truth, meaning or authenticity” (p. 174). So there seems to be in both of these pieces this focus on non-representational thought. And I think often qualitative inquiry focuses on interpretation—the meaning of the child, or the person you’re interviewing, or what you’re observing. So talk with us a little bit about how these philosophical concepts are really opening up different ways of thinking about this notion of meaning, and representing the meaning of something else, someone else.

**Maggie:** I’m just trying to think of an example from some recent work. My colleague Abi Hackett and I have been looking recently at images or views of early literacy that kind of get away from that notion that the whole task of children is to learn words and then convey meanings to one another (Hackett et al., 2021). And the non-representational energy, if you like, comes from trying to think about how things like affect and movement, and sensation and atmosphere, and excitement and stuff all come together in what one might call an event of language. So again, it’s trying to get past that idea that it’s all about words and sentences, and even semantics conventionally, and trying to get at a more—I guess you could say synesthetic notion of language, as involving all the senses. And also, the notion of language and speech or communication as haptic: it’s about feeling and sensing as much as it is about understanding and making sense in that literal sense.

Another example of a non-representational focus comes from some work with another colleague, Christina MacRae. We have been working on a project for the Froebel Institute that’s revisiting the insights of Froebel’s philosophy for contemporary understandings of children and how they develop. And one of the things we’ve been revisiting is the overlooked, or the disparaged role of imitation in early child language development. The

prevailing idea has been that imitation is just kind of empty mimicry. It’s not seen as *real* expression because it’s not coming from “inside” the child. And we’ve tried to open up that notion of imitation to look at the overlooked forms of relation that imitation involves—which are more about contagion and attunement to one another, and about the unfolding of an event from inside the actions of what the children are doing, as much as from what they say (MacRae & MacLure, 2022). So again, it’s that attempt to find other dimensions or other forces, if you like, at work in language, that are not just about meaning and representing the world.

**Candace:** As we’re thinking about this notion of non-representation or thinking about language as more than about meaning, I’m going to share two quotes and then see what your thoughts are. In the “Inquiry as Divination” (MacLure, 2021) piece, you say that “diagrammatic or divinatory practice demands that we give up our inclination for narrative as well as logical coherence” (p. 509). And then, in “Researching Without Representation” (MacLure, 2013b), you state that “qualitative inquiry might stop looking for depth and hoping for height” (p. 665). Help us think about this, as new graduate students, or as people who have maybe been doing this work for many decades. What does it mean to “stop looking for depth and hoping for height?” And what does it mean if we give up narrative and logical coherence in the narratives that we are trying to tell and somewhat represent in the publications that we share or presentations that we give?

**Maggie:** Yeah, great question again. What was it—“looking for depth and hoping for height”? Sounds like the title of a bad country song! I’m embarrassed at admitting having written that actually (laughs). I suppose it’s that representational thing again of always taking something as an example or an instance of something *else*, you know, like an indicator of development, or a deeper meaning, or a theme. Not that there’s any reason *not* to look for generality, sameness, and coherence—I probably haven’t made it clear enough in my work that I don’t oppose those because I think they’re important. But it’s about also finding those other unruly things that happen, that are also important in the unfolding of life. I think it’s no accident that early childhood has been such a fertile space for post-qualitative work, precisely because children themselves are these liminal entities on the border between what we think of as the animal and the embodied (on the one hand), and this so-called “higher order” stuff about language and conceptualization. But looked at another way, what children are doing in traversing the worlds of sensation and matter and materiality—as well as acquiring these coherence and depth things—is

tremendously important. And I was trying to argue in the “Divination” article (MacLure, 2021) that it’s still important for engaging with what adults and other entities do. This is what underpinned Deleuze and Guattari’s contentious notions of “becoming-child,” “becoming-woman,” and so on—these non-linear, non-representational, energetic movements that keep life going.

So I think that’s what I was getting at there. But I also think I haven’t fully worked out my own position on the role of narrative yet, because I tend to think of narrative as, you know, highly structured, deeply discursive. But of course, there are narratives in the form of myths, and creation stories, and pocket devices for getting you through your life in hard times, and so on, and that’s tremendously important. I was struck by something Jerry Rosiek said a while back about narratives as being living, material things with force in the world. So I’ve been a bit dismissive of narrative, as this kind of structured representational stuff. But one of the things I would definitely want to think about again, and your question helps me to do it, is to rethink the notion of narrative in a more material, speculative way.

**Candace:** I love that. I’ve taught a narrative inquiry class here at Mizzou every couple years and, as the years have progressed, I’ve had more conversations with students in that class about—what *is* narrative? How are we ontologically thinking about it? And if we think about it with some of these post philosophies, what might that open up? So I’d love to hear, as you continue to explore that, where you go with that.

Let’s shift to our third question, and this question really comes from a lot of chatter and conversation in the broader field of qualitative research about methodologies and methods, especially when someone is aligning with or claiming to engage in different post-philosophical concepts. So where are you sitting now in this discussion on methodology and methods when inspired or you know when you’re putting to work some of these concepts?

**Maggie:** I’m not really particularly invested in the contemporary debate for or against methods. It’s quite a lively one, and I like the debate. But I don’t really have a dog in the fight—is it a good thing/is it a bad thing. I’m obviously not committed to notions of methods as recipes or how-to resources, or in method as the search for generality and sameness and hierarchy—you know, looking for the themes that underlie the messiness of surfaces, and so on. So in that sense, I definitely don’t feel that kind of method is particularly helpful, or at least not as the main way that you’re doing it. But on the other

hand, I think it’s probably not important whether you call them methods, or resources, or maybe techniques or exercises. I do think you need some . . . protocols, I suppose, for bringing forth the unpredictable. One of the things about immanent ontologies that I wrote about at some length in the “Divination” paper (MacLure, 2021) is that you’re in the paradoxical situation of being open to the emergence of the unforeseen. But how do you do that? You can’t have methods that define what that will be before it happens. But you do need some way of preparing for, or sensing the potential emergence of something new. And I don’t think that the best way to do this is to think about method instead as a completely open-ended state of artistic playfulness, as some scholars might argue. In other words, that you play with concepts, or materials, or language until something happens. That doesn’t really work for me. I actually believe in some notion of patience and watchful attention, as part of an experimental attitude of preparation for the arrival of the new. But it’s just so difficult to formulate that in a way that is helpful to people. So I think you need methods, but they need to be bespoke methods—ones that you fashion for yourself in the middle of things. And I think that conceptual work I talked about earlier is important for that. In the “Divination” paper I talk about Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of the practice of the smith or the metallurgist, whose relation to the materiality of the substance is completely embroiled in it. You need methods that are “ambulant,” they argue (p. 431): that follow the contours of what you’re examining. So you can’t have methods that stand apart and say, “this is what qualitative inquiry should look like.” But you do need to have some sense of method, even if it unfolds from—*must* unfold from—ongoing, immanent immersion in the field.

I can think of one example that has really made an impact on me in recent years in the work of E. J. Renold and Gabrielle Ivinson. They do amazing work with young people and they draw on immanent ontologies and arts-based practices, as these emerge out of the unfolding research. So one fantastic paper (Renold & Ivinson, 2019) was about young people living in extreme poverty in North Wales, and particularly the young women’s experiences of harassment and—you know, bad times with the boys, and so on. And an artifact emerged, which was this chair that became a kind of totemic, almost magical repository of their fears, and the injustices, and the hopes, and the promises, as they decorated this chair. And it came to stand for their experience in a very non-representational way. But the thing that really struck me was the way in which that chair was then played forward into the arenas in which policy makers and those in power impact on young people’s lives. It shared the stage

at a very auspicious convention or conference of Welsh policy makers, and it appeared at the Summer Institute in Qualitative Research. So, trying to relate that back to method, it wasn't that E. J. and Gabrielle felt that *anything* would work; it was that what worked was so deeply embedded in the specification of the problem, and the way that it unfolded, that it had its own rationale. The methods emerged from the project.

Just as kind of sideline to that, I don't see any reason not to do the sorts of things that qualitative research has often done in terms of methods—things like interviews or observations. But I do think there's a certain impulse, for me anyway, to break those methods while using them, and force them to reveal unforeseen things. Partly, I embarked on this whole post-qualitative, speculative route by becoming more and more fascinated by the stuff in children's language development that was reckoned to be irrelevant—you know, laughs, or coughs, or sniffs, or whatever. But I was working from quite conventional video data. So I don't see that there's any a priori reason not to use the conventional paraphernalia of qualitative research—interviews, and so on. But I do think you have to do something differently with them, and alongside them. And call that method maybe.

**Candace:** Let me follow up. As I reread your pieces, there's a phrase that students have found really helpful in trying to explain to other [doctoral] committee members or others why particular data are the data that they engage with. And you probably know, it's this phrase about "data glowing." It seems to be something that people really have, you know, hooked on to in your writing. And you talk in that piece "Researching Without Representation" (MacLure, 2013b) about data making itself intelligible to us and data glowing. And, in the book chapter about qualitative methodology and materialism (MacLure, 2017), you start with a question in that chapter: *What does method want?* Which I think is a really provoking question. And you end that chapter talking about methodology as unintelligible to itself. So it seems like data makes itself intelligible to us; methodology is unintelligible to itself. So maybe just a little bit around that notion of data glowing, data making itself intelligible to us, and (I just love that question) "What does method want?"

**Maggie:** Yeah I like that question, too. I don't know that I had any satisfactory answer to it! I'm glad that people find the notion of the glow helpful. I have had some qualms about it, because it's quite susceptible to being read in a slightly romantic or individual way: data are what appeals to *me*, and you don't have to take into account other stuff. I guess, what I meant was that it does glow, but it only glows within an emergent assemblage

or set of problems. So the glow is not there all the time. It's there when, in Barad's (2007) sense, the agential cut is made, and then something acquires an import or a sense that wasn't "there" before the act of cutting. And the glow is always worth going with when that happens, even if it's on an individualistic kind of basis. If something starts to emerge and it builds up an energy, there's probably something more going on there than we know. And it's almost certainly about something like affect, or something non-representational, or something that would never really be picked up adequately within a coding scheme. That doesn't necessarily mean we should avoid coding (MacLure, 2013a). Looking for order can be a productive source of that glow, because you get stuff that doesn't fit, and rather than ignoring it, it kind of comes to pass.

As for intelligibility, I don't know if intelligibility is the word I would use now. But again, the intelligible emerges within a particular assemblage, a particular context. It's not necessarily completely "there" across all contexts. I'll have to have a think again about the glow. I suppose it kind of relates to the later stuff I've been thinking about—about witchcraft and speculative philosophies, where the glow is something that has a power, and an atmosphere that can't be summarized in conventional terms, in terms of meaning systems, and so on. So there's probably still something in there.

**Candace:** What I love hearing today, Maggie, is that I probably could start tallying the times that you say something about "I'm still thinking about that" or "I might say that differently now." I love that invitation for us all to think about how, even if something's published as an article, our thinking still is shifting and changing and we're still wrestling the thing. So I really appreciate hearing your transparency with that.

Our final question is connected to that really. It's about trying to make transparent how to go about doing this work in the academy, and especially for graduate students who join us, or people who are just recently graduated and moving into different academic positions. We wanted this webinar series to be a place to open conversations. Often, what gets published in a journal looks so neat and tidy in some sense and there's a lot that went into getting it there. So we want to just open a space here before we move into our Q & A time, for you to share a little bit about suggestions, advice—things that you've learned over your years in the academy as you've mentored people engaging in post philosophies, whether it's related to publications or grants or other things that are expected of academics. What might you share with those who are here today?



**Maggie:** Well, I should say that this webinar series has been an incredibly productive space for doing exactly the sort of work that you're talking about, which is about opening up in a much more leisurely way, how this field is developing, and where its gaps and its tentativeness and its potentials are. Setting up forums or avenues for that kind of collective work across spaces and time zones definitely underlies our own work at Manchester Metropolitan as well.

In terms of supporting graduate students and colleagues, the U.K. context differs from some other countries, obviously, both in terms of its graduate education and the general way that universities work. So it's not necessarily generalizable. For instance, doctoral candidates in the United Kingdom have to have at least one external examiner. So it's important for very pragmatic reasons to have a cadre of academics in other institutions and countries who are competent to judge the work of students who are undertaking unorthodox and new methodologies. So that's one reason—it's far from the only one—why in the Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), where I am based, we put so much effort into fostering networks and maintaining international debate with colleagues in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Not so that these people will wave our candidates through, but so that they'll be competent to evaluate the work. And, more importantly, this international reach introduces our graduate students to debate at this particular leading edge of the field. So we feel that these international occasions, of which your webinar is most definitely one, are very important to our students, not just in getting institutional support, but also in helping them to progress.

I think, generally, the work of supporting students and early career researchers involves both internal and external culture building. ESRI has been going for 20 years or so and it's very much a working research community. ESRI members don't only teach and supervise graduate students and teach at other levels, but they're also actively involved in doing externally funded research. In that sense, we are jobbing researchers as well: we take the business of research seriously. One of the things that perhaps makes us distinct from other University contexts is that notion of a community of researchers who are not just academics within university departments, but also see ourselves as having obligations to do important research and to develop methodologies for doing that better. And I think we try to involve our students in that collective endeavor to generate a sort of research sensibility, if you like. There are a lot of things in university life today in the United Kingdom and elsewhere that tend to squeeze out or to managerialize research, and I

think there's a certain stubborn work of resistance that we've done, to constantly remind ourselves and others that research is important. Not just to train the next generation of graduate students, but also to do socially valuable research.

We do a lot of internal things to support new researchers and graduate students. We're one of very few places that has a research group specifically dedicated to developing theory and methodology, so we constantly emphasize the importance of that. It's not just about post philosophies: there are many other approaches to research that go on in ESRI. We also run a lot of things like intensive reading groups, workshops, and seminars. We organize the Summer Institute in Qualitative Research, and again, the intention was twofold. It was both to take part in the development of theory and methodology internationally, by having people who are really expert come and talk about their work over the space of a whole week and also to introduce our students to methodological debate, and the practice of taking this seriously. Just to summarize: I think it's that we hope that our students benefit from that sense of research being a public good, as well as an intellectual activity. Of course ESRI is not a perfect place, and it's constantly subject to the pressures of performativity and quality audit, and so on. But I think we've been privileged to have a sense of a collective within a traditional university, which has worked okay, but it only works as long as the current climate allows it to.

**Candace:** Right yeah, I have heard that theme from a lot of panelists: it's about creating these spaces within, and having people who help to nurture and spend their time creating these webinars, or seminars, or reading groups, and so on, that really helped to connect people internationally as well. We're going to shift our attention to the questions that are coming in from those who have joined us on the webinar.

**Erin Price:** There is a question about the ways in which language limits the speaker. So this participant gives an example of people speaking one verbal language and not able to think in accordance with speakers of another language. How might we address such events?

**Maggie:** So this is about thinking about translation across different actual languages, I guess?

**Erin:** Yes. And the thinking that is perhaps structured by the event.

**Maggie:** Right. That is a very important question—to what extent thought is shaped and structured by the particular language you're speaking. I'm particularly aware

of that, I guess, because the Anglo, the Germanic languages, and all the languages of the Global North are so tightly structured by precisely those dichotomies and hierarchical relationships that post-qualitative philosophies are trying to get away from: transitivity, cause and effect, subject and object, and so on. So I think it's possibly more difficult for us to think in a more relational, posthuman way, unlike some of the indigenous languages, which have a completely different notion of the significance of temporality, relations with the nonhuman world, and so on. It's definitely the case that the languages that inhabit us are our resource for engaging with the world, and I wouldn't want to deny that. But they are also possibly incommensurable in ways that are quite difficult to overcome. But I would also add that I feel that's the case even "inside" a single language. That idea that there is a meaning and that it's our job to extract it—I think one of the reasons I had difficulty answering some of Candace's questions about stuff that *I myself wrote*, was that at a distance, or even at the time that I wrote them, I can't really say what they mean. And so maybe one of the messages is that we can do more than we thought with the notion of dimly sensing things that are going on, rather than knowing exactly what they mean. And that one way of approaching communication across languages might be to learn to be more comfortable with getting the gist of things or the drift of them, I suppose.

**Viv Bozalek:** The participant's question is, I'd be interested to hear Maggie's thoughts on how we might better integrate speculative ways of thinking and practicing across different disciplines relating to language in the body, for example, physics, neuroscience, psychology, and health.

**Maggie:** Such an important thing and very difficult to operationalize. One of the ways that we did it at MMU, when Liz de Freitas and I set up the Manifold Lab—the biosocial lab as it was then—was to explicitly make links with researchers in other disciplines who would come and talk with us. So we had people from neuroscience, biology, sports science, and so on, come and spend some time, and we ran some events that were spread over a couple of days, where the idea would be to bring people together to think about, not so much about language and the body as about biosocial currents in general. But my main thought on that goes back to what I was saying about being still so much at the very beginnings of understanding how to bring what were previously separate disciplines into productive and generative dialogue. There are great examples of wonderful writing that is doing that—Anna Tsing's books for example. Elizabeth A. Wilson's got a wonderful book called *Gut Feminism*. There's a great book by the anthropologist

Eduardo Kohn called *How Forests Think*. Obviously there's Karen Barad's (2007) book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, which introduced us all to quantum physics. So I think there's already an energy and a kind of frisson of what's possible. But we are still at the start and we're kind of hampered still by the politics, I guess, of interdisciplinarity, where different disciplines have—not just different worldviews, but also different places in the pecking order. How do you bring those together? It's quite a live question for me at the moment, actually, about how to bring all those disciplines together in a speculative way, rather than allowing each of them just to reside in their own expertise and authority. I recently completed an article with Riikka Hohti called *Insect Thinking* (Hohti & MacLure, 2021) and it started off from an exploration between Riikka and myself of personal encounters with insects in our early childhood. We were trying to work across species boundaries, engaging with animal studies, posthumanism, autobiography, and so on. Riikka was talking about early encounters with mosquitoes, and I was talking about early encounters with cockroaches. And I ended up really holding the paper up from getting finished, because I got kind of paralyzed by the possibilities that were opened up by "following" the cockroach into neuroscience where people do experiments on it, its role in the reproduction of poverty and illness and asthma, its uses as live jewelry in Victorian fashion, and the way in which it was linked with slavery and came over in the slave boats. But the problem was, it was so generative that I got almost paralyzed by the sheer impossibility of ever knowing enough about any of these disciplines to take that stuff forward. I guess my answer would be that we just need to keep trying with as good a will as we can, to do that sort of transdisciplinary work.

**Viv:** When I was reading your papers there were a couple of sentences where I did a double take. Everything else was making a lot of sense. It's about Claire Colebrook and the privileging of relationality and incommensurability. You say this would involve a radical cut or refusal of relationality. At least of its hegemonic form. So if you could just explain how this works—because relationality is so much at the core of everything that we are doing.

**Maggie:** That was prompted by an article by Claire Colebrook (2019) that I really, really loved. It's part of a general critique that Colebrook (2013) puts forward, of a tendency within contemporary new materialist and affect theory to conceive of relationality as this unbounded, haptic, very positive notion of total interconnectedness. She argues that the assumption of infinite interconnection is ultimately static and unworkable if it leaves no place for difference and distance, and she sees the role of

theory as being that. So she's got this notion of unlimited relationality as not a helpful thing to think with. And then, in her 2019 article that I was discussing there, about incommensurability and the radical cut, she was looking particularly at the politics of that notion of relationality when it's taken into contexts of postcolonial or decolonial art practices, where the idea is that you just bring everything together in the gallery, and you can forge relationships that didn't work before. And she had a very pessimistic view of the ethics of that gesture, and the price that's always paid by those on the margins, or the subaltern, when those who come from the Global North take it upon themselves to be the guarantors of relationality. Sometimes it's necessary to stop seeking relationality and accept incommensurable worlds.

In addition, there's an article by Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2008) in New Zealand, where they were talking also about incommensurable realities, in the context of Maori and Pakeha accounts of the signing of treaty of Waitangi. And they were arguing, not for a relativity of different points of view, but again for a radical incommensurability of material realities. Again, it's unhelpful to say it I suppose, but that is another area that I am currently wondering about. Because on the one hand, I think relational ontologies are so productive, but on the other hand, I have a reservation about them. Some of the work I read is stylistically very warm, and it has this expansive generosity about how everyone and everything is connected. Part of me doesn't buy that, on grounds that I haven't fully figured out. And in the case of some particular writers, who I won't name because I love their work in other ways, their style is so kind of flowy and warm that, you know, it almost seems to be at risk of a collapse back into romanticism, or valorizing of feelings in a kind of old way.

**Viv:** Yes I know what you're getting at. I think the notion of affirmation is a more complex one. I like Erin Manning's work on that—that it's not just about affirming something. It's much more complex than that. I think people have taken it into that sort of positivity about everything, and slightly apolitical views of the world. I suppose, as anything else it can be used in very productive and generative ways and it can also be used in romanticizing ways.

**Maggie:** Yeah, and you don't want to get in a position of arbitrating which are the good and the bad ways, because that's not affirmative either. It's making me think now about the previous question about different languages, and partly it's because in the English language notions of affirmation and care—which is another big concept of at the moment—they do carry that kind of humanist

positivity that partly you want; and you want to extend it to animals and the nonhuman. But you're also aware that there's a whole baggage underlying it.

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